# What Happened in Ukraine?

August 13, 2015

Ukraine went through mass mobilizations and a political revolution during November, 2014 – February, 2015. In this it resembles struggles in Tunisia and Egypt since 2010, and as in the Egyptian case, the outcomes of these struggles (to date) have sorely disappointed most of the left in the United States and, indeed, internationally. Unlike the Egyptian and Tunisian struggles, however, from its outset the struggles in Ukraine were seen in remarkably contrasting ways by different parts of the left. ([1]) Some have viewed the Maidan struggles as an illegitimate movement that supported US (or US/EU) imperialism and should thus be opposed. Others have viewed it more favorably.

Far too much of the discussion on the left and in progressive publications, in my opinion, has focused on the geopolitical aspects of the struggles in Ukraine. Far too little has focused on the failures of those movements that did succeed in ousting their governments in Ukraine but also in Egypt and Tunisia to bring about governments that moved away from supporting austerity, belt-tightening, and support for neo-liberalism. Most importantly, far too little discussion has focused on the failure of left currents in any of these movements to create serious efforts to bring about a socialist, anarchist, environmentalist or horizontalist reorganization of the economic and social order of society.

In this article, I first try to clarify what happened in Ukraine, focusing primarily on events in the Kyiv Maidan movement but also addressing what has happened since. I base what I say on the words of friends of mine who took part in it. At the end of the paper, I will also address several important analytical questions: 1. Why the government that developed from a politically-amorphous popular revolution has been so rightwing; 2. why no mass movement has developed to oppose from the left the austerity that has drastically reduced living standards in the months since this revolution; and 3. What are the implications of these events for the actually-existing lefts in the “post-Communist” countries and in the rest of the world?

Unlike most Americans who write and speak about these events, I had several good friends in

Ukraine before these events began. ([2]) I had met them because I have conducted research (and assisted in activism) around HIV/AIDS since 1983, with a considerable amount of this research focused on people who use drugs and their communities. In the 1990s, after the USSR broke up, HIV began to spread among Ukrainian drug users and sex workers. The people who later became my friends got involved in efforts to stop its spread and to help those who became sick, mainly through the activities of the International AIDS Alliance Ukraine, various medical institutions and the All-Ukrainian Network of People Living with HIV. I became involved with their efforts in 2010 when they decided to use some of my ideas to try to stop HIV's spread. In the next few years, particularly in visits I would take to Ukraine two or three times a year but also when we would meet at international conferences around drug use and/or HIV, we shared in these efforts and some of their other projects. In some cases, we became very close friends. For example, in some cases, they sought my advice about problems with lovers or other intimate issues.

On one of my first trips to Ukraine, about two years before the Maidan struggles began, I became impressed with how much more deeply a sense of Russian imperialism was in my friends' consciousness than I had expected. It was based on their understanding, based on what they learned in school and from family recollections, of Ukrainians' experiences before 1917, during the Revolution, from the famine and state repression of the 1930s, and in the decades since. It was most strongly impressed upon me by a young woman I have worked with who grew up in Odessa in a non-elite family. As I have thought over what they were saying about this and other political and economic topics, I have realized how deeply the consciousness of my friends in Ukraine—and I might add, also of my friends in Russia and Poland who are engaged in work with drug users, sex workers and others facing the HIV epidemics in their countries—is deeply shaped by their understanding that what some call "state socialism" was a bad thing. Since they were taught, and are taught, that this is the essence of Marxism and of anti-capitalist thought, this poses barriers to my friends' thinking through the possible outcomes and strategies for their Maidan revolution—barriers even more challenging than those we face in the USA.

During the Maidan struggles, I had conversations with some of them via Skype and e-mail, and had the opportunity in late January, 2014, as the Maidan struggles were nearing their climax, to have a several hours long face to face conversation with one of them in another country in a context where we could speak freely with much less fear that others would know what we were saying. At that point in time, my overwhelming impression was the similarities between what he was describing and what I remember of the US movement in the mid-1960s in terms of its being an effort to organize democracy from below while engaging in potentially-mortal struggle with the "power structure." In May, at the time of the confrontation in Odessa, two of my friends, including the one I spoke with in January, were in New York and were in my office when they heard about the way the confrontation between pro- and anti-Maidan forces had involved considerable violence on both sides, and how this led to the tragedy of scores of anti-Maidan activists being killed in a fire in a building they had taken refuge in (while continuing to exchange gunfire with the pro-Maidan forces.) By then, it was clear that the radical-democracy direction of their consciousness was being moved by events into a more nationalist direction. Since then, I have spoken with Ukrainian friends face to face in Australia during the International AIDS Conference and during two-week trips to Odessa and Kyiv in February and in May, 2015. During the February trip, I had long conversations about what had gone on, and got written comments or descriptions from several of them.

What this means is that I am reasonably confident that the descriptions they have given me over these months have been honest descriptions. Unlike much of what we read, they have not been presented orally or in written form "with political intent" but rather as statements to a friend. There is one exception to this, perhaps, in that when they spoke to me in February 2015, they knew I planned to write it up for US publication. (And they know I am a Marxist antiwar activist in the US,

and that my primary audiences will also be left. Which, I might add, my friends are not.) But even in these cases, they were speaking to me primarily as a friend. This by no means implies that I think that their words are “neutral” or “objective,” since this is not possible in social conflicts of this sort. But I do believe that they were honest reports about what they did and saw.

At this point, I will present several descriptions that friends gave me about what happened in the Kyiv Maidan over the months of the struggle during November, 201 , through February, 2014. I present them edited only for clarification. ([3])

**Recollections of a Recent Public Health Graduate**

This first set of recollections is from a recent graduate in public health from the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, the only university that teaches public health in the country. I had asked her to write up her experiences and this is what she wrote. In conversations, she refers to these events as their revolution.

**She wrote:** When all these events began, nobody could have imagined that situation would drop so far. It was the end of autumn and everyone was waiting for signing the resolution on the accession to the EU. For every Ukrainian it meant something different: for some it was an opportunity to travel, others saw it as a chance to live like in Europe. Everyone knew that this process would be difficult, but at the same time, very necessary. When Yanukovych [then the President] said that the signing of the agreement is transferred [to set up an agreement with Russia instead], it was the first signal that we were deceived. We heard promises, and then did not receive them. And so it will continue in the future if nothing is changed. Students have always been a kind of revolutionaries, and therefore there was no doubt that our rights must be fought for, and if we continued to be silent now, they would cheat us always. The head of our student parliament together with his colleague from National University organized a students’ meeting and I knew that I had to be part of it. We met near the Kyiv-Mohyla academy together with our teachers and graduates. There were at least 500 people. At that moment I could not even understand that we were at the beginning of the fight. It was very awful that some politicians wanted to make a public relations point on our desire to say that we are free.

I think that Maidan had its three main points [of crisis]. The first one was the night when police beat the tar out of students. Some of them are my friends. I was there till 8 p.m. and it is hard to understand that I had just left the main square several hours prior to when everything started. Many people were upset at such actions and went to the Maidan to express their position. Ukrainians were divided in  two groups: those who did not support the power as it was and those who did. But I don’t understand the part who were neutral. I think it was the biggest evil.

After the New Year, 2014, people lost their belief that something could be changed and went home. I was one of them and thought that we have no chance to change the situation. But events in the middle of January changed our mind. The laws that were adopted forced many people to come back. [These laws criminalized the protestors.—SF ] It was the second main [crisis] point. We were afraid of staying alone; we walked only in big groups, because we knew that we had no protection. Our power was our voice.

The hottest point of Maidan was in February when they started to kill people. When I looked through the news I could not even imagine that those events happened with our people and in our country. I could not watch TV without tears. When you came to Maidan, you understood that there was no stratification: rich people stood next to poor and had the same aim – they wanted to protect their rights and stop the junta of Yanukovich. The positive side of these events was the changes in people’s minds. I’ve never heard how beautiful can be the hymn performed by millions of Ukrainians.

In spite of thousands of deaths, there were many people who thought that we were crazy, especially when the economic situation went down. Some of them were my friends. At first I began to argue with them and was very nervous, but then I understood that nothing could change their mind and just asked them to delete my phone number. They were blind. They thought that everything was good and these crazy people destroy their heaven.

In addition to that recollection, I also interviewed her.

**In what ways, if any, did you take part?**

When we crossed the line of war [violent conflict in the Maidan] in February, I understood that I should help those people who struggled for my freedom. I knew that I could not help those brave people at the front line, but I understood that I had to do something for them. We worked in the field kitchen: we made tea, cooked meals for our men. I was surprised by the cleanliness and self-discipline. I felt no fatigue at the end of the day only happiness; it was my own drop in the freedom ocean. Also, we helped to take up a subscription, buy foods and clothes, medicine and equipment. When I came back home, I was waiting for next day when I could do something even small but so needful for my country.

**Were there activities you wanted to do there but were unable to do because you are a woman? Or for other reasons?**

Of course, I could not fight at the front line. But also I could not help people in the hospital for some reasons: firstly, I have no education in this sphere; also, I could not stand seeing how many people had died for our freedom. It was too harmful for me, especially when you met people who thought that we were just wasting our lost time and had nothing to do.

**Did it help you to develop new skills or new ways of thought?**

I think that the events on Maidan changed me dramatically. I grew up in a Russian-speaking family, I was never very patriotic and didn't like the Ukrainian symbolism very much. But now I know that I am Ukrainian and proud of it. I know that if we do not change ourselves and our future, no one will do it for us. I'm not afraid to tell the truth. I think if we want to change society, it is necessary to start with yourself, and do not to shift the responsibility for our mistakes on someone else. It is silly to think that a new man will come [into office] and change everything, and if nothing changes then he will be guilty. I understand that I am not alone and even unknown persons can help me without any compensation. We can change the situation if we fight together every day. I understand that we are at the midway, but we have no right to stop, because so many people have been killed to give us a chance to be happy.

**Pointing Our a Few Things**

At this point, I will just point out several key but disturbing things in what she has written. It is clear that the struggle did not raise issues of class in her mind, but instead she explicitly still says "there was no stratification" between rich and poor in the struggle. It is also clear that she accepted the sexual division of labor within the struggle—men fought, women did the support work. It is probably worth mentioning, given what some news media and progressives in the United States have written about the primacy of conflicts between "Russians" and "Ukrainians" in these conflicts, she is from a Russian speaking family, but the events she took part in made her see herself as a patriotic Ukrainian. Finally, she makes a statement that flatly belies the claims by many "progressives" in the US and elsewhere that what took part was a "coup." She states clearly that: "I've never heard how beautiful can be the hymn performed by millions of Ukrainians." Anyone who has been part of large

mass actions knows that it is impossible to know how many people are there, but also knows that a statement like hers reflects the reality of a truly mass movement. (Below, I will analyze this revolution in terms of its many flaws, and the disturbing questions that its failure to become a movement trying to change fundamental social relationships raise. In this, I might add, it resembles similar failures of the revolutions in Tahrir Square in Egypt and of the Tunisian revolution before it.)

**Interview with a Ukrainian Man**

My next description is provided by a man I have known since 2010 and who has become a very dear friend indeed. I interviewed him over a long brunch in February, 2015, typed up the notes, and sent them to him for changes. He added a lot of detail in written form. When I interviewed him, I asked him general questions (in parenthesis), and his answers were somewhat shaped by that.

**How were the food and other supplies for the Maidan demonstrations financed?**

Many donations were brought in buses and trucks from Western Ukraine. People would donate food, money, old clothes in collection boxes. Some came from political parties for their own parties' people or their own group's tents. Most people in Maidan were volunteers and unpaid, but it could be that parties would give some members small stipends and provide transportation to Kyiv. The Batkivschina, Svoboda (opposition parties) had their own tents and may have paid some stipends to people who were there (but maybe 50 people were paid out of the thousands who were there a lot) and sponsored some money for supplies, like petrol for generators, generators, some woods. There was less need in food and water as it was brought by citizens of Kyiv regularly in huge quantities as well as warm new and used clothes. The more sophisticated supplies – toilets, electrical generators, petrol, big military tents, etc. were likely supplied by opposition parties or some bigger civil society or political organizations.

Also there were some new public self-organized groups created that did a lot of logistics around Maidan. There was a well organized hot-line (with people volunteering to call to different people and arrange supplies and delivery from the list they collected on the needs from Maidan. For example every day they updated the website list of needs (clothes, socks, tents, barrels, woods for fire, water, warmers, construction helmets, shovels for snow, sacks, charcoal ovens, large woods for barricades, wire, cold medication) and then people placed whatever they could buy or donate, bring or just ask someone to pick it up. Smaller items were brought by individuals, large quantities and oversized by trucks like the one I used. Later gasoline and oil ("tea for cocktails") and empty beer bottles ("glass"), tires ("bagels") probably were not officially listed, but everyone who could risk bringing them knew that it was needed and silently brought them through all police blocks around Maidan.

The Centurions (Maidan self-defense) were from a wide variety of different backgrounds, including a few from parties. Some were apolitical office workers, some were students, lots of different kinds of people. The more "radical" [by which I think he means militant, not political radicalism] joined fighting units of the Right Sector to some extent. It is notable that none of those killed in the actions were from Right Sector. The biographies of the martyrs are well known. Those killed included students and workers (many from Western Ukraine). Who lived and died was in many ways a question of what part of the Maidan they were in when the snipers started shooting.

The Centurions had no uniform. People brought their own helmets. [My friend] had a construction worker helmet, which he later upgraded by buying a ski helmet. Some people had ice hockey or motorcycle helmets. Most people had cheap construction worker helmets—which were cheaper and people were donating a lot of them.

People would come to Maidan usually after work, then go home at some point near midnight. And in

the morning, when subways started working, some would pour into the square, particularly when there was another police attack on the barricades during the night (it was usually timed at 3-4 am). Often, taxis would give free rides to Maidan for pedestrians they saw walking during such attack nights.

At night, there were fewer demonstrators, so cops would try to take Maidan then.  In the morning during the key days, huge crowds would show up, and you could see busloads of police leaving the area (only to come again when balance of forces changed again during some nights.)

Barricades were three barricades deep, Many nights police would capture and destroy an outer barricade and maybe others, but then the next day the crowds would build them even higher. Barricades often were made of plastic garbage bags filled with ice and snow, large woods, steel wires, steel barrels. But once shooting started, tires and cocktails were key. The smoke blocked the police shooters and snipers' aim. There was a tent filled with people making Molotov cocktails from petrol and oil. People brought petrol in canisters, perhaps in trunks of private cars.  Later, they added Styrofoam pellets and this made the mixture sticky like napalm—which meant that cops now became afraid of the Molotov cocktails. Before they had laughed at them.

People with more experience organized the Maidan self-defense.

**At this point, I mentioned that I have heard the Independent Trade Unions tried to organize a tent but were repressed by right forces.**

He responded that he had never heard of the Independent Trade Unions.

There were some inter-party fights among the rightwing groups in terms of who got to run which municipal or government buildings after building take-overs began around Maidan.

The Self-Defense Leader was from Tymoshenko's party (Батьк вщина) at the time of the Orange Revolution in 2004. He had been the self-defense coordinator then as well.

The toilets on Maidan were organized and paid for by the parties (most likely). Maybe by Батьк вщина. At one time following few days after heavy police siege, [my friend] noted that the toilets were full and leaking over. He found a company that took care of this, and organized for them to be replaced with good ones.

He organized wood, tires, food etc. on his own and in coordination with volunteers and coordinators on hotline. At the first days of Maidan he brought a more than 50 of 4 by 3 meters wooden shields and pallets to build bottoms of the large tents, more than 30 steel barrels for bonfire and about three vans full of wood, and some bags of coal (250 kg). One time a lumber mill near Kyiv called the Maidan Hotline to say they had piles of remnant wood to donate, and the Hotline called my friend to do it. It was in huge piles. He and others loaded the van and took it every other day for few weeks. Some days he brought two or three van-loads of woods (each time about 3,000 kilos). Some wood was coming from the forest belonging to [President] Yanukovych. (The forest guards secretly called and supplied Maidan.) It was really good quality logs and stumps, very wide but also dry.

Early in the Maidan, there was a web site to register your ability to help (with whatever resource you have). He registered with truck (a large van) to be able to do deliveries of supplies. He left his phone number and agreed to be contacted any time of day or night to deliver anything to Maidan.

There were periods when they had huge numbers of volunteers and suppliers. Other times, people were too scared. For a few rather short periods, when people were not actively offering anything for free, my friend bought the wood out of his own money from the trucks standing outside of Kyiv,

because there was a huge need on Maidan, particularly when it was very cold and it was not clear what would happen next.

Trucks were not allowed into the city and definitely in downtown, but large cargo vans were. So he had to drive out of the city or some distant blocks to get stuff from trucks and load it on a van.

Cops also had checkpoints in the city and would turn him away sometimes. Usually, he would just find another route to Maidan. The balance of forces was such that the cops couldn't get away with too much. Once he was near the Maidan, he could call the Maidan and one or two dozen people from self-defense would come to clear the way for the van.

[I here deleted a paragraph to protect my source.])

At one point, when the government had brought in criminals to attack the movement's people at home or on the streets, the Auto-Maidan and many citizens decided to protect themselves, so one night there were about 2,000 cars patrolling the streets. They could get 50 cars somewhere in 5 or 10 minutes using a common channel on the Zello app.

[His partner] tells him that women did food and nursing and made Molotov cocktails. During the fighting, the Stage sound system would direct people on what to do. Women would be told to move to internal areas near the stage and men to go to the front lines.

My friend does not know who organized and ran the stage. The political control was not all that tight. Anyone from the crowd could go up to speak for themselves or at least with some public support from the people on the Maidan.

Here again it is clear that these events were massive and were self-organized. Politically, the parties of the neoliberal pro-European Center (such as Батьк вщина) played an important initial role, and Right Sector and others became important as the struggle continued—but at no time did these groups have large numbers of members mobilized. Instead, the self-mobilization through the web and the telephones of the Maidan Hotline played a key role, as did the crowds of people who simply came to take part. What is also clear is that there was little organized left presence—which resulted from the inability of the Independent Trade Unions, the feminists and others to organize successfully on a large scale in Kyiv. (The Maidan movement in Krivih Rih, on the other hand, was based in miners' trade unions.)

**Interview with a Woman Doctor**

My third description is by a woman doctor whom I have known for several years. I asked her in writing certain questions which appear as bullets below. Her answers follow them.

**How were the food and other supplies for the Maidan demonstrations financed?**

For sure, at the earlier stages of Maidan there were funds that came from different political parties (and maybe some oligarchs), but at some point later people started to have self-organized groups responsible for different services needed at Maidan. Social networks were used as main source of coordination. Hot telephone lines were organized and this information was shared through the Internet as well. Actual needs were daily updated (such needs as human resources, food, supplies). Bank accounts were created so anybody from Ukraine or from other countries could donate money.

Also some companies and institutions organized internal groups who were responsible to provide support for Maidan (gather money etc.) Some working days were canceled so people could join the movement.

**How about in other parts of the country?**

As far as I know, in Western Ukraine and other Regions (except Eastern), the situation was similar to Kiev but to lesser extent. Also lots of people came to Kiev Maidan and supported Maidan thru different sources.

**Two More Reports**

I asked two of these friends to answer some questions about struggles in other parts of Ukraine against the Maidan revolution. These were questions that others raised that I found hard to answer. Their responses appear below. The first set is from the woman whose descriptions of the Maidan struggle appear directly above.

**To what extent was the original anti-Maidan movement in Eastern Ukraine indigenous? How do we know? Do we trust these sources to be both honest and to know what they are talking about? If so, why?**

I don't think the original movement in Eastern Europe was really indigenous. In this region more people supported Russia compared to other regions in Ukraine. But my understanding is that the movement has been organized by pro-Russian Ukrainian politicians from Yanukovych's party and from people who were sponsored by Russian government. From the very beginning they organized some movements paying money to people from Eastern Ukraine to come to Kiev [to oppose the] Maidan, and then also organized movements in the Eastern Ukrainian cities using same mechanism of "buying people." It was also easier to do because (as I wrote before) at first Russia and Yanukovych had more support in this region.

Also people who used to participate in such meetings (anti-Maidans) mainly came from so called "underclass population" [sic] that was widespread in the eastern Ukraine because of economical and cultural characteristics.

**To what extent are those doing the fighting now indigenous? Russian? How do we know? Do we trust these sources to be both honest and to know what they are talking about? If so, why?**

There are local Ukrainians participating in the fighting, lots of them were bandits and excluded populations in the peaceful time. (Now they sort of found their role in the new–built community.) There are also lots of Russian military in the region. I know it from people who have moved from Eastern Ukraine, also there are lots of reports of the Russian documents that have been found there. (It's always hard to check what was shown on TV, but using information from different sources I personally think that Russian people and pro-Russian locals are doing the fighting there).

**Some Thoughts on Their Comments**

In this quotation, too, it is clear that the writer's (relatively privileged) sense of class structure and the meaning of class differences was not changed by her experiences in the movement. Her description also parallels that of my other two friends in that the movement began to some extent as an initiative supported by existing parties and some oligarchs, but that in the course of struggle the movement escaped from their control and became a mass movement and then a revolution.

I would add an important interpretation to this. To some degree, at least, the ruling oligarchs of Ukraine have been helped to get this revolution under control by the Russian seizure of Crimea and underwriting of the fighting in the Donetsk and Luhansk areas.

**Additional Information From the Ukrainian Man**

Next, I present the responses to my questions from the Ukrainian man already introduced who above described his activities bringing supplies to Kyiv Maidan in his van. The format is that I asked him these questions during the brunch interview, wrote them up, and sent them to him. He then added detail and corrections and sent it back. Again, I have edited this only for clarification. Again, I posed to him questions that I found hard to answer.

**To what extent was the original movement in Eastern Ukraine indigenous? How do we know? Do we trust these sources to be both honest and to know what they are talking about? If so, why?**

**To what extent are those doing the fighting now indigenous? Russian? How do we know? Do we trust these sources to be both honest and to know what they are talking about? If so, why?**

The movement in the East is heavily supported by Russia. Originally, the local oligarchs tried some initiatives to try to control the region (even though they had lost control of the national government) through trying to organize for federalism.  But czarist Russian nationalists in favor of a Russia from ocean to ocean came over the border to further their cause. They were independent of the oligarchs. Putin let them do it. They had some funding, My friend does not know from where.

**Is this what you said or did you just not mention from where?**

ALL this is not-proven information from multiple sources. Some were ex-KGB. Igor Strelkov was a major game-changer in this. He organized among Fundamentalist Russian Orthodox Church guys, with ideas similar to those of the White Army. They got weapons and some military professionals and took over administrative and police buildings in cities. It was a coup against the oligarchs organized by Russians from Russia. They did not obey the oligarchs. They then took over local media and propaganda and called Maidan etc. fascists. They want to make Ukraine and Europe part of Russia.

They started this war. Then the Ukrainian government realized it was a war and mobilized the army and started fighting back.

Strelkov went back to Russia after the plane was shot down. ([4]) Then power went to the local military governments. And the two cities [Donetsk and Luhansk] split apart.

**How do you know all this?**

I read journalists who are reporting from there. And Strelkov's writings and talks. And official Ukrainian reports.

**What do people in the East whom you know tell you?**

The people I know do not take part in any of this. They just want to live their own lives. The "new governments" talk with harm reduction groups and let them continue. ([5])

The military and police and judges are headed by people who came from Russia. They say this freely to reporters and on video, that they came to help their fellow Russians at a time of need and they are on vacation from their work/military service/whatever back in Russia. Some "bandit groups" of fighters are not from Russia, some are from Russia, Chechnya and Abkhazia (where there is not much work so I imagine many come to earn some money or get some money by force) but they do coordinate military activities with the Russian-led military. The Russian military units have the local

bandit groups take the front line positions in engagements. Thus a large proportion of the casualties are these local bandit groups. In these groups there are a lot of "local crazies with guns." That will be a problem.  But a lot of them are killed in action as the first wave or under artillery fire (might be from both sides).

The leaders of the Eastern governments and military have ordered the execution of a lot of people. They should face life sentences when hostilities end.

**Who is fighting on the Ukrainian side?**

Army, police, and volunteer battalions.

**Some U.S. "progressives" say some of these battalions are fascists.**

My friend has not heard this. One of the battalions is Right Sector, but that is one battalion out of 10 or 15.  And my friend has heard Right Sector people speak, and he says that at least publically they speak nationalist but do not speak fascist.

When I wrote up the notes of our interview, I realized that I had failed to ask him about a key event in Odessa.  So I asked him about this in the notes I sent to him. His replies follow the question.

**What is your current interpretation of the events in Odessa that even Chomsky has called "the Odessa massacre"?**

There was a group of pro-Russians organized in Odessa in small anti-Maidan for a few months before May 2. I guess they had hope that there will be much public pro-Russian support or at least passive pro-Russian mood like in Crimea. The same pro-Russian mobilization was in other cities – Donetsk, Kharkiv … so I think there was a scenario to start anti-Maidan and pro-Russian movement in all south and east cities. It failed in Kharkiv and it failed in Odessa – it only succeeded in Donetsk and Luhansk – I think after Odessa there was activation of military action in the east.

Specifically in Odessa – there was a football game and two teams of football fans Ultras (very pro-Ukrainian) which wanted to march to the game with the United Ukraine march. There were some Maidan supporters. I think that the intended scenario was (like previously in Donetsk) to violently punish Maidan supporters by some "radical pro Russian groups " with support of local police. This was successfully done in Donetsk – the aim was to make people fear to support Maidan in those big cities. But this time it was not successful because of football fans and some Self-Defense from Odesa Maidan who were better prepared to respond to violent attack. When they were attacked they fought back – the police were covering [protecting] pro-Russians. There was shooting and some people were killed on the streets – it escalated the situation and pro-Russians were pushed back with police trying to cover their retreat. The fans got very angry that some of them were killed.  The anti-Maidan camp was burned away and so was the building where pro-Russians were barricaded, although I think that the killing people in the building was a bad accident and some gas or chemicals involved – I am not clear on this part.

Generally I think that if there had not been football fans there could be many more victims among peaceful Maidan people in Odessa which were planned to be punished by pro-Russians with support of local police.

**Some Comments on His Responses**

I just want to add two sets of comments about what he said above. The first set concern the Odessa events. Many people on the US left have interpreted the events in Odessa as a massacre by fascist

forces of those who opposed them. I remember hearing about the likelihood of a confrontation on May 2 from a friend of mine who worked on our research project in Odessa. She grew up in Odessa before attending public health school in Kyiv, and I had visited her mother's apartment in Odessa some months before these events. She was worried about whether peaceful Maidan demonstrators would be massacred. As it turns out, a confrontation occurred, and it was the anti-Maidan forces who lost.

In the days following the event, I read widely in the web to try to get to the bottom of what happened. I was particularly impressed by the writings of some anarcho-syndicalist Ukrainians (such as the Autonomous Workers' Union—see http://avtonomia.net/2014/05/05/awu-kiev-statement-odessa-tragedy/#comments. See also the reprinted eyewitness report from "Sergei" in *People and Nature* (https://peopleandnature.wordpress.com/?s=Darkness+in+May.+A+socialist+eye-witness+in+Odessa) who concluded that the police were supporting the anti-Maidan forces to some extent, and that when the building caught on fire and people fled from it, some pro-Maidan activists helped them. (But some—and I do not know how many—were shot by pro-Maidan activists.)

So I consider these events a tragedy—and one that contributed to the violence in Eastern Ukraine—and not a massacre. I furthermore think that many on the international left who call it a massacre have uncritically accepted the news coverage and perhaps the arguments of the Russian propaganda machine, while seeing this (as I suspect Chomsky does) as a more accurate view than the lies and obfuscations put out by the US propaganda system. (My own interpretation of Chomsky on this is that he has been focusing so much on the US propaganda system in recent years that he has lost sight of the existence of rival imperial countries that have their own propaganda systems. Putin, as an ex-officer in the Russian secret police and an oligarch in his own right, is particularly familiar with how to use the Russian system.)

But I want to emphasize one point about Odessa that many people do not seem to understand: Had the Odessa anti-Maidan forces won in the confrontations of May 2, 2014, then Odessa would likely have become devastated by the war that broke out like the regions of the East. Additional hundreds of thousands of refugees, and thousands of deaths, would have been the result.

The second point I want to make based on what my friend said above is to call attention to his analysis of Strelkov's role in organizing the war in the East. Strelkov is a rightwing Russian nationalist with roots in the Russian Orthodox Church as well as in the Russian Army and its suppression of autonomists and fighters for independence in Chechnya. Thus, a key organizer of this war was a man with deep roots in the Russian imperial army. (Given the emphasis that some on the left have put on the presence of fascists in the Ukrainian government after the revolution drove the government out in February, 2014, I would add that there are credible reports about fascists on the other side of this war as well. These include Oleg Tsarev; Pavlo Gubarev, a former head of Donbass militia and of member of Russian fascist paramilitary group, Russian National Unity and the Progressive Socialist Party of Ukraine [which is lined to Russian fascist groups]; and Valeriy Bolotov.)

**Some Concluding Thoughts**

The main reason for this paper is to make available to the international left the realities of the Maidan revolution in Ukraine as it was experienced by some of its participants. To my mind, they make it quite clear that what happened was a political revolution by a politically- and socially-amorphous mass movement that successfully drove the government from power.

In my concluding remarks, I want to address three questions, all of which deserve fuller treatment.

First, why was the government that developed from the Maidan Revolution so rightwing? Second, why has the Maidan Revolution not developed into a social revolution or even into a major social confrontation between the working class (however conceived) and the rightwing capitalist "oligarchs" who dominate the current Ukrainian state? Third, why does so much of the international left view this revolution as a coup and thereby miss its deep implications for revolutionary strategy and visions today?

**§ Why was the government that developed from the Maidan Revolution so rightwing?**

We should not be surprised that the Maidan Revolution resulted in a right-wing government. This almost always happens when an insurrectionary struggle ousts the government. At that time, sections of the ruling classes almost always dominate the immediate temporary government that comes to power. This happened in Egypt earlier in this decade, it happened in Argentina in 2003, and it even happened in the classic struggles in the Russian Empire in February 1917 and in Germany in November 1918. Furthermore, these governments often include some extreme right elements like the Moslem Brotherhood in Egypt—and in Ukraine, it included some extreme rightwing nationalists and a few fascists. Due to the extreme weakness of the organized left in the Maidan struggles—even though there were large numbers of vaguely left participants, and even though the great bulk were radically democratic, anti-Russian imperialist, and desirous of economic changes and an end of corruption—which is to say, open to moving left—the power of capital dominated. Also, as is always true, to the extent that they are able, representatives and/or secret agents of a range of imperialist powers attempted to influence the composition of the resulting temporary government. In this case, many have pointed to the role of the US in supporting Yatsenyuk to be the man who ended up as temporary prime minister. Some on the left have called this a "coup," but it is far more accurate to call it the process by which imperialists and ruling classes respond to successful mass revolutions if they are able to. In this sense, the process in Ukraine in February, 2014, was no more a coup than that which led to the provisional government in the Russian empire in February, 1917, or that which led to the temporary government in Egypt in February, 2011.

**§ Why hasn't the Maidan Revolution moved to become a social revolution?**

I think we have to look to the history of the USSR and the years since its fall to begin to understand this. Stalinism was a horrible experience in Ukraine, as was World War II. Millions of Ukrainians were killed in both. ([6]) The years immediately after World War II were years of continued Stalinist brutality in Ukraine as elsewhere, followed by some continued economic growth, various experiments with economic and political reform, and then the collapse of the USSR and the incredible economic depression and social demoralization of the 1990s. But in one way, Stalinism was a success: It convinced the overwhelming majority of Ukrainians (and Russians and indeed the world) that Stalinism was the true meaning of Marxism and even of socialism. In the context of the Maidan Revolution, this posed a huge ideological barrier to the movement. Based on the face to face talk I had with my Ukrainian friend in another country in January, 2014, I think that by then many in the movement supported radical democratic forms that are akin to what we called "participatory democracy" in the US movements around 1963. But they stalled at that point. Perhaps due in part to the weakness of the Independent Trade Union movement in the country (which itself reflects in part this same ideological barrier), the activists continued to see all classes as participants in the struggle, and no sense of working class agency or of socialism based on it became a mass current in the Maidan in Kyiv. ([7]) In my opinion, the failure of both the left and of union activists to be able to establish on-going presences in the Maidan in Kyiv and most other major cities shows a major weakness of the left internationally, and particularly in those countries that used to be part of the "Communist bloc."

Solving this problem, which is in part due to the popular equation of "left" with Stalinism and other forms of statist autocracies, is a crucial problem for the left and for humanity as a whole. Finding solutions for this can only be retarded by the interpretations and actions of much of the US left in interpreting the Ukrainian crisis as an issue of fascism in Ukraine and/or in terms of the "legitimate" right of Russia to control politics in countries along its borders. (It is shocking to hear some on the left point to the U.S. refusal to allow Cuba to host Russian missiles as a parallel justification for Russian intervention in Eastern Ukraine. But leftists ought to defend the right of any small country to determine its own foreign policy regardless of the wishes of its larger imperial neighbor, whether it's the U.S. or Russia – even if we disagree with the choices the smaller nation makes.) Both of these interpretations help convince many left-thinking workers and activists in Ukraine, Russia and other "post-Communist" countries that the left is either deluded or their enemy.

Despite these issues, at the time of the Maidan Revolution, the movement did have enormous potential to move sharply to the left. This is because the incoming government was another government of corruption and, most important, because it supported and indeed has accepted IMF/US/European demands for structural adjustments and cutbacks. This has led to a number of strikes and other class-based struggles—but they have been muted and weakened because of the Russian intervention and annexation of Crimea and the ensuing struggles in the East.

It is important to understand the potential impact on other countries and the world if the Ukrainian revolution had evolved into a left movement and a workers movement during Spring, 2014. There was a real—but hard to quantify—chance that this could have spread to other countries. There was—and perhaps remains—a potential for it to spread to Bosnia, to Greece, to Italy, to Spain—and particularly to Russia. All of these countries had mass disaffection with their governments and might have followed the lead of a Ukrainian or other social revolution or revolutionary movement. Of course, the movements in each country has its own weaknesses and unclarities about political directions and goals, which would have shaped their responses—but as events after the Tunisian revolution showed, revolutionary movements can sometimes spread more than we would expect.

Putin is no dummy ([8]). He and the government officials and the Russian (and perhaps foreign) capitalists around him saw this potential threat to their power and indeed, perhaps, to capitalism. They moved intelligently—but with some risk of causing a world war—to prevent it by creating a threat to Ukrainian national independence by its former imperial master. They seized Crimea, and supported efforts at rebellion by groups in East Ukraine and Odessa. In Odessa, they were defeated quickly, but the Russian propaganda machine distorted what happened as discussed above. In Eastern Ukraine, they had more success. This, as I think they knew it would, strengthened the nationalist and militarist forces within Ukraine, ([9]) and therefore weakened the possibilities of the fight against cutbacks taking forms that would threaten Putin's rule in Russia, the oligarch's rule in Ukraine, and, more generally, that of capitalism and all imperialism.

Part of their success was based on a line that distorted the fascist threat out of all proportion. A fair number of Ukrainians, perhaps particularly those with less understanding of Russia as imperialist, believed this description of either Maidan or the new government as fascist. Others were confused and were immobilized, or had opposed Maidan for other reasons. (The anti-Maidan reaction was helped along by the stupidity—quickly reversed—of those in the temporary Kyiv government who passed a law making Ukrainian the only official language.) It should be noted that in the elections during Fall, 2014, neither the Right Bloc nor Svoboda got the 5% votes needed to enter into parliament.

**§ Why does so much of the international left view this revolution as a coup and thereby miss its deep implications for revolutionary strategy and visions today?**

I do not have space here to do a proper job of presenting the various statements by groups that view this revolution as a coup and implicitly or explicitly support the actions of Russia in seizing Crimea and backing the struggles in Eastern Ukraine. Instead, I will briefly present their rationales for such an action and then briefly critique it.

Most basically, they present this in terms of American (and European Union) imperialism as being the greatest purveyor of violence in the world (which it is) and the overwhelmingly dominant imperialist force. They see Russia's actions in opposing any increase of US/EU power in Ukraine or other countries near Russia's borders as being "legitimate" defensive anti-imperialist actions. Some of them still see the world from the viewpoint that many in the US left had in the late 1960s as being a world where the main actors are the imperialist states (US and its allies) and those states which oppose imperialism—which have included, for some of them, Gaddafi's Libya, Syria, China, and Russia, among others.

In my discussions with them, furthermore, they proudly proclaim that they oppose US imperialism and see these other countries as their allies. Put in terms that Lenin or Marx might have used, they are thus siding with the capitalist rulers of these other countries and against the capitalist rulers of their own country. In some ways, this echoes Lenin's call to create revolutions in your own country since your own rulers are your main enemy—but neglects to mention that Lenin saw this as the proper strategy for the global left and thus would freely criticize and act against the rulers of Germany or the USA even while embroiled in the struggle against Czarism and Russian imperialism.

In a time of global climate change, not to mention severe strains among nuclear-armed states like the US, Russia and China, I have trouble seeing how such an analysis of some powerful states' rulers as allies offers much basis for hope or strategy. Petro-state Russia (which just seized the Crimea with its nearby Black Sea carbon fuel resources) is not going to move to end climate change any faster than the USA.

Furthermore, this analysis totally ignores the democratic rights of 45 million Ukrainians and those of other countries that border Russia. Inside the US, it blows up in our faces when people see "the left" supporting regimes like Assad's or Putin's.[10]

Even more important, to the extent that people in Ukraine and other countries who rightly understand that Russia has been and is imperialist—which includes some in the Russian left–see "the left" supporting the imperialists closest to them, they will see the left as either an enemy or feeble-minded. It will be hard enough for the left in these countries (and Russia too, for that matter) to unlearn the lessons of the USSR that equate the system they lived under at that time with Marxism and socialism.  Add to that the support of large sections of the Western left for Russian imperialism, and the task becomes monumentally harder.

Finally, let me be clear. I do not believe that capitalist states are forces for good. They form the basis for imperialism, warfare, workers' exploitation, and a host of oppressions around race, religion, nationality and gender. What I have learned from my own activism and also from reading history is that change comes from below. Any hope for liberation or indeed for the survival of human civilization in an age of climate change depends on workers and their allies mobilizing and taking the power to destroy the planet and our lives and happiness away from capital and its states. Our commitment both inside the US and around the world should be with movements for workers' rights and power, democracy, sustainability, an end to all imperialism, and an end to all oppressions. In terms of Ukraine, this will mean siding with those who fight for their rights and needs, like the workers in Krivih Rih who were the bulk of the local Maidan movement there, and later waged massive strikes around economic issues, or like the tram drivers in Kyiv who struck against cutbacks instituted by the new government there. It will also mean generally opposing the Kyiv regime,

US/Western imperialism—and Russian imperialism. And just as I wish US anti-war and anti-imperialists would support the workers', pro-democracy and anti-Russian imperialist movement in Ukraine, I also wish that more Ukrainian democrats and activists would oppose not only Russian but US/EU imperialism.

**Sam Friedman is an internationally known HIV/AIDS researcher, an activist and socialist for most of his life, and a published movement poet.*

*This article was previously published in various versions on other websites. We thank the author for permission to republlish here.*

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**Appendix:**

**Timeline: Ukraine's Political Crisis**

(Source: Al Jazeera http://www.aljazeera.com/news/europe/2014/03/timeline-ukraine-political-crisis-201431143722854652.html 20 Sep 2014 05:48 GMT) downloaded 4/15/2015

I amended the Al Jazeera timeline by deleting a lot of entries not central to this article and by monor text editing for brevity and clarity. Anyone who wishes to see the original can look at the URL cited above.

The dates of my trips to Ukraine appear on the right

September 2010 Kyiv

May/June 2011 Kyiv

October 2011 Kyiv, Kriviy Rih, Lviv

May 2012 Kyiv, Crimea

October 2012 Kyiv, Odessa

May 2013 Kyiv, Odessa

October 31/November 14, 2013 Kyiv, Odessa

Nov 21, 2013: President Yanukovich abandons trade agreement with EU, seeks closer ties with Moscow.

Nov 30: Public support grows for pro-EU anti-government protesters as images of them bloodied by police crackdown spread online and in the media.

Dec 1: About 300,000 people protest in Kiev's Independence Square. The City Hall is seized by activists.

Dec 17: Russian President Putin announces plans to buy $15bn in Ukrainian government bonds and a cut in cost of Russia's natural gas for Ukraine.

Jan 16 2014: Anti-protest laws are passed and quickly condemned as "draconian".

Jan 22: Two protesters die after being shot. A third dies following a fall during confrontation with police.

Jan 28: Mykola Azarov resigns as Ukraine's prime minister; parliament repeals anti-protest laws that caused the demonstrations to escalate in the first place.

Jan 29: A bill is passed, promising amnesty for arrested protesters if seized government buildings are relinquished.

Jan 31: Opposition activist Dmytro Bulatov found outside Kiev after being imprisoned and tortured for eight days, apparently at the hands of a pro-Russian group.

February 4 – 8, 2014 Odessa

Feb 16: Opposition activists end occupation of Kiev City Hall. In exchange 234 jailed protesters are released.

Feb 18: Street clashes leave at least 18 dead and around a hundred injured. Violence begins when protesters attack police lines after parliament stalls in passing constitutional reform to limit presidential powers. Protesters take back government buildings.

Feb 20: Kiev sees its worst day of violence for almost 70 years. At least 88 people are killed in 48 hours. Footage shows government snipers shooting at protesters from rooftops.

Feb 21: Protest leaders, the political opposition and Yanukovich agree to form a new government and hold early elections. Yanukovich's powers are slashed. The parliament votes to free Yulia Tymoshenko, the former prime minister, from prison. Yanukovich flees Kiev after protesters take control of the capital.

Feb 22: Ukraine politicians vote to remove Yanukovich. Tymoshenko is freed from prison and speaks to those gathered in Kiev. May 25 is set for fresh presidential elections.

Feb 23: Ukraine's parliament assigns presidential powers to its new speaker, Oleksandr Turchinov, an ally of Tymoshenko. Pro-Russian protesters rally in Crimea against the new Kiev administration.

Feb 24: Ukraine's interim government draws up a warrant for Yanukovich's arrest.

Feb 25: Pro-Russian Aleksey Chaly is appointed Sevastopol's de facto mayor as rallies in Crimea continue.

Feb 26: Crimean Tartars supporting the new Kiev administration clash with pro-Russia protesters in the region.

Feb 27: Pro-Kremlin armed men seize government buildings in Crimea. Ukraine government vows to prevent a country break-up as Crimean parliament sets May 25 as date for referendum on region's status. Yanukovich is granted refuge in Russia.

Feb 28: Armed men in unmarked combat fatigues seize Simferopol international airport and a military airfield in Sevestopol. UN Security Council holds an emergency closed-door session to discuss the situation in Crimea.

Moscow says military movements in Crimea are in line with previous agreements to protect its fleet position in the Black Sea. Yanukovich makes his first public appearance, in southern Russia.

March 1: Russian upper house of the parliament approves a request by Putin to use military power in Ukraine.

March 2: A convoy of hundreds of Russian troops heads towards the regional capital of Crimea. Arseny Yatsenyuk, Ukraine's new prime minister, accuses Russia of declaring war on his country.

March 3: Russia's Black Sea Fleet tells Ukrainian navy in Sevastopol in Crimea to surrender or face a military assault.

March 4 : In his first public reaction to crisis in Ukraine, Putin says his country reserves the right to use all means to protect its citizens in eastern Ukraine. Russian forces fire warning shots on unarmed Ukrainian soldiers marching towards an airbase in Sevastopol.

March 6: Crimea's parliament votes unanimously in favour of joining Russia. Hours later, the city council of Sevastopol in Crimea announces joining Russia immediately.

March 11: The EU proposes a package of trade liberalisation measures to support Ukraine's economy. Crimean regional parliament adopts a "declaration of independence".

March 12: Obama meets with Yatsenyuk at the White House in a show of support for the new Ukrainian government and declares the US would "completely reject" the Crimea referendum.

March 13: Ukraine's parliament votes to create a 60,000-strong National Guard to defend the country.

March 15: UN Security Council members vote overwhelmingly in support of a draft resolution condemning an upcoming referendum on the future of Crimea as illegal. Russia vetoed the action and China abstained.

March 16: Crimea's referendum official results stating that at least 95 percent of voters support union with Russia.

March 17: US and Europe put asset freezes and visa bans on individuals involved in the Crimean breakaway.

March 18: Putin signs treaty absorbing Crimea into Russia, the first time the Kremlin expands the

country's borders since World War II. Kiev says the conflict has reached a "military stage" after a Ukrainian soldier was shot and killed by gunmen who stormed a military base in Simferopol, the first such death in the region since pro-Russian forces took over in late February.

March 19: Pro-Russian activists, apparently Crimean self-defense forces, overtake Sevastopol base without using violence.

March 20: EU leaders condemn Russia's annexation of Crimea. EU and US extend list of individuals targeted for sanctions.

March 21: Russia backs off from tit-for-tat sanctions after US targets Putin's inner circle and EU adds 12 names to sanctions list. Ukraine says it will never accept loss of Crimea while Moscow signs a bill to formally annex the peninsula.

March 29: Ukraine's presidential race begins with former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko and billionaire confectionery tycoon Petro Poroshenko registering as hopefuls.

March 31: Russian troops partly withdraw from Ukrainian border in the south region of Rostov in Russia, following talks between Russia's foreign minister and his US counterpart.

April 2: Ukraine's ousted president admits he was "wrong" in inviting Russian troops into Crimea and vows to try to persuade Moscow to return the peninsula.

April 6: Pro-Russian activists seize control of government buildings in the eastern cities of Donetsk, Luhansk and Kharkiv, calling for a referendum on independence. Ukraine authorities regain control of Kharkiv buildings on April 8 after launching an "anti-terror operation".

April 11: Ukraine's interim prime minister offers to give more powers to the eastern regions, as pro-Russia separatists continue to occupy buildings in Donetsk and Luhansk.

April 12: Pro-Russian gunmen take over the police station and security services building in the town of Slovyansk, 60 kilometres from Donetsk where pro-Russian rebels take over the police headquarters. The separatists also seize a police HQ in Kramatorsk.

April 13: Ukrainian special forces fail to dislodge pro-Russian gunmen in Slovyansk. One Ukrainian officer and one pro-Russian activist are killed in the operation. Meanwhile, separatists seize city council buildings in Mariupol and Khartsyzsk.

April 16: Ukrainian troops turn back from Slovyansk while a pro-Russian group seizes the town hall in Donetsk.

April 17: Ukrainian troops repel an overnight attack in Mariupol, killing three assailants. Around 200 people then demonstrate in the town against Kiev. Putin acknowledges that Russian forces were deployed in Crimea during the March referendum on joining Russia, but says he hopes not to have to use his "right" to send Russian troops into Ukraine.

April 18: Pro-Russian groups say they will not be moved from occupied buildings until the government in Kiev, which they see as illegitimate, is also removed. Russia condemns talks of more sanctions. Ukraine's interim government pledges broad independent governance and says the Russian language will be given a "special status" in the country.

April 20: A deadly gunfight in an eastern Ukrainian town shatters a fragile Easter truce.

April 21:  Protesters in Luhansk pledge to hold their own local referendum on autonomy on May 11.

May 1: About 300 pro-Russian fighters seize the prosecutor's office in Donetsk. Conscription is reintroduced for all Ukrainian men aged 18-25.

May 2: The bloodiest day since the new government came to power. At least 10 die in fresh army assault on Slovyansk. In the southern city of Odessa, 42 die when clashes between pro-Russian fighters and pro-Ukraine supporters culminate in a massive blaze.

May 9: Putin flies to annexed Crimea after overseeing a display of military might in the Red Square where he paid tribute to Russia's "all-conquering patriotic force." Clashes break out in Mariupol that the interior minister says leave 21 dead.

May 12 :  Pro-Russia activists declare resounding victory in a twin referendum on sovereignty for eastern Ukraine. The provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk voted on Sunday to secede from Ukraine. Russian gas giant Gazprom gives Ukraine until June 3 to pay $1.6bn for natural gas. The EU ramps up sanctions on Moscow.

May 25:  Petro Poroshenko wins the Ukrainian presidential runoff, but reports indicate that access to voting was blocked or heavily impeded in many rebel-held areas of eastern Ukraine.

June 16: Russia halts gas deliveries to Ukraine, despite an offer from Ukrainian and European negotiators for an interim agreement. Gazprom announces Ukraine will only receive gas it pays for in advance.

June 27:  Poroshenko signs an EU association agreement, eight months after protests over the abandonment of the agreement began.

July 5:  Ukraine's army recaptures Slovyansk, formerly a major rebel base. A simultaneous operation in Kramatorsk also forced the rebels out of the town.

July 17:  Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 is shot down of eastern Ukraine, killing all 298 people on board. An adviser to Ukraine's interior ministry states the plane was shot by a missile from a Buk surface-to-air launcher.

July 18:  Obama confirms that initial assessments suggest MH17 was shot down by a BUK-M1 surface-to-air missile shot from territory controlled by pro-Russia rebels.

July 19:  Kiev accuses rebel forces of tampering with evidence at the crash site, saying the armed groups were moving bodies and destroying evidence. Other reports indicate the OSCE monitoring group sent to the site was only granted limited access.

July 20:  Several EU leaders threaten to impose further sanctions on Russia if the Kremlin does not pressure rebels thought to have shot down the MH17 passenger plane to grant more access to the crash site.

July 23:  US intelligence officials say they believe the plane was shot down by pro-Russian separatists "by mistake."

July 24:  The US accuses Russia of firing artillery across the border into Ukraine, but does not share its evidence. A Pentagon spokesman describes it as a "military escalation." on the same day, the coalition government in Ukraine collapses, and Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk resigns following the withdrawal of the Svoboda and UDAR parties.

August 1: Ukraine's government votes to reject the resignation of Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk. Yatsenyuk's budget proposals, previously blocked by the parliament, forcing his resignation and the collapse of the coalition, are approved in full. Meanwhile, investigators from Holland and Australia begin a detailed inspection of the MH17 crash site.

August 13: At least 12 Ukrainian nationalist fighters from the Right Sector group are killed and an unknown number taken captive when their bus is ambushed in eastern Ukraine.

August 26: Ukraine says its troops have captured a group of Russian military servicemen who had crossed the border into eastern Ukraine. Russian and Ukrainian presidents meet in Minsk face-to-face for the first time since June.

August 30: Ukraine announces that it has abandoned an eastern city of Ilovaisk through a corridor after days of encirclement by the rebels.

Source: Al Jazeera and agencies

January/February 2015 Kyiv, Odessa

**Footnotes**

[1] See the Appendix for a brief timeline of events.

[2] Sophie Pinkham, who worked for Soros-connected US NGOs that worked on harm reduction activities in Ukraine, has also described what some of her friends have told her. See Pinkham citations in the Reference list. Given the extent to which some progressives have demonized NGOs, I would add that the funding of the Ukrainian organizations my friends work in comes heavily from the Global Fund on AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria; World Bank; and PEPFAR. These groups are of course funded by governments and by capital, but their anti-HIV activities are far less directly political than those usually mentioned by progressive critics. Many of the critics of NGOs, I would add, work for universities or other organizations in the US (or elsewhere) that are likewise funded to a large extent by governments and capital, although in some cases the degree of direct political control of these organizations is considerably less than is true for the NGOs that they focus their criticism on.

[3] This means, in some cases, that some of the words they use may seem imbalanced or unclear. For this I apologize, but I think it is better to present what they say and leave some questions in readers' minds than to ask them to explain and perhaps get sanitized explanations.

[4] This is a reference to the shooting down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over the war zone in Eastern Ukraine in mid-July, 2014. It dominated the news reports for several days. Since some well-known AIDS researchers were on this plane from Amsterdam on the way to the International AIDS Conference, I knew at least two of the people who were killed, and was interviewed (at the Melbourne AIDS Conference) about the event by several TV stations. My remarks centered on the bravery of all AIDS researchers in flying so much, particularly after the death of Jonathan Mann and Mary Lou Clements-Mann in the crash of Swissair Flight 111 off Nova Scotia in September, 1998. That air crash also dominated the news, and was used by groups in the US government to enact what they framed as anti-terrorist legislation. I knew Jon Mann well, and Joep Lange and Glenn Thomas who died in the Ukraine disaster to a lesser extent.

[5] My friends who provided this interview information are part of the efforts to counter the large-scale HIV/AIDS epidemic in Ukraine. As in Russia, this epidemic is centered among people who inject drugs. Thus, my friends are part of networks of harm reduction projects across Ukraine (and beyond) that provide access to sterile syringes and HIV testing and counseling to help stem the spread of HIV and also help people who inject drugs and others to gain access to, and due well in, HIV-related medical care. In the course of this work, they are in frequent communication with similar harm reduction activists in Donetsk, Luhansk, Crimea and elsewhere.

[6] Many supporters of the Putinist interpretation of Maidan emphasize the existence of pro-German Ukrainian groups who fought against the USSR in WW II, and the pro-Nazi views of some of them. These same Putinists discuss the many millions of Russians who gave their lives fighting the NAZIs. They fail to mention the millions of Ukrainians who died either as victims of Nazi repression or as soldiers fighting the German forces. Even for those who view WW II as a morality play between evil Nazis and a virtuous democratic alliance, this failure to take account of the huge number of Ukrainian deaths fighting Germany is shameful. For those of us who are Marxist or other left activists who understand the WW II was a war among rival imperialisms, such an analysis is simply naïve and incomplete.

[7] Unfortunately, although I visited Krivih Rih a couple years before these struggles broke out, I do not have friends there who can tell me the details of what happened in their Maidan movement. In that city, the movement was heavily working class and based on the unions. But overt working class power or even participation in the movement did not broaden to many other cities. Huge numbers of workers took part—but not consciously as workers.

[8] Putin may be worth analysis.  He seems to me to be taking a “Metternichean” role in trying to organize a “concert of nations” against revolution.  At a talk he gave at the Valdai International Discussion Club in October, 2014, this is quite clear.  One sentence in this talk was particularly revealing. He said: “Only the current Egyptian leadership’s determination and wisdom saved this key Arab country from chaos and having extremists run rampant.” In this, he supported the coup against the Moslem Brotherhood and the repressive dictatorship which currently rules the country in a counter-revolution directed against workers, strikes and the Tahrir Square liberation movement. His effort to form a counter-revolutionary concert of nations is unlikely to be any more successful at holding off revolutions than the Holy Alliance or any more successful in preventing a World War than were similar efforts in the early 1900s.

Another perspective on Putin is that he is head of a petro-state at a time when global warming threatens the economic and political power of petro-states and the industry. Furthermore, if Dzarasov is right in his analysis (Dzarasov, Ruslan. 2013. *The Conundrum of Russian Capitalism: The Post-Soviet Economy in the World System*. London: Pluto Press), the internal organization of Russian capitals in terms of high vulnerability to political attacks and related short-term “grab the cash” approaches to investments means that it will be difficult for policy or other action to reduce national economic dependency on energy extraction.

[9] A friend sent me an email on 10 November, 2014, that said, “Sorry for missing this on time. If I still may, I agree with most of what you said. It is after speaking to you I noticed in the Ukrainian events that there was a huge swing from left to right in public debate. However some people stay focused on anti-corruption and lustration and change of the system but now because of the war and conflict this is quite lost in patriotic rhetoric … Military and war leaders become popular heroes of

popular vote and they are in the top list of most political parties along with the  usual politicians and some Maidan leaders. Worrisome are some radical calls to fighters to come after fighting with Russia to Kyiv and demand or take power. Reminds me of some military coups following revolutions. At the same time the Right Sector as a political party didn't get many votes in the last elections. So it is not swinging all way to the right yet."

[10] Which are generally not as horrible as the US propaganda machine paints them. But they are nonetheless pretty terrible and nothing to emulate or praise. People in left and workers' movements in Ukraine or Russia will wonder how the left can support people like Putin who oppress gays and limit democracy, and base their economic and diplomatic power on carbon-based fuels and atomic weaponry.