

Kyrgyzstan and Capitalist Democracy

It is not clear from afar exactly what forces were at work in the overthrow of Kyrgyz President Bakiyev. What is clearer is the background that created the conditions for this overthrow and how these events in a “destitute, landlocked, mountainous nation of around five million people” (as the New York Times described Kyrgyzstan) have global implications.

As with the rest of the former Stalinist states, Kyrgyzstan lacks the normal means of keeping its own capitalist politicians in check, and therefore the capitalist class is much less able to maintain stability. In the United States, for instance, the corporate-controlled “free” press can be used to mobilize “public opinion” against a politician that the capitalists want out of office. Furthermore, they have a court system that can also be used for similar purposes. The capitalist class in the former Stalinist states has been unable to develop such means. Rather, the individual rulers have been able to capture or control such institutions as the press and the courts to strengthen their own individual rule. Kyrgyzstan is a perfect example of this.

“Tulip Revolution”, but Nothing Changed

In 2005, the relatively peaceful “Tulip Revolution” occurred, which threw out then-president Akayev. At the head of this movement stood Bakiyev, who assumed the reins of power. According to some reports (eurasianet.org), this revolt was centered in the (wealthier) southern portion of the country and was organized by the “elites” of that region. Bakiyev came to power as their representative, and if anything, he was even worse than Akayev.

One of the few resources of this mountainous nation is hydro-electric power. This hydro power was run by a nationalized corporation. Under the guidance of Bakiyev’s son, Maksim Bakiyev, the company was privatized. However, a split developed in the ruling circles as different gangs of thieves struggled for the profits. Maksim’s gang was tied to some Russian capitalists, while another gang was tied to domestic capitalists. This division split the ruling Ak Zhol party.

Divisions in Ruling Party

A related division arose around the sale of political offices. In a country as undeveloped as Kyrgyzstan, with so little to reap profits from, the occupying of political office was one of the best ways to plunder society. So, while Ak Zhol was guaranteed to win almost all “elections” (through fraud and intimidation) the question was which individual thief would get to represent the Party in the election and thereby reap the benefits of office. At times, something like 100 times the number of candidates would vie for the number of political seats available. Many of these candidates were from the Ak Zhol Party.

As the NGO “Freedomhouse” reported about one particular election: *“The number of pro-regime candidates exceeded four times the number of available seats in Bishkek (the capital city); this might signify an ongoing bargaining. Over 370 candidates were registered for the 44 seats available in the Bishkek kenesh. The National University was*

the most contested precinct in Bishkek, where university faculty manipulate and blackmail students into supporting candidates through their grades. A total of 61 candidates competed for four seats at the precinct.”

Imperialism and the NGO's

The role of “Freedomhouse” and similar NGO's in Kyrgyzstan is in itself interesting. This NGO is funded mainly by the US government as well as several major capitalist foundations and has ties ranging from the CIA to all sorts of liberals. It and other NGO's went into Kyrgyzstan with bundles of cash to try to build up an “independent” judiciary, through which the normal operations of capitalist democracy could be instituted. They failed miserably, as the Bakiyev regime bought off or intimidated the entire judiciary. Rather than the court system keeping the president in check, the president used the court system as a means of furthering his power and looting of society.

Another issue has been organized crime in Kyrgyzstan. As Lauren Goodrich of the private intelligence company Stratfor said, “Kyrgyzstan is a mob state - always has been, always will be.”

Masses & Grinding Poverty

For the masses of people, it hardly mattered which gang was ripping them off. What did matter, though, was the disastrous mismanagement of the hydropower company as well as the massive corruption. The main reservoir upon which the power depended had been allowed to drain down to extremely low levels, but nobody could explain where all the money from the resulting sale of hydro power had gone. On top of that, there were rolling blackouts throughout the country for several years.

The world capitalist economic crisis also played a role as remittances from Kyrgyz workers abroad was a significant source of national income. Due to the crisis, these remittances plunged in the last year. The last straw was when the regime announced a 200% increase in electricity rates. Blocked by every other means of working out the tensions, the opposition parties took to the streets, and the masses of workers then went far beyond anything that the rulers had planned.

Bakiyev, apparently drunk with his apparent power, had planned to hold mass rallies throughout the country at which he would speak to “explain” his policies. These were to be meetings based on a tradition of local councils, called “kurelties”. The opposition parties came together and organized their own kurelties and out of this the protests erupted, especially after several opposition leaders were arrested.

Here is where things are unclear in the absence of really reliable reports. On the one hand, the stronghold of the opposition to Bakiyev apparently was in the north of the country. To what extent a north-south division is developing is unclear, especially since as of this writing Bakiyev has holed up in his home town in the south. It is also unclear to what extent this overthrow was really a popular uprising. Certainly, the fact that thousands of people, mainly youth, stood up to the batons and guns of the police and army is extremely significant. It is hard to conceive of this happening had they not felt

they had mass support. On the other hand, the pictures and videos of the events do not seem to show truly mass uprising of tens of thousands. Even this, though, must take into account the fact that the total population is only some 5 million and the capital city of Biskerk has less than a million population.

“New” Leaders

These leaders, of course, were not shy about taking advantage of the situation. The new, self-declared president, Rosa Otunbayeva, was herself one of the leaders of the Tulip Revolution who helped install Bakiyev into office. Prior to that role, she had served as a career diplomat for the corrupt bureaucracy of the old Soviet Union. Given this history, it is not difficult to guess how her presidency will play out.

Meanwhile, both the US and the Russian regimes have military bases in Kyrgyzstan. For the US, this base plays a key role in supporting its war in Afghanistan. (It also played a key role in the enrichment of Maksim Bakiyev, who was responsible from selling fuel to the US military at that base.) The Russian capitalist class, on the other hand, views the entire region as part of its sphere of influence and does not like to see a military base there of one of its foremost rivals. This view is likely to be ambivalent, as the US struggle against Islamic fundamentalism partly serves Russian capitalist interests. In fact, in Kyrgyzstan, there has been a small revival of interest in Islam, although no such force seemed to be present during the recent uprising. (On the contrary, there was no evidence of religious or ethnic conflicts during those days.)

While the previous regime simply sold itself to the highest bidder, it is possible that the new one will be slightly more aligned with Russian capitalism, but apparently not to the extent of kicking the US base out of the country.

Final Acts Not Written

Bakiyev remains holed up in the South. The degree of support he can mobilize there is as yet unclear. If he can mobilize a base, then increased regional conflict and even possibly civil war is possible. If he cannot, then the new regime will probably stabilize itself for a time. It will also probably continue to play off Russian and US capitalism against each other.

The last act in Kyrgyzstan has yet to be written. On the one hand, the rising of the masses, or even just a portion of them, has succeeded in toppling a hated and repressive regime. What it failed to do was put the working class in power. The main reason for this is that the class lacked a leadership that was capable of helping the working class fully organize itself and concentrate its power. What will come of this situation remains to be seen.

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