

A Letter from Ukraine

February 19, 2014

Dear Friends,

As the uprising in Ukraine seems to be coming to a crisis after weeks of mass demonstrations and occupations, I would like to translate for you the following letter received last week from Julia Gusseva, the Russian translator of Victor Serge and co-organizer of the International Conference of Independent Labor Unions in Kiev last November. Julia, an activist since the '80s, is one of the founders of the Praxis Center in Moscow, and writes from an anarcho-syndicalist viewpoint.

Richard Greeman

Dear Richard,

You ask what we think of the situation in Ukraine. In fact, the Ukrainian movement is a part of the wave of civil protests that has been unfurling for the last few years in every corner of the world ("Arab Spring," Occupy Wall Street, *Indignados*, the movements in Greece, Turkey, Russia...). In Ukraine, the pretext was the refusal of the President to sign the agreement on association with the countries of the European Union. In this semi-authoritarian country, a large part of the population considered that association as a step toward democracy, rights, higher social standards, etc. The positive demands of the movement are democratic (return to the 2004 Constitution, new, free, honest elections, etc): the people are fighting for their full rights. The main thing is that the movement is self-organized (autonomous) everywhere around the country, with activists occupying the town halls, etc. The same labor unions who participated in our conference in Kiev last year have recently formed the all-Ukraine strike committee.

As far as the "leading personalities" of the movement are concerned, we see the same thing as in Russia, Turkey, etc: politicians who are trying to put themselves at the head of the movement, but whom the great mass of protesters does not at all recognize as their leaders. Yes, there are various political currents in the movement, including Ukrainian nationalists (and also the Left, which is part of the "citizen sector" of the protesters), but the vast majority - as in Russia and elsewhere - are regular citizens, non-party political activists.

Kiev has already seen police violence (before the current clashes - RG) causing dozens of injuries and several deaths (at least four); this means the movement will not stop half way and fade out. Besides, the President is inclined to give in to popular pressure (there is no doubt that Putin would have acted differently in his place!) So there is a good chance that the popular movement will triumph and, on the condition that the politicians don't turn it to their own ends, will make Ukraine a freer and more democratic country than it is today.

Je t'embrasse, Julia

P.S.

Asked about the publicity given to the presence among the demonstrators of right-wing and nationalist elements (both in the mainstream media and on the Left), Julia referred me to the following article, refuting what she called "Putinist/Stalinist insinuations about democratic revolutionary movement in Ukraine."