

# UKRAINE'S ANTI-SOVIET EURO-REVOLUTION

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The tragic murder of seven protesters on 22 January 2014, symbolically Ukrainian independence and unity day, is the first occasion this has happened in three decades when the country was still part of the Soviet Union. Although the use of firearms and other lethal weapons was authorized by the Nikolai Azarov government in three resolutions that same day under the presidential constitution the buck stops President Viktor Yanukovich.

The bloodshed came about because of the nature of who are in power.

In the first decade of Ukrainian independence the dominant political figures were former dissidents turned national democrats on the one side and ex-Komsomol (Communist Youth League) and senior political and economic nomenklatura on the other. Ukraine's first three presidents (Leonid Kravchuk, Leonid Kuchma and Viktor Yushchenko) hailed from these groups and they supported the three pillars of the Ukrainian independent state – democratization (in fits and starts), Ukrainian national identity and European integration. They were anti-communist and fought Crimean Russian nationalist-separatists. More importantly, during crises such as the 2004 Orange Revolution they supported compromise and negotiation through round-tables.

They were not angels – few were on either side of the political divide – and most were tainted with corruption. But, at the same time, this was largely derived from white collar crime.

A second group emerged throughout the former USSR but only in Ukraine did ex-criminal elites come to power; post-Soviet leaders have come from the senior Soviet party or security nomenklatura. Yanukovych and Azarov come from the Donetsk region which has two specifics of being highly violent during the post-Soviet transition and very Soviet in its identity. Little wonder that the Party of Regions, the political krysha (roof, criminal slang for protection) for the Donetsk clan, found common cause with Crimean Russian nationalists. The Crimea led the way in violence in the 1990s and also has a strong Soviet identity. Meanwhile, the Communists have become a Party of Regions satellite.

The Donetsk-Crimean alliance was forged in 2006 when the Party of Regions won first place in Parliamentary elections but it was Yanukovych's 2010 election as president that enabled the alliance to capture the Ukrainian state. Donetsk and Crimea were backwaters in the USSR and its local elites had no influence in Kyiv and this was the first time Donetsk ruled Ukraine.

High levels of bloodshed in Donetsk and Crimea continued through to the late 1990s and the Party of Regions that emerged from this in 2000 was organized by Governor Yanukovych to provide political protection for the Donetsk clan. The Party of Regions integrated former 'Red Directors' of state enterprises that had been insider-privatized, organized crime leaders, newly emerging oligarchs and ex-security officials. Fourteen years later the party still includes eighteen people with ties to crime.

The regional and social origins of Yanukovych and the Party of Regions explain their Sovietophile and Russophile identities as well as their thuggish behavior.

It was therefore wrong to assume post-Soviet elites were similar to US robber barons as this would be only analytically correct for those who dominated ruling elites in the 1990s. Yanukovych and his oligarch allies have more in common with American criminal figures. As a Kyiv taxi driver told me in December, the difference between Kuchma and Yanukovych was that between Silvio Berlusconi and Al Capone.

The bloodshed was therefore the culmination of five sparks that led to the explosion that began last Sunday and is on-going. Disillusionment with the Yushchenko presidency had dampened protest during Yanukovych's first three years.

Firstly, the destruction of Ukrainian democracy that had its apogee on Black Thursday (16 January) culminating in the installation of a dictatorship.

Secondly, replacement of Ukrainian by Soviet Russian national identity with in summer 2012 the Russian language elevated to the same status as Ukrainian.

Thirdly, thuggishness; they are the only political force to use skinhead-sportsmen vigilantes (nicknamed Tushki) operating in tandem with and trained by the police for corporate raiding and attacks on journalists, opposition leaders and civic activists. Two of the seven dead were murdered by vigilantes operating as a de facto death squad. Ihor Lutsenko, a Euro-Maydan leader who was also kidnapped by them, managed to escape. Thuggish behaviour has also been evident in the use of election fraud by Yanukovych in every one of his state capacities as governor, prime minister and president and use of brutal police violence against Euro-Maydan protesters, leaders (former Interior Minister Yuriy Lutsenko) and journalists (Tetyana Chornovol).

Fourthly, corruption as pointed out by the editor of Ukraine's influential Dzerkalo Tyzhnya weekly Yulia Mostova who wrote Yanukovich has three goals of becoming the wealthiest, most powerful and longest serving president in Ukraine. Capture of the state has led to rampant corruption of a scale never seen before with massive corporate raiding. Economist Anders Aslund believes this in the nature of over \$10 billion lost to corruption each year. Yanukovich has used his power to establish his own clan (dubbed 'The Family') led by his eldest son Oleksandr who although a dentist joined the top fifty wealthiest Ukrainians only three years after his father became president.

Fifthly, some Ukrainians were willing to ignore the above if the president kept Ukraine on a course of European integration hoping that Brussels would reform these practices in a manner to which Italians and Greeks had also despaired of their capital cities. But, at the end of November the government without warning annulled further negotiations with the EU for an Association Agreement which became the straw that broke the camel's back.

Ukrainians have hit the streets and set up tents on the Maydan three times in 1990, 2004 and 2013-14 all each occasion against Eurasianist authoritarian leaders. Today, anger is at boiling point because Yanukovich has both attacked the three pillars of Ukrainian independence and undermined Ukrainian sovereignty travelling to Moscow in the capacity of president and returning as regional governor.

Yanukovich's Sovietophile and thuggish behavior, his destruction of democracy which he is constitutionally obligated to protect coupled with his shedding of blood undermines his legitimacy in the eyes of most Ukrainians and rules out him having a political future in Ukraine. A 'wanna-be' Putin who dreamt of ruling Ukraine as a managed democracy in the same manner

as he governed Donetsk, Yanukovich has now learned too late that Ukraine is not – and will not – be Russia.