

Sweden: Internationalen paints Ukraine Black

Saturday 13 August 2022, by [CZAJKOWSKI Jan](#), [Friends of Socialist Politics](#) (Date first published: 11 August 2022).

In my post in [the Swedish left publication] Internationalen 32/2022 (see below), I argue that Per Leander's claim in No. 30/2022 that Ukrainian President Zelensky "banned virtually all remaining opposition parties at the outbreak of war" is false and misleading.

Internationalen's editorial board responded directly to my post, claiming that "with the addition of 'of importance', the political situation might have been better captured."

But my main point was that - in fact - none of the voices in the Ukrainian parliament have been silenced. So when the Internationalen editorial continues, "The state of war has silenced most voices advocating peace settlements, neutrality, and criticism of EU and NATO accession" - then it becomes clear that it is actually the small extra-parliamentary, pro-Russia party groupings that Internationalen sees as Ukraine's only "real" opposition parties "of significance". That is, those who think much the same as the Socialist Party (SP) Internationalen's editorial board. The fact that other voices advocating "peace settlements" have generally been silenced during the state of war is not due to repression, but to the realization by the Ukrainian people that the country must be defended against Russian aggression if Ukraine is to survive as a nation at all.

In order for Internationalen's recurring vision of peace negotiations as the solution to the conflict not to lose credibility, it will be necessary to continue to paint the Ukrainian side in a black light and to play down the true nature of the Russian genocidal policy. Despite repeated statements by Putin and his mouthpieces that Ukraine has no reason to exist and should be annexed in its entirety, despite the fact that over 300,000 Ukrainian children have been abducted to Russia to an unknown fate, despite Russian spokesmen saying that millions of Ukrainian "Nazis" cannot be converted but must be liquidated, Internationalen continues to sing the refrain of ceasefire and peace negotiations - as if nothing had happened.

And Per Leander doesn't seem to take much care to check his sources when attacking the Ukrainian government. He later writes in the same article I criticised: "Last week, the head of the Ukrainian security police SBU Ivan Bakanov and the chief prosecutor Irina Venediktova were fired, both accused of being 'Russian agents'. In addition, over 600 state officials have been arrested as 'traitors'. Whether there is any truth in these accusations, or whether it is Zelensky's increasingly desperate search for scapegoats, remains to be seen."

It turns out that Per's angle is questionable, to say the least. Bakanov and Venediktova, for one, were not dismissed but suspended. Nowhere have I found any allegations that they were "Russian agents." Moreover, on August 4, it was announced that Venediktova is proposed as the new Ukrainian ambassador to Switzerland. Is this how Zelensky handles Russian agents? What it really comes down to, according to the Ukrainian government, is that both top officials had to resign because they did not do their jobs.

That 600 state officials were arrested as “traitors” is Per’s own interpretation. What had been said was that 651 preliminary investigations have been launched. How many, if any, have been arrested has so far not been revealed. It was also announced at the same time that some 60 of these cases concerned officials who had already openly changed sides, i.e. people who had gone to work for the occupying forces in the Russian-controlled areas.

Per Leander’s analysis is that this is all about Zelensky’s “desperate search for scapegoats”. Scapegoats for what? Before the war, as we know, there were quite a few people in eastern Ukraine who sympathised with Russia. Today, according to consistent reports, there are far fewer of them. Apparently, most of those who saw Russia as a “brother nation” before the war have changed their minds as Russian bombs have rained down on neighbourhoods, hospitals and schools, especially in the Donbass. But that there are individuals who see an opportunity to enrich themselves by completely switching their allegiance to the side of the occupiers is almost self-evident. Let us not forget that even before the war, Ukraine had huge problems with corruption permeating all levels of society.

And as one might expect, Internationalen is probably the voice in Sweden that has so far been most positive about Amnesty’s report on Ukraine, which has been heavily criticised for not distinguishing between aggressor and aggrieved. On Internationalen’s editorial page in the latest issue, Åke Eriksson cheerfully thanks Amnesty for the report. The fact that Russia can continue to ruthlessly attack all kinds of civilian targets, without even having to apologise, is nothing that worries the peace campaigners on the International’s editorial board.

Once again, the parallel with the Vietnam War comes to mind. We used to say that the FNL was like the “fish in the water” among the people. This meant that the guerrillas mixed with the population and got their supplies from peasant sympathisers. The downside of this was that virtually all Vietnamese civilians came to be regarded as potential enemies by the American invasion forces, and many massacres were committed against people who were not directly involved in the war effort in any way.

I do not know whether Amnesty ever drew attention to this in its reports. But I can imagine what they might write today.

My contribution to the Internationalen 32/2022:

Error on Party Ban in Ukraine

Per Leander writes in passing in Internationalen 30/2022 that Ukrainian President Zelensky “banned virtually all remaining opposition parties at the outbreak of war.”

That sounds very bad. Per Leander seems to want to give the image that Zelenskyj has used the war to make himself more or less a dictator.

But is that really the case?

There are currently 16 or 17 banned political parties in Ukraine, all of which have had close ties with Russia or organised pro-Russian separatists based in eastern Ukraine.

In 2020, there were 349 registered parties in Ukraine, most of them very small or no longer existing.

The Ukrainian party system has been characterised by parties built around individuals, such as Petro Poroshenko, Yulia Tymoshenko and Volodymyr Zelensky. The parties have sometimes had great success in elections, only to be reduced to rather insignificant players once people have seen through them. This is more a sign that Ukraine is not a Western European-style democracy, but hardly something for which Zelensky and his party can be blamed. It is likely that if the war had not intervened, Zelensky's party would have met a similar fate in the coming elections.

The ban on pro-Russian parties is certainly an abuse. But perhaps not so remarkable when it occurs in the midst of a burning war. The fact that parliamentary processes are still functioning reasonably well while Russian artillery attacks continue throughout the country may well be considered remarkable in itself.

Just as the Nazis in World War II put local quislings in formal power in occupied countries, the Russian occupying power has sought to find collaborators sympathetic to the occupiers to place in key administrative positions. It is natural that the existing pro-Russian party structures on the ground have been turned to in the first instance. And of course there are therefore also strong incentives for the Ukrainian state leadership to try to prevent this.

In the 2019 parliamentary elections, Zelensky's party won a landslide victory and gained its own majority in the Ukrainian parliament, the Rada. The parties that can be described as opposition parties in the Rada have since held about a third of the seats.

Only one of the now banned parties was represented in the Rada - "Opposition Platform - For Life" which had 43 seats (out of a total of 450). But what Per Leander does not write is that already a week after the ban, the banned party's members had transformed themselves into two organised parliamentary groups, "Platform for Life and Peace" and "Restoration of Ukraine", groupings that are still active (I use the English party names here).

So when Mr Leander claims that virtually all opposition parties have been banned, it is simply not true. The parties in the row are still allowed, except for the "Opposition Platform - For Life", whose members are still sitting in their seats and have formed new parliamentary groups.

And even an extra-parliamentary socialist party like the Social Movement, Sotsialnyi Ruch, which has condemned both the party ban and the anti-union laws pushed through by the government, is still allowed.

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