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OLD LEFT AND NEW LEFT IN THE UKRAINIAN PROTESTS BEFORE MAIDAN

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The article is to presenting a systematic estimation of the major trends in the protest activity of Ukrainian left parties, organizations and informal initiatives before the Maidan protests erupted in late November, 2013. I analyze the monthly dynamics, the number of participants, tactics, issues, geography and allies in the protest events with the left groups participation on the whole territory of Ukraine from 1 January 2011 until 20 November 2013.

Стаття представляє систематичну оцінку основних тенденцій протестної активності українських лівих партій, організацій і неформальних ініціатив перед початком протестів Майдану наприкінці листопада 2013 р. Представлений аналіз помісячної динаміки, кількості учасників, тактики, тематики, географії та союзників в протестних подіях за участі лівих груп на всій території України з 1 січня 2011 р. по 20 листопада 2013 р.

Статья представляет систематическую оценку основных тенденций протестной активности украинских левых партий, организаций и неформальных инициатив перед началом протестов Майдана в конце ноября 2013 г. Представлен анализ ежемесячной динамики, количества участников, тактики, тематики, географии и союзников в протестных событиях с участием левых групп на всей территории Украины с 1 января 2011 г. по 20 ноября 2013 г.

Key words: left-wingers, right-wingers, protest.

The goal of the article is to present a systematic estimation of the major trends in the protest activity of Ukrainian left parties, organizations and informal initiatives before the Maidan protests erupted in late November, 2013. This analysis helps to explain why the Ukrainian left played such an unenviable role in the Maidan protests and after being unable to resist and present a viable alternative to the right-wing surge.

It is worth discussing the Ukrainian left as two main types: 1) the 'old left' political parties in almost all cases originating from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union or its post-Soviet successors; 2) the 'new left' political organisations and initiatives, leftist politicised unions, intellectual and cultural initiatives which did not have or had clearly broken connections to the CPSU-successor parties and are always very critical towards them. The very small literature on the left in post-Soviet Ukraine (most importantly, by Oleksii Haran and Andrew Wilson) focuses exclusively on the 'old left' political parties [2, 4, 6, 7, 8] ignoring the emerging 'new left' movement. The article continues my previous studies of the Ukrainian 'new left' [3] and heavily draws on 'The Ukrainian left during and after the Maidan protests' project [5]. Yulia Dukach also tried to analyze protest activity of Ukrainian left before Maidan, however, she focused exclusively on the network analysis of the left protests in Kiev in 2013 [1]. In this article I analyze the monthly dynamics, the number of participants, tactics, issues, geography and allies in the protest events with the left groups participation on the whole territory of Ukraine from 1 January 2011 until 20 November 2013. Some of the following comparisons of distributions with the Ukrainian far right will be very indicative in underlining the left's strengths and weaknesses.

I use an original data set 'Ukrainian Protest and Coercion Data' (UPCD) collected under my supervision. The data collection started in September 2009. The result is a systematic database of all protest events (regardless of issues or number of protesters) and reactions to them taking place on the territory of Ukraine since October 2009 based on monitoring of the news lines of almost 200 web media covering all

the provinces (oblasts) in Ukraine as well as major national media and activist websites representing all sectors of social-political activity. The events had been coded manually and, since April 2013, semi-automatically, improving the quality of coding. The databases and codebooks with details on methodology and the sample of sources can be accessed from the Center for Social and Labour Research website (<http://cslr.org.ua>). For the period from 1 January 2011 until 20 November 2013 the UPCD database contains almost 13,000 events. The protest event in our definition must comply with four criteria: 1) political or social demands or criticism are present; 2) it involves public action (not limited to verbal protests such as petitions); 3) it is made by a group of people or one person outside central government; 4) the locality where the event took place is known and the date of event is at least approximately known (up to a month). In case of complex events, each reported action was coded separately. For example, a fight after a demonstration or a picket during a strike are coded separately as two events in each case. In this article the events lasting more than one day are coded as one event.

In the UPCD all the reported participants in the events are coded. It is therefore possible to check how often the old left and the new left participated in Ukrainian protest events. In general the protests with the participation of the left did not account for a big share of the Ukrainian protests overall. For almost three years only 597 old left participants and 218 new left participants were reported. Together this was only 9% out of more than 9,300 protest events during this period. For comparative purposes, the Ukrainian ultranationalist far right was twice as active and reported in 1,859 protest events (20% of the total).

The Communist party of Ukraine (CPU) was the most active in the old left protests (it participated in 509 protest events out of 597) while the Progressive socialist party of Ukraine (PSPU) (74 protest events) and the Socialist party of Ukraine (SPU) (24) were a long way behind. The new left protest field was, however, more diverse and did not have an overly dominant protest organisation. The Marxist-Leninist Borotba was the most active organisation in the pre-Maidan period (it participated in 98 protest events out of 218) followed by the independent student union Direct Action (60 protest events) and the independent labour union Defense of Labour (often together with the left nationalist network Autonomous Resistance) (46). Other political organisations like the anarchist Autonomous Workers' Union or post-Trotskyist Left Opposition participated in two to three dozen events as well.

Figure 1 depicts the monthly number of protests with the left's participation. The curves are very uneven, meaning that the left protest activity was not stable. There are also evident peaks in May and November almost every year, corresponding to the Labour Day and Russian October Revolution anniversaries – holidays celebrated by the left with rallies and marches being more of a tradition than a strategic struggle. However, there were other big campaigns as well, such as CPU rallies against pension reform and increasing prices for public utilities in 2011 or the Direct Action campaign against the law on higher education at the beginning of the same year. There was also some increase in the number of left protests in 2013. The CPU opposed the then pro-European politics of the Yanukovich government and protested against plans for IMF credit while it later mobilised people to support a customs union with Russia against

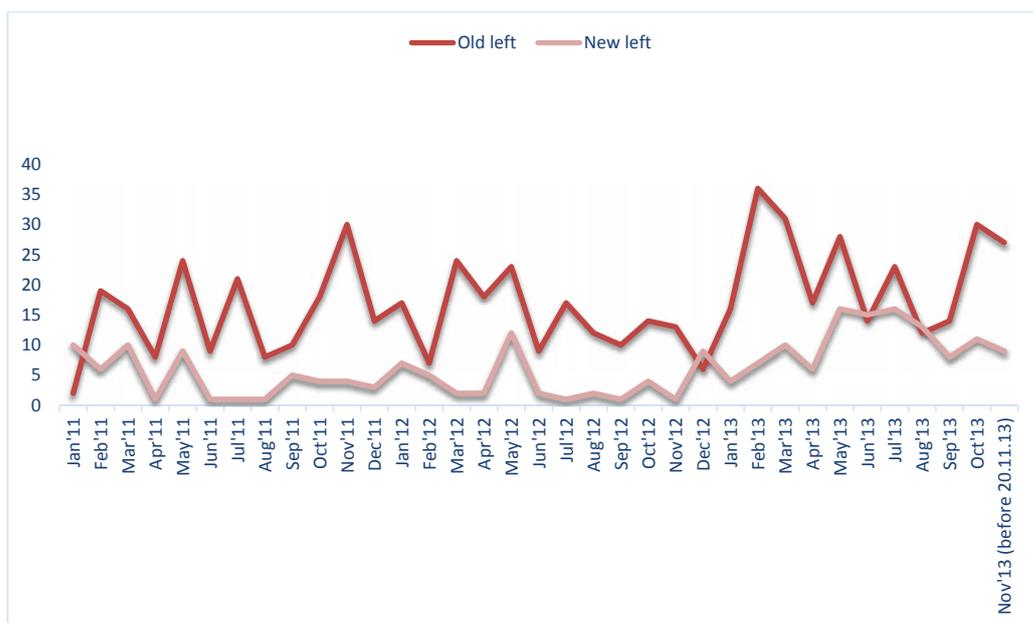


Fig. 1. Monthly number of protest events with 'old left' and 'new left' participation before the Maidan

the European Union association agreement. The new left in 2013 was more active in local labour struggles against unpaid wages or employment fraud.

The old left was able to mobilise not only more frequently but also in bigger numbers (Table 1). Only in two cases did the new left participate in protests with over 1,000 participants (both times in labour protests in 2011). The old left participated and organised at least 55 bigger protests.

Table 1. The reported number of participants in left protests, 2011-2013 (before 20 November 2013)

	Old left	New left	Ukrainian far right	Total
<10	27	28	144	1,087
<100	267	122	738	3,501
<1,000	138	26	320	1,394
<10,000	53	2	63	263
<100,000	2	0	8	21
Unknown	110	40	586	3,075
Total	597	218	1,859	9,341

What were the issues of protests with old left and new left participation? Overall the majority of Ukrainian protests before Maidan raised socio-economic issues¹ (Table 2). Despite the major social problem orientation that could be expected from any leftist force, the old left raised socio-economic issues only slightly more frequently than the average and very rarely protested because of civic rights' violations. It is not possible to say that the old left ignored socio-economic struggles but a much higher emphasis on ideological conflicts and 'cultural wars' around historical, language, geopolitical, and religious questions is also significant. By comparison, even Ukrainian far right nationalists participated in ideological protests relatively less frequently than the old left. They also devoted relatively less attention to socio-economic problems but at the same time much more frequently participated in the protests around political struggles and civic rights.

The issues for the protests with the participation of the new left were very different. 70% of them raised socio-economic issues and the new left protested about the violation of civic rights more frequently than the average. The new left protested slightly less frequently than on average about ideological conflicts (and mostly these were antifascist protests) and much less frequently participated in political struggles, reflecting their lack of representation at the political party level.

Table 2. Issues of protest events with left participation, 2011-2013 (before November 20, 2013)

	Old left	New left	Ukrainian far right	Total
Socio-economic	54%	70%	26%	52%
Ideological	56%	23%	47%	24%
Political	34%	17%	40%	29%
Civic rights	5%	32%	28%	21%
N	597	218	1,859	9,341

The left protests were less violent and confrontational than on average, which was normal in Ukraine before Maidan for protests with the participation of identified political actors (Table 3)². One of the reasons for this fact is that in violent events the participants often prefer to avoid publicity and are not reported in the media, which are the data source for UPCD. Even considering this fact the Ukrainian far right were much more ready for violence than the left even before the Maidan protests.

¹ Issues' classification: *Political* – protests against or in support of concrete politicians/political parties or government as a whole together with electoral protests; *Ideological* – historical and ideological issues in the majority of cases connected to the regional divide in Ukraine: Ukrainian and Russian nationalisms, anti-Communism, issues related to WWII, Russia's Black Sea Fleet base in Sevastopol, conflicts around the split of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church etc.; *Social and economic* – among the most frequent: urban development and construction projects, labour rights (particularly, wage arrears), environment, state public services (public utilities, transportation, healthcare etc.), and many other; *Civic rights* – defence of civil liberties (particularly freedom of speech), protests against police abuse, officials' illegal actions and corruption. Since 2011, up to three issues were coded for each event, so the sum of the shares is over 100%.

² By the tactics the protests in UPCD project are usually divided into three categories: *conventional* – well-known and commonly accepted forms of protest that do not impose direct pressure on the protest targets, such as pickets, rallies, demonstrations, performances, etc.; *confrontational* – protest actions involving direct pressure on the goals of a protest ('direct action') but not yet causing any direct damage to people or property, such as blocking roads, strikes, hunger strikes, etc.; *violent* – protest actions with causing (or threat of causing) of direct damage to people or property, such as beating or vandalism.

Table 3. Tactics of protest events with left participation, 2011-2013 (before 20 November 2013)

	Old left	New left	Ukrainian far right	Total
Conventional	91%	86%	81%	75%
Confrontational	6%	13%	11%	17%
Violent	3%	1%	8%	8%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
N	597	218	1,859	9,341

Table 4 shows statistics for how often some structural groups, organisational forms and ideologies were reported participating in protests together with the old left and the new left. The indices for political parties, NGOs and trade unions indicate, first of all, the dominant form of the organisation of the old left and the new left. For the old left this is the party while little cooperation with the unions and NGOs (more precisely, the same as the average) must be noted. The major mobilising structures for the new left were the student and labour unions (mostly Direct Action and Defense of Labour) and the registered formal civic organisations (coded as NGOs) such as Borotba. The old left cooperated quite substantially with Russian nationalists but also cooperated with the Ukrainian far right as well (including Svoboda party) in a small number of mostly local socio-economic protests. The new left were not reported in any protest action together with Russian nationalists and only accidentally (in three events) cooperated with Ukrainian far right. In only five cases was the new left reported at the same protest events together with the old left, reflecting the big political distance between both wings of the Ukrainian left.

The data on the reported participation of some major structural groups (such as workers, students and small business etc.) are also very indicative about the involvement of the left in particular socio-economic struggles. Thus, for example, the old left was not really very active in labour, student, small business or neighborhood protests (participating less than on average). However, they were quite interested in supporting the protests of pensioners, Chernobyl disaster liquidators, WWII and Soviet Afghanistan war veterans, i.e. state dependent groups receiving social payments. By comparison, the new left attempted to participate in workers' and, especially, students' struggles but almost ignored very significant fully national mobilisations of small business, Chernobyl liquidators and Afghanistan war veterans in 2010-11.

Table 4. Some reported participants of the protests together with the left, 2011-2013 (before 20 November 2013)³

	Old left	New left	Ukrainian far right	Total
Party/politician/ local authorities	95%	2%	80%	35%
NGO	21%	39%	26%	22%
Trade union	4%	55%	1%	4%
Russian nationalists	8%	0%	0%	2%
Ukrainian far right	3%	1%	100%	20%
Workers	5%	13%	1%	7%
Students	1%	24%	3%	4%
Small business	1%	1%	2%	5%
Pensioners	6%	0%	1%	2%
Neighborhood	3%	7%	6%	13%
Chernobyl liquidators	3%	0%	1%	3%
Veterans	6%	0%	1%	2%
N	597	218	1,859	9,341

The regional distribution is set out in Table 5. As expected, the old left was stronger in protests in the southern and eastern regions where they had more electoral support but also in the central

³ All reported participants in the events are coded separately; this is why the sum of percentages is more than 100%.

Ukrainian provinces as well while their participation was far below the average in Kiev and western Ukraine⁴. At the same time, the new left protest activity was strongly skewed to Kiev city, reflecting the fact that the new left groups generally had much weaker levels of mobilisation in the Ukrainian provinces. Other cities with at least ten new left protests in almost three years were (in descending order): Odessa, Kharkov, and Lviv. By contrast, the Ukrainian far right was more active in western and central regions, including Kiev city.

**Table 5. Regional distribution of the left protests, 2011-2013
(before 20 November 2013)⁵**

	Old left	New left	Ukrainian far right	Total
Centre	24%	11%	24%	19%
Crimea	6%	5%	1%	6%
Donbass	17%	4%	5%	9%
East	19%	9%	13%	11%
Kiev	5%	47%	19%	17%
South	22%	16%	10%	15%
West	6%	10%	27%	22%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
N	597	218	1,859	9,323

By the time the protests started in the late 2013 the left was much weaker in terms of protest mobilisation compared to the far right. The leadership of the parliamentary old left joined the bourgeois elite. The Communist party was perceived as a part of the governing coalition together with the oligarchic Party of Regions and it was aligned with the pro-Russian position in the 'cultural wars' tearing Ukraine apart. The CPU was conservative, old and stagnating as a party structure. It was not strong in terms of socio-economic mobilisations, mainly reactively defending attacks on the remnants of state socialist security, and was weak in terms of cooperation with the unions and in supporting workers' struggles. At the same time the new left was even weaker. While young and open to grassroots' organisation, it did not have any political representation. It was too concentrated in the capital and virtually non-existent publicly in many Ukrainian cities. Moreover, while it was weak the new left was deeply divided by internal conflicts between liberal and libertarian left and post-CPU Marxist-Leninists over issues of party politics and conservative/libertarian values. All of this is important to understand why the left was not able to have any significant impact on the Maidan protests, less presenting a serious alternative to the far right. The analysis of the finalized UPCD data for 2014-2016, which are now in preparation, will help to tell more how the left participation in the protest events changed after Maidan.

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⁴ The regions of Ukraine are defined as follows:

Centre: Zhytomyrska, Kyivska, Chernihivska, Sumska, Vinnytska, Cherkaska, Kirovohradska, Poltavska oblasts;

Crimea: Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol;

Donbass: Donetska, Luhanska;

East: Kharkivska, Dnipropetrovska, Zaporizka oblasts;

Kiev: the city of Kiev;

South: Odeska, Mykolaivska, Khersonska oblasts;

West: Volynska, Rivnenska, Lvivska, Ternopilska, Ivano-Frankivska, Chernivetska, Zakarpatska oblasts.

⁵ The 'nationwide' events (i.e. those that were impossible to locate in a particular settlement) are not included in the regional distribution.

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