

# Mass demonstrations sweep Ukraine

by Konstantin George

A milestone toward the goal of Ukraine's peaceful revolution—a free, independent Ukraine—was reached after three days of mass demonstrations, Oct. 15-17, by upwards of 100,000 persons in the Ukrainian capital of Kiev. Mass protests swept Kharkov, Ukraine's second largest city, and the major cities of western Ukraine: Lvov, Ternopol, and Ivano-Frankovsk. On Oct. 17, the Strike Committee of the Donetsk coal miners, the leaders of the U.S.S.R. miners' strikes of July 1989 and July 1990, declared their total support for the demonstrations and their demands.

The demands were: 1) the immediate resignation of Ukraine's Communist government, headed by Prime Minister Vitali Masol; 2) the holding of new parliamentary elections, under a multi-party system with full and equal media time for all candidates and parties; 3) a new Ukrainian Constitution, codifying in binding law the state sovereignty voted for by Ukraine's Parliament July 16, no joining of Gorbachov's proposed "new Union of Sovereign States" until a new constitution and parliament exist, and that Ukrainian conscripts may not serve outside the territory of Ukraine.

By the evening of Oct. 17, the Ukrainian Communist Party leadership was beating a tactical retreat. Ukraine's Communist President, Leonid Kravchuk, announced at a press conference that the Masol government was resigning, thus granting the protesters' first demand. The Ukrainian Parliament accepted the resignation on Oct. 23.

Kravchuk also announced that the Parliament, where the party holds a two-thirds majority, had just voted by "a large majority" that Ukraine "will receive a new constitution," and that Ukraine will not join the "new Union" until the constitution is in effect. Finally, he promised: 1) that a "referendum" would be held "early next year," for Ukrainians to decide whether to hold new parliamentary elections, and, 2) that no Ukrainian conscript may serve outside the territory of Ukraine, except on a voluntary basis.

The referendum, whose outcome is certain, ensures new elections, almost definitely by March. The concession shows the stunning gains made by the revolutionary process in Ukraine in a mere two weeks. On Oct. 1, the Ukrainian national movement Rukh and its allied Republican Party were demanding elections for March at the latest. On Oct.

17, it was the government offering March elections, and Ukrainians replying "too little, too late."

The demands listed above echoed those first put out by Kiev University students, 250 of whom began a hunger strike on Oct. 2, one day after the "hot autumn" began in Ukraine with dozens of mass protests and strikes. The hunger strike tactic and student marches are copying, in combined form, the May 1989 methods of the Chinese student freedom fighters, and the actions of the Czechoslovak students later that year, who succeeded in sparking the mass actions by workers that toppled the Stalinist regime in Prague.

The 250 Ukrainian students staged their hunger strike along the Kreshchalik, Kiev's main boulevard, and then set up a second hunger strike site directly in front of the Ukraine Parliament building. University students began parallel hunger strikes in downtown Lvov, the metropolis of western Ukraine. Emulating the Chinese, the Ukrainian students set up tent cities at these central sites. While the core of hunger strikers manned the tent cities, thousands of students followed the Prague model and staged daily marches through the worker districts of Kiev and other cities, calling on the people to join them. The universities were proclaimed "free territory." From every building and many windows flew the blue and yellow Ukrainian national flag.

## Moscow falls back

Moscow has been forced into a fallback policy option concerning Ukraine. This policy can be summarized as "Ukraine can have everything it wants, as long as it remains in some fashion, however loosely, part of the successor state to the Soviet Union."

In an Oct. 24 interview to the German daily, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Ukraine's Communist President Kravchuk announced, in a total change of line, that Ukraine cannot accept "in its present form" the Gorbachov draft for a "new Union Treaty," intended to create a "Union of Sovereign States" to replace the Soviet Union: "It is much more important to stop the worsening of the social situation and in this way create more favorable conditions for a new Union Treaty." The next surprise was his rejection of the economic Shatalin Plan as "unacceptable for Ukraine, alone on the grounds that Ukraine needs its own program for its own special circumstances." Then he declared that Ukraine also would not accept "presidential decrees if they contradict the sovereign right of Ukraine."

Asked point-blank whether Ukraine should stay in the Soviet Union, Kravchuk dismissed the question as "theoretical," but interjected that "one must speak of a path of independence which Ukraine has undertaken. It must be evolutionary, and proceed in stages." A month earlier, such statements from a Communist President of Ukraine would have been unthinkable. On Oct. 25, Rukh began its Second Congress, where it will formally adopt a platform calling for Ukraine's full independence.