This article examines the anatomy of the conflict in and surrounding Ukraine. Employing the dialectical method, the author presents the conflict as a multidimensional system of contradictions, with the accent on its socioeconomic and class aspects. Also discussed are the prehistory and political and economic bases of the confrontation, as well as possible scenarios of future interrelations.

Keywords: civil war; Ukraine; Novorossiya; Russia and the West; political economy

Scholars and academic experts, politicians and ordinary citizens of our countries, we have been immersed for almost a year now in discussions of the situation in Ukraine. There is nothing astonishing about this; the situation both in and surrounding Ukraine is marked by painful, fundamental contradictions.

The crucial task is to analyze the situation, and in this way to resolve it. This is not for the sake of satisfying our intellectual curiosity, and not from political motives, but because it is impossible to be indifferent when on the territory of your homeland (and my homeland is the Soviet Union!) a civil war is raging.

But as a person very meaningful to me once said, such an analysis requires clean hands, a passionate heart and a cool head.

The author of these lines has no political commitment to any of the contending parties in Ukraine, Russia, or the West. My hands are clean. I have not been indifferent to the struggle occurring in my homelands west, and nor will I be in future, but as a scholar I hope to maintain a clear head. Now let me address the issue.

Analyzing the situation requires a strict methodology, and I plan to employ a method that has proven consistently effective in studies of social phenomena. That method is a historicaldialectical approach, making it possible to distinguish between the logical development of the process and random events, to emphasize the evolutionary and revolutionary (qualitative) changes that are occurring, and to isolate both the essential contradictions driving the process and their forms, including perverse ones.

The task I face is to use a dialectical systems approach. For a Marxist, this is perhaps so obvious as to be trite, but the fact is that this approach is rarely used. All the more important, then, is to apply it to analyzing so complex a topic as the conflict in Ukraine.

This material has been a long time in preparation, more than six months, and has grown into a text significantly exceeding the usual length of a single article. It is divided into three relatively independent sections. The first of these deals with the prehistory of the war.

1. The Prehistory and Political and Economic Bases of the Conflict

It should be stressed that this situation is being analyzed within a definite social and historical conflict. I do not pose the question in terms of who is right and who is wrong, Russia or the West, Ukraines new government or someone else, and nor is it clear who this someone might be. The question is posed differently: What are the socialspatial and historical contradictions that gave rise to the current situation in Ukraine? Meanwhile, I do not resile from defining my position and ultimately, answering the question of where I stand. The answer will become apparent, but as a result of the analysis.

Let us therefore examine the problem through the prism represented by the history of the socialspatial parameters in which Ukraine now finds itselfUkraine with its complex of territories, some of them traditionally Ukrainian, some traditionally Russian, and others which have changed hands repeatedly over the centuries.

In the course of its history, Ukraine has undergone a series of integrations and disintegrations. These have reflected its interactions with Poland and Russia, as well as a series of internal conflicts and wars that have been waged on its territory, beginning with the events that followed the rule of Bogdan Khmelnitsky and proceeding through Poltava and the civil war of 1917 22. The history of the latter period is particularly instructive. Some Ukrainian nationalists fought with Germany and AustriaHungary, and others against them. The more proRussian elements of the population joined with either the Reds or Whites in struggling for a united Russia, while others resisted both Reds and Whites in fighting for an independent Ukraine. The Second World War (for us, the Great Patriotic War) also swept across the territory of Ukraine, separating out two groups of people apart from those who were simply victims of that terrible conflict. The majority of Ukrainians, together with the Red Army, fought against fascism in all its manifestations, but a significant minority joined the detachments of Bandera and various other nationalist formations that were used as punishment units by the German fascists. They were in fact accomplices of the Nazis, sometimes even more ruthless than their masters. All this occurred beneath the flag of Ukrainian national liberation (it is well known that fascism made wide use of nationalist movements, and the Ukrainian movement was not alone; the Vlasov forces were also a Russian liberation army and also employed nationalist slogans, though in both cases, of course, these were puppet formations and thoroughly reactionary).

This context is important because it is now, after more than half a century, once again shaping events. In Ukraine, 30 years ago it would have been completely impossible, including among supporters of Gorbachevs perestroika, to discuss Bandera and the OUN (Organization of Ukranian Nationalists) in a positive sense. Now, Bandera and the OUN have become symbols of national liberation for important numbers of Ukrainians.

A further important component of the historical process is the wellknown transfer of Crimea to Ukraine. So long as the Soviet Union existed, the fact that Crimea was part of the Ukrainian Republic was largely of symbolic significance. But after the Belavezha Accords at the end of 1991, the Ukrainian status of Crimea came to pose a considerable problem.

Since 1991, the Russian question in general has become highly relevant in Ukraine, where a marked division exists not only in terms of socioeconomic and political characteristics, but also of national and ethnocultural orientation. The issue of language too has proven to be both important, and (so to speak) diffuse. The areas of Ukraine that are Russianspeaking have at the same time been Ukrainianized; the people there use a specific variety of Russian, in some cases (as in Odessa) their own dialect, or else a southern Russian dialect which is influenced by Ukrainian, and which spread long ago into Russian territory.

Something similar applies to Western Ukraine, in parts of which the population now feel more affinity with Central and Eastern European culture than with the Ukrainian cultural heritage. The

latter has come to be perceived as a sign of provincialism, from which people are anxious to escape (though this is not so easy . . .). There is a diffusion in the center as well, since Gogol, Shevchenko and many other great cultural figures belong both to Ukraine and to Russia; Ukrainian nationalists and people in the more Russianoriented areas of Ukraine are simultaneously proud of them. This unity is especially characteristic of the culture of the Soviet Ukraine; every Ukrainian and every Russian considers as his or her own the film director Dovzhenko, the singer Hnatiuk, the creators of the great Antey aircraft, astronauts and other heroes, including heroes of the Great Patriotic War.

This context is important. The contradiction between east and west in Ukraine is not so much a matter of two poles separated from each other by a national barrier, along with traditions of confrontation, as of diffuse spaces in which there are powerful traditions of unity. The history of antagonism is not especially profound, except when Ukrainian nationalists with fascist roots, or else Russian chauvinists, enter into heated conflicts.

Another historically important factor has been the wave of shock therapy (or rather, of shock without therapy) which rolled across both Ukraine and Russia following the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. One of the results of these reforms was socalled appropriationprivatization, that is, the concentrating in a short period of time huge quantities of the countries wealth in the hands of a few oligarchs. This was especially marked in the case of natural resources and of large raw materials processing facilities, including metallurgical plants. The process unfolded almost identically in Russia and Ukraine, and in eastern and western regions of the latter. The result was that a bureaucraticoligarchic capitalism, resembling the Russian version in all its key parameters, took shape in Ukraine in the course of the 1990s, via the same stages of evolution and involution as in Russia. The difference was that in Ukraine there was no Putin; appearing instead were various parodic clones of Gorbachev. The central government thus finished up relatively weak and indecisive. The oligarchic clans pursued their struggles furiously, exploiting the contradictions in the sociocultural field and in nationalism of every variety. The result was the significant socioeconomic embeddedness of conflicts which at first sight appear purely ethnic or cultural.

The result of the economic reforms in Ukraine, endlessly drawn out and never brought to their conclusion, was the creation of a semiperipheral mutation of late capitalism very similar to the Russian model. Within this model, economic power belongs mainly to clanoligarchic groups that have become fused with the political authorities. A specific feature of Ukraine, however, is that unlike the case in Russia there has been no consolidation of this power into a single pyramid headed by a sole leader. Instead, two broad, amorphous oligarchic groupings arose, one of them gravitating in geoeconomic terms (and hence also geopolitically) toward Russia, and the other toward the Europe Union (EU).

Amid the stillshadowy confrontation of oligarchobureaucratic groups that did not differ substantially in their socioeconomic platforms, but which battled furiously to redistribute economic power in their favor, western and eastern political and social forces began to flirt with nationalists and with various geopolitical allies. For some it proved beneficial to court Russia as a geopolitical ally and to position themselves on the territory of Ukraine through promoting the use of the Russian language, through exploiting the profits to be made from cheap gas, and through other advantages of integration with Russia. Others found it beneficial to promote the ideas of Ukrainian national independence, of the use of the Ukrainian language, and of orienting the country toward Europe instead of Asiatic Russia.

Concealed behind all this, I repeat, were very serious conflicts in the social and economic fields between actors who were identical in their economic and political nature. These conflicts were linked to the enduring economic interests (as opposed to the shortterm political ones) of the opposing oligarchic clan groups. Manipulating the population, the political authorities in these

circumstances positioned themselves as the sole means of ensuring balance and compromise between the warring forces.

Viktor Yanukovych was one of the symbols of this search for compromise, and playing the nationalist card was an important device for him. As far as I can judge, based on the views of wellinformed colleagues,1 the previous government of Ukraine flirted with nationalists and profascist elements in order to suggest who might come to power if the existing leaders were not elected again. A sort of semiproRussian orientation, inconsistent and fluctuating, came into being. The government several times reversed decisions concerning the EU and Russia, each time settling on compromises that were partly proEuropean and partly proRussian, while constantly invoking the bogeyman of the nationalist threat. The upshot was that the Yanukovych group themselves strengthened the nationalists, creating the preconditions for their transformation into a real political force.

Unlike the tactic of flirting with the nationalists, the suppression of the left was consistent no matter who was at the helm. The left was not admitted to power, and persistent efforts were made to crush it. On the one hand, this policy took the form of attempts to destroy the Socialist Party of Ukraine from the inside, using a wide variety of political techniques. The Socialist Party tried to portray itself as a proEuropean socialdemocratic alternative which at the same time had a proRussian cultural orientation (in the socioeconomic and political fields they were inclined to the West, while in the area of culture they did not reject bilingualism or closeness to Russia). Meanwhile, the Communist Party of Ukraine was effectively driven into the ghetto of a Russophile orientation. The Communists became known less for their alternative socioeconomic programs than for their unequivocal support of Vladimir Putin as a great leader and an alternative to the current authorities and politics in Ukraine.

This latter stance created a rather unpleasant atmosphere. In earlier times, I repeatedly encountered Ukrainian Marxists, Communists and members of left movements, especially in the eastern part of Ukraine, who viewed Putin as their hope of salvation. When I tried to explain the economic and political consequences for eastern Ukraine of this salvation, the reply was that it did not matter; the main thing was that they would be allowed to speak Russian.