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Ukraine

The Western Left Should Not Repeat the Mistake Ukrainian Protesters Did on Maidan

- Debate - 2022 - Ukraine -

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The protesters that started gathering on Kyiv's main square (â€˜maidan') almost ten months ago were driven by a certain kind of â€˜occidentalism' (if I may introduce this term by analogy with orientalism). Europe, which stood as an epitome of Occident for them, presented a generalized image of Ukraine relieved from all evils: corruption, poverty, economic backwardness. However, this vacuous image formed by the desires of the protesting masses, was filled by the content provided by political passions of groups, organizations and parties that struggled to dominate the protest. For liberals it was the Europe of bourgeois democracy, free trade and developed financial markets, for national democrats it was the Europe of elusive â€˜European values' opposed to â€˜the Asian horde', for the far right it was the â€˜Fortress of Europe' and for the few left-wing groups it was the Europe of social struggle. While the brightest dreams of the Maidan coalesced in the image of Europe, the worst nightmares were projected towards Ukraine's East: Ukraine's own eastern regions, the stronghold of the then ruling elite, and its eastern neighbor, Russia.

Later, both dreams and fears turned into a nightmare of reality. The occident came with IMF conditional borrowing that stipulated cutting of budget expenses, freezing wages, raising energy prices for households and a set of other austerity measures. The orient came with the Orwell-style propaganda, annexation of Crimea and aggravation of the military conflict in Ukraine's eastern regions. By now, protesters of Maidan and anti-Maidan got the worst of both West and East: economic imperialism of international financial institutions and military-political imperialism of Putin's regime. The consequences on the ground are devastating: the worst economic downturn since 2008 crisis with thousands of workers that lost their jobs, with every household facing the challenge of heating their houses in the winter, with thousands of lives lost in a meaningful war and other tens of thousands displaced or lost the roofs under their heads.

Meanwhile, some western left-wing groups and parties repeat the mistake of the Maidan protesters: they create an equally Orientalized image of either anti-fascist â€˜people's republics' fighting against Kyiv â€˜junta' or a democratic government harassed by an Asian despot. They project their frustrated desires either onto the pro-Russian rebels or pro-Western oligarchic government. It is true that situation is complex and it takes time to analyze the concrete situation on the ground, but the analysis from class perspective is never simple. At the end of the day, the effect of the civil war in Ukraine aggravated by Russian military intervention has a truly devastating effect for Ukraine's working class formation and anti-capitalist struggle. The workers are split between the ultra-conservative ideology of nostalgia for the Russian empire and nationalist ideology of the â€˜united Ukraine', devoid of any pro-socialist agenda. Moreover, Russia's increasingly reactionary and chauvinist domestic policies distantiate Russian working class from the Ukrainian. These splits are reflected in the disoriented and fragmented left in Ukraine and Russia. The European left should be very careful and attentive in reacting to the Ukrainian crisis not to aggravate the defeated workers' situation in Ukraine and invent relevant forms of solidarity and support.

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