

Constituencies of Political Authoritarianism: Struggle, Survival, and Separatism in the  
Donets Coal Basin (1989-2014)

By  
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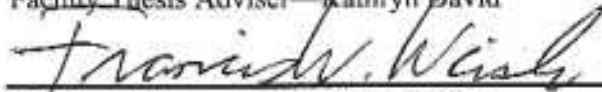
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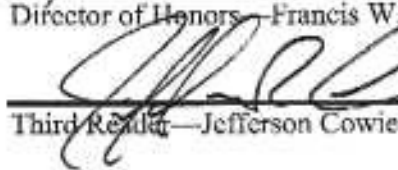
On the basis of this thesis defended by the candidate on  
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we, the undersigned, recommend that the candidate be awarded  
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Figure 1. "Diploma." Source: Roman Minin

Будь в лаве, как в бою, – прославишь Родину свою.

Be in the longwall-face, as in a fight, and you will bring glory to your Motherland.

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Терпение и труд всё перетрут.

### **Translator's Note**

All translations from Russian and Ukrainian are the product of original work unless otherwise noted. The footnotes and bibliographic citations which contain the acronym FBIS in parentheses are sources which were translated by the Foreign Broadcast Information Service, an open source intelligence component of the Central Intelligence Agency's Directorate of Science and Technology (reformed as the Directorate of National Intelligence Open Source Center in 2005). Primacy has been given to Ukrainian personal names and place names, except for instances where these names could not be easily identified, or the individual in question only used their name in Russian. For the sake of uniformity based on the original dataset produced at the end of this thesis, the names of mines and mining associations have been left in Russian, with few exceptions. This decision is not meant to reflect any political leanings or biases. Russian and Ukrainian footnotes and bibliographic citations are not transliterated, as this method does not increase the comprehension of non-Russian and non-Ukrainian readers. Instead, a citation system has been adopted, wherein the title of the source is translated in parentheses alongside the original Cyrillic title in order to give a sense of the information contained within a given source.

## Glossary

(N)-ugol' (e.g. Donetskugol') – The name of coal mining companies and associations which were often composed of multiple located in a single region.

Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) – The Ukrainian state-led counter offensive to retake the Donbas from pro-Russian separatists and Russian forces.

Dnipropetrovsk Clan – The ruling oligarchic clan which emerged from Dnipropetrovsk. Major figures in politics and business from eastern Ukraine were members of this clan, including President Leonid Kuchma. It was the strongest oligarchic clan in Ukraine under his presidency (1994-2004).

Donetsk Clan – The ruling oligarch clan which emerged from Donetsk. The main economic and political figures in the Donbas belonged to this clan, including Viktor Yanukovich and Rinat Akhmetov. This was previously the strongest and most influential political force in the Donbas (1998-2014) and all of Ukraine (2010-2014).

Donetsk Coal Basin (Donbas) – A coal basin which contains the majority of the Ukraine's coal mines spread out over the Donetsk, Luhansk, and Dnipropetrovsk Oblasts. The cultural and historical roots of coal mining in the Donbas stretch back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) – The self-proclaimed separatist statelet that occupies parts of Donetsk Oblast in eastern Ukraine.

Independent Miners' Union (NPG) – An independent, non-governmental trade union which was founded as the first independent miners' trade union during the Soviet period at the Second All-Union Miners' Congress in Donetsk in 1990.

Independent Miners' Union of (city name) (NGP-first letter of the city) – Local miners' unions which are located either in a city or in a mine. Many of them supported the Party of Regions, Viktor Yanukovich, and the separatists.

Independent Miners' Union of the Donbas (NGPDb) – An independent, non-governmental regional trade union which branched off from the NPGU. It was created when miners from the independent trade unions in Luhansk and Donetsk united. Their support changed multiple times. The long-time leader of the union is Mykalo Volynko

Independent Miners' Union of Ukraine (NPGU) – An independent, non-governmental trade union which inherited the legacy of the NPG in the newly independent Ukrainian state. It is one of the oldest trade unions in Ukraine. This trade union supported Batkivshchyna and the Yulia Tymoshenko Bloc (BYuT) rather than the Party of Regions and Viktor Yanukovich. The long-time leader of the union is Mykhailo Volynets.

Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) – The self-proclaimed separatist statelet that occupies parts of Luhansk Oblast in eastern Ukraine.

Miners/Colliers – The workers in the legal and illegal coal industries in Ukraine. This thesis considers both current and former workers of the coal industry.

Party of Regions – The main political wing of the Donetsk Clan. It was originally known as the Party of Regional Revival. Under Viktor Yanukovich's leadership, the Party of Regions became the most dominant political force in Ukraine beginning in the mid-2000s. It effectively established a political machine spanning the entire Donbas region. The party, and its vertical power structure, collapsed at the outbreak of war in 2014.

Prikhvatizatsiya (“Grabitization”) – A combination of the Russian words for “privatization” and “to seize” which is used to describe the period of faux capitalism and corrupt privatization which took place immediately following Ukrainian independence.

Regional Union of Strike Committees of the Donbas (RSSKD) – One of the main centers of the miners’ strike movement and the most militant and active miners’ organization. The union was repressed by the Kuchma administration and local authorities in 1996. Mikhail Krylov was the leader of the union.

Separate Regions of the Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts (ORDLO) – The main acronym used to describe the areas of the Donbas which are currently under the control of pro-Russian separatists and Russian forces.

Svoy Chelovek (“One of us” or “Inside man”) – A person who represents their group and the interests of their group members. They have the trust of their colleagues or subordinates within this group.

Trade Union of Workers of the Coal Industry (PRUP) – The official government trade union for all Ukrainian miners. It is one of the oldest and strongest trade unions in Ukraine.



## Introduction

On March 28, 2019, three days before the first round of the 2019 Ukrainian Presidential Elections, the final episode of the popular Ukrainian television series *Sluha Narodu* (Servant of the People) aired on channel “1+1.” As part of Volodymyr Zelensky’s campaign to reprise his role as on-screen president of Ukraine in reality, this episode presented a future vision of a prosperous Ukraine and a potential path towards the reunification of the country following five years of war in the Donetsk Coal Basin (Donbas). During the climax of this final episode, President Vasyl Holoborodko (played by Zelensky) and his cabinet members anxiously watch a news report about a disaster in a coal mine in the western Ukrainian city of L’viv. As the foreman of the local miners pleads with military police to help the colliers trapped five hundred meters underground, the officers remark that there are no mine rescue specialists nearby who can help, exclaiming, “Where else would we get experienced specialists?” The concerned foreman immediately replies, “In the Donbas.” Despite accusations of being crazy and claims that “no one will come from the Donbas,” every character looks on in a mix of shock, disbelief, and relief when, in fact, the Donbas mine rescue specialists arrive. The next scene transitions to a schoolteacher in future Ukraine, where schoolchildren learn about the restoration of Ukrainian territorial integrity and national unity.<sup>1</sup> Riding a wave of enthusiasm drawn from this vision of hope and change, Zelensky won both the first and second rounds of the 2019 Ukrainian Presidential Election.

Reality has not reflected this fantasy during the past seven years of conflict in the separatist-controlled territories of the eastern Luhansk and Donetsk Oblasts of Ukraine. Indeed,

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<sup>1</sup> Слуга народа, «Слуга Народа 3. Выбор - 3 серия | Сериалы 2019», *YouTube*, 28 марта, 2019, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8pZbPKy4j\\_k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8pZbPKy4j_k), 42:00-57:00.

the choice of the miners as the fulcrum for peace in this television series was not accidental. At 5:20 a.m. on March 4, 2015, a methane gas explosion rocked Zasyadko mine in the so-called Donetsk People's Republic, trapping 207 coal miners below ground. Although the Ukrainian government offered to send mine rescue specialists to assist in the rescue operation, the so-called Donetsk People's Republic refused any assistance and did not guarantee the safety of the Ukrainian mine rescue specialists. Unlike *Sluha Narodu*, there was no reconciliation and reunification. Thirty-four colliers perished in the disaster. The mine, which was well-known for its deadly conditions, had avoided closure eight years earlier thanks to the intervention of then Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich.<sup>2</sup>

Since the start of the War in the Donbas in 2014, the miners of the Donetsk Coal Basin have suffered immensely due to economic and political destabilization, mine flooding, mine closures, intermittent shelling, mounting wage arrears, outdated technology, and generally hazardous conditions.<sup>3</sup> This struggle for survival, however, is not a recent or unfamiliar phenomenon for the Donbas colliers. Ever since the first widespread Soviet miners' strikes in 1989, the Donbas colliers have been fighting their own impending redundancy amidst a general dearth of future prospects in the Ukrainian coal mining industry. Due to massive subsidies, latent privatization, bloated labor forces, and general unprofitability, the Donbas mines have been

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<sup>2</sup> Татьяна Козак, «На Засядько шахтёры просят помощи Украины. Сепаратисты её не пропускают», *НВ*, 4 марта, 2015, <https://nv.ua/amp/na-zasyadko-shahtery-prosyat-pomoshchi-ukrainy-separatisty-ee-ne-propuskayut-37444.html>; «Шахта Засядько: Боевики наотрез отказались от помощи украинских спасателей», *Украинская Правда*, 4 марта, 2015, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2015/03/4/7060497/>; Владимир Ивахненко и Марк Крутов, «Взрыв на шахте в Донецке», *Радио Свобода*, 4 марта, 2015, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/26881231.html>; Григорий Аросев, «Директор шахты имени Засядько арестован», *Deutsche Welle*, 9 марта, 2015, <https://p.dw.com/p/1Eng9>.

<sup>3</sup> See for instance Kazanskyi, D., Nekrasova, A., Pavlov, I., Savytskyi, O., Smirnov, A., Tarabanova, S., Yanova, H., "The Real Price of Coal in the Wartime in Donbas: A Human Rights Perspective," *Justice for Peace in Donbas: Coalition of Human Rights Organizations* (Kyiv: East-Ukrainian Center for Civic Initiatives), ed. A. Nekrasova and V. Shcherbachenko, [https://www.boell.de/sites/default/files/real\\_price\\_of\\_coal\\_in\\_wartime\\_donbas\\_eng\\_summary.pdf?dimension1=Division\\_OSOE](https://www.boell.de/sites/default/files/real_price_of_coal_in_wartime_donbas_eng_summary.pdf?dimension1=Division_OSOE).

treated as a barrier to progress and a siphon for state funds in post-independence Ukraine, a relic of the old Soviet system that refuses to acquiesce to the economic reform programs of an increasingly Europe-oriented Ukrainian nation-state. Even more than a story of survival, the tragedy of the Donbas coal miners is a story of the failure of collective action and their willing subsumption into authoritarian structures on the heels of repression. If the Donbas coal miners were the prototypical heroes of Soviet labor in 1989, then today, in 2021, they are scattered, divided, and cowed by the yoke of the same pro-Russian separatist elements whom they either supported or failed to resist in 2014.

This thesis seeks to trace the evolution of the Donbas colliers as collective actors, analyzing their transformation from independent grassroots organizers to a constituency of authoritarianism as part of their long-standing struggle for the preservation of their livelihoods. The miners' drastic economic circumstances presaged and hastened the emergence of exploitative, yet symbiotic political relationships with authoritarians who professed support for the coal industry. In the absence of meaningful political alternatives, the Donbas miners have been one of the most important constituencies that has supported authoritarianism and allowed separatism to establish a foothold in Ukraine. This support has been built on the decades-long desire to stave off economic redundancy and revive the Donbas coal mining industry.

### **Review of the Literature**

The early history of the Donbas as a coal-mining region and its expansion during the Soviet period into a hotbed of single-industry towns has received considerable academic attention. On the whole, these works collectively portray the Donbas as a violent, politically idiosyncratic region with a history that is deeply tied to its coal mines. Theodore H. Friedgut's pathbreaking volumes provide a veritable saga of industrialization, hardship, riots, strikes, and

revolutionary movements across the bloody labor relations of the modern Donbas.<sup>4</sup> His analysis traces the evolution of the city of Iuzovka (modern-day Donetsk)<sup>5</sup> from its founding as an attractive site for foreign investment in coal enterprises in 1869 up until its tumultuous and violent political transformation during and following the 1917 Russian Revolution. Charters Wynn's *Workers, Strikes, and Pogroms* expands on the roots of this violence during a period of rapid industrialization and political transformation in the Donetsk basin from 1870 until 1905. Contrary to other studies of working-class opposition and collective action, Wynn focuses on these laborers willful use of violence to achieve their goals, not just the formation of class consciousness. Workers, particularly those in the mining and steel industries, regularly carried out strikes and pogroms in the Donbas, reflecting their “shifting, politically contradictory hostilities and allegiances.”<sup>6</sup>

Along with the pre- and post-revolutionary periods in the Donbas, there is also substantial academic research and discussion of the role the miners played in the twilight years of the Soviet Union and the early years of Ukrainian independence during massive miners' strikes. All of these analyses from the late-Soviet and early post-Soviet period are primarily restricted to the period 1989-1994, with minimal commentary on the development of the miners' movement thereafter. Lewis H. Siegelbaum and Daniel J. Walkowitz discuss the deeply ingrained nature of mining culture and the mining industry in the Donetsk region in *Workers of the Donbass Speak*. There, they presciently claimed that “the Thatcherite ‘solution,’ which entailed the destruction of the British coal miners' movement and the gutting of much of their industry, was child's play

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<sup>4</sup> Theodore H. Friedgut, *Iuzovka and Revolution, Volume I: Life and Work in Russia's Donbass, 1869-1924*, (Princeton: Princeton University Library, Princeton Legacy Library, 1989); Theodore H. Friedgut, *Iuzovka and Revolution, Politics and Revolution in Russia's Donbass, 1869-1924, Volume II*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, Princeton Legacy Library, 1994).

<sup>5</sup> The city was as also known as Stalino.

<sup>6</sup> Charters Wynn, *Workers, Strikes, and Pogroms: The Donbass-Dnepr Bend in Late Imperial Russia, 1870-1905*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, Princeton Legacy Library, 1992), p. 255.

compared to what it will take to exit from a system that simultaneously protected and enraged the miners of Donetsk.”<sup>7</sup> Their analysis reveals the miners’—members of a lionized Soviet labor elite—struggle during a crisis of identity between 1980s *perestroika* and Ukrainian independence in the 1990s. Key in this discussion is the variety of approaches that different mines took to achieve their shared goal of survival and prosperity against the rising tide of economic hardships, mine closures, and failed reforms. Across their secondary analysis, and the accompanying interviews, Siegelbaum and Walkowitz demonstrate that the miners had an enormous capacity for independent collective action to enact their political will, despite the fact that they were generally unprepared for the stark realities of a truly competitive, free market system.

Adam Swain argues in favor of this continued trend into the modern era in “Soft Capitalism and Hard Industry: Virtualism, the ‘Transition Industry’ and the Restructuring of the Ukrainian Coal Industry.” He extends this to encompass broader implications in modern Ukraine, given that “following independence, Russophone and Russophile miners were the most powerful social group in the country and sought regional autonomy.”<sup>8</sup> Vlad Mykhnenko’s “State, society, and protest under post-communism: Ukrainian miners and their defeat” supports the idea that the miners’ strikes began as a grassroots, well-organized, and spontaneous movement.<sup>9</sup> However, he ultimately concludes that by 2000, the miners had effectively been outmaneuvered by rent-seeking elites who had used the political opportunities created by the strikes for their own utility-maximizing goals. According to his analysis, the strike movement failed because

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<sup>7</sup> Lewis H. Siegelbaum and Daniel J. Walkowitz, *Workers of the Donbass Speak: Survival and Identity in the New Ukraine, 1989-1992*, (New York: State University of New York Press, SUNY series in Oral and Public History, 1995), p. 87.

<sup>8</sup> Adam Swain, "Soft Capitalism and a Hard Industry: Virtualism, the 'Transition Industry' and the Restructuring of the Ukrainian Coal Industry," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, New Series, 31, no. 2 (2006): p 214-215, [www.jstor.org/stable/3804382](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3804382).

<sup>9</sup> Vlad Mykhnenko, “State, society, and protest under post-communism: Ukrainian miners and their defeat,” in P. Kopecky and C. Mudde (eds.) *Uncivil Society? Contentious Politics in Post-communist Europe*, (London: New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 93-113.

there was a lack of working-class solidarity, and once elite support collapsed, the miners were left without the same influence.

With regards to collective action amongst the colliers, the academic literature generally agrees that the barriers to collective action and the formation of independent trade unions were lowered at the end of the Soviet period. Sue Davis' *Trade Unions in Russia and Ukraine, 1985-1995* analyzes the contributing factors which raise or lower the relative likelihood of independent union formation. She concludes that Soviet reform programs—which diluted the state's monopoly on political power and scarce resources—and the turn away from violent repressions created the circumstances necessary for the creation of independent miners' unions.<sup>10</sup> Friedgut and Siegelbaum further develop this idea in relation to collective action. In their view, the Soviet government's perceived weakness and inability to adequately respond to miners' demands for change prompted the colliers to take matters into their own hands.<sup>11</sup> Stephen Crowley outlines the underlying factors behind miners' collective action, whose successful organization he attributes to deeply ingrained enterprise paternalism. However, he points out a paradox in the miners' movement, namely the fact that the miners revolted against their primary source of economic protection—state subsidies and state coal purchases—both pre- and post-independence. Moreover, he points out that the miners' failure to create functioning pro-labor parties and their inability to overcome the economic deficiencies of the Donbas coal enterprises

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<sup>10</sup> Sue Davis, *Trade Unions in Russia and Ukraine, 1985-1995*, (New York: Palgrave Publishers, 2001).

<sup>11</sup> Theodore H. Friedgut and Lewis H. Siegelbaum, "The Soviet Miners' Strike, July 1989: Perestroika from Below," *University of Pittsburgh Center for Russian and East European Studies: The Carl Beck Papers*, no. 804, March 1990, <https://carlbeckpapers.pitt.edu/ojs/index.php/cbp/article/view/43/41>.

increased the likelihood that the miners would take more radical measures to preserve their industry.<sup>12</sup>

In contrast to the literature on collective action, the issue of separatism and the mining industry is far more controversial in present academic discourse. Although there is general consensus about Russia's role in invading and conducting hybrid warfare in the Donbas, there is far less attention directed towards the miners' role in and reactions to the War in the Donbas. Yuri Zhukov uses micro-level data to map the intensity of separatist activity and prevalence of rebel control against the presence of ethno-linguistic minorities, employment in major industries, and areas with a low opportunity cost for insurrection. He determines that rates of employment in the mining and metallurgy industries were some of the most statistically significant correlating factors for separatist activity at the outset of the conflict.<sup>13</sup> Vlad Mykhnenko critiques Zhukov's "homo-economicus" position because it assumes the presence of rational economic thinking and decision-making amongst the miners. He further points out that there is evidence to suggest that the miners were operating with a warped worldview at the outset of the conflict, and so they cannot be considered the traditional rational economic man.<sup>14</sup> Psychological and flawed logic played an influential role in the miners' decisions to support separatism. Other reports, such as Franklin Holcomb's "The Kremlin's Irregular Army: Ukrainian Separatist Order of Battle" and Anna Matveeva's "No Moscow stooges: identity polarization and guerrilla movements in Donbass," refer to the composition of separatist units being drawn from, in part, "marginalized

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<sup>12</sup> Steven Crowley, *Hot Coal, Cold Steel Russian and Ukrainian Workers from the End of the Soviet Union to the Post-Communist Transformations*, (Ann-Arbor: Michigan University Press, 1997), <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015040697537&view=1up&seq=1>; Stephen Crowley, "Between Class and Nation: Worker Politics in the Post-Communist Ukraine," (Washington D.C.: The National Council for Soviet and East European Research, 1994).

<sup>13</sup> Yuri M. Zhukov, "Trading hard hats for combat helmets: The economics of rebellion in eastern Ukraine," *Journal of Comparative Economics*, 10:43, (October 2015), p. 1-15, doi: 10.1016/j.jce.2015.10.010.

<sup>14</sup> Vlad Mykhnenko. "Causes and Consequences of the War in Eastern Ukraine: An Economic Geography Perspective," *Europe-Asia Studies*, 72:3, (April 2020), p. 528-560, DOI: 10.1080/09668136.2019.1684447

locals from economically-distressed areas,” including miners.<sup>15</sup> Taras Kuzio argues in *Putin’s War Against Ukraine* that “while some joined the separatists for ideological reasons, such as *Oplot* vigilantes, many did so because it provided an income after their coalmines and factories had closed or were destroyed in the conflict.”<sup>16</sup> Although notable authors like Andrew Wilson and Mychailo Wynnykyj have already acknowledged the importance of local complicity in the success of the separatist movement in the Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts, this abbreviated discussion has hitherto failed to address the roots of *why* and *how* the Donbas—specifically the mining regions and colliers—fell victim to separatist influences.<sup>17</sup>

The regional character of the Donbas is another important aspect of the literature on the miners. Hiroaki Kuromiya’s *Freedom and Terror in the Donbas* attests to the fact that the mining industry plays a “central political role in the Donbas. It is in this industry that a sense of exploitation, reinforced by the deep division of the actual and symbolic world into the dark netherland and the bright open field, has remained keenest among the workers.”<sup>18</sup> Kuromiya offers perhaps the most compelling and important discussion of the Donbas’ idiosyncrasies as a wild, free steppe, where the opportunism and exploitation remain the norm. These trends have made the Donbas a peculiar singularity within the broader boundaries of Ukraine. Ulrich Schmid and Okana Myshlovska’s edited collection of regional studies in Ukraine provide an important

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<sup>15</sup> Franklin Holcomb, “The Kremlin’s Irregular Army: Ukrainian Separatist Order of Battle,” *Institute for the Study of War*, Russia and Ukraine Security Report 3, (September 2017), p. 10; Anna Matveeva, “No Moscow stooges: identity polarization and guerrilla movements in Donbass,” *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 16:1, (February 2016), p. 34, doi: 10.1080/14683857.2016.1148415.

<sup>16</sup> Taras Kuzio, *Putin’s War Against Ukraine*, (Toronto: Chair of Ukrainian Studies, University of Toronto, 2017), p. 164.

<sup>17</sup> Andrew Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis: What It Means For The West*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), pp. 131-133; Mychailo Wynnykyj, *Ukraine’s Maidan Russia’s War: A Chronicle and Analysis of the Revolution of Dignity*, (Stuttgart: ibidem Verlag, 2019), Ukrainian Voices, vol. 1, pp 152-154.

<sup>18</sup> Hiroaki Kuromiya, *Freedom and Terror in the Donbas: A Ukrainian-Russian Borderland, 1870s-1990s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 334.



look into this unique Donbas' identity.<sup>19</sup> These chapters demonstrate how the Donbas stands out from other Ukrainian regions due to its historical closeness to Russia, the predominant language (Russian), feelings of envy, low satisfaction of life, weak Ukrainian civic identities, and strong regional identities, amongst other factors. The miners had a significant role in the formation of this identity. As Liebich, Myshlovska, Sereda, Gaidai, and Sklokina point out, "The high status of miners and their corresponding social benefits during the Soviet period stimulated the growth of the idea of the special character of the Donbas and its superiority over similar industrial regions abroad, especially in capitalist countries." They also describe how "the notion of the 'Donbas' was essentialized and discursively expanded to include the whole regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, in spite of the fact that the Donets coal basin occupies only part of the territories."<sup>20</sup> Their analysis demonstrates how the Donbas identity is inextricably linked to the miners and coal.

The term authoritarianism is deployed in this thesis in reference to both the intraregional authoritarian political structure that emerged in the Donbas, as well as the authoritarian politics that characterized the presidencies of Leonid Kuchma and Viktor Yanukovich. Although it is tempting to use the label of populism for these figures, their regimes, and political machines, this label is unsuitable. At its core, if populism refers to appeals to "the people" against a "corrupt elite," then such rhetoric has flourished across the political spectrum in Ukraine. Indeed, Kuzio's work on populism in Ukraine reveals how this phenomenon is hardly restricted to the Party of

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<sup>19</sup> *Regionalism Without Regions: Reconceptualizing Ukraine's Heterogeneity*, ed. Ulrich Schmid and Oksana Myshlovska (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2019).

<sup>20</sup> Andre Liebich, Oksana Myshlovska, Viktoriia Sereda, Oleksandr Gaidai, and Iryna Sklokina, "The Ukrainian Past and Present: Legacies, Memory and Attitudes," within Schmid and Myshlovska, p. 92.

Regions, Yanukovych, or Kuchma.<sup>21</sup> While these authoritarians did operationalize populist tactics, the features that distinguished them from other Ukrainian political figures and parties were their authoritarian tendencies. Yet, defining authoritarianism is not a clear-cut process. The overuse of this term in recent memory has diminished the clarity of its meaning. As Marlies Glasius writes, “We currently lack the tools to distinguish between tangible threats to democracy and interpretations imbued by left-liberal prejudice, because we have failed to define or operationalize ‘authoritarianism’ or ‘illiberalism’ in ways that relate to the commonsense meanings journalists and citizens are freely using.”<sup>22</sup> This thesis follows Glasius definition of authoritarianism, which stretches beyond elections and personalities to focus on authoritarian *practices*. These are defined here “as patterns of action that sabotage accountability to people over whom a political actor exerts control, or their representatives, by means of secrecy, disinformation and disabling voice.”<sup>23</sup> The “eastern” authoritarians used all three to great effect against the miners. These authoritarians disabled miners’ voices during repressions, employed illiberal practices to coopt the miners and exert control over the Donbas, used disinformation to inject separatist sympathies into the mining communities, all while operating in as opaque a manner as possible.

This thesis is positioned as a continuation of the academic studies on the early Donbas and the late-Soviet period. It builds on the conclusions of all the aforementioned authors while expanding the discussion of the miners’ struggle for economic survival to encompass the critically important period from 1994 to 2013. There has been comparatively little attention paid

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<sup>21</sup> Kuzio, *Ukraine: Democratization, Corruption, and the New Russian Imperialism*, p. 312-313; Taras Kuzio Populism in Ukraine in a Comparative European Context, *Problems of Post-Communism*, vol. 57, no. 6 (2010), 3-18, <https://doi.org/10.2753/PPC1075-8216570601>.

<sup>22</sup> Marlies Glasius, “What authoritarianism is...and is not: a practice perspective,” *International Affairs*, vol. 94, no. 3 (2018): 515-533, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiy060>.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

to the miners during and after the collapse of the strike movement, leaving open the question of what happened to them between this time, and both *how* and *why* the Donbas miners have supported authoritarian figures, political parties, and separatists. In fact, several heart-wrenching, monumental episodes in this historical trajectory have been left wholly unattended. As such, this thesis represents a concrete attempt to shed light on the neglected narrative of miners' struggles for economic prosperity in eastern Ukraine and the associated long-term consequences in the contemporary moment. More importantly, this thesis offers insight into an understudied phenomenon in academic literature: working-class support for authoritarianism and the transformation of traditionally left-wing political forces into constituencies of authoritarianism. The historical model that emerges from the Donbas miners' decades-long battle to preserve their livelihoods contains important lessons for a rapidly shifting economy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the long-term consequences of neglect, disillusionment, and deindustrialization.

### **Primary Sources and Methodology**

Primary source research for this thesis has required the creative use of news reports, newspapers, interviews, video footage, personal accounts, government documents, and reports from non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Due to COVID-19 restrictions and the ongoing war in the Donbas, this thesis could not incorporate archival materials from the region. Moreover, since this thesis is, in part, a work of contemporary history, there are inherent issues that arise with nationalist vitriol stemming from the conflict, the classified nature of information related to the war, oligarch control over media outlets in Ukraine, and ongoing attempts to uncover the reach of the Yanukovich kleptocracy. Despite this, wherever and whenever possible, this thesis strives to incorporate and emphasize the. Nevertheless, the available sources provide access to miners' voices, which are the primary focus of this thesis. Their thoughts,

feelings, and experiences—at times expressed loudly and at others muted or suppressed—serve as the foundation of this thesis.

News reports and newspapers are perhaps the most important primary sources when locating the miners' voices and experiences. With few personal memoirs or written accounts from the miners themselves, news reports and newspapers serve as a repository of miners' opinions and perspectives. They provide a bottom-up look at the miners' Moreover, news reports and newspapers can provide important insight into the general mood and atmosphere of a particular city, region, or stratum of society depending on the publication's location, owner, and contributors. Many of these news sources also contain interviews, which are extremely useful for their often deep, engaging discourse. Interviews provide a rare opportunity to analyze comprehensive perspectives from critical actors during important moments in the history of the Donbas colliers' struggle.

Video footage also contributes to the creation of a more complete picture of the miners' struggles. There is an abundance of video material available through non-fiction movies and raw and uncut footage on digital platforms like YouTube. Such videos not only provide an intimate, extremely personal look at the miners' experiences—especially during the 1990s miners' movement and strikes—but also contain unfiltered opinions and first-hand audio of the miners. This adds a layer of detail that is missing from purely written mediums.

Personal accounts found on various media platforms are the final piece of the bottom-up puzzle. These often appear in the form of blogposts, opinion articles, or memoirs from residents of the mining regions. Although the number of actual colliers who author these sources is minimal, personal accounts still illustrate important aspects of the mentalities and motivations that permeate the coal mining regions of Ukraine.

Government documents and reports from NGOs supplement miners' voices with important context, analysis, survey data, and statistics from the Ukrainian government and international institutions like the World Bank. These sources supply information about the conditions in the coal mines, the overall state of the coal industry, miners' opinions, and the government's response to miners' strikes. In tandem, the combination of a bottom-up and top-down approach reveals an ongoing tension and power struggle between labor and state between 1989 and 2014 in the Donetsk Coal Basin.

There are unique difficulties that accompany the study of the Donbas miners and separatism. This is especially true in light of Russian President Vladimir Putin's—the man directing the invasion of Ukraine—own dubious suggestion that Ukrainian forces are fighting “yesterday's miners and tractor drivers” in the Donbas.<sup>24</sup> The miners' continual use as a propaganda tool often inhibits the identification of clearly defined opinions and narratives amongst the miners. Methodologically, many of these sources, especially those informing the period from 2013 until the present, are drawn from often conflicting Russian and Ukrainian news reports. The former glorifies separatist support amongst the miners; they have every incentive to claim all miners support the separatists. The latter vilifies it; they have every incentive to claim that no miners support Russia. Loaded terms are commonplace across both expert analysis and everyday news reporting. In a region where political intrigue and exploitation are the norm, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish a rally that is paid for from a rally that is grassroots organized. There also exists the possibility for faulty journalism, quotes taken out of context, false flag operations, and narratives aimed at manipulating people's perceptions. In the current media landscape in the Donbas, disinformation presents challenges beyond the traditional positivist

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<sup>24</sup> Николай Соловьев, «Путин назвал сепаратистов шахтёрами и трактористами», *Republic*, February 18, 2015, <https://republic.ru/posts/1/1216589>.

versus phenomenologist debate. Never has there been such easy access to information, nor such comprehensive tools for disseminating and presenting misleading or otherwise reductive and generalized narratives. This problem is not going away for the foreseeable future, especially as more people share their innermost thoughts on the internet, rather than through the traditional written media presented in diaries, memoirs, and letters. Social media has become the new bastion for sharing one's experiences, and within this sphere, historians are presented with an overabundance of potential primary source material. They also, however, confront the methodological dilemma of differentiating between reliable and unreliable sources, especially as so-called "deep fakes," "fake news," bots, and trolls become harder to identify.

Given this problem, this thesis takes an approach that utilizes sources from Russian, Ukrainian, and foreign media outlets to approximate events and attitudes as they unfolded during the War in the Donbas. This thesis has adopted this method while keeping in mind the potential for deliberate disinformation amidst the descriptions and quotes presented. To this end, whenever possible, multiple sources and citations have been included when discussing miners' attitudes and pro-separatist sympathies in the Donbas. Essentially, one source is easier to refute than multiple reports that present similar evidence. The logic behind this decision rests on the core assumption that some miners, given their deep mistrust of western and central Ukrainians and Westerners more broadly, are likely hesitant to speak with journalists and media sources based in these regions. If not for reasons of mistrust, then it would also stand to reason they would not speak for fear of the repercussions under a repressive separatist regime.<sup>25</sup> This problem of the "missing" miners' voices is in some ways akin to existing (or perhaps more accurately

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<sup>25</sup> For more on both phenomena, see "Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine," *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*, May 15, 2014, <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/UA/HRMMUReport15May2014.pdf>. Multiple reports on the human rights situation in Ukraine during 2014 emphasized the restrictions on free speech and the growth of hate speech.

“invisible”) political attitudes in the United States. One need only look at the results for political polls in both the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections to determine how disinformation and deep-seated mistrust can impact a willingness to respond to questioning, especially in regions hard-hit by de-industrialization and dying industries similar to coal mining in the Donbas. This issue is compounded by the lack of miners’ voices in the halls and colloquiums that agonize over the analysis of coal mining regions. Naturally, this can lead to these workers becoming an “afterthought,” particularly when their views seldom align, and more often contradict, the views professed by those who recommend reform programs and call for radical change in their industries. Poorly concealed condescension is too often the norm on both sides in this debate. Moreover, the lack of written records and testimonies left behind by the historically illiterate and undereducated Donbas miners creates difficulties when attempting to locate their voices. Nevertheless, the collection of sources represented hereafter is meant to reflect the diversity of opinions and thought across both time and the political spectrum in Ukraine.



Figure 2. Map of Ukraine. Source: Encyclopedia Britannica.

## Structure of the Thesis

The miners' transformation into a constituency of authoritarianism took place across four main phases since 1989. The chapters of this thesis mirror these phases. In the first phase (1989-1993), the Donbas coal miners rejected the Soviet system that revered them in favor of market reforms. This genuine grassroots movement carried out *perestroika* from below as miners self-organized strike committees and presented their economic and political demands to the center of power in Moscow. The miners' desire for economic freedom eventually pushed them to seek political independence in Ukraine as a means to this end. Independence in 1991, however, brought the miners more traumatic economic crises—intensified by the new phenomenon of post-Soviet life—and rampant rent-seeking in the Donbas coal industry. In a bid to resolve their



economic hardships, the miners allied themselves with regional political opportunists, who willingly used the miners' movement as a vehicle to obtain power.

In the second phase (1994-1998), the miners' movement was pacified once the political opportunists turned to authoritarian tactics. Newly elected President Leonid Kuchma became the "grave digger" of the coal industry. He mandated a reform program that introduced widespread mine closures which inflicted lasting physical and psychological damage on the miners. To make matters worse, the miners fell victim to rampant infighting. Eventually, the new reforms were accompanied by harsh repressions against any miners or local authorities in the Donbas who refused to submit to Kuchma's administration. By 1996, the movement had been crushed, and for the next few years, the reeling miners were forced to pay an exorbitant price for the smallest concessions.

In the third phase, (1999-2013), the miners, with no other viable political alternatives, elected to submit themselves to the authoritarian power structure in the Donbas. The Donetsk Clan and the Party of Regions consolidated the miners' support for authoritarianism in a Faustian bargain—a pact whereby a person trades something of supreme moral or spiritual importance for some material benefit. The miners willingly forfeited independent collective action in exchange for authoritarian patronage and the survival of the industry. Thereafter, Donbas colliers mobilized under the direction of Donetsk Clan leader Viktor Yanukovych, whom they trusted as one of their own, and his authoritarian political machine, the Party of Regions. As part of this Faustian bargain, the Donbas colliers became increasingly exposed to inflammatory separatist which exacerbated interregional tensions. Moreover, despite the Donetsk Clan's exploitative business practices and open kleptocracy, the miners continued to show up for them at rallies and

the ballot box so long as they received promises of higher wages, higher pensions, increased subsidies, and the expansion of the coal industry.

During the fourth phase, (2014-present), the long-term consequences of the miners' Faustian bargain became apparent when armed separatists began seizing control of the Donbas. The colliers could not and did not meaningfully resist as a unified labor force. Once Viktor Yanukovych and his close associates fled the country, they left an authoritarian power vacuum that radical fringe groups and subversive Kremlin agents quickly moved to fill. Under a barrage of disinformation that exploited existing rifts in Ukrainian society and amplified pre-existing separatist rhetoric, the divided colliers expressed both tacit and open support for these separatists in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblast, who offered a terrible, yet palatable, alternative to European integration.

Since that time, the miners' hopes for the economic resurrection of the coal industry have once more proven unfounded. Hazardous conditions have only worsened due to the conflict, and wage arrears have amassed in both separatist-controlled and government-controlled regions of the Donbas. Although atomized wildcat strikes have appeared, most recently in the summer of 2020, the miners have, as of writing this thesis, failed to coalesce into a movement and recapture the political power and independent collective action they enjoyed at the beginning of the 1990s.

**Chapter 1:** *1989-1994: Strikes, Disillusionment, and Independence Between Perestroika and 'Grabitization'*

In the waning years of its existence, the Soviet Union and its satellite states faced a reckoning in their coal fields. Long-term deindustrialization, a precipitous decline in oil prices, over-spending on the military-industrial complex, chronic energy shortages, and endemic economic inefficiencies in the planning and execution of antiquated five-year plans left the Soviet government with seemingly endless economic conundrums, little growth, and even less consensus on a solution.<sup>26</sup> Across the factories and mines that made up around 70 percent of the Soviet economy in the mid-1980s, a rust belt descended.<sup>27</sup> Long overdue investment, refurbishing, and enterprise restructuring meant that mines were dilapidated, obsolete, and dangerous; around 800 coal miners perished each year in work-related accidents (for comparison, 55 American coal miners died in 1988) and 365,000 miners were still waiting for proper housing.<sup>28</sup> Amidst this industrial decline, the rapid onset of inflation, rising prices for basic necessities, and rampant shortages sowed anger and resentment that boiled just underneath the surface of mining communities across the Communist world. These emotions mixed with long-held grievances with the official trade unions of the Soviet Union and a pervasive sense of injustice, thereby creating a perfect storm of discontent in the coal basins.

The coal miners found themselves in a uniquely precarious position after decades of a stable economic relationship with the central government. Coal production rates were no longer

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<sup>26</sup> For more on the divisions within the highest echelons of the Soviet government and the barriers to effective reform, see Anders Aslund, *Gorbachev's Struggle for Economic Reform*, updated and expanded ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991). For more on some of the major issues described here, see Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted*, updated ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>27</sup> Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted*, 17.

<sup>28</sup> "Notes from the Underground: Soviet Miners in Particular Could Benefit from U.S. Technical Aid," *Los Angeles Times*, July 22, 1990, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1990-07-22-op-655-story.html>; Elizabeth Shogren and John-Thor Dahlburg, "Soviet Miners Strike, Seek End to Communist Rule," *Los Angeles Times*, July 12, 1990, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1990-07-12-mn-290-story.html>.

being met by the internal demand of the Soviet Union, and competing resources such as natural gas, oil, and nuclear energy were securing a greater share of the energy market.<sup>29</sup> For instance, in 1951, 281.7 million tons of coal were produced, while coal occupied a healthy 58.8% share of the fuel-energy market in the Soviet Union. In 1988, 771.8 million tons of coal were produced. However, this vast increase in production—except in the Donbas, where coal production had declined from 225 million tons in 1976 to 200 million tons in 1988—was only matched by a declining 20.0% share of the fuel-energy market.<sup>30</sup> Despite the obvious trend towards obsolescence and overproduction, the central government did nothing to remedy the problem and was content to continue exceeding production quotas. The miners, on the other hand, were still unable to profit from the export of excess coal and were forced to participate in an enterprise that increasingly saw fewer state subsidies or funds for modernization, an issue that was only compounded when the funds from profitable mines were used to cross-subsidize unprofitable enterprises. The industry needed 23 billion rubles each year in subsidies to compensate for the fact that only 32 out of 564 mines could operate without them (200 of these mines required subsidies of 50 to 100 rubles per ton while 45 required subsidies greater than 100 rubles per ton).<sup>31</sup> As a result, many mines fell into disrepair, a notoriously hazardous profession became more dangerous, and the number of unprofitable enterprises grew.

By the spring and summer of 1988, 40,000 coal miners in the Polish People's Republic (PRL) had joined widespread strikes and protests in support of Solidarity, the Polish trade union

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<sup>29</sup> Росинформуголь, “История отрасли,” [The history of the industry], Музей отрасли, accessed September 20, 2020, <https://www.rosugol.ru/museum/>.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.; Александр Сергеев, “Шахтёрские забастовки 1989 года,” [Miners' strikes in 1989], *Независимый Профсоюз Горняков (НПГ)*, accessed September 20, 2020, <https://ngr-ru.ru/About/history/miners-strike-1989>; in Sue Davis, *Trade Unions in Russia and Ukraine, 1985–1995* (New York: Palgrave Publishers, 2001), 69.

<sup>31</sup> Matthew Sagers, “Review of Soviet Energy Industries in 1990,” *Soviet Geography* 32, no.4 (April 1991), 275, cited in Davis, 74.

calling for an end to the communist monopoly on political power in the Polish state.<sup>32</sup>

Eventually, Polish Solidarity leader and future President Lech Walesa convinced these miners to cease their militant action in favor of negotiations for a power-sharing agreement.<sup>33</sup> Following June 1989 parliamentary elections, Solidarity won all but two of the contested seats (and one of these candidates ended up siding with Solidarity anyways). Thereafter, General Wojciech Jaruzelski invited the anti-Communist opposition to form the government—despite the nominal Communist parliamentary majority—and the regime capitulated.<sup>34</sup> Reforms and strikes had toppled the Communists' hold on power. The miners who participated in this process, concentrated primarily in the Silesia region of Poland, were part of the vanguard that inspired a wave of subsequent movements across neighboring states in the Soviet bloc.

The Soviet Union and its satellite states were not prepared to suppress workers' discontent. Unlike the massacre of dozens of strikers at Novochoerkassk Electromotive Building Factory in Russia on June 2, 1962 and the pacification of Wujek coal mine in Poland on December 16, 1981, the Soviet authorities did not use violence to force the miners to submit.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, the authorities did not turn to less kinetic methods to deter independent collective action as they had in preceding years with harsh reactions to miner-activists Alexei Nikitin and

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<sup>32</sup> John Daniszewski, "Pro-Solidarity Strikes Spread in Poland," *Associated Press*, August 20, 1998, <https://apnews.com/article/2372e5073562968b400eac2590606dfc>; John Tagliabue, "Thousands Strike Major Coal Mine in Poland," *The New York Times*, August 17, 1998, <https://www.nytimes.com/1988/08/17/world/thousands-strike-major-coal-mine-in-poland.html>.

<sup>33</sup> Jackson Diehl, "Strikes in Poland End as Coal Miners Yield," *The Washington Post*, September 4, 1988, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1988/09/04/strikes-in-poland-end-as-coal-miners-yield/f364e710-c8c5-432c-900b-2013fdc8f6a6/>.

<sup>34</sup> Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted*, 88.

<sup>35</sup> "Не хватает денег на мясо и колбасу, ешьте пирожки с ливером," [Not enough money for meat and sausage? Eat liver pies], *Бессмертный Барак*, June 2, 2016, [https://bessmertnybarak.ru/article/ne\\_khvataet\\_deneg\\_na\\_myaso/](https://bessmertnybarak.ru/article/ne_khvataet_deneg_na_myaso/); David Remnick, "Massacre in Workers Paradise," *The Washington Post*, December 18, 1990, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1990/12/18/massacre-in-workers-paradise/b0da3023-bba2-4512-ae0d-a2d72acf3d35/>; "Polish court sentences 15 policemen in 1981 massacre at coal mine," *The New York Times*, May 31, 2007, <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/31/world/europe/31iht-poland.4.5947139.html>.

Vladimir Klebanov in the Donetsk Coal Basin. Nikitin had worked to expose the injustices taking place at Butovska-Donetsk mine in Donetsk, Ukraine—namely unpaid bonuses, horrific working conditions, and party corruption.<sup>36</sup> Despite his efforts, and the rare success of directing his fellow miners to submit a formal complaint to the Central Committee of the Communist Party, Nikitin had been expelled from the party and blacklisted from work at other mines in the Donbas.<sup>37</sup> He and his family were also subject to frequent arrest, humiliating hearings before kangaroo courts, and abuse from the mine leadership and security services. When Nikitin and Klebanov formed the Association of Free Trade Unions of Workers in 1978, the organization was repressed in its infancy, and both Klebanov and Nikitin were confined to psychiatric hospitals, a common practice at the time for political dissidents.<sup>38</sup> After a second internment for three years in a psychiatric hospital—where Nikitin was forced to undergo a series of drug treatments that left him partially blind, disoriented, and psychologically depressed—Nikitin died from stomach cancer on January 21, 1984.<sup>39</sup>

By 1989-1991, the previous deterrent effect of arrests, shootings, forced hospitalizations, and repressions had evaporated. Mykola Volynko, one of the first co-chairmen of the Donetsk Strike Committee and future leader of the Independent Miners' Union of the Donbas (NPGDb), later recalled that when 27 mines went on strike in June 1989, “we approached the ‘White House,’ where a cordon of state police stood, and General Nedrihaylo, now deceased, stood up and said: ‘Guys, I received an order to drive you away, to the point of shooting. But I will not do

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<sup>36</sup> Kevin Klose, *Russia and the Russians: Inside the Closed Society*, (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1984), 54-74.

<sup>37</sup> David Satter, *Age of Delirium: The Decline and Fall of the Soviet Union* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 125–27.

<sup>38</sup> Taras Kuzio, *Ukraine: Perestroika to Independence* (London: Palgrave Macmillan Press, 2000), 62, full book may be found at <http://diasporiana.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/books/12187/file.pdf>; Kuromiya, *Freedom and Terror*, 330–31.

<sup>39</sup> Satter, *Age of Delirium*, 147; Klose, *Russia and the Russians*, 115.

this.”<sup>40</sup> The general then ordered his subordinates to stand down, at which point Volynko began organizing with the other miners to form a strike committee. Similarly, in an interview in 2019, former Donbas miner Igor Ivanichenko recalled,

“They didn’t shoot this one. Probably, the country itself was headed towards collapse. And on our account, they wanted to accelerate the process. But we didn’t understand that then. I didn’t have time for this at all – I had a kid, and I had to think about where I could get a kopeck for milk products.”<sup>41</sup>

The act of “not shooting this one,” in combination with the economic hardships Ivanichenko described, emboldened opposition efforts and drastically lowered the risks and opportunity costs associated with the creation of independent trade unions and a miners’ movement.<sup>42</sup> Even if miners like Ivanichenko were primarily motivated by pressing material concerns—such as getting a kopeck for milk products—rather than emerging nationalist and political ideologies, their actions still contributed to the wider stream of political events that precipitated the collapse of the Soviet Union

Building on the example set by Polish Solidarity, the coal miners of the Soviet Union began formulating economic and political demands.<sup>43</sup> These initially focused on better working conditions, higher pensions, more time off, economic independence for mining enterprises, and accountability for decades of grafting and corruption amongst the mining leadership and union representatives. Despite serving as paragons of Soviet labor for decades, the miners found

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<sup>40</sup> “Interview with Mykola Volynko, Chairman of the Independent Miners Union of Donbas,” [in Russian], *College of Europe: Three Revolutions Project* (May 10, 2017): 1, [http://www.3rnatolin.eu/wp-content/uploads/3r-library/Volynko\\_Ru.pdf](http://www.3rnatolin.eu/wp-content/uploads/3r-library/Volynko_Ru.pdf).

<sup>41</sup> Алена Вишницкая и Анастасия Власова, “Забастовка. Что помнят шахтёры Донбасса о протестах 90-х,” [The strike. What Donbass miners remember about the protests of the 90s], *Hromadske*, August 24, 2019, <https://hromadske.ua/ru/posts/zabastovka-cto-pomnyat-shahtery-donbassa-o-protestah-90-h>.

<sup>42</sup> Davis, *Trade Unions*, 44.

<sup>43</sup> “Interview with Mykola Volynko,” *College of Europe: Three Revolutions Project*, 6.

themselves unable to remain the silent subordinates of an authoritarian economic system which espoused Janus-faced policies, simultaneously glorifying miners' deeds while allowing mining communities to fall in disrepair and abject squalor.<sup>44</sup> As the economic crisis in the Soviet Union continued to worsen, these colliers presented their demands to both regional leaders and the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. In an ironic twist of fate, the miners formed unauthorized strike committees and independent unions en masse for the first time since the February and October Revolutions over seventy years earlier. These strike committees were initially formed by elected representatives drawn from the mining enterprises. The representatives then directed strike actions and articulated demands. Such committees became the primary forum for debate over protest and the protection of colliers' rights in the late-Soviet period.

As these parallel organizational bodies emerged, they began to pull power away from the authoritarian central government and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). In effect, the miners replaced the "conveyor belt" of state power with their own elected representatives. The very workers who formed the supposed foundations of Soviet society bemoaned their "paradise" lost in the form of deindustrialization and economic insecurity. Anger boiled over into action as wildcat strikes in the Siberia and the far north of Russia coalesced into a nearly half-million strong all-Union strike movement that incorporated the Pechora Coal Basin (23,000 miners who produced 6-10 percent of Soviet coal), Kuznets Coal Basin (150,000 miners who produced 22-30 percent of Soviet coal), and Donetsk Coal Basin (300,000 miners who produced 36 percent of Soviet coal) at the forefront.<sup>45</sup> The miners' eventual push towards

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<sup>44</sup> For an example of this kind of propaganda and glorification see the 1950 drama *Донецкие Шахтёры*, located here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AoHCREH87Ig>, or the 1972 documentary film *Шахтёры*, located here [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMUh\\_ZuAv88](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMUh_ZuAv88).

<sup>45</sup> Davis, *Trade Unions*, 68–69.



political activism would mark the beginning of a decades-long struggle with central governments in Moscow and Kyiv.

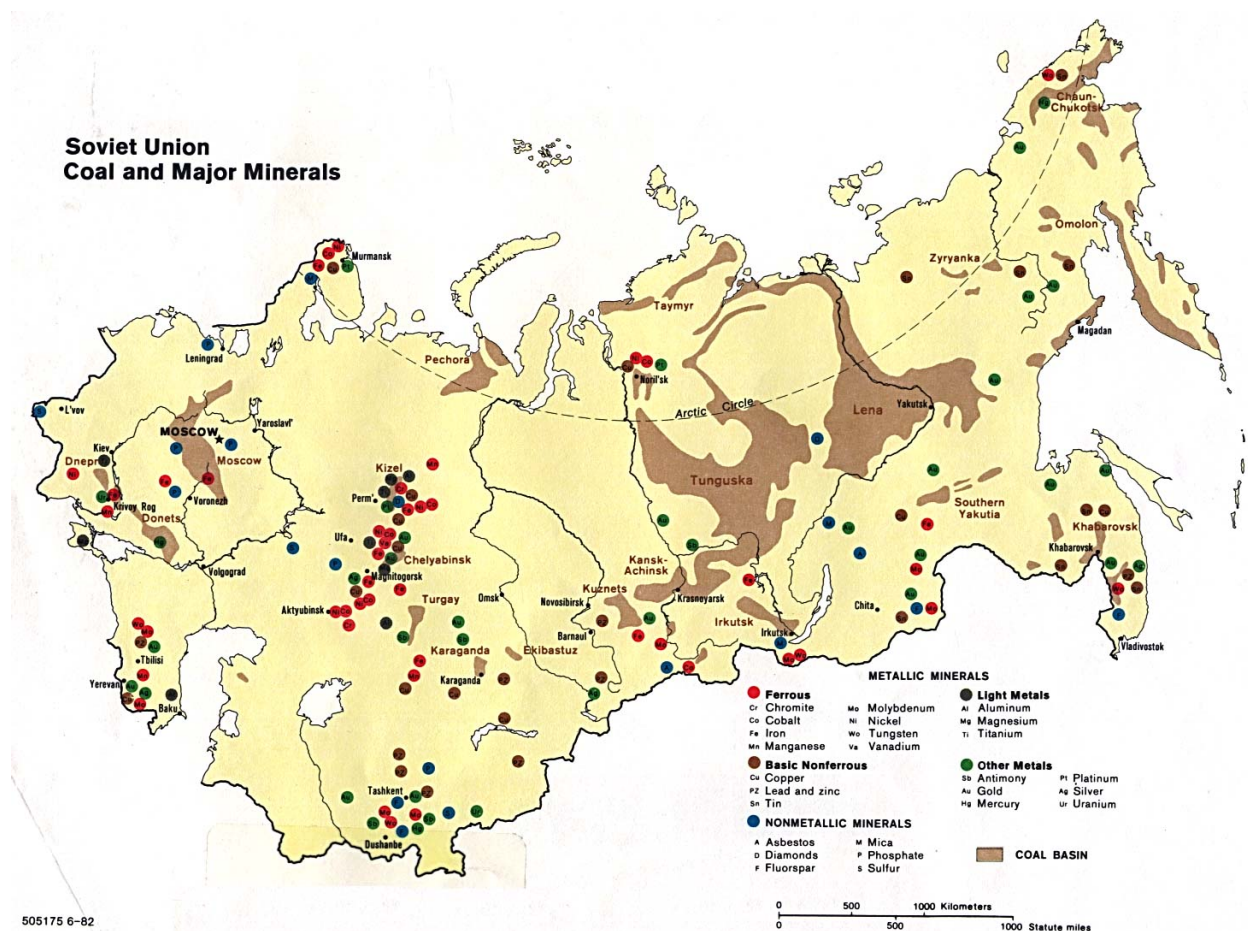


Figure 3. Map of coal basins and mineral deposits in the Soviet Union. Source: 1upTravel

This chapter investigates the origins of this struggle, the arc of miners' collective action in the Soviet Union and the Donbas, and the zenith of power in the miners' movement. These colliers could hardly have imagined the impact their actions would have on not only the collapse of the Soviet Union, but also the legacy of labor movements and collective action amongst the miners of the Donbas. In particular, the genuine grassroots miners' movement in the Donbas would come to define the miners' changing relationship with a Communist authoritarian central government in Moscow, swinging the relative balance of power towards the striking coal miners

and the constituent republics of the Soviet Union. The Donbas miners carried this power into a newly independent Ukrainian republic, where they quickly found that their vision of regionally based free-market reforms did not align well with a new, post-Soviet reality. As a result, the movement partnered with regional authoritarian political figures to enact change at the highest echelons of political power.

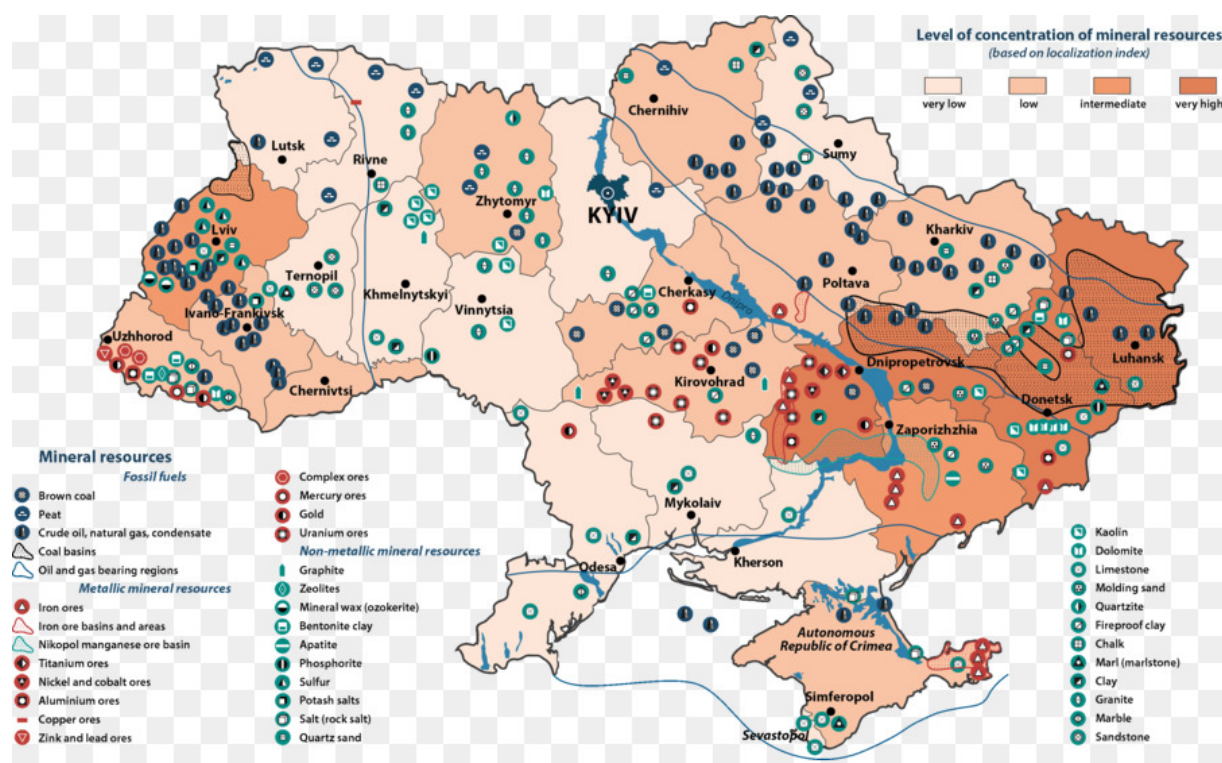


Figure 4. Map of coal basins and mineral deposits in Ukraine. Source: CleanPNG

### The Movement Ignites: The Rise of Miners' Collective Action

The Soviet colliers began voicing their grievances for the first time in the summer of 1989. On July 11, 1989, in response to deteriorating economic conditions in the Soviet Union, the coal miners of Mezhdurechensk in Kemerovskaya Oblast of the Kuzbass region in Russia refused to descend into the mines and commenced a wildcat strike.<sup>46</sup> Rising food prices,

<sup>46</sup> П. Ворошилов, “Обстановка остаётся сложной: продолжается забастовка шахтёров Кузбасса,” [The situation remains difficult: the strike of Kuzbass miners continues], *Известия*, July 15, 1989.

shortages of goods, and falling wages meant that the relatively well-off position of the miners did not shield them from hardships in 1989.<sup>47</sup> In the words of one female collier, when asked why the miners were striking:

“Because it is already impossible for us to live! A miner goes to the mine for an entire day, and for the entire shift he is hungry. It is because of this that the strike has started.”<sup>48</sup>

This growing frustration and suffering were evident across the Mezhdurechensk miners’ addresses. In an appeal to a local broadcasting station, “The Projector of Perestroika,” to air their grievances, the miners at Shevyakova mine lamented lower wages, inequality between the managerial staff and underground workers, terrible transportation conditions to and from work, a lack of basic necessities, unequal food distribution, and mandatory work on weekends.<sup>49</sup>

Following a lackluster response from the mine directors and regional authorities, this initially measured address was replaced by a list of 21 demands signed by 508 miners, which was sent to both the director of the mine and the Central Committee of the Miners’ Union.<sup>50</sup> These comprehensive demands included calls for higher pay, independent price controls on coal, power over the distribution of food, better quantity and quality of food, provisions for basic necessities such as warm clothes and soap, a weekly day off for the miners, maternity leave for female miners who recently gave birth or adopted a child, and even a demand to fire the head engineer of one worksite. As an appendix to this list, the miners’ local professional union committee

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<sup>47</sup> Вишницкая и Власова, “Забастовка. Что помнят шахтёры Донбасса о протестах 90-х,” [The strike. What Donbass miners remember about the protests of the 90s]. At this time, miners’ wages were higher than in most other professions. For more on this unexpected turn of events, see Steven Crowley, *Hot Coal, Cold Steel*, especially the first chapter on the 1989 strikes and the Donbas.

<sup>48</sup> РОМВ, “Шахтёрские забастовки 1989 года. Как это было,” July 22, 2019, YouTube video, 00:00–00:11, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gX30jiTY87A&feature=share>.

<sup>49</sup> И.В. Назаров, “Кузбасс. Лето 1989 (из опыта массовых протестов),” [Kuzbass. Summer 1989 (from the experience of mass protests)], accessed September 20, 2020, <http://re2ro.ru/kuzbass-let-1989-iz-opyita-massovyih-protestov/>.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

added their commentary in eight points, listing out summaries and recommendations based on the major demands put forth in the previous letter.<sup>51</sup> This appendix was signed by 500 miners. The quick change in tone and style between these two letters was significant. Although the former retained a respectful disposition towards the local television station, the latter, while directly addressing the Soviet authorities, was both blunt and straightforward. After the politburo's initial reluctance to engage in the kind of dialogue the miners were demanding, the party eventually relented. But a meeting with Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU Nikolai Nikitovich Slyunkov and Minister of the Coal Industry Mikahil Ivanovich Shadov on July 18 was not enough to satisfy the miners.<sup>52</sup> Any illusions the ruling powers may have entertained about the strike quickly dissipating were disrupted by this stark new reality.

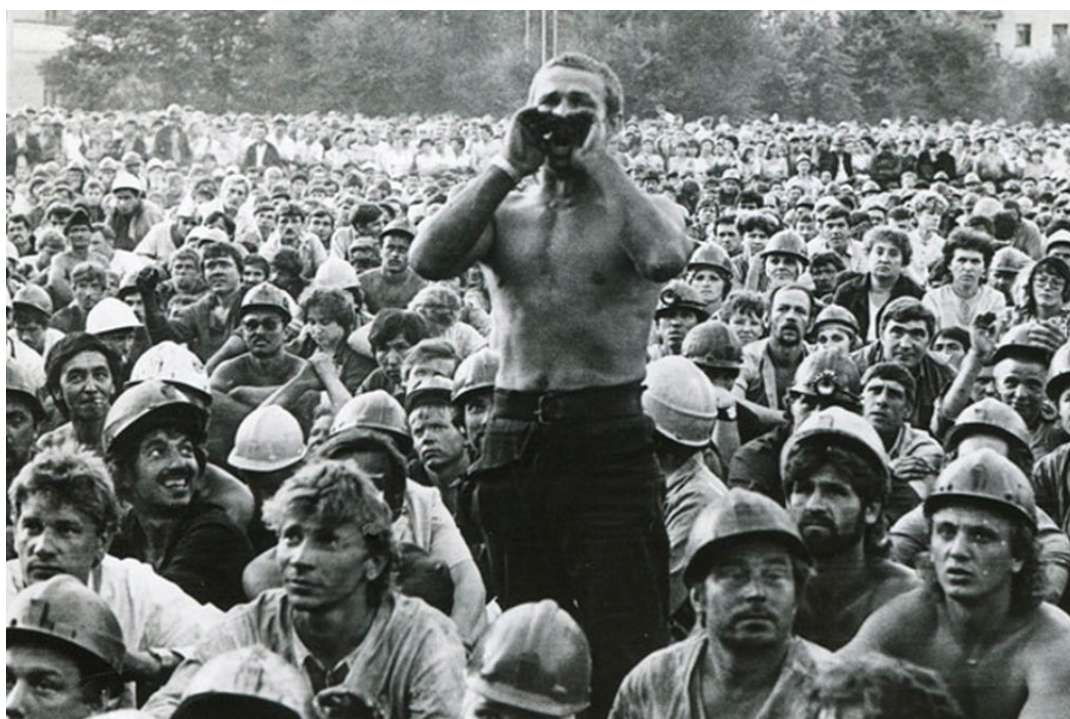


Figure 5. A miner stands up amidst the crowd to voice his thoughts during the strike. Source: NPG

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<sup>51</sup> Назаров, “Кузбасс. Лето 1989 (из опыта массовых протестов),” [Kuzbass. Summer 1989 (from the experience of mass protests)].

<sup>52</sup> А. Богачук, “Возьмёт ли верх благоразумие: забастовка продолжается,” [Will prudence take over: the strike continues], *Правда*, July 18, 1989.

The first place outside of the Kuzbass that was deeply impacted by the growing strike movement was the mining city of Vorkuta in the Komi Republic, an area situated over the Pechora Coal Basin. The miners of Vorkuta, the most radical wing of the strike movement in 1989, took the initial demands of the Kuzbass miners a step further, adding overtly political demands to miners' collective action. On July 21, the striking Vorkuta miners presented an extensive list of 43 demands, ranging from quality of life demands akin to the those in the Kuzbass, to others that can only be described as radical and revolutionary.<sup>53</sup> For instance, some of the political demands included abolishing Article 6 of the Constitution of the USSR (which notably made the communist party the uncontested ruling party of the Soviet Union), provisions for direct and secret-ballot elections, reducing the total number of delegates in the Supreme Soviet by 40%, removing local mining officials, dissolving the local Vorkutaugol' mining association, and provisions for solving economic and ecological problems. The last two points are particularly remarkable. The protesting miners stated, "42. In the case of any kind of prosecution of the members of the strike from the side of the authorities, decisions are carried out in accordance with the strike committee; 43. To cancel the privileges of the administration and the party apparatus on every level of our government."<sup>54</sup> Unlike their contemporaries in the Kuzbass, the Vorkuta miners demands crossed the threshold from limited economic demands to radical calls for the complete overhaul of the Soviet government and society.

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<sup>53</sup> Андрей Ходов, "Почему именно шахтёры?" [Why exactly miners?], *Журнал "Самиздат,"* July 24, 2006, [http://samlib.ru/h/hodow\\_a/vvv.shtml](http://samlib.ru/h/hodow_a/vvv.shtml).

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

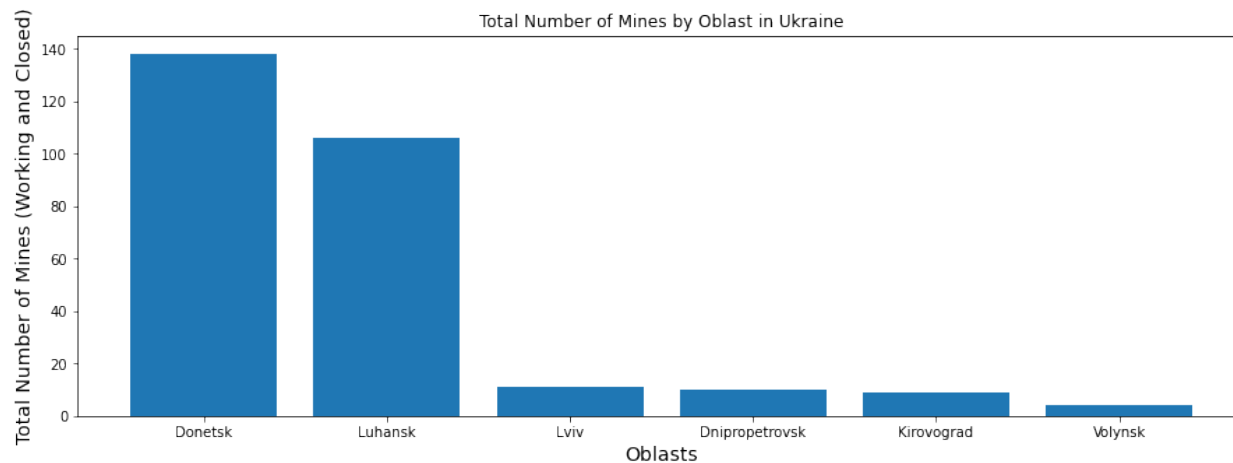


Figure 6: Total number of mines by oblast in Ukraine. The Donbas includes the Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts, with Dnipropetrovsk Oblast forming the western Donbas. Source: original dataset, see appendix.

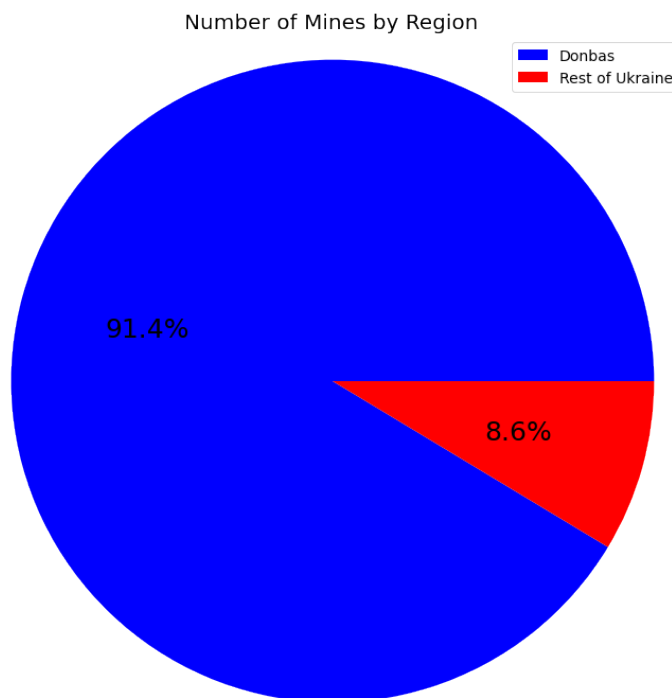


Figure 7: Number of mines by region as a percentage of the Ukrainian coal industry. Source: original dataset, see appendix.

The Donbas, meanwhile, occupied an even more difficult position relative to Vorkuta and Mezhducherensk. The Donbas had historically been the quintessential mining region of the USSR. Single industry towns (*monogoroda*) which formed the bedrock of the large Ukrainian mining industry dotted the steppe. Yet, some of the mines in the region had been open since the

end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>55</sup> and years of underinvestment and a shift towards coal production in the Kuzbass had resulted in a region considered by some to be in its death throes. In 1988, the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences declared that the Donbas mines were economically incompatible with long-term prosperity.<sup>56</sup> Political scientist Stephen Crowley described a palpable sense of impending mine and factory closures in the Donbas.<sup>57</sup> The reasons for such closures were not a mystery. The mines were unprofitable, with poor coal quality (high sulfuric content), obsolete machinery, deep shafts, thin seams, and high levels of methane gas, which led to a dangerous work environment. In describing the consequences of these pitiful conditions, Donetsk miner Gennady Kusch remarked in 1989:

“As to the dangers of the mining, we have a lot of injuries. If you count the fingers, we don’t even pay attention to them. If we break a leg, a finger, or a hand, we consider it a light injury. We count the serious stuff, when your spine gets broken, when it’s your head. I had a big injury; I was completely buried in a cave-in.”<sup>58</sup>

Hardship and injuries were not unfamiliar to the miners, but recent trends had made their livelihoods unbearable. Mikhail Krylov, Co-Chairman of the Donetsk Strike Committee, placed the average life expectancy of miners in the “main occupations”<sup>59</sup> at only thirty-eight years; “mortality is enormous, four or five people per million tons.”<sup>60</sup> Alternative statistics from Daniel J. Walkowitz estimated that this number was forty-nine years, with roughly thirty to forty miners killed each year just in Donetsk. Between 1979 and 1989, ten thousand Soviet miners died

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<sup>55</sup> For a discussion on the mines in the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century and across the 20<sup>th</sup>-century, see Friedgut, *Iuzovka and Revolution, Volume I*; and Friedgut, *Iuzovka and Revolution [...] Volume II*.

<sup>56</sup> Davis, *Trade Unions*, 72.

<sup>57</sup> Crowley, *Hot Coal, Cold Steel*, 101.

<sup>58</sup> Siegelbaum and Walkowitz, *Workers of the Donbass Speak*, 28-29.

<sup>59</sup> These occupations included tunnel cutters, machinists, coal cutters, and other underground miners.

<sup>60</sup> Siegelbaum and Walkowitz, *Workers of the Donbass Speak*, 121-122.

during their shifts, and, in the course of Walkowitz's 1992 research visit, two cave-ins killed sixty-five miners.<sup>61</sup>

Such conditions contributed to the overall perception of the Donbas coal mining industry as an increasingly anachronistic enterprise that relied on government subsidies to sustain its outdated and unprofitable operations. Yet, the miners did not readily acknowledge this economic reality, instead insisting that survival and salvation could be found in the devolution of economic authority. The miners' wanted justice, economic security, and economic stability, but a general ignorance of free-market economics and the potential consequences of neo-liberal reforms created distortions in their perception of the coal industry. The colliers only basis for understanding reform was rooted in a Soviet environment and upbringing. The miners looked elsewhere for a free-market model in places like Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, but they only highlighted an overly optimistic vision of Pittsburgh, sans the deindustrialization, unemployment, and aging population.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, the miners wanted control of their economic enterprises and profits without forfeiting the subsidies that helped them run, a form of cognitive dissonance that was promulgated by miners across the region.<sup>63</sup> The desire for a higher standard of living and the benefits of greater economic autonomy and political liberty were based on real possibilities in the Kuzbass and Pechora Coal Basin, which received the lion's share of government investments in the coal industry to fund new mines and capital improvements.<sup>64</sup> In contrast, the Donbas was operating according to an economic rationale that only made sense for a small minority of coal mines.

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<sup>61</sup> Siegelbaum and Walkowitz, *Workers of the Donbass Speak*, 170.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 81, 84–85.

<sup>64</sup> Davis, *Trade Unions*, 72.



In light of this desire for survival, prosperity, and a respectable standard of living, the Donbas miners soon joined the Kuzbass and Vorkuta miners in their strike. Frustration over a general decline in living standards and the inability to afford or purchase basic necessities resembled the circumstances that had instigated the Kuzbass and Vorkuta movements.<sup>65</sup> The Donbas miners' strikes began in earnest on July 15, 1989 on the third shift at Yasinovataya-Glubokaya mine in Makeevka, Donetsk Oblast. The miners elected M. V. Blishikom as the head of a new strike committee. By July 18, all of the mining enterprises in Krasnoarmeysk, Dzerzhinsk, Shaktyorsk, Krasnodon, Pervomaysk, and the western Donbas had joined the strike. Donetsk and Horlivka followed closely behind.<sup>66</sup> In total, as many as 173 mines went on strike in the Donbas between July 19 and July 30.<sup>67</sup>

Beginning at the enterprise level, a complex, democratic, and multifaceted organizational structure took shape, with strike committees representing individual mines, associations, and regions. Representatives were elected on an open ballot.<sup>68</sup> They were charged with defending the strikers' demands, negotiating with the authorities, and enforcing order and discipline within the strike movement. This last task was particularly important, as the miners wished to avoid any provocations that would create the grounds for harsh repressions.<sup>69</sup> Former *afghantsy*, veterans of the Soviet War in Afghanistan, helped act as adjudicators during this process. Collectively, the

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<sup>65</sup> Вишницкая и Власова, "Забастовка. Что помнят шахтёры Донбасса о протестах 90-х," [The strike. What Donbass miners remember about the protests of the 90s]; Siegelbaum and Walkowitz, *Workers of the Donbass Speak*, 28.

<sup>66</sup> "Interview with Mykola Volynko," *College of Europe: Three Revolutions Project*, 6.

<sup>67</sup> А.Н. Русначенко, "Стачка шахтёров на Украине в июле 1989 года," [Miners' strike in Ukraine in July 1989], *РАН: Отечественная История* 1 (January–February 1993): 66–77, <http://xn---7sbxcach3agmieaceq1th.xn--plai/archive/1993-1>.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.; Дэвид Мендел, "Забастовка шахтеров: впечатления, комментарии, анализ," [Miners' strike: impressions, comments, analysis], *Социологические исследования* 6 (1990): 54–65, <http://ecsocman.hse.ru/data/778/785/1219/54-65.pdf>; "Interview with Mykola Volynko," *College of Europe: Three Revolutions Project*, 1.

<sup>69</sup> Николай Лисовенко, "Конструктивный диалог с горняками," [Constructive dialogue with miners], *Известия*, July 18, 1989.

strike committees implemented a policy of strict sobriety and mandatory attendance at the strike during the miners' shifts.<sup>70</sup>



Figure 8. A miners' strike committee addresses the colliers. The banner reads, "Miners! We stand to the end!" Source: NPG

The miners' new platform for negotiating circumvented the existing unions, for whom the striking miners had little respect or trust.<sup>71</sup> Instead, the strike committees dealt directly with people's deputies from the surround regions. Talks between the miners and deputies produced results in short order. By July 19, 1989, the local deputies in Makeevka agreed to fulfill half the demands set forth by the miners. The remaining demands—such as those pertaining to vacation time, pensions, and workplace trauma—were set to be introduced to the Supreme Soviet by Makeevka People's Deputy Anatoliy Saunin.<sup>72</sup> Saunin, alongside other representatives who had reached similar agreements in the Donbas, delivered on their promises. He gave an impassioned

<sup>70</sup> Русначенко, "Стачка шахтёров на Украине в июле 1989 года," [Miners' strike in Ukraine in July 1989].

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Николай Лисовенко, "Донбасс: в ожидании решения," [Donbass: waiting for a decision], *Известия*, July 19, 1989.

speech before the Supreme Soviet. He reminded the authorities that the miners' situation was difficult, and the colliers' demands needed to be addressed with urgent measures. He characterized the miners as a well-organized working class, which had refused to engage in radical political action or the disruption of public order. More importantly, he emphasized that the overall situation in the Donbas was more dire than the Kuzbass because of the decades-long lack of funding for social and economic growth. Saunin further defended a list of 55 demands from the miners:

“These demands, I will tell you, are fair at their core. The demands stem from the special characteristics, difficulties, severe circumstances of labor, and problems which have not been resolved for many years and decades.”<sup>73</sup>

Saunin was joined in this assessment of the miners' circumstances by other representatives, who reiterated his plea for understanding and quick, decisive measures to relieve the miners' struggles across the Soviet Union. Some even called for new elections to replace the existing unions, local party representatives, and Work Collective Councils (STKs), the latter of which were formed under *perestroika* to promote increased democratization and efficiency.<sup>74</sup>

Their pleas produced results. The miners in Donetsk received two telegrams from the Gorbachev and Shadov on July 20, although only the former was accepted by the crowd of picketers. Shadov's letter provoked discontent because of its opaque wording and rambling structure. Despite these addresses, the miners refused to return to work.<sup>75</sup> Two days later, on July 22, 1989, the Donetsk miners' strike committee entered into negotiations with the deputy

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<sup>73</sup> *Сессия Верховного Совета СССР. Стенографический отчёт* [Session of the Supreme Council of the USSR. A verbatim record]. Москва: Верховный Совет СССР, 1989, 704.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 687, 704–708, 791–793, 840.

<sup>75</sup> Николай Лисовенко, “Трудный путь к компромиссу: Донбасс,” [The hard road to compromise: Donbass], *Известия*, July 20, 1989.

chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR in order to formulate the miners' demands.<sup>76</sup> In addition to some of the economic grievances previously put forth by the Mezhducherensk and Vorkuta miners, the striking colliers emphasized their desire to replace the existing union with their own chosen representatives.<sup>77</sup> On the same day, both sides signed an agreement, in which the government promised to satisfy all of the miners' demands. The Donetsk miners upheld their end of the agreement when they halted the strike on July 25. Although some mining enterprises held out, similar agreements across mining cities in the Donbas slowly brought the majority of the strike to a temporary end, pending the fulfillment of the miners' demands.<sup>78</sup>

The miners' issues with the official unions, mining leadership, and the party formed one of the most important motivating factors behind strikes in the Donbas, as feelings of betrayal and exploitation were rampant. It was a common for miners to experience humiliation and arbitrary rule under the iron fist of mine directors.<sup>79</sup> The mine management ran their enterprises as personal fiefdoms. During a trip through Donetsk in the late Soviet period, Kevin Klose, the Moscow bureau chief for the *Washington Post*, wrote that "the bosses had absolute power to fire, reprimand, dock pay, deny vacation, or mete out any combination of punishment they chose."<sup>80</sup> The official trade unions, for their part, did nothing to protect the workers' rights. In the words of one miner:

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<sup>76</sup> Игорь Овсянников, "Донецк Забастовка шахтёров. 1989 год," [Donetsk Miners' strike. Year 1989], aired by Время ЦТ СССР on July 22, 1989, published on August 26, 2020, YouTube video, 00:10-00:40, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eeKCLc82iGg&feature=share>.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 01:50-02:15.

<sup>78</sup> Русначенко, "Стачка шахтёров на Украине в июле 1989 года," [Miners' strike in Ukraine in July 1989]; В. Ардаев, "Извлекать уроки из забастовочных ситуаций," [To learn from strike situations], *Известия*, July 21, 1989.

<sup>79</sup> Siegelbaum and Walkowitz, *Workers of the Donbass Speak*, 147; Klose, *Russia and the Russians*, 39–52.

<sup>80</sup> Klose, *Russia and the Russians*, 43.

“In fact, previously the union did very little to help the workers, and we struck so that it would help more. The union was more concerned with pleasing our higher authorities, and now we are fighting so that the union will protect the rights of workers...”<sup>81</sup>

As this miner pointed out, the Soviet trade unions did not primarily function as the protectors and guarantors of workers’ protections. Rather, the official Soviet trade unions functioned as coercive organs of state power and control. The official miners’ unions used control over social insurance funds, pension funds, housing, kindergartens, vacation resorts, and health care to compel union membership and party discipline. They encouraged labor productivity while repressing and punishing dissent within their ranks.<sup>82</sup> In practice, union representatives failed to adequately address miners’ grievances, opting to exploit their positions of privilege instead.

But even these unions were forced to respond to the new movement. A miner at Kuibyshev Mine in Donetsk described this situation during an interview on Donetsk TV during the strike in Donbas:

“Our strike broke out spontaneously, though a lot of problems had accumulated, and they were sure to result in something. Besides, the mine’s authorities didn’t support us immediately. All of this was new for us. That’s why the authorities thought it was sort of a joke, that after a whole of fooling around everything would calm down. But when our party leaders and trade union realized that it was serious, they finally began supporting us. This is the very thing that Mikhail Gorbachev means when he says that they should implement *perestroika* from above and we should do it from below. It is a shame to live so poorly. The country is great, but we live like beggars.”<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Siegelbaum and Walkowitz, *Workers of the Donbass Speak*, 28.

<sup>82</sup> Davis, *Trade Unions*, 34–39.

<sup>83</sup> Siegelbaum and Walkowitz, *Workers of the Donbass Speak*, 97–98.

The miners were not only voicing their frustrations, they were also making demands and forcing the official trade unions and the central government to adjust long-standing practices. Though not as sensational as the Vorkuta miners' initial desire to abolish Article 6 of the constitution, this was a profoundly radical departure from past precedent in the Soviet Union. The colliers' "perestroika from below" fueled the miners' movement and shook the foundations of their relationship with the state to its core.



Figure 9: The miners march to voice their demands and demonstrate their solidarity. Source: Бабель: ЦДКФФА України імені Гордія Пшеничного / Wikimedia

One of the most striking instances of the Donbas miners' changing relationship with the authorities can be found in the film *Perestroika from Below*.<sup>84</sup> During a raucous Trade Union Conference on August 5, 1989 at Kuibyshev mine, the Chairman of the Kuibyshev Mines' Trade Union Committee, Viktor Efimov, was faced with a bellicose crowd of miners. The miners had felt they were on the receiving end of years of lies and deception, all of which had served to

<sup>84</sup> Vitalii Atanasov, "Perestroika from Below / Перебудова знизу," produced by Daniel J. Walkowitz and Barbara Abrash, June 10, 2012, YouTube video, 34:00–38:30, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9TqNkFSB3YY&t=3263s>. Although the transcript from this meeting is available in *Workers of the Donbass Speak*, it is necessary to watch the film in order to ascertain the full extent of the explosive atmosphere and the miners' fury.

enrich the managers and union representatives at the expense of the underground miners. While Efimov attempted to justify the union's position against the strike movement by blaming the STKs and a decline in workplace discipline, the workers were unrelenting in their accusations. After refusing to listen to Efimov's report, they voted to open the floor to questions.<sup>85</sup>

The miners assailed Efimov, unleashing the fury that had built up after decades of promises without results. Questions related to material assistance, waiting lists for cars and apartments, and resort vouchers were accompanied by scathing criticisms. Miners posed questions such as "where was your conscience when you bought an imported refrigerator?" Efimov's less than adequate excuses, claiming that he was lucky and bought the last refrigerator sold by the economic managers, only elicited laughter and heckling from the crowd. One miner shouted over the roars, "I bet you were the first in line, bastard!" The most demonstrative statement in this episode that captured the spirit of the miners, however, was an older miner, whose uncompromising rage contrasted with the generally irreverent atmosphere. While shaking his fists, the miner proclaimed:

"Some people have worked for forty-three years. What for? To make the country stronger and more closely knit. And you shit all over it!"<sup>86</sup>

After Efimov answered one of this older miner's questions by telling him he needed to put his name down on a waiting list in order to receive a car, the miner continued, "I worked for forty-three years, for truth, for honesty!" But the miners were not just venting their frustrations about superiors and authorities. They were attempting to hold the authorities accountable for decades of corruption, abuse, and negligence.

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<sup>85</sup> Vitalii Atanasov, "Perestroika from Below / Перебудова знизу," 36:30.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 38:30–40:30.



*Figure 10. An older miner voices his anger with the mine and union leadership. Source: Perestroika from Below*

The desire for justice and accountability was a necessary precursor to the renegotiation of the miners' relationship with the official union and trade committees. For the miners, they were beginning to see the existing managers and representatives as useless appendages, symbols of repression, graft, and inefficiency. As one miner chastised Efimov later on in the meeting:

“Why are you there? Say it. You are free [of any responsibilities], while these people are working. Why do we need you if you can't do anything? You don't do anything. You only collect a salary and interfere. What are you paid for? Doesn't it seem to you like that's enough? Aren't you ashamed, standing there? If I were you, I would want the ground to swallow me up, or get up and leave and apologize before everyone, saying, 'Comrades, forgive me, I'm incompetent.'”<sup>87</sup>

The miners, fueled by an intense sense of exploitation and economic injustice, saw Efimov as repugnant. He added nothing, while the workers beneath the surface toiled for no discernable

<sup>87</sup> Vitalii Atanasov, “Perestroika from Below / Перебудова знизу,” 38:30–40:30.



reward. Such sentiments carried the meeting to its conclusion, at which point Efimov was stripped of his title of Honorary Miner of Ukraine and the associated pension perks. Despite an attempt at intimidation by the higher-up union authorities, the miners would not be denied. They spoke freely about election fraud, Efimov's lies and self-aggrandizement, and the need to transfer power to the workers themselves.<sup>88</sup> The miners' justice was served.

At its pinnacle, in July 1989, 400,000 miners went on strike in the Kuzbass, Donbas, Vorkuta and nearly every other mining region of the Soviet Union.<sup>89</sup> One figure cites the Donbas strikes as 300,000 strong on their own.<sup>90</sup> Such widespread collective action highlighted the drastic need for reform and a solution from the central government. President Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev referred to the strike movement as the "biggest test" during his four years in power.<sup>91</sup> In response to the Donbas miners, on July 22, 1989, Gorbachev and the Council of Ministers of the USSR issued a telegram, stating their commitment to quickly solving the economic and social issues alongside the strike committees, while urging the miners to return to work.<sup>92</sup>

The Council of Ministers of the USSR followed through on this commitment with the approval of Resolution №608 on August 3, 1989.<sup>93</sup> The contents of this resolution demonstrated

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<sup>88</sup> Vitalii Atanasov, "Perestroika from Below / Перебудова знизу," 41:00–41:40.

<sup>89</sup> Crowley, *Hot Coal, Cold Steel*, 27.

<sup>90</sup> "Gorbachev calls strikes his biggest test, blames unrest on coal ministry, says most miners have returned to work," *Deseret News*, July 24, 1989, <https://www.deseret.com/1989/7/24/18816687/gorbachev-calls-strikes-his-biggest-test-br-blames-unrest-on-coal-ministry-says-most-miners-have-ret>; Ардаев, "Извлекать уроки из забастовочных ситуаций," [To learn from strike situations].

<sup>91</sup> "Gorbachev calls strikes his biggest test, blames unrest on coal ministry, says most miners have returned to work," *Deseret News*, July 24, 1989, <https://www.deseret.com/1989/7/24/18816687/gorbachev-calls-strikes-his-biggest-test-br-blames-unrest-on-coal-ministry-says-most-miners-have-ret>.

<sup>92</sup> Игорь Овсянников, "Донецк Забастовка шахтёров. 1989 год," [Donetsk Miners' strike. Year 1989], 02:10-03:40.

<sup>93</sup> Совет Министров СССР, «Постановления от 3 августа 1989 г. №608», *Совет Министров СССР*, 3 августа, 1989 [On the measures to guarantee the fulfillment of the joint resolutions, accepted by the ruling commissions with the participation of the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions and the workers' strike committees of the mining regions of the country], <https://ngr-ru.ru/media/02da70a9-f12d-46f4-a10b->

the success of the miners' strike and their newfound negotiating power relative to the rapidly weakening central government. The government had buckled under the collective pressure of hundreds of thousands of miners' voices and acquiesced to some of the major demands put forth by the strike committees. In its opening lines, Resolution №608 stressed the "upmost importance" of developing the social and economic spheres of the coal mining industry. Impressive guarantees for the economic independence of mining enterprises, improved housing development, better economic incentives and working conditions, the increased use of coal in the national economy, the decisive improvement of ecological conditions in mining regions, higher wages, formal days off, and pension protections accompanied this statement.

The miners' reaction was cautious, but optimistic. Many returned to work, and at least on the surface, it appeared that the greater part of the demands had been satisfied.<sup>94</sup> Referencing the protocol, Donetsk miner Valery Samofolov noted:

"Our main demands are incorporated in the protocol. They talk about granting our work collectives full economic and juridical independence. We have a lot of work to do, and most of our workers only have a secondary education. We came to an agreement with our authorities that

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[e15665128988/5MpDKQ/%D0%9E%20%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%81/%D0%98%D1%81%D1%82%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%8F/%D0%98%D1%81%D1%82%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%87%D0%B5%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%8F%20%D1%81%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B2%D0%BA%D0%B0%20%D0%9D%D0%9F%D0%93/%D0%9F%D0%9E%D0%A1%D0%A2%D0%90%D0%9D%D0%9E%D0%92%D0%9B%D0%95%D0%9D%D0%98%D0%95%20%D0%A1%D0%9C%20%D0%A1%D0%A1%D0%A0%20%E2%84%96608%20%D0%BE%D1%82%203%20%D0%B0%D0%B2%D0%B3%D1%83%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B0%201989%20%D0%B3..pdf](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=kPuygoUUW1c&feature=emb_logo)

<sup>94</sup> Игорь Овсянников, "Донецкая область. Шахтёры возвращаются в забой после забастовки. 1989 год," [Donetsk region. Miners return to the mine after the strike. Year 1989], aired by Время ЦТ СССР on July 25, 1989, published on August 26, 2020, YouTube video, 1:38, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=1&v=kPuygoUUW1c&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=kPuygoUUW1c&feature=emb_logo); Francis X. Clines, "Striking Ukrainian miners, appeased, return to work," *The New York Times*, July 26, 1989, <https://www.nytimes.com/1989/07/26/world/striking-ukrainian-miners-appeased-return-to-work.html>; James Rosen, "Siberian miners end 11-day strike," *United Press International*, July 21, 1989, <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1989/07/21/Siberian-miners-end-11-day-strike/3217616996800/>.

we'll work hand in hand and solve all the problems together. They will help us do everything we can't do ourselves.”<sup>95</sup>

Although the miners' primary demand for independence had been satisfied, Samofolov's words reflected an increasingly apparent reality on the ground in the Donbas. The miners held a contradictory view on the role of government. They wanted the CPSU and the command economy to surrender the controls on economic production, while simultaneously calling for continued government funding and support. In a critical assessment of the strikes, retired steelworker Viktor Mikhailovich Ignatov observed that “today they demand a car and tomorrow they shall demand a plane.”<sup>96</sup> Although the miners had regained their voice and were actively fighting for workers' rights, the articulation of these rights and the path to a resolution of the crisis remained elusive. The underlying problems that accompanied an unprofitable, heavily subsidized industry remained unsolved. This fact, coupled with the lofty expectations levied on a central government that was woefully underequipped to fulfill Resolution №608, set the stage for overwhelming disillusionment and renewed strikes.

### **Unmet Demands and A Turn Towards Politics**

In the months following Resolution №608, optimism gave way to anger over the government's inability to uphold its guarantees. Beginning on October 25, the Vorkuta miners once more went on strike. This time, in an appeal written on November 22 to the other mining regions of the USSR, the Vorkuta miners called for solidarity and a new all-Union strike movement.<sup>97</sup> In this address, they underlined the need for solutions to the economic, social, and

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<sup>95</sup> Siegelbaum and Walkowitz, *Workers of the Donbass Speak*, 98.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>97</sup> “Наше Дело: Вестник независимого рабочего демократического движения,” [Our Business: Bulletin of the Independent Labor Democratic Movement], workers' self-published journal *Воркута: Независимое рабочее демократическое движение* 7 (1989): 1.

political problems which remained unresolved by Resolution №608. Standing out amongst these needs, the Vorkuta strike committee specifically pointed out “the first point of our demands: the real transfer of power to the Soviets, the land—the peasants, factories—workers.” Echoing the calls to revolution from seventy years prior, the Vorkuta miners emphasized their right to both political and economic freedom, solemnly confirming their commitment to change in the communist system. The closing lines of their address simply read:

OUR FIGHT WILL NOT LEAD TO THE COLLAPSE OF THE COUNTRY AND CHAOS  
WE ARE ONLY AT THE START OF OUR PATH  
WE CALL YOU TO SOLIDARITY

The response to this call was swift, though atomized. In the Donbas, 100,000 workers staged a warning strike on November 1,<sup>98</sup> followed by organized strikes at all 28 mines in Donetsk once again calling for better economic conditions, such as improved pensions and vacation days.<sup>99</sup> Political demands remained contentious, as individual mines were split on whether to strike or call for changes to election procedures and Article 6 of the Soviet constitution. The Donbas regional strike committee reached an impasse, with a 14-14 tie on a vote calling for a region-wide strike.<sup>100</sup> In a direct reply to the Vorkuta miners, the strike committee at Makeevka-Donetsk mine reiterated their commitment to oppose authoritarian pressures on the workers’ committees. However, they also underscored their unwillingness to strike in support of political demands, going so far as to say:

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<sup>98</sup> Michael Dobbs, “Miners’ Strike is ‘Warning’ in Ukraine,” *The Washington Post*, November 2, 1989, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1989/11/02/miners-strike-is-warning-in-ukraine/34e0cf89-4294-4bd3-9326-ae4d478dca6a/>.

<sup>99</sup> “Coal Miners in the Ukraine Defy Official Ban on Strikes,” *The New York Times*, November 2, 1989, <https://www.nytimes.com/1989/11/02/world/coal-miners-in-the-ukraine-defy-official-ban-on-strikes.html>; Rachel Douglas, “Soviet Workers Defy Strike Ban,” *Executive Intelligence Review* 16, no. 44 (November 3, 1989): 28–29, [https://larouchepub.com/eiw/public/1989/eirv16n44-19891103/eirv16n44-19891103\\_028-soviet\\_workers\\_defy\\_strike\\_ban.pdf](https://larouchepub.com/eiw/public/1989/eirv16n44-19891103/eirv16n44-19891103_028-soviet_workers_defy_strike_ban.pdf).

<sup>100</sup> Dobbs, “Miners’ Strike is ‘Warning’ in Ukraine.”

“At the present-day, there is not a single point of the protocol for which it would be worth it to use such a terrible weapon as the strike. But you are requesting support for political demands, which we have refused from the very beginning.”<sup>101</sup>

Such discrepancies arose mainly due to the Donbas miners’ hesitancy to support political demands. Mykola Volynko later recalled that the Vorkuta miners’ demand to abolish Article 6 was “wild” and “shocked” the Donbas miners.<sup>102</sup>

In 1989, the Donbas colliers were hesitant to openly challenge the Communist political system, with the exception of some calls for democratization in local election procedures.<sup>103</sup> But this soon gave way to political demands as the government struggled to offer a comprehensive solution to the coal industry’s innumerable issues. In line with this trend, Mikhail Krylov, Co-Chair of the Donetsk City Strike Committee, declared following the 1989 strike, “we’re now most concerned with the Ukrainian government, since we believe that Ukraine should be sovereign and become an independent state. In this case the people of Ukraine, and of the other republics if they attain sovereignty, will find it easier to address all economic and social issues.”<sup>104</sup> For economic and social reasons, the Donbas miners became more openly political actors, even if they were still hesitant to profess it in these terms.

More miners began calling for regime change, and by March 1990, the Donetsk strike committee called for the resignation of the Cabinet of Ministers.<sup>105</sup> Anti-Communist rallies emerged in the Donbas. Vladimir Osmanov, a Donbas collier, stated that “there will be no

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<sup>101</sup> “Наше Дело: Вестник независимого рабочего демократического движения,” [Our Business: Bulletin of the Independent Labor Democratic Movement], workers’ self-published journal *Воркута: Независимое рабочее демократическое движение* 7 (1989): 3.

<sup>102</sup> “Interview with Mykola Volynko,” *College of Europe: Three Revolutions Project*, 8.

<sup>103</sup> Michael Parks, “Soviet Miners’ Strike Spreads to Ukraine,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 18, 1989, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1989-07-18-mn-4078-story.html>

<sup>104</sup> Siegelbaum and Walkowitz, *Workers of the Donbass Speak*, 118.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

fundamental changes in our country until we take the party *apparatchiki* out of our country's leadership." In a sign of the rapidly changing situation, he continued that "we had reason to have faith a year ago, but the government doesn't listen to us, and now we no longer trust this government to change anything." Another miner, Igor Khokhlov, remarked that "it is clear our economic demands cannot be met within the system we have, so we need a new government."<sup>106</sup>

To support these new demands and consolidate their efforts, the miners entered a new organizational phase of the movement in the summer and fall of 1990. On June 11-15, 1990 and October 24-26, 1990, the strike committees of the Soviet Union organized the first and second miners' congresses of the USSR.<sup>107</sup> At the first congress in Donetsk, as part of the wider effort to draw power away from the central government, the miners took the historic step of declaring the "complete independence of workers' organizations of the coal and mining industries from any political formations." Moreover, the delegates at the congress expressed that "the independent labor movement and the workers' organizations only submit to the will of their members and consider that no political forces or parties should lead them." If that message was not clear enough, the next line of the resolution from the congress read: "our striving towards independence determines our attitude towards the CPSU [Communist Party of the Soviet Union]."<sup>108</sup> The miners, the supposed vanguard of the Soviet ideology, had effectively seceded from party control. This unprecedented rebuke of the CPSU cemented the miners' open political resistance to the central government in Moscow, delegitimizing an already reeling central government.

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<sup>106</sup> Shogren and Dalhburg, "Soviet Miners Strike, Seek End to Communist Rule."

<sup>107</sup> Александр Сергеев, "Шахтёрские забастовки 1989 года," [Miners' strikes in 1989].

<sup>108</sup> "Резолюция I съезда шахтёров СССР об отношении к КПСС. 11–15 июня 1990 г." [Resolution of the 1st Congress of USSR Miners on the attitude towards the CPSU. June 11-15, 1990], *Коммерсантъ* 23, 1990, <http://doc20vek.ru/node/4236>.

Following the turn toward all-Union radicalization at the first congress, the miners established the All-Union Independent Miners' Union (NPG) as the new representative arm of the underground miners at the second congress in Donetsk.<sup>109</sup> Alongside the founding of the new independent union, the miners also expressed their lack of faith in both the party and the existing unions. They argued the existing unions had done nothing to uphold their duties or protect the rights of miners.<sup>110</sup> Through this declaration, the miners maligned the authority of the long-standing, state-sponsored trade unions and STKs. Indeed, in the same week, the Central Council of Trade Unions had reconstituted itself as a voluntary organization, creating the unprecedented opportunity to leave the official union for a preferred organization, or none at all.<sup>111</sup> If at the first congress, the miners nullified the power of the communist party, then at the second congress the miners completed their declaration of independence, stripping the government-sponsored workers' organizations of their influence. With a potential membership of more than 2 million, the NPG was positioned to grow into the second largest organization in the entire Soviet Union, second only to the Communist Party.<sup>112</sup>

The creation of the NPG marked the convergence of two trends in the Donbas: 1) their long-standing grievances with the existing unions and representatives, and 2) the aggressive shift towards overt political demands as the government proved unable to resolve their economic woes. An informative sociological study on the trajectory of the miners' demands, first published

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<sup>109</sup> Thomas Ginsberg, "Soviet Coal Miners Union Could Become Second Largest Mass Organization," *Associated Press*, October 26, 1990, <https://apnews.com/article/e3c8b1db6e028e415a428dc986c848bb>.

<sup>110</sup> "Второй съезд шахтёров: Независимый профсоюз горняков СССР всех разоблачил," [Second Miners' Congress: the Independent Trade Union of Miners of the USSR exposed everyone], *Коммерсантъ* 42, October 22, 1990, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/266819>.

<sup>111</sup> Ginsberg, "Soviet Coal Miners Union."

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

in 1992, outlined this general trajectory.<sup>113</sup> In 1989, only 155, or 8.8 percent of a total 1605 demands were focused on the universal, all-Union movement. By 1991, however, 201 of a total 482 demands were aimed at the entire mining industry and Soviet Union. Similarly, the shift away from regional demands in favor of collective industry demands was reflected in a drop from 29.8 percent to 12.1 percent between 1989 and 1991 in the former, while the latter experienced an increase from 50.0 percent to 52.9 percent. Collective action in the mining industry also coincided with a rise in economic and political demands. Economic demands rose from 26.8 to 43.5 percent, while political demands rose from virtual nonexistence at 0.3-0.8 percent to a significant 10.2 percent of total demands.

### **The Miners Choose Independence and Encounter “Grabization”**

The miners’ anger and disillusionment with the Soviet system, compounded by the ongoing inability of the USSR to fulfill its promises, carried the strike committees and the newly formed NPG towards calls for Ukrainian independence in the Donbas. The miners’ believed economic independence and prosperity could be achieved through the regional devolution of power. Importantly, the miners’ decision to support independence was not born out of common cause with the kind of liberal reform pushed by nationalists or the intelligentsia in Ukraine. Rather, as one Donetsk miner explained, “it’s all the same to us what language we speak, as long as there is sausage.”<sup>114</sup> Economic issues still superseded political concerns. When the Rukh movement<sup>115</sup> gained traction in Ukraine in 1990 and 1991, in Donetsk “Rukh activists went from

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<sup>113</sup> И. П. Киселева, “Чего же всё-таки хотят шахтёры?” [What do miners really want?], Социологические исследования 3 (1992): 85–92, <http://ecsocman.hse.ru/data/609/750/1217/007.KISELEVA.pdf>.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 364.

<sup>115</sup> A civil political party founded in 1989, Rukh, or the People’s Movement of Ukraine, was one of the main opposition organizations calling for Ukrainian independence prior to the dissolution of the USSR.



mine to mine handing out leaflets and literature. Almost nowhere were they well received.”<sup>116</sup>

There was general skepticism and apathy.<sup>117</sup> The miners’ intent in pursuing independence was to obtain the economic stability and security they had lost in the Soviet Union.

By May 1991, the miners were already planning for life in a post-Soviet, independent Ukraine. The newly-elected Vice-Chair of the STK at Kuibyshev mine, Valery Samofalov, explained the mining leadership’s intention to present the Ukrainian legislature with “deputies’ requests and legislative initiatives” once Ukraine became independent.<sup>118</sup> After their trial by fire in the strike movement, the Donbas miners were ready and willing to advocate for the improvement of their living standards by whatever means necessary, which Samofalov described in the following manner:

“Conditions are awful, of course, I’d say conditions are not for people living in the twentieth century. We are entering the twenty-first century in a horse-drawn cart. It’s an embarrassment. I’m ashamed for my great country.”<sup>119</sup>

Without any other recourse, the miners elected to pursue extreme measures, hoping that Ukrainian sovereignty would bring solutions to their seemingly endless troubles.

During the referendum on Ukrainian independence on December 1, 1991, Luhansk Oblast voted in favor of independence with 83.90 percent of the vote, and Donetsk Oblast voted in favor of independence with 83.86 percent of the vote.<sup>120</sup> The die was cast, but the miners were not pacified. For these miners who had only just found their political voices, their fight was far

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<sup>116</sup> Satter, *Age of Delirium*, 364.

<sup>117</sup> “Interview with Mykola Volynko,” *College of Europe: Three Revolutions Project*, 6–7.

<sup>118</sup> Siegelbaum and Walkowitz, *Workers of the Donbass Speak*, 111.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>120</sup> “Референдум-1991. Как Украина выбрала независимость,” [Referendum-1991. How Ukraine chose independence], *Корреспондент*, December 1, 2016, <https://korrespondent.net/ukraine/politics/3781495-referendum-1991-kak-ukrayna-vybrala-nezavysymost>.

from over. Valery Samofalov's prophetic words would ring true for the foreseeable future, as he warned:

“There will be huge upheavals and its is impossible to predict their outcome. In short, we'll remain in this cesspool for a long time.”<sup>121</sup>

Indeed, the cesspool persisted. Despite their temporary convergence with nationalist and intelligentsia groups in 1991, the Donbas colliers quickly discovered that their vision of Ukrainian independence sharply diverged from the nationalization program envisaged by western and central Ukraine. Independence from the Soviet Union did not bring quick economic relief or economic autonomy.<sup>122</sup> Instead, the collapse of the command economy precipitated a rapid decline in coal production, hyperinflation, and price increases on basic necessities that rendered life both unforgiving and inhospitable for the miners. Moreover, the introduction of free-market reforms was a halting and stunted process, with the complete absence of any coherent economic reform program.<sup>123</sup> Such delays were both aided and abetted by an emerging class of former Soviet and Communist Party officials, commonly known as the *nomenklatura*,<sup>124</sup> who participated in the systematic asset-stripping of the major Soviet industries, including the coal-mining industry. They acted as opportunists and rent-seekers—people who sought to exploit gaps between international free-market prices and domestic state-controlled prices for their own benefit.<sup>125</sup> Many of the wealthiest individuals became oligarchs or used their economic success

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<sup>121</sup> Siegelbaum and Walkowitz, *Workers of the Donbass Speak*, 115.

<sup>122</sup> Jane Perlez, “Ukraine’s Miners Bemoan The Cost of Independence,” *The New York Times*, July 17, 1993, <https://www.nytimes.com/1993/07/17/world/ukraine-s-miners-bemoan-the-cost-of-independence.html>.

<sup>123</sup> Anders Aslund, *Ukraine: How Ukraine Became a Market Economy and Democracy* (Washington D.C.: Peterson Institute for International Economics, 2009), 3.

<sup>124</sup> A class of appointed people within the former USSR who held key administrative positions in the Soviet bureaucracy.

<sup>125</sup> The term *rent* is defined here as “profits in excess of the competitive level,” see Richard A. Brealey and Steward C. Meyers, *Principles of Corporate Finance* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2000) and Aslund, *Ukraine: How Ukraine Became a Market Economy and Democracy*, 55-60.

as grounds for political influence. These senior managers of the major state industrial enterprises, the “red directors” (especially those from Dnipropetrovsk and Donetsk who dominated manufacturers, coal mines, and steelworks), advocated for continued state-interventionist policies as a means to slow economic transition and prolong the morass of arbitrage<sup>126</sup> from which they stood to benefit.<sup>127</sup>

In sum, this stunted, murky transformation between a command and market economy became known disparagingly as *prikhvatizatsia* (literally “grabitization”).<sup>128</sup> This word on its own, a combination of the Russian words for “to seize” and “privatization,” refers to the questionably legal or illegal methods of privatization employed by state enterprise managers. Since the 1990s, the term has come to represent and embody a period of rapacious faux capitalism that encumbered economic transition in the heavily industrialized eastern oblasts of independent Ukraine.

### **Hyperinflation Catalyzes a Regional Revolt**

The initial years of Ukrainian economic policy, characterized by government impotence and a half-hearted attempt at a nationalist economic program, were disastrous. The specter of Soviet sensibilities remained strong, as did popular suspicion of free-market economics.<sup>129</sup> Prime Minister Leonid Kuchma—one of the foremost red directors from Dnipropetrovsk—briefly remedied the lack of any real economic programs during his tenure, but his attempts to introduce

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<sup>126</sup> The purchase and sale of an asset in order to profit from the difference in the asset’s price between markets. This was one of the main methods that rent-seekers used to exploit the transitional Ukrainian economy.

<sup>127</sup> Kuzio, *Ukraine: Democratization, Corruption, and the New Russian Imperialism*, 293.

<sup>128</sup> The author owes the usage of this term collectively to both Anders Aslund (see Aslund, *Ukraine: How Ukraine Became a Market Economy and Democracy*, 79) and Taras Kuzio (see Kuzio, *Ukraine: Democratization, Corruption, and the New Russian Imperialism*, 50), as well as Russian and Ukrainian friends who use this term in a not-so-humorous form of post-irony in reference to the 1990s.

<sup>129</sup> Aslund, *Ukraine: How Ukraine Became a Market Economy and Democracy*, 44.

market-oriented reforms and privatization did not meet any success in parliament.<sup>130</sup> Persistent government inaction failed to resolve an enormous problem for Ukraine: the Ukrainian economy could no longer support government expenditures. In 1992, loans exceeded 500% of the existing money supply. Simultaneously, price indexes increased by 2,100%, and the inflation rate stood at 2,000%.<sup>131</sup> By 1993, the situation had become untenable. Price indexes increased by 10,256%, while the inflation rate reached 10,160%. Between January and December, the price for a loaf of rye bread increased from an average of 33 *karbovantsy*<sup>132</sup> to almost 2,000 *karbovantsy*.<sup>133</sup> The standard of living plummeted, as did hopes for a swift economic turnaround.

Anger towards Kyiv began simmering almost immediately. Far from tempered, the Donbas miners' fury towards the Soviet system had simply been redirected. Whereas they perceived Moscow as the exploitative center that denied the Donbas its rightful economic power in the Soviet Union, now, in an independent Ukraine, Kyiv fulfilled the role of the antagonistic, exploitative, and repressive center. The rallying cry of economic injustice reverberated in an industry whose future prospects were disappearing alongside industrial output and wage payments. In 1991, Ukraine produced 135.6 tons of coal.<sup>134</sup> By 1993, this number had dropped to

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<sup>130</sup> Aslund, *Ukraine: How Ukraine Became a Market Economy and Democracy*, 46.

<sup>131</sup> Е. Л. Филимонова и Д. Коваленко, “Гиперинфляция в Украине в начале девяностых,” [Hyperinflation in Ukraine in the early nineties], *Вісник Придніпровської державної академії будівництва та архітектури*, no. 6–7 (June–July 2011): 77, <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/giperinfljatsiya-v-ukraine-v-nachale-devyanostyh>.

<sup>132</sup> The temporary currency Ukraine issued after leaving the ruble zone and before the adoption of the hryvnia, see Siegelbaum and Walkowitz, *Workers of the Donbass Speak*, 169 for more on the exchange rate between the *karbovanets*, ruble, and dollar.

<sup>133</sup> Филимонова и Коваленко, “Гиперинфляция в Украине в начале девяностых,” [Hyperinflation in Ukraine in the early nineties], 77.

<sup>134</sup> И. Н. Попович, “Состояние и перспективы развития угольной промышленности Украины,” [State and development prospects of the coal industry in Ukraine], *Уголь Украины* 10 (October 2013): 4, [http://irbis-nbuv.gov.ua/cgi-bin/irbis\\_nbuv/cgiirbis\\_64.exe?C21COM=2&I21DBN=UJRN&P21DBN=UJRN&IMAGE\\_FILE\\_DOWNLOAD=1&Image\\_file\\_name=PDF/ugukr\\_2013\\_10\\_2.pdf](http://irbis-nbuv.gov.ua/cgi-bin/irbis_nbuv/cgiirbis_64.exe?C21COM=2&I21DBN=UJRN&P21DBN=UJRN&IMAGE_FILE_DOWNLOAD=1&Image_file_name=PDF/ugukr_2013_10_2.pdf).

a paltry 75.2 tons of coal.<sup>135</sup> Renewed investment and much-needed renovation in the industry did not take place, leaving the mines extremely inefficient and unprofitable.<sup>136</sup> Privatization had not yet reached the mines, and state coal managers, the quintessential red directors, took advantage. According to Swedish economist Anders Aslund, these state coal managers “thrived on state subsidies, which they extracted through transfer pricing and management theft, criminalizing the industry.”<sup>137</sup> The miners subsequently blamed Kyiv and Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk for their struggles, voicing their regrets over independence. During this time, Donbas miner Volodymyr Dubkin remarked that “we voted for independence and for Kravchuk because we thought our Ukrainian black earth would make us richer. Instead we have become poorer and poorer, poorer even than our Russian neighbors.”<sup>138</sup> Hope had turned to despair in the span of less than two years.

In January, Luhansk miners organized a conference to present demands for the government to resolve the severe impoverishment and financial chaos.<sup>139</sup> Despite the arrival of several representatives from the Cabinet of Ministers and subsequent reassurances, nothing was resolved. The continued deterioration of economic circumstances led to another conference of Donetsk miners on May 27-28 in Novgorodka. In demonstrative fashion, the miners adopted a resolution, which declared that “the anti-people economic policy of the Ukrainian government has placed the Donbas in a catastrophically difficult situation, that taxes and prices have become

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<sup>135</sup> CEIC Data, “Ukraine Coal Production,” Annual Year-End Reports from *BP: Production Volume: Coal: Europe & Eurasia: Ukraine*, December 1993, last modified June 20, 2020, <https://www.ceicdata.com/en/indicator/ukraine/coal-production>.

<sup>136</sup> Anders Aslund, *How Capitalism Was Built: The Transformation of Central and Eastern Europe, Russia, the Caucasus, and Central Asia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 110.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>138</sup> Chrystia Freel, “Miners Blame Decline on Kiev,” *The Washington Post*, June 18, 1993, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1993/06/18/miners-blame-decline-on-kyiv/fdb9c6de-6892-4f3f-87b0-f4668fe64a90/>.

<sup>139</sup> Николай Лисовенко, “Шахтёры не просят денег, а требуют политических перемен,” [Miners are not asking for money, but demanding political change], *Известия*, June 10, 1993.

another instrument for the ruination of workers and industrial collectives, and the majority of the population lives below the poverty line.”<sup>140</sup> The miners also reaffirmed their belief that it was necessary to adopt a new election law for the Verkhovna Rada,<sup>141</sup> and notably, they called for adjustments to the Ukrainian constitution which would strengthen the Donbas’ regional autonomy.

This final demand was one of the opening salvos in a drawn-out battle between the new Ukrainian state, represented by the central government in Kyiv, and the Donbas colliers, whose regional interests put them in direct opposition to the unitary Ukrainian national project. Federalism was (and still is) an abhorrent concept to the Ukrainian government and the majority of the Ukrainian population outside of the Donbas.<sup>142</sup> As such, the demands for regional autonomy put forth by the Donbas miners touched a nerve across Ukraine. For example, in L’viv Oblast,<sup>143</sup> coal miners in Chervonograd, who had joined the all-Union strike movement in 1989-1991, now opposed the Donbas regional strike, expressing their belief that “rather than ruining Ukraine by strikes, other ways of obtaining socioeconomic goals must be found.”<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Лисовенко, “Шахтёры не просят денег, а требуют политических перемен,” [Miners are not asking for money, but demanding political change],

<sup>141</sup> Ukrainian Parliament/Supreme Soviet—the most important legislative body in Ukraine since the country’s independence in 1991.

<sup>142</sup> “Громадська думка про ситуацію на Донбасі та шляхи відновлення суверенітету України над окупованими територіями (соціологія),” [Public opinion on the situation in Donbas and ways to restore Ukraine’s sovereignty over the occupied territories (sociology)], *Разумков центр*, October 11, 2019, [https://razumkov.org.ua/napriamky/sotsiologichni-doslidzhennia/gromadska-dumka-pro-sytuatsiiu-na-donbasi-ta-shliakhy-vidnovlennia-suverenitetu-ukrainy-nad-okupovanymy-terytoriiamy?fbclid=IwAR3IAhhHakGJT02A8fjkwT6lDg3u\\_7T9P11QpF8DBc5U65TNaZPM7j2Zpfl](https://razumkov.org.ua/napriamky/sotsiologichni-doslidzhennia/gromadska-dumka-pro-sytuatsiiu-na-donbasi-ta-shliakhy-vidnovlennia-suverenitetu-ukrainy-nad-okupovanymy-terytoriiamy?fbclid=IwAR3IAhhHakGJT02A8fjkwT6lDg3u_7T9P11QpF8DBc5U65TNaZPM7j2Zpfl);

“Большинство украинцев не поддерживают федерализацию Украины как вариант для установления мира на Донбассе,” [Most Ukrainians do not support the federalization of Ukraine as an option for establishing peace in Donbass], *Интерфакс-Украина*, July 19, 2018, <https://interfax.com.ua/news/political/519383.html>.

<sup>143</sup> L’viv is often positioned on an ideological spectrum opposite Donetsk. These two cities are cited as the regional ethno-cultural poles of Ukraine, with L’viv representing a more Ukrainian nationalist, Europe-oriented disposition and Donetsk representing a more post-Soviet, regionalist, and Russia-oriented disposition.

<sup>144</sup> “Chervonograd Miners, Workers Reject Strikes,” *UNIAN*, June 16, 1993, FBIS.

But the Donbas miners would not be denied. As a direct result of soaring disillusionment and inflation, coal miners from Zasyadko mine flooded the square in front of the Donetsk Oblast administration building beginning on June 7, 1993.<sup>145</sup> Bread had already reached a price range of 176-200 *karbovantsy*, and fuel consumers owed the Donetskugol' association—each N-ugol' association was treated as a holding company for various mining enterprises—owed a debt of nearly forty billion *karbovantsy*. Miners did not receive their wages, and salaries were constantly being recalculated in an attempt to compensate for price fluctuations. The miners “protested against such treatment of the people.”<sup>146</sup> Although the protests began at eight mines within Donetskugol' in response to the consumer debts, by June 9, seventy-six out of 120 coal mines in Donetsk alone were on strike.<sup>147</sup> Their economic demands included “indexing the population’s deposits, determining the minimum living standard budget, and adjusting pensions, students’ grants, and wages for all workers on the basis of this budget.”<sup>148</sup> These were followed by political demands for a nationwide referendum on confidence in the authorities and the independence of the Donbas from Ukraine. Such demands reflected the regional character of the miners’ movement, as demands were made on behalf of not only the mining industry, but other workers, industries, and even students.<sup>149</sup> These calls did not pass unnoticed in the Donbas, and on the same day, deputy head of the regional Trade Union of Metallurgists, Viktor Shabalov,

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<sup>145</sup> Борис Глотов, “Донбасс встаёт на дыбы,” [Donbass rears up], *Правда*, June 9, 1993; Nikolay Mokrishchev, “The Strike is Becoming General,” *Trud*, June 11, 1993, FBIS.

<sup>146</sup> Николай Лисовенко, “Донбасс: Цены выросли и шахтёры вышли на площадь,” [Donbass: Prices have risen and miners took it to the streets], *Известия*, June 9, 1993.

<sup>147</sup> “Miners Say Strike Due to Consumers’ Debts,” *Holos Ukrayiny*, June 8, 1993, FBIS; “Over 60 Donetsk Mines, Enterprises on Strike,” *ITAR-ITASS*, June 9, 1993, FBIS.

<sup>148</sup> “Over 60 Donetsk Mines, Enterprises on Strike,” *Ukraine World Service*, June 9, 1993, FBIS.

<sup>149</sup> Notably, this departs from the stereotypical characterization of the miners as a selfish cohort only seeking to fill their own pockets.

proclaimed that the Donbas metallurgists “fully support all of the demands of the miners,” including the referendum directed against the central government in Kyiv.<sup>150</sup>

The intensity of the strike movement quickly accelerated. On June 10, machine-builders, chemists, transport workers, medical personnel, and schoolteachers in Donetsk Oblast joined the striking miners and metallurgists.<sup>151</sup> Miners together with workers from other industries demonstrated in front of regional administrative offices. Over eighty percent of the mines in Donetsk Oblast eventually joined the strike.<sup>152</sup> With each passing day, support became more widespread, and voices from Luhansk Oblast, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, and Kharkiv added to the chorus calling for a nationwide referendum and pushing for the political and economic demands first put forth by the Donetsk miners.<sup>153</sup> By June 16, approximately 230 mines and over 100 collectives at enterprises engaged in machine- and instrument-building, the construction industry, motor vehicle transportation, light industry, food industry, metal workers, chemical workers, and aviation workers were either full participants in the strike or showed complete solidarity for the strikers’ political and economic demands.<sup>154</sup> In total, over two million people reportedly took part in the strike.<sup>155</sup> “Virtually the entire population of this industrial region” was in open revolt because Donbas residents continued to believe that their best economic fortunes lied in the devolution of political authority. The resulting tension threatened to fracture the young Ukrainian

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<sup>150</sup> “Over 60 Donetsk Mines, Enterprises on Strike,” *Ukraine World Service*.

<sup>151</sup> Nikolay Mokrishchev, “The Strike is Becoming General.”

<sup>152</sup> “Gennadiy Kondaurov, “Over 80 Percent of Miners Affected,” *Ostankino Television First Channel Network (Novosti)*, June 10, 1993, FBIS.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.; G. Klimov and V.A. Sokolov, “Dnepropetrovsk Miners Strike,” *Ostankino Television First Channel Network (Novosti)*, June 14, 1993, FBIS; Leonid Zamyatin, “Kharkov Oblast Supports Striking Donbass Miners Demands,” *Ukrinform*, June 10, 1993, FBIS; Vitaliy Pidchenko and Aleksandr Dovgal, “Kharkov Workers Support Political Change,” *Ostankino Television First Channel Network (Novosti)*, June 17, 1993, FBIS;

<sup>154</sup> Igor Sukhanov, “Ukraine: Economy Paralyzed. And the authorities?” *Rossiyskiye Vesti*, June 16, 1993, FBIS.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.; Gennadiy Kondaurov, “Deputies Debate ‘Referendum on Confidence’ in President,” *Ostankino Television First Channel Network*, June 15, 1993, FBIS.



state.<sup>156</sup> Gennady Kushch, a driver at Kuibyshev mine in Donetsk, remarked at the time that “everyone seems to be sitting on a barrel of gunpowder,” thereby signaling the potential for a social explosion.<sup>157</sup>

The arguments both for and against the devolution of central authority danced around the subject of separatism. On June 10, Mykhailo Horyn, People’s Deputy of Ukraine and chairman of the Ukrainian Republic Party, chastised the Donbas strike movement in this manner. Although he acknowledged the miners’ economic demands as “wholly justified,” he excoriated the “political ultimatum” issued by the miners as “directed against Ukrainian statehood.”<sup>158</sup> He went on to indicate that “pro-empire forces, both in Ukraine and outside, are trying to exploit our domestic economic problems for their own purposes,” ultimately concluding that “the strike in the Donbas” was a link “in a single chain, a chain with which they<sup>159</sup> hope to shackle and strangle the young Ukrainian state.” Horyn was hardly alone in his sentiments. Similarly, in a denouncement of the strikes on June 14, the Donetsk branch of the Ukrainian Democratic Party referred to the strikes as “political provocation on the part of communist anti-Ukrainian forces and a threat to Ukraine’s territorial integrity.”<sup>160</sup> The Donbas was a periphery that threatened to pull away from the unitary center in Kyiv.

In this view, miners and regional authorities concerned with economic autonomy were separatists. For instance, in a pointed warning against separatism, Mykhaylo Horyn indicated that “among the slogans put forward by the miners is the demand that the Donbas region be

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<sup>156</sup> Nikolay Stolyarov, “Strikers Receive Widespread Support,” *Ukrinform*, June 11, 1993, FBIS.

<sup>157</sup> Siegelbaum and Walkowitz, *Workers of the Donbass Speak*, 186.

<sup>158</sup> Ilko Kolodiy and Volodymyr Melnyk, “We Have No Future Without Independence,” *Za Vilnu Ukrainynu*, June 10, 1993, FBIS.

<sup>159</sup> “They” can be read here as Russia and pro-Russian elements in Ukraine, as the other “links” Horyn refers to are the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol, stoppages in oil deliveries, and “general political pressure from Russia.”

<sup>160</sup> “Democratic Party Condemns Strike,” *UNIAN*, June 14, 1993, FBIS.

joined to Russia in the hope that the neighboring state will somehow be able to improve the economic situation in the region.” Accession into the Russian Federation and full regional autonomy were extreme options aimed at solving the seemingly insurmountable economic problems that plagued the coal industry.<sup>161</sup> This separatism borne out of economic desperation generated political demands as a potential solution to continuing government incompetence, now located not in Moscow but in Kyiv with the new Ukrainian central government.

As consumer debts and wage arrears continued to mount, the miners reformed strike committees and level their demands towards the central government. The miners’ anger was potent, and the sentiments expressed by strikers primarily placed the blame on the president, Leonid Kravchuk, and a fractured, ineffective parliament. The demands for a referendum, in effect, quickly became a regional expression of no-confidence in Kravchuk and the Verkhovna Rada. At rallies with thousands in attendance, the strikers castigated the president,<sup>162</sup> carrying banners with slogans such as “Down with Kravchuk,” “Kravchuk, don’t bring back 1933!,” and “Kravchuk’s policy is a policy of genocide”—clear references to the state-led famine (*Holodomor*) carried out by Joseph Stalin against Ukrainians.<sup>163</sup> Yuri Boldyrev, a former leader of the 1989 miners’ strike turned Verkhovna Rada deputy, expressed his belief that the strike was intentionally provoked by the president and the government as a means of “letting off steam.”<sup>164</sup> Boldyrev lamented the “total political bankruptcy of the Ukrainian leadership and loss of Ukrainian statehood, because an entity that has no economy cannot be referred to as a state.”<sup>165</sup> In line with these views, miners began to harden their position on the issue of dissolving the

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<sup>161</sup> Николай Лисовенко, “Донбасс бастует, Приднепровье посылает свои пикеты в Киев,” [Donbass goes on strike, Pridneprovye sends its pickets to Kiev], *Известия*, June 11, 1993.

<sup>162</sup> Anatoliy Gordeyev, “Tens of Thousands at Rally,” *ITAR-ITASS World Service*, June 14, 1993, FBIS.

<sup>163</sup> Kondaurov, “Deputies Debate ‘Referendum on Confidence’ in President.”

<sup>164</sup> “Action ‘Staged’ by Government,” *UNIAN*, June 11, 1993; Kondaurov, “Deputies Debate ‘Referendum on Confidence’ in President.”

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*

Verkhovna Rada and holding pre-term elections.<sup>166</sup> Workers in the eastern oblasts lambasted the president and parliament as “incapable of resolving this situation” and “incapable of carrying out their functions.”<sup>167</sup> Alongside regional autonomy, the resignation of President Kravchuk and the dissolution of parliament became the most important demands of the strike movement. Any attempts at blocking a potential referendum were resolutely opposed. During one such attempt, Vladimir Minenko, a member of the Donetsk Strike Committee, spoke for the strike movement and their increasing certainty that “both the president and the parliament are afraid to learn what the people think about them and their policies; Therefore, they hold debates, dodging discussion of our main demands.”<sup>168</sup>

Amidst this explosive environment, political opportunists from the Donbas quickly seized on the anger generated by the miners as a vehicle to obtain positions of power. In much the same way, many of these opportunists had already built their existing political and financial capital at the expense of a broken transitional system, when “the opportunities for rent-seeking were probably greater than at any other time in world history.”<sup>169</sup> For these exploiters, the dubious methods and principles used during “grabitization” (*prikhvatizatsia*) could be reapplied to popular movements.

Although miners still conceived of themselves as the victims of an unjust and corrupt system, they paradoxically helped to create and expand their own crisis.<sup>170</sup> After seventy-four years of relative stability under the Soviet system, in which they were revered as the labor elite,

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<sup>166</sup> Лисовенко, “Донбасс бастует, Приднепровье посылает свои пикеты в Киев,” [Donbass goes on strike, Pridneprovyie sends its pickets to Kiev].

<sup>167</sup> Pidchenko and Dovgal, “Kharkov Workers Support Political Change.”

<sup>168</sup> Anatoliy Gordeyev, “Donetsk Strikers Assail President, Parliament,” *ITAR-ITASS*, June 16, 1993, FBIS.

<sup>169</sup> Aslund, *How Capitalism Was Built*, 55.

<sup>170</sup> Siegelbaum and Walkowitz, *Workers of the Donbass Speak*, 180.

the miners had broken with the source of their own privileged identity.<sup>171</sup> As a result, the Donbas colliers exposed themselves to the mercy of a competitive free-market where the products of their labor were increasingly unprofitable. Meaningful reform demanded the widespread closure of unprofitable mines and major cuts to both government subsidies and a bloated workforce. Still, the prospects for alternative employment remained bleak in the Donbas.<sup>172</sup> Furthermore, without a solidified party wing to represent their interests, the colliers had no legislative staying power to challenge the threat to their livelihoods. After all, strike actions had only served to force a change in government, for better or for worse, rather than the special appointment or election of the miners' preferred representatives. Survival in this new context necessitated a change in tactics and unsavory compromises. In a pattern that would repeat itself at the ballot box, Donbas residents trusted their own to solve Donbas problems, even if their own were often red directors or authoritarian opportunists who readily abused their power.

The “saviors” of the Donbas colliers were the rapacious and exploitative proto-political forces of Donetsk Oblast: rent-seekers, oligarchs, and red directors. Confronted by an increasingly hostile Western and Central Ukraine, the coal miners cooperated with authoritarian opportunists in the Donbas. Political Scientist Stephen Crowley remarked on the advent of this popular support in place of a true labor party by stating, “this would appear to be bad news for the creation of a democratic society, since most workers, a very significant social group, and one that will be asked to make still more sacrifices for the sake of economic reform, lack a genuine channel for articulating their interests and defending their rights.”<sup>173</sup> Instead of a political party

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<sup>171</sup> Siegelbaum and Walkowitz, *Workers of the Donbass Speak*, 180.

<sup>172</sup> Davis, *Trade Unions*, 69.

<sup>173</sup> Crowley, “Between Class and Nation,” ii.

built upon an independent trade union akin to Solidarity, the miners relied on authoritarian figures to articulate and defend their interests.

One of the best examples of this new class of political chameleons was Yukhym Zvyahilsky.<sup>174</sup> A red director from Donetsk, Zvyahilsky privatized two of Ukraine’s largest coal mines (Zasyadko and Kuybyshevskaya mine) and worked as a commodity trader in the initial years of Ukrainian independence.<sup>175</sup> He first rose to political prominence after he was elected mayor of Donetsk in November 1992.<sup>176</sup> In the opening days of the strike movement, Zvyahilsky “eagerly scolded the president and the government for incompetence in ruling the country; he demanded additional authorities for local and regional self-government.”<sup>177</sup> In a move apparently meant to ease the eastern conflagration, Leonid Kravchuk appointed Zvyahilsky as first deputy prime minister of Ukraine on June 11, 1993—mere days after the start of the strike, which originated at Zvyahilsky’s Zasyadko mine—filling a vacancy that had been left open since Igor Yukhnovskiy’s resignation three months earlier.<sup>178</sup> Zvyahilsky quickly set about attempting to rebuild elements of the command economy with the realization that increased regulations led to more rents for a small circle of kleptocrats.<sup>179</sup> As a means to cover the difference in controlled prices, Zvyahilsky influenced the Cabinet of Ministers to issue a record amount of state subsidies to the coal industry. In sum, these subsidies amounted to an absurd 3.8% of GDP in 1993.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Alternative spellings include Yefim Zvyagilskiy.

<sup>175</sup> Aslund, *Ukraine: How Ukraine Became a Market Economy and Democracy*, 47.

<sup>176</sup> Viktor Chamara, “Zvyagilskiy Appointed First Deputy Prime Minister,” *ITAR-ITASS World Service*, June 11, 1993.

<sup>177</sup> Sergey Furmanyuk, “Yukhym Zvyahilsky—the First of the Second Fiddles,” *Nezavisimost*, July 21, 1993, FBIS.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>179</sup> Aslund, *Ukraine: How Ukraine Became a Market Economy and Democracy*, 47.

<sup>180</sup> Кирилл Родионов, “Война не Единственная Серьезная Проблема Угольной Промышленности Восточной Украины,” [War is not the Only Serious Problem of the Coal Industry of Eastern Ukraine], *VoxUkraine*, January 9, 2015, <https://voxukraine.org/ru/coal-industry/>.

This attempt to revive central planning failed miserably, only working to the benefit of Zvyahilsky and his business partners.<sup>181</sup>

Apart from these kleptocratic practices, Zvyahilsky also helped act as an intermediary in negotiations with the leaders of the strike movement. On June 14, 1993, only three days after his initial appointment as deputy prime minister, Zvyahilsky reassured representatives from every major industrial center in the Donbas that there would be a quick decision on holding the desired referendum on confidence in the president and parliament, and he personally would work to convince other delegates of the need for such a referendum.<sup>182</sup> Indeed, on June 16, 1993, Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Soviet Vasyl Durdynets presented a draft resolution, which clearly reflected part of miners' demands for the first time. The resolution affirmed the government's commitment to hold a Ukrainian-wide referendum "on the issues of confidence or no confidence in the President of Ukraine and the Supreme Soviet of Ukraine on 26 September, 1993."<sup>183</sup> This referendum would contain the following questions on the ballot: "1) Do you have confidence in the president of Ukraine?—yes/no; 2) Do you have confidence in the Supreme Soviet of Ukraine?—Yes/No." The results of this referendum would determine the need for pre-term elections to both the office of the presidency and the Verkhovna Rada.<sup>184</sup> At least in part, it appeared that Zvyahilsky had delivered on the idea that he, as someone "outside blocs and factions, an experienced manager, and a mayor of the mining capital, [could] quench the

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<sup>181</sup> Aslund, *Ukraine: How Ukraine Became a Market Economy and Democracy*, 47.

<sup>182</sup> Gennadiy Kondarov, "Zyagilskiy Addresses Rally," *Ostankino Television First Channel Network (Novosti)*, June 14, 1993, FBIS.

<sup>183</sup> "Presents Draft Resolution on Confidence Referendum," *Radio Ukraine World Service*, June 16, 1993, FBIS.

<sup>184</sup> Yekaterina Kindras, "Opposition Demands Early Elections; the Majority Wants to Continue in Power: The 17 June Morning Session," *Golos Ukrainy*, June 18, 1993, FBIS.

‘eastern’ fire (and thereby make it possible for the supreme authorities to raise spirits to a great height)” [parentheses are from the original text].<sup>185</sup>



Figure 11. The miners express their support for Zvyahilsky while warning against meaningless action. The poster reads “Don’t make empty promises!” Source: Gennadiy Gordienko, Донецкий авторский сайт Е. Ясенова.

Despite a mixed response to this resolution, the main goal of diffusing the mounting tensions was successful. On the surface, the partnership with Zvyahilsky had worked. The majority of the Donbas colliers were at least momentarily satisfied by the promise of a referendum and assurances on the gradual fulfillment or consideration of their additional economic demands. By June 21, 204 out of 250 Donbas mines had resumed operations (112 out

<sup>185</sup> Furmanyuk, “Yukhym Zvyahilsky—the First of the Second Fiddles,” 4.

of 121 in Donetsk Oblast and 61 out of 90 in Luhansk Oblast).<sup>186</sup> However, the regional-level and oblast-level strike committees were unable to reach a unanimous consensus, and several of the more militant mining operations (Zasyadko, Lidiyevka, etc.) continued to express their dissatisfaction with the negotiations. In the western Donbas, 7 out of 11 mines remained on strike over unfulfilled economic and political demands. In Pavlograd,<sup>187</sup> thousands rallied for the immediate dissolution of the Verkhovna Rada, increased wages and lower taxes for all professions, indexing of monetary deposits, raising the minimum living wage to 50,000 *karbovantsy*, and a local demand for the dismissal of Viktor Romanyuk—chairman of the city council—and current deputies.<sup>188</sup> For days this situation remained in flux, with seemingly constant changes in the attitudes of individual mines. By June 24, according to the Independent Union of Miners of Ukraine (NPGU), fourteen mines in Krivoy Rog, twelve in Krasnodon, eight in Prevomaysk, seven in Lisichansk, five in Stakhanov, five in Krasnoarmeysk, and one in Dobropol'e continued to strike over their opinion that “the protocol on the coordinating measures”—the only deliverable produced by the negotiations—did not provide any guarantees on the fulfillment of their demands.<sup>189</sup> The miners were frustrated by the lack of concrete promises and only a tentative referendum date, given the possibility that months of organizing and protesting could end without any solutions. Despite these concerns, the strike movement progressively lost momentum over the following weeks, and by June 30, only 13 mines out of 250 were not extracting or delivering coal.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Yuriy Sagan, Petr Shevchenko, and M. Starozhitskaya, “He Who Does Not Eat Does Not Work. A Strike Has Been Suspended, Confrontation Continues,” *Nezavisimost*, June 23, 1993, FBIS.

<sup>187</sup> Mining town located in Dnepropetrovsk Oblast in the western Donbas.

<sup>188</sup> Sergey Kravchenko, “Strikes Continue in Western Donbass Mines,” *Ukrinform*, June 24, 1993, FBIS.

<sup>189</sup> Vladimir Loktev, “Miners Picketing...,” *Trud*, June 24, 1993, FBIS.

<sup>190</sup> Nikolai Lisovenko, “Strike Should be Considered Suspended—for the Time Being,” *Izvestiia*, July 2, 1993, FBIS.



While these militant mines opted to strike, tensions elsewhere continued to simmer. Although the majority of miners had returned to work, the compromise solution for the Donbas-wide strike committees was to suspend, rather than dissolve, the regional strike movement, pending the results of the referendum on September 26. Colliers remained especially vigilant over the prospect of further price increases. This temporary solution to an entrenched problem would quickly unravel over the coming months as the referendum deadline approached. However, at least in the short-term, Zvyahilsky and the red directors had bought time for the government and, more importantly, political capital for themselves.

Zvyahilsky would later profess that he “got involved in government at the personal request of Leonid Danilovich Kuchma and Ivan Stepanovich Plyusch—chairman of the Ukrainian parliament—and with the consent of then-President Leonid Makarovich Kravchuk. According to Zvyahilsky, he “understood that [he] needed to go help lead the country out of this crisis.”<sup>191</sup> His term in office was characterized by a duplicitous image. Zvyahilsky simultaneously presented the outward appearance of a defiant opposition leader—going so far as to proclaim that “no one will bring the Donbas to its knees!”—while also acting as perhaps one of the primary executors who contributed to continued hardship in the Donbas.<sup>192</sup> During his tenure, the government maximized personal profits using cumbersome foreign trade regulations, thereby producing extraordinary rent-seeking to the benefit of state enterprise managers, new entrepreneurs, government officials, commodity traders, bankers, and criminal elements.<sup>193</sup> In an example of the rising trend of authoritarian co-option in the Donbas, Zvyahilsky actively

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<sup>191</sup> Юлия Мостовая, “Ефим Звягильский: ‘Умирать я буду дома, в Донецке, как бы мне старались помешать’,” [Efim Zvyagilskiy: “I will die at home, in Donetsk, no matter how they will try to prevent me from it”], *Зеркало Недели*, December 6, 1996, [https://zn.ua/politics\\_archive/efim\\_zvyagilskiy\\_umirat\\_ya\\_budu\\_doma\\_v\\_donetske\\_kak\\_by\\_mne\\_ne\\_staralis\\_pomeshat.html](https://zn.ua/politics_archive/efim_zvyagilskiy_umirat_ya_budu_doma_v_donetske_kak_by_mne_ne_staralis_pomeshat.html).

<sup>192</sup> Furmanyuk, “Yukhym Zvyahilsky—the First of the Second Fiddles,” 4.

<sup>193</sup> Aslund, *Ukraine: How Ukraine Became a Market Economy and Democracy*, 55.

manipulated the levers of power to ensure that the managers of large city enterprises would support him, neither out of altruism or compassion for their constituents, but due to their personal stakes in ownership.<sup>194</sup>

Zvyahilsky's bipolar actions proved to be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the miners gained a powerful advocate in the highest halls of power. On the other hand, Zvyahilsky, and others like him, were unabashed kleptocrats, primarily interested in exploiting political power for personal gain. They mobilized dissatisfaction amongst the ranks of their constituents, using these sentiments as a reservoir for popular support as the trusted representatives of the miners. But despite its inherent toxicity and the lack of long-term solutions for long-term problems, this relationship was undoubtedly symbiotic in the early 1990s.

Due to these opportunists' advocacy, the miners advanced their agenda. Although the miners never received their promised referendum, they did force a resolution on pre-term elections. Notably, the central government and electoral commission ignored a regional referendum attached to the ballot in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblast, despite the fact that residents voted overwhelmingly in favor of federalism, official status for the Russian language, and entry into the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) with the Russian Federation and other former Soviet republics.<sup>195</sup> In effect, the miners only received half of what they had demanded. Meanwhile, former Prime Minister Leonid Kuchma, a red director from Dnipropetrovsk, won the pre-term elections with 52.15 percent of the vote with significant support from the Donbas,

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<sup>194</sup> Furmanyuk, "Yukhym Zvyahilsky—the First of the Second Fiddles," 4.

<sup>195</sup> "Киев уже 20 лет обманывает Донбасс: Донецкая и Луганская области еще в 1994 году проголосовали за федерализацию, русский язык и евразийскую интеграцию," [Kiev has been deceiving Donbass for 20 years: Donetsk and Lugansk regions back in 1994 voted for federalization, the Russian language, and Eurasian integration], *Накануне*РУ, March 26, 2014, <https://www.nakanune.ru/articles/18807/>.

unseating Kravchuk.<sup>196</sup> The result was unsurprising considering that observers had noted Kuchma and other former *nomenklatura*'s growing popularity at the expense of Kravchuk since the preceding summer of miners' strikes.<sup>197</sup>

Following the transition of power from the Kravchuk presidency to the Kuchma presidency, the Ukrainian government opened a prosecution case on September 17, 1994, forwarding the accusation that "Zvyahilsky's actions caused material damages of over twenty million dollars to the government,<sup>198</sup> undermined the defense capabilities of the government, increased the currency deficit in the country, and resulted in punitive sanctions by coordinator-governments."<sup>199</sup> The Verkhovna Rada even took the rare step of removing his parliamentary immunity. Zvyahilsky's immediate departure for Israel, where he remained until negotiating his return in 1997, further contributed to speculation around his guilt.<sup>200</sup> He denied any wrongdoing, seeing himself as a victim of political intrigue and mafia interests.<sup>201</sup> Zvyahilsky may have been a victim of the consolidation of political power in Ukraine, but he overlooked the fact that he had previously used political intrigue and promoted mafia interest for his own benefit. The hypocrisy was astounding.

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<sup>196</sup> Steven Erlanger, "Ukrainians Elect a New President," *The New York Times*, July 12, 1994, <https://www.nytimes.com/1994/07/12/world/ukrainians-elect-a-new-president.html>.

<sup>197</sup> Volodymyr Chemerys, "Someone's Private Pedestal Will Rise on the Ashes of the Common Home," *Ukrayina Moloda*, June 18, 1993, FBIS; "Kuchma, Zvyahilsky Most Popular Politicians in Donetsk," *UNIAN*, August 30, 1993, FBIS; Vladimir Skachko, "President Gives In to Parliament Once Again. Prime Minister Fulfills Strikers' Demands," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, June 24, 1993, FBIS; Stepan Chuprina, "Crisis of Power—Crisis of Confidence," *Segodnya*, June 25, 1993, FBIS.

<sup>198</sup> Aslund, *Ukraine: How Ukraine Became a Market Economy and Democracy*, 47; Zvyahilsky was accused of embezzling \$25 million worth of state-owned aviation fuel.

<sup>199</sup> Янина Соколовская, "Звягильский подсуден. Кто следующий?" [Zvyagilsky is under trial. Who is next?], *Известия*, September 17, 1994.

<sup>200</sup> Aslund, *Ukraine: How Ukraine Became a Market Economy and Democracy*, 47–48.

<sup>201</sup> Мостовая, "Ефим Звягильский: 'Умирать я буду дома, в Донецке, как бы мне старались помешать,'" [Efim Zvyagilskiy: "I will die at home, in Donetsk, no matter how they will try to prevent me from it"]; His guilt still remains a question to the present-day, as he returned to parliament and thrived as one of the leading businessmen in the coal industry.

Zvyahilsky was emblematic of a rising political class from the ranks of red directors in the Donbas. Their interests subsumed the workers' movement as a tool for political advancement and their personal economic interests. While these aims sometimes aligned and provided real, tangible benefits, as in the case of the adoption of the resolution on the referendum, their convictions and motivation were solely their own. Although the strikes underlying causes generated genuine grassroots support for issues such as regional autonomy, higher wages, better working conditions, and lower prices, the not-so-invisible hand of the former *nomenklatura* blunted the impact of these demonstrations. The alliance between exploiters and exploited resulted in a strike that seemed like it “did not give anything to the mass of workers” other than an authoritarian voice in Ukrainian politics.<sup>202</sup> And yet, as Mykola Volynko later recalled:

“And one of our mass strikes just then brought Yukhym Leonidovych Zvyahilsky to power, and we don't need to hide this. Right then, I was present when he addressed the Verkhovna Rada. And he asked the Verkhovna Rada to approve the sale of a strategic supply of aviation fuel, and using this money they would pay off the miners' wage arrears. Then they voted in favor of this resolution. And after some time, they blamed Zvyahilsky, because he had evidently stolen. But they paid the miners with some-kind of money.”<sup>203</sup>

These budding authoritarians did not necessarily neglect their subordinates. Regardless of where the money had come from, the fact that the miners were paid on time trumped any outstanding concerns with corruption.

Despite the fact that the strike was the product of the miners' own capacity for self-organization, it was eventually headed by the regional elite—namely local administration

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<sup>202</sup> Furmanyuk, “Yukhym Zvyahilsky—the First of the Second Fiddles,” 4.

<sup>203</sup> “Interview with Mykola Volynko,” *College of Europe: Three Revolutions Project*, 7.

officials, clientelist groupings, and industrial lobbies.<sup>204</sup> However, the symbiotic relationship between the miners and authoritarian opportunists was ephemeral. It was restricted to periods when an opportunity to seize power was present. Once resurgent authoritarian elements assumed power in 1994, they immediately began dismantling the vehicle of regime change that had put them in power, defending their gains from would-be opportunists in the same mold as themselves. At the zenith of their power, the miners willfully signed the death warrant of their own movement at the ballot box.

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<sup>204</sup> Mykhnenko, "State, society, and protest under post-communism," 103.

**Chapter 2:** 1994-1998: From “Heaven to Earth,” The Pacification of the Miners’

*Movement*



Figure 12. A sculpture of a crucified miner. The first and second labels read “Donbas” and “Restructuring.” The base of the sculpture shows the names of mines which were permanently closed during the 1990s as a result of industry reform programs.  
Source: Alexander Red’kin

With Kuchma’s election to the presidency, the opportunists of the industrial east returned to preeminence.<sup>205</sup> Despite the colliers’ initial optimism, the shift of political power towards eastern Ukraine bode ill for the future of collective action. Although the miners had arguably been the most instrumental constituency that propelled Kuchma and his allies into office, the newly elected leaders of Ukraine felt no sense of responsibility towards the struggling colliers. Rather, Kuchma proved to be an adept power broker and adopted a shrewd approach towards

<sup>205</sup> Kuzio, *Ukraine: Democratization, Corruption, and the New Russian Imperialism*, 52–53.

dealing with the miners. Whilst repaying mounting arrears, Kuchma was uncompromising in suppressing political alternatives or potential threats to economic stability. He would not allow a repeat of Kravchuk's demise. Through elite discipline, co-optation, reform efforts, and repressions, Kuchma sapped the miners' movement of the vigor it had carried into the 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet Union. His efforts were aided by widening divisions amongst the miners themselves. By the beginning of 1995, they struggled to establish a consensus on major issues such as strikes, proposed reforms (especially mine closures), and support for the new administration. As the first major efforts at reform took hold, the miners fractured into competing trade unions and strike committees, hastening the death knell of their own movement. As it had been with *perestroika*, the miners' success was predicated on the confluence of factors from both above and below. This time, however, they would fail to recapture the successes they had experienced in 1989-1991 and 1993-1994.

This chapter investigates how the miners' movement collapsed before an onslaught of infighting and government-led repressions between 1994 and 1998. Faced with a government which was cognizant of the potential politicization of the miners' strikes and displayed an unwillingness to bend under pressure, the colliers faltered. Disunited and disorganized, they fell victim to a divide and conquer campaign that only left small pockets of dissidents in its wake. Playing off the miners' long-standing desire to receive colossal overdue wage arrears, Kuchma's administration ensured that the miners were paid when it mattered most. In doing so, he eased social tensions at critical junctures, creating the circumstances necessary for a rapid consolidation of power and a crackdown on the miners' militancy. The government's actions during this period fundamentally changed the nature of the miners' movement and politics in the Donbas, shifting the balance of power from the labor movement to authoritarian government.

## Winds of Change

Although Kuchma rode the wave of miners' dissent to the foremost political office in Ukraine, the earliest days of his administration did not bring about an immediate reprieve from the strikes. During the electoral process in summer 1994, isolated strikes erupted on June 28 at five coal mines from the Ordzhonikidzeugol' association in Yenakiyevo, Donetsk Oblast alongside miners from the Pervomayskugol' association in Luhansk Oblast. They were joined in short order by three shifts at Stakhanov mine and a shift from Tsentral'naya mine of the Krasnoarmeyskugol' Association. Under the direction of the Independent Miners' Union of Ukraine (NPGU), all of the miners demanded payment of wage arrears, overdue disability benefits, and overdue holiday bonuses, as well as the immediate departure of Aleksandr Poshtuk, the general director of the Ordzhonikidzeugol' association.<sup>206</sup> In a sign of actions to come, the Kuchma administration's immediate response to the miners' unrest was to introduce a proposal for a Charter of Discipline and revisions to the Law on the Protection of Labor, based on the recommendations of the Ministry of Coal and the Council of Coal Mining Directors. The revisions in question specifically dealt with the payment of lump-sum benefits and the definition of professional fitness in the mining industry. Both measures threatened to curb miners' rights to independent collective action and protections from occupational hazards.<sup>207</sup> A L'viv newspaper, *Post-Postup*, later described the recommendations in no uncertain terms as a plan "to revive the coal mine code from the era of Iosef Vissaryonovich [Stalin]—to limit the rights of trade unions,

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<sup>206</sup> "Miners at 5 Mines in Donetsk Begin Strike," *Interfax*, June 28, 1994, FBIS; "Donbass Miners' Strike Spreads," *Moscow Radio Rossii Network*, July 5, 1994, FBIS.

<sup>207</sup> "The Independent Miners' Trade Unions Chairmen Warn," *Donetskiy Kryazh*, August 19–25, 1994, FBIS.



employ miners on a contract basis, and fire them without any dilemmas. In short, ‘to restore order there.’”<sup>208</sup> The government’s campaign to stamp out the movement had begun.

The miners’ rebuke was both immediate and explosive. Overnight, Kuchma earned the enmity of representatives of both the strike committees and trade unions. Although they did not call a new strike, organizations within the movement voiced their discontent. On August 13, 1994, the miners issued a statement signed by chairman of the Independent Miners’ Union of Donetsk (NPGDk) Mykola Volynko, chairman of the Independent Miners’ Union of Makeyevka (NPGM) I.N. Dyatlov, chairman of the Independent Miners’ Union of Pervomaysk (NPGPm) S.M. Galyautdinov, chairman of the Independent Miners’ Union of Pavlograd (NGPg) V.N. Myasnikov, and deputy chairman of the Independent Miners’ Union of Shaktersk (NPGS) O.A. Kuptsova. Their joint statement questioned the government’s decision not to eliminate the coal miners’ debt, which they viewed as “artificially imposed by the government,” or pay the wage arrears. They further threatened “unpredictable repercussions” in the event that the proposals were adopted, placing the “whole responsibility” on “those that are provoking this, namely, the president of Ukraine, the Supreme Council,<sup>209</sup> the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, and the enterprise directors that are proposing and insisting on the adoption of these decisions.”<sup>210</sup> Notably, the regional devolution of authority within the trade unions, as evidenced by the signatories, presaged future difficulties. Although these miners’ unions displayed an enormous degree of cooperation and solidarity in response to some governmental affronts, such as the

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<sup>208</sup> Maryana Chorna, “Through the Donetsk Looking Glass,” *Post-Postup*, October 6–12, 1994, FBIS.

<sup>209</sup> It is unclear from this translation whether the authors wrote Verkhovna Rada or Supreme Soviet (*Verkhovniy Sovet*).

<sup>210</sup> “Miners’ leaders statement addressed to the Ukrainian president, the chairman of the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet, the prime minister of the Ukrainian Cabinet of Ministers, and the chairman of the State Committee for Coal,” *Donbass*, August 13, 1994, FBIS.

aforementioned proposed measures, the tabling of more complex issues would eventually deepen these pre-existing divisions.

Despite the relative success of the miners' initial pushback, the elite betrayal was becoming more evident with each such incident. In a remarkably prescient interview on August 17, only three days after the published statement, Mykola Volynko remarked on the mounting vilification of the miners by increasingly hostile authorities and the broader public. He lamented:

“Today, miners are often reproached for using strikes to win high salaries, various benefits, and the world's longest vacation lasting two months. People forget, however, that our miners have the toughest labor conditions in the world and that the long vacation was granted to us not for the sake of the populism, but due to the unbiased recommendations and conclusions of medical experts... We have recently felt that that public was being prepared to put up with the plan to strike a blow to miners—those who can still stand up and resist.”<sup>211</sup>

Volynko was painfully aware of the shifting policies towards the miners. Kuchma's administration may have represented the interests of eastern oligarchs, namely from Dnipropetrovsk, but once in power, the miners' movement presented the same fundamental threat to central power and authority in Kyiv that it had since its inception. Eastern Ukrainian politicians had used this fact to their advantage when Kravchuk had been in power. Now, when faced with the same conundrum, they understood all too well the political implications that came with an unrestricted social explosion in the mines, lest similar political chameleons emerge to exploit the resulting fissures. As such, they promulgated what Volynko referred to as “open statements to the effect that miners are to blame for everything, that they are unruly, lazy, undisciplined, and stubborn... This is an unmasked attack on human rights. Attempts are being

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<sup>211</sup> Nataliya Birchakova, “For What Did We Fight?” *Zhizn*, August 17, 1994, FBIS.

made to destroy all instances of dissidence among miners. The system against which we have fought is still alive.”<sup>212</sup> Although the Soviet Union and independent Ukraine shared drastic differences in their respective systems, Volynko was noting a return to a system that was authoritarian in nature and anti-labor in its practices.

Although Kuchma had not completely tilted towards authoritarianism in the earliest days of his administration, miners like Volynko entertained no illusions about the consequences of the shifting political environment. As Volynko observed:

“The administration realizes that to distract people’s attention from the commotion in the highest echelons of the current sad economic situation, something serious and extraordinary has to take place, perhaps bloodshed. There are two probable scenarios: Either miners will be pacified, or a scapegoat will be chosen and handed over to the mob. In light of the situation with former acting Prime Minister Zvyahilsky and appeals for strikes voiced by certain ardent ‘revolutionaries,’ the government seems to have bet on both hands. That is why we are restraining mines from anarchic actions. It is the administration that wants a bloodbath.”<sup>213</sup>

He only erred insofar as the government would not choose: the miners would be pacified, *and* multiple scapegoats would emerge. In many cases, the miners themselves eventually became the scapegoats in question. Shortly after Volynko’s comments, an article published in the regional newspaper *Donetskiy Kryazh* reported that after another government decision to raise coal prices by 1.6 times, the anticipated “chain reaction of price hikes will eventually return to the miners who provoked it.” The same article went on to offer the assessment that “it is time to stop playing with irresponsible trade unions, and to legislatively restrict their activities until the

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<sup>212</sup> Birchakova, “For What Did We Fight?”.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

economy is stabilized.”<sup>214</sup> Much of this vitriol stemmed from concerns over rapid inflation, plummeting labor productivity in the coal industry to the level of 1934, and coal shortages in advance of winter. At a time when Ukraine’s thermoelectric power stations still relied on coal mines for their primary fuel supply, there were real concerns about insufficient utilities services, especially for those Ukrainians who lived in harsher climates.<sup>215</sup> Between rising wage arrears, which continued to push many skilled mining specialists to transfer industries, and falling coal reserves, several blast furnaces ceased firing by September. A single truckload of coal reportedly cost 14 million *karbovantsy*, while desperately-needed new machinery cost 27 billion *karbovantsy*. Both were untenable sums with mounting debts across the coal industry and a general lack of funds.<sup>216</sup>

As summer turned to fall, these issues came to a head, and new isolated strikes began to emerge. On August 26, Luhansk miners launched a hunger strike in Luhansk’s central square, in large part as a response to both wage arrears and the tightening control of the reformed Communist Party of Ukraine (CPU) in the Oblast-level administration.<sup>217</sup> By September 8, Stakhanov mine in Donetsk Oblast, one of the largest mine’s in Ukraine, had 7,300 members of the NPGU go on strike over more than two months of unpaid wages, and miners from Skochinskiy mine in Donetsk followed suit with a short-lived strike between September 14 and September 17.<sup>218</sup> The strike committee at Skochinskiy mine emphasized that their strike was spontaneous and that “miners’ nerves simply cannot stand it,” in reference to the wage arrears

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<sup>214</sup> Nikolay Zahirko, “Coal Inflames Prices,” *Donetskiy Kryazh*, August 19–25, 1994, FBIS.

<sup>215</sup> Mykola Mokrishev, “Coal Reserves Are Being Used Up,” *Donetskiy Kryazh*, December 2–8, 1994, FBIS.

<sup>216</sup> M. Lisovenko, “The Entire Industry Needs To Be Rescued,” *Uryadovyy Kuryer*, September 17, 1994, FBIS; Yuriy Yurov, “Donbass’s Strike Temperature Is High Enough for Boiling, But Too Low for an Eruption,” *Postup*, September 1–6, 1994, FBIS.

<sup>217</sup> Yurov, “Donbass’s Strike Temperature Is High Enough for Boiling, But Too Low for an Eruption.”

<sup>218</sup> “Country’s Largest Coal Mine To Strike 8 Sep,” *Interfax*, September 6, 1994, FBIS.

and unresolved economic plight.<sup>219</sup> The strike committees sent delegates to discuss their demands with the Cabinet of Ministers for nearly two weeks at the end of October. These meetings were organized around pressing issues, such as the miners' 11<sup>th</sup> place ranking on the Ukrainian wage scale—a humiliating decline from their previous prestige in the Soviet Union—and the financial impropriety of mine managers. But the negotiations did not produce any results, and the miners returned in frustration.<sup>220</sup> Similar meetings between the miners and government representatives failed to move the pendulum on reform.<sup>221</sup> Due this lack of progress, representatives from five coal mining associations in Donetsk and Luhansk met on November 3 to proclaim a pre-strike state across the Donbas, expressing a lack of faith in the plans for reform put forth by the central government and chairman of the Donetsk Oblast Council, Volodymyr Shcherban. They received no support from the associated metallurgy industry, signaling a shift in public attitudes within the Donbas industrial sector<sup>222</sup>.

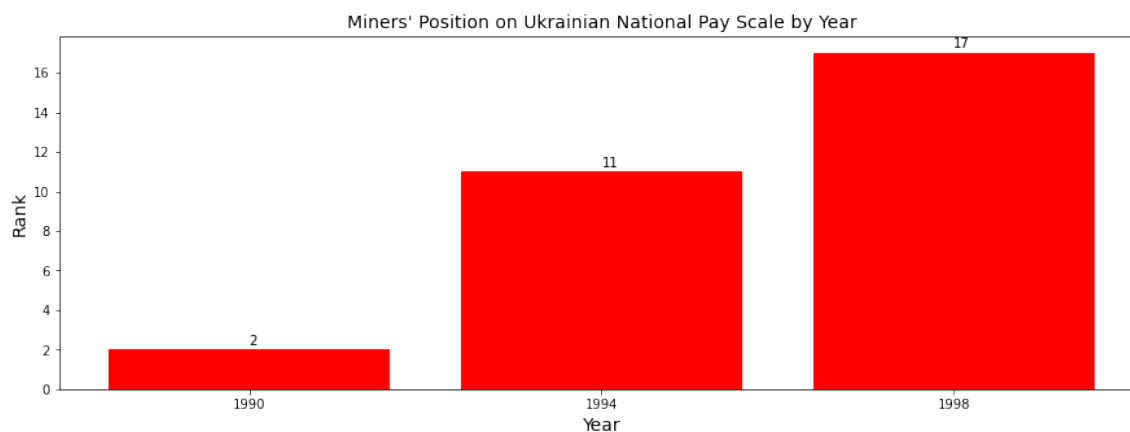


Figure 13. The miners' position on the Ukrainian national pay scale by year. Source: original dataset, see appendix.

<sup>219</sup> Georgiy Dorofeyev, "Miners' Nerves Are Also Giving Way," *Rabochaya Tribuna*, September 17, 1994, FBIS.

<sup>220</sup> Oleksandr Savitsky, "The Donbass Has Raised the Strike Sledgehammer. The First Blow Will Fall on Their Own Fingers," *Post-Postup*, November 10–16, 1994, FBIS; "Pre-Strike Posture Remains at the Mines," *Donbass*, 12 November, 1994, FBIS.

<sup>221</sup> "Miners Sit Without Wages, While Managers Buy Personal Planes and Cutters," *Donbass*, November 30, 1994, FBIS.

<sup>222</sup> Savitsky, "The Donbass Has Raised the Strike Sledgehammer."

Rhetoric from President Kuchma and Prime Minister Vitaliy Masol pointed to the widening rift between the government and the miners. Kuchma reiterated that “the government has already done everything that can be done for the miners,” while Masol conceded that the government was “prepared to pay not 10 but 15-20 *karbovantsy*. But it should not be a handout. The money should be earned.”<sup>223</sup> Kuchma’s administration held the belief that the government had already exhausted its capabilities by attempting to satisfy the miners demands. The miners did not share this view. Once more, the two sides spoke past each other.

To try and remedy the situation, coal ministry representatives, directors of coal associations, miners, research institutes, and coal engineering plants, alongside trade union leaders and representatives of the iron and steel workers met on November 21 in Donetsk.<sup>224</sup> Although the newly appointed minister of the coal industry, Viktor Poltavets, promised state support and the cooperation of President Kuchma, he also criticized the lack of workplace discipline in the mines, the shortage of skilled specialists, and the dereliction of duty amongst the miners’ leadership with coal production at 1955 levels and productivity at 1934 levels. Approaching the issue from a fundamentally different perspective, the mine directors and trade union representatives did not offer platitudes over their commitment to work and personal responsibility for the shortcomings. Rather, they emphasized supply issues, the prestige of coal mining, and the payment of outstanding wage arrears. The discussion devolved into a platform for reiterating problems without presenting meaningful, multilateral solutions.<sup>225</sup> Shortly thereafter, however, a momentary breakthrough came at the end of November. In exchange for lifting existing caps on the miners’ consumption fund, which effectively allowed the miners to

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<sup>223</sup> Georgiy Dorofeyev, “For First 21 November Shift,” *Rabochaya Tribuna*, November 16, 1994, FBIS.

<sup>224</sup> V. Zhigalin, “Into the Donetsk Steppe, My Boys, in 1955,” *Aktsent*, November 23, 1994, FBIS.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*

earn unlimited wages according to their productivity, the mining collectives called off the intended strike, preserving, if only momentarily, the fragile socio-economic stability in the mines.<sup>226</sup> It what would not be the final example of the Kuchma administration's ability to manage tensions in the mines, they offered financial concessions, without political or social guarantees, to stave off a widespread social explosion.

### **A House Divided**

In 1995, the miners faced a year of reckoning. Kuchma's administration, at the behest of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), finally launched a reform program for the coal mining industry. Though halting and limited in scope, it mandated permanent mine closures. Colliers were divided in their response. Some viewed Kuchma's reforms as a necessary part of the move towards a market economy, economic independence for the mines, and the general profitability in the mining industry. Others decried Kuchma and the Ministry of Coal as repressive and haphazard in their approach, exposing thousands of miners to redundancy, a loss of prestige, and social unrest. Already in 1994, these differences of opinion had manifested themselves during discussions over potential reforms.<sup>227</sup> The issue remained divisive both within the highest echelons of government and amongst the ranks of strike committees and trade unions. These divisions at the top pushed Kuchma towards repressive measures aimed at retaining his hold on power. The divisions at the bottom left the miners in disarray, robbing them of the unity that had contributed to the strength of the miners' movement. In tandem with the reforms, an increasingly repressive political environment created the conditions necessary for the decline of the miners' collective action as a discernable "movement." Instead, wildcat strikes and

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<sup>226</sup> Georgiy Dorofeyev, "Unlimited Wages," *Rabochaya Tribuna*, November 30, 1994, FBIS.

<sup>227</sup> Mikhail Yermakov, "Miners Give OK to Reforms," *Donbass*, September 23, 1994, FBIS.

decentralized actions became more commonplace, undermining the miners' previous influence on the political, social, and economic environment in Ukraine.



*Figure 14. An abandoned mine in Horlivka, Donetsk Oblast. Source: Donmining.info*

Within the first couple months of 1995, the contradictions present in the mines were already revealing themselves. On January 4 in Shakhtersk, Donetsk Oblast, A.N. Lysenko and Yu. S. Gorlatykh, director of Shakhterskaya-Glubokaya mine and chairman of the Shakhterskaya-Glubokaya trade union committee, published an appeal that supported economic independence for the mines and criticized parliament, calling “on all citizens of Ukraine who are sober-minded and who are not indifferent to their fate and the fate of the state to actively support the policy of long-awaited reforms pursued by President L. Kuchma... We are sick of living in a state in which anarchy, lack of responsibility, crime, and degrading living conditions reign. We see the president as the guarantor of our deliverance from all this, who was the first to tell the



people of Ukraine the whole truth and to chart the paths and begin in practice to implement a program of the development of our state.”<sup>228</sup> In sharp contrast, Valentyn Ilyushenko, the general director of the Donetskgol’ Association, was repeatedly cited in February as an advocate for the maintenance and expansion of state control and expenditures, especially for subsidies to the coal mining industry, an assessment that had previously been shared by others, such as Semyon Saratykyants, a senior scientific associate at the Donetsk Coal Institute.<sup>229</sup>

At the level of the trade unions and strike committees, differences of opinion morphed into splits in the existing miners’ organizations. On January 25, 45 delegates from NPGU branches in nine cities across the Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts adopted a charter which established an Independent Trade Union of Miners of the Donbas (NPGDb).<sup>230</sup> Although nominally a subsidiary of the main NPGU, the NPGDb functioned in practice as a separate institution. In February, an article in the Kyiv newspaper *Most* summed up this division and the lack of cooperation between miners’ trade unions and strike committees as follows:

“The Ukrainian labor movement began 1995 highly splintered into numerous trade unions, excessively competitive with each other. Only the strongest trade unions, those of the air traffic controllers and railway machinists, was able to avoid drinking from that cup. The Independent Trade Union of Miners (NPG), however, drank fully from the cup as its regional organizations, withdrawing one after the other from the NPG, recently created the Donbas NPG, so that at present there are simultaneously four miner organizations of comparable size: The Regional Union of Strike Committees of Donbas (RSSKD) and the state Trade Union of Workers of the

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<sup>228</sup> “Appeal of the Work Force of the Shakterskaya-Glubokaya Mine to the Citizens of Ukraine,” *Donbass*, January 4, 1995, FBIS.

<sup>229</sup> Semen Denysov and the Hroshi Donbasu Agency, “The Miners’ Syndrome,” *Post-Postup*, February 3–9, 1995, FBIS; Naum Bondar, “How to Save the Key Sector?,” *Vecherniy Donetsk*, February 7, 1995, FBIS; Lisovenko, “The Entire Industry Needs To Be Rescued.”

<sup>230</sup> V. Pozdnyshev, “Independent Trade Union of Miners Created in Donbass,” *Vecherniy Donetsk*, January 25, 1995, FBIS.

Coal Industry [PRUP], which as before amalgamates over half the workers in the branch, continue functioning, beside the two NPGs.”<sup>231</sup>

Apart from these major institutions, the schisms that *Most* pointed out also extended to the strike committees and smaller, localized trade unions. Although the leaders of these larger institutions—including Mikhail Krylov (RSSKD), Mykola Volynko (NGPDb), and Mykhailo Volynets (NGPU)—spoke of the possibility of cooperation and unification, all of them were quick to throw in caveats that such a proposition was contingent upon the “principles” involved.<sup>232</sup> But this cooperation failed to manifest itself.

Internal disagreements weakened the miners’ general position. This confused state of affairs prompted the Luhansk newspaper *Golos Donbassa* to remark that PRUP “holds a congress and then, an hour later, the [NPGU] begins a hunger strike. As a result, we can say that both actions produced no results. Perhaps, everything would be better if there was more unity and solidarity among those who prepare miners for the fight.”<sup>233</sup> With their aims divided, the trade unions and strike committees found themselves in a war on multiple fronts, where they fought with those who claimed to be on the same side. Even in the case of the “best” relationship between the two NPGs, their respective leaders nearly severed contacts. Yet, the worst consequence of this internal schism was the impact on support for the miners’ movement. As Svetlana Krasnyanskaya, chairwoman of the Kharkov Regional Association of Solidarity Trade, predicted:

“I am afraid that arguments about which trade union is the most effective one, the one with the most freedom, representing the greatest solidarity, which association is the most democratic and

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<sup>231</sup> G. Larin, “Trade Unions in Flux,” *Most*, February 13–19, 1995, FBIS.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>233</sup> Tetyana Tkacheva, “We are Following Different Paths,” *Golos Donbassa*, February 9, 1996, FBIS.

authoritative on the international arena, may evolve into a sectarianism that turns away the last of our supporters.”<sup>234</sup>

Although their infighting was aimed at shoring up support, the self-centered approach of the respective trade unions had the opposite effect, paradoxically creating a toxic environment unsuited for collective action.

Compounding this labor sectarianism, the Ukrainian miners, unlike the Polish Solidarity movement, never managed to coalesce into a unified political body that cemented their power and influence on the national stage. Many miners actively opposed this notion, such as Mykola Volynko, who in 1994 plainly stated:

“For some reason, everybody would like the workers’ movement to be transformed into a party. Then, everything will become quiet again. Any party, formed on the backbone of a workers’ movement, will be still-born. We are only five years old. When we are sufficiently strong, we will arrive at our own party, without any aliens.”<sup>235</sup>

But Volynko’s optimistic belief that miners would eventually form their own party failed to account for the fact that the miners’ power was not increasing. In fact, the goal of obtaining sufficient strength was fading away. The miners’ unwillingness and inability to form a united front hastened their atomization. By 1995 and 1996, there were as many proposed solutions to the economic crisis as there were trade unions and strike committees. Compounding the issue, the lack of a general consensus on anything apart from the repayment of wages could not be boiled down to a single paradigm. For some, the solution to this problem was to split once more in the false hope that their salvation could be found in a localized structure that more directly

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<sup>234</sup> Larin, “Trade Unions in Flux.”

<sup>235</sup> Birchakova, “For What Did We Fight?”

represented their decisions.<sup>236</sup> Far from coherently drawn battle lines, the landscape of the miners' movement in 1995 and 1996 resembled a free-for-all. For instance, the NPGU and PRUP may have disagreed on a great multitude of issues—indeed, Mykhailo Volynets derided PRUP as loyalists to the Ministry of Coal—but both professed an understanding of the need to close down uneconomic mines and push for market reforms. Any potential agreements along these lines, however, remained woefully out of reach.

Evidence of this fact may be drawn from the rhetoric of the leaders of NPGU and PRUP. On November 3, 1995, Volynets tore into the Ministry of Coal, arguing that the miners' crisis was “complicated by the fact that the people heading the Ministry of the Coal Industry, not taking up the course towards market reforms, were adherents of administrative-command methods.”<sup>237</sup> In Volynets' view, contrary to their stated reform path, “the ministry was striving to centralize virtually all the production management functions, reserving for itself the problems of selling the coal, distributing the profits of the profitable enterprises, depriving them of the possibility of working successfully under competitive conditions, cutting the administrative staff, etc.” Drawing this line of criticism into the internal conflict between the miners' unions, he continued by referring to a July 14 miners' congress between PRUP, NPGDb, RSSKD, and several other trade unions as a congress of “representatives of precisely the organizations loyal to the leaders of the Ministry of the Coal Industry, in the person of V. Poltavets.” He went on to condemn the charter that resulted from the miners' congress as a tool which supported “the political games which the minister [Poltavets] plays.” He believed that they were only organizing

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<sup>236</sup> Tkacheva, “We are Following Different Paths.”

<sup>237</sup> A. Parakhonya, “Reforms or the Outward Appearance of Them?” *Nezavisimost*, November 3, 1995, FBIS.

protests actions and threatening to call for the president's resignation in order to "put pressure on the Cabinet of Ministers and to 'drum up' funds for the sector."<sup>238</sup>

Swirling rumors at the time claimed that Poltavets was offering additional subsidies under the table to the ministry's supporters, and he had purportedly even purchased an apartment for Viktor Derzhak, the leader of PRUP, at the price of 15 billion *karbovantsy*. In an important precursor to the miners' future allegiances, the Kyiv paper *Nezavisimost* explained that they had been "forced to reconcile themselves to both a lack of independence and to the 'common pot.'"<sup>239</sup> For his part, Derzhak's rhetoric mirrored Volynets' in some instances, as Derzhak hailed the government's decision to grant the mines full economic independence and he criticized the decision of some miners to begin collecting signatures calling for Kuchma's resignation.<sup>240</sup> He professed his knowledge that "there have always been people who have attempted to exploit as powerful an 'engine' as the miners in their own interests," while emphasizing that "there has to be order in the country, and the guarantor of this order must be the president."<sup>241</sup> Moreover, on the issue of mine closures, Derzhak responded:

"I find this absolutely normal. I am the head of the trade union's Central Committee and presumably should be loudly voicing my opposition to this. But I am also an economist, and I understand that old mines are loss-making for the state. The IMF is requiring that the first thing we should do is ensure that there is correspondence between mines and costs. The Fund is allocating money for the civilized shutting down of mines, so why should we oppose this? Some

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<sup>238</sup> Parakhonya, "Reforms or the Outward Appearance of Them?"

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> E. Samoylova, "Coal Miners Get Economic Freedom," *Aktsent*, December 26, 1995, FBIS.

<sup>241</sup> Yaroslav Halata, "'Miners Will Not Become the 'Miner's' Pick' in the Struggle for Power,'" *Ukrayina Moloda*, August 11, 1995, FBIS.

mines have exhausted their reserves long ago. By operating them, we are merely wasting electric power and squandering money to buy timber, rails, etc.”<sup>242</sup>

This support for coal industry reform aligned with Volynets’ ideas. But Derzhak departed from Volynets insofar as he trumpeted his own achievements, proclaiming in February 1996 that “the main thing that I did was the consolidation of the trade-union movement, and the signing of the Charter of Unified Actions. We put an end to separateness and civil strife, which is so advantageous for the government, and have united into a true political force.”<sup>243</sup> Derzhak’s assessment ignored the changing labor dynamic in the Donbas. There were major dissenting figures in the miners’ movement, such as Volynets and Mikhail Krylov, co-chairman of the RSSKD—an organization, which at face value, had cooperated with PRUP and Derzhak at the aforementioned miners’ congress. When the Ministry of Coal announced its intention to close 12 coal mining enterprises, a measure that would cost 17,003 miners their jobs, Krylov angrily countered that “to speak of the closure of the mines in the nearest future is simply impossible!” He, and many like-minded miners, opposed Derzhak’s ideas on reform. Instead, they argued that the costs of closure would far outpace the costs of investment to restore profitability.<sup>244</sup>

This issue of mine closures, alongside the decision of whether to strike, would prove to be one of the most damaging flashpoints in the complex web of relations between the trade unions, the strike committees, and the government. Indeed, tensions continued to boil over into strikes and threats of collective action across 1995-1996. While the trade unions squabbled and quarreled over who would act as the standard bearer for the movement, the miners’ plight continued unabated. As early as April 6, 1995, 405 out of 789 miners on the third and fourth

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<sup>242</sup> Halata, “‘Miners Will Not Become the ‘Miner’s’ Pick’ in the Struggle for Power.”

<sup>243</sup> N. Ilina, “Viktor Derzhak: We Are Not the Enemies of Our People,” *Aktsent*, February 9, 1996, FBIS.

<sup>244</sup> Segey Lukin, “Has the Coal Sector of Ukraine Gone the Way of Britain?”, *Most*, February 20–27, 1995, FBIS.

shifts at Zhdanivska mine in Zhdanovka, Donetsk Oblast went on strike, demanding the dismissal of mine management and wage increases.<sup>245</sup> The following month, Nikolai Minchenko, chairman of the Central Committee of the Trade Union of Metallurgists and Miners of Ukraine (PMGU), criticized the failures of Kuchma's implementation of market reforms, remarking that "workers and trade unions in our region [Dnipropetrovsk] supported Leonid Danilovich with their votes, but he appears to have forgotten his promises." Reiterating a well-known line in the miners' movement, Minchenko stressed that the miners and metallurgists were "literally on their knees." In a more resolute tone, he stated that miners and metallurgists "have struggled and will continue to struggle to keep our jobs" and demanded "guaranteed wages, sensible management of and support for enterprises in the state sector, and maximum involvement of labor collectives in privatization." He refused to rule out a general strike if negotiations failed to produce results.<sup>246</sup> The next month, Viktor Derzhak followed suit, calling for a "radical resolution of the problems of the mining industry." More pointedly, he warned:

"Force respects only force. I am an advocate of a civilized kind of force, with a tough approach on demands and on resolutions. Any compromise would harm the interests of the industry and the state."<sup>247</sup>

In the short term, this intransigent position produced results, as the negotiations yielded a 17-point protocol on the coordination activities signed by Prime Minister Yevhen Marchuk.<sup>248</sup> The protocol promised to fulfill some of the miners' demands by June 15, including the partial settlement of overdue wage arrears from March and April.

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<sup>245</sup> "Donetsk Miners Strike, Demand Higher Wages," *UNLAR*, April 6, 1995, FBIS.

<sup>246</sup> Vasiliy Zakrevskiy, "The First Ominous Signs: Ukraine's Metallurgists Are Not Only Losing Their Jobs – They Are Also Losing Their Health and Hopes for the Future," *Trud*, May 26, 1995, FBIS.

<sup>247</sup> Ivan Dmytrenko, "How Representatives of Miner Staffs 'Attacked' Kiev," *Golos Donbassa*, June 2, 1995, FBIS.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*

Despite these successes, the miners were not satisfied. Only days later the deputy chairman of the Donetsk Oblast Executive Committee for Industrial Issues, Vitaliy Hayduk, and co-chairman of the Donetsk Strike Committee, Yuriy Makarov, both called for greater economic independence of the mines, albeit with a continuation of massive state subsidies. Notably, Makarov blamed an ineffective government, but mentioned that “Zvyahilsky, running the state as mine, reached temporary stability,” demonstrating a persistent loyalty to local figures despite the by then well-known accusations of widespread corruption and inefficiency under Zvyahilsky’s premiership.<sup>249</sup> Dissatisfaction over the government’s policies on price controls<sup>250</sup> led some trade unions to launch a campaign collecting signatures for Kuchma’s immediate resignation, a familiar strategy.<sup>251</sup> When the June 15 deadline on the fulfillment of the 17-point protocol finally passed, the crisis in the coal industry only worsened as the government failed to deliver on its promises. Tensions reemerged, if they had every truly subsided. Leonid Kolesnyk, chairman of the Trade Union of Engineers and Technicians of the Coal Industry (PITUP), summed up the government’s continued inability to remedy the crisis and a sharp shift in the attitudes of the miners:

“The present state policy concerning the coal industry cannot be called anything but genocide.

The government is clearly turning away from the miners’ troubles. The attempts of the leaders to strangle the coal industry have never been so apparent.”<sup>252</sup>

The use of the loaded term “genocide”—and the obvious connotations it carried in connection to the state-led *Holodomor* under Joseph Stalin—and a professed feeling of abandonment signaled

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<sup>249</sup> Olha Burda, “Special to INTELNEWS,” *Intelnews*, June 5, 1995, FBIS.

<sup>250</sup> See Кабінет міністрів України, *Постанова №733 від 21 жовтня 1994* [Resolution №733 of October 21, 1994], Kyiv: June 13, 1996, <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/733-94-%D0%BF/ed19960513#Text>.

<sup>251</sup> “Trade Unions Threaten the President,” *Holos Ukrainy*, June 21, 1995, FBIS.

<sup>252</sup> Olha Burda, “Special to IntelNews,” *IntelNews*, June 21, 1995, FBIS.



a growing level of recognition that the government both *could not* and *would not* fix the problems in the coal industry. State and labor were living in two different realities.

As strike leader turned parliamentary deputy Yuriy Boldyrev pointed out in an interview in July, the miners' demands, however justified, did not fit the financial realities of the Ukrainian state in 1995. According to him, in order to satisfy the miners' demands, the state would need to allocate 300 trillion *karbovantsy* in 1995 alone, or nearly forty percent of the state budget. Boldyrev believed that a strike was inevitable.<sup>253</sup> Indeed, in August, the Cabinet of Ministers and the National Bank of Ukraine—headed by future Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko—ordered a credit emission of 3.948 trillion *karbovantsy* to resolve government debts in the industry. This was an embarrassingly small fraction of the sum the miners sought. This announcement, together with the planned introduction of the new Ukrainian currency (*hrynia*) in October tanked the value of the *karbovanets* and set off rapid inflation.<sup>254</sup> Even if the government's debts would be covered on their own books, the precipitous fall in purchasing power of the miners' wages heralded a decline in the government's already fraying relationship with the miners.

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<sup>253</sup> Burda, "Special to IntelNews," June 21, 1995.

<sup>254</sup> "Three Thousand Coal Miners Continue Strike," *IntelNews*, August 13, 1995, FBIS.

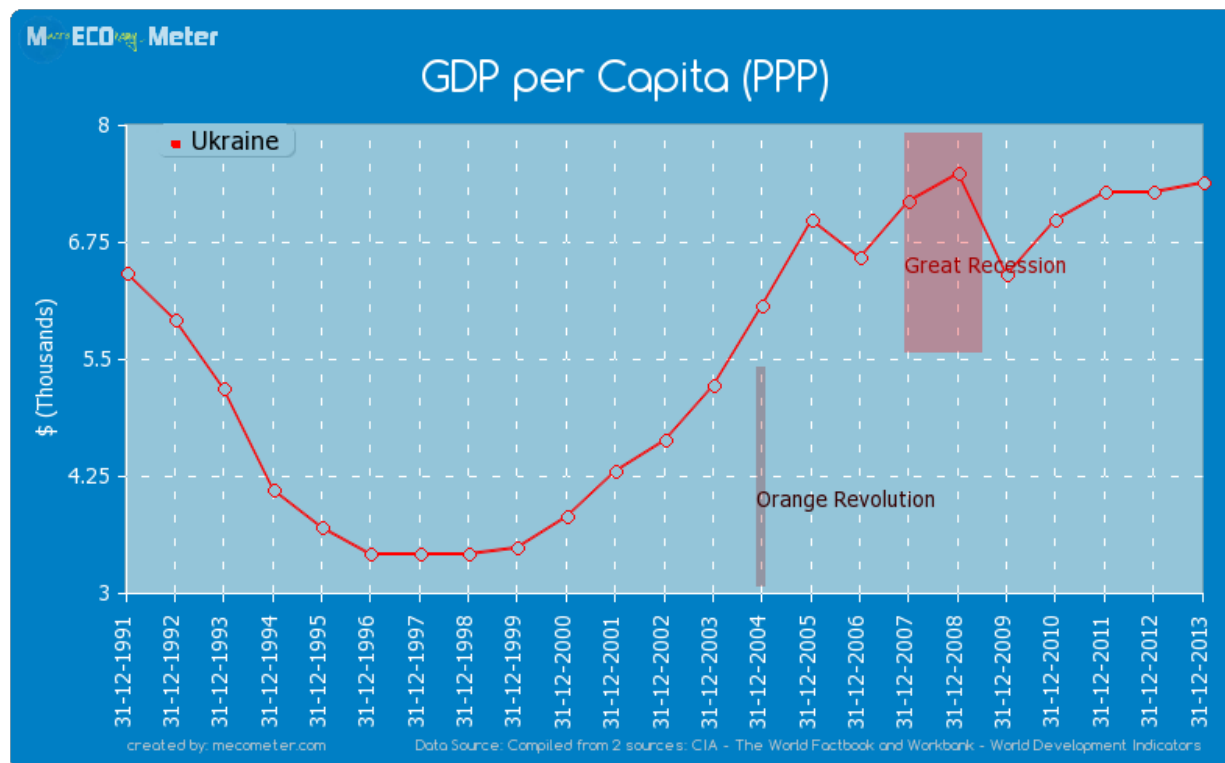


Figure 15. GDP per Capita (PPP) in Ukraine. Source: Macro Economy Meter

True to Boldyrev’s prediction, only a couple of days after his interview, miners at Zhovtneva mine in Donetsk went on strike, while other trade unions and strike committees across the Donbas threatened similar actions, including a march on Kyiv.<sup>255</sup> Although Ukrainian Minister of Coal Viktor Poltavets expressed measured optimism about the progress of reforms, the crisis deepened.<sup>256</sup> On July 7, 200 miners from three Luhansk mines—Bilorechenska, Leninka, and Lutuhinska—went on strike over unpaid wage arrears and sent a telegram with their demands and an expression of no-confidence to the president and prime minister. At the same time, Donetsk strike committees and trade unions convened to discuss the overdue wage payments.<sup>257</sup> Shortly thereafter, 3,000 miners from the Stakhanovugol’ association joined the

<sup>255</sup> Olha Burda, “Special to IntelNews,” *IntelNews*, June 24, 1995, FBIS.

<sup>256</sup> Anatoliy Yeremenko, “Viktor Poltavets: ‘We Desperately Need the Stabilization Fund,’” *Pravda Ukrainy*, July 4, 1995, FBIS.

<sup>257</sup> “Striking Miners Arrive in Luhansk, Demand Back Wages,” *IntelNews*, July 8, 1995, FBIS.

strike in Donetsk.<sup>258</sup> By August 11, representatives from strike committees and trade unions Donetsk, Luhansk, and Dnipropetrovsk—the major industrial centers of the Donbas—unanimously decided on announcing protest actions, though the details of these actions were not determined.<sup>259</sup> Following the credit emission, the widening rift became a chasm. Leonid Kalesnyk announced that “the government of Ukraine has again exhausted a credit of miners’ confidence.”<sup>260</sup> More miners from the Selidovugol’ association subsequently joined in strike actions after director general of the association, Ivan Morozov, stated that “money promised by the Cabinet had not come on the production amalgamation’s accounts by August 21.”<sup>261</sup> Even the more reserved NGPU called for an indefinite strike among its more than 50,000 members in October and November; in their view, a strike had sufficiently matured at the lower levels of the mining industry and had not been called on orders from “the generals.”<sup>262</sup> The NGPU stopped short, however, of supporting other trade unions in their calls for the president and prime minister’s resignations.<sup>263</sup>

As a consequence of the divisions between the trade unions and strike committees, this spiraling quagmire was disorganized and disjointed, unlike previous strikes in 1989-1994. Mikhail Krylov, co-chairman of the RSSKD, remarked in November that the leaders of the miners’ movement were losing control of the situation, and more had not been achieved due to the personal ambitions of these figures.<sup>264</sup> Indeed, only a paltry ten percent of the industry’s roughly 256 mines were actively participating in the strike by mid-November according to the

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<sup>258</sup> “Three Thousand Coal Miners Continue Strike,” *IntelNews*.

<sup>259</sup> Lyudmila Gordeyeva, “Miners Decide on ‘Action of Protest,’” *ITAR-TASS*, August 11, 1995, FBIS.

<sup>260</sup> Anatoliy Gordeyev, “Donbass Miners Leave for Talks With Government,” *ITAR-TASS*, August 14, 1995, FBIS.

<sup>261</sup> “Miners Strike Due To Delay in Pay,” *Interfax*, August 22, 1995, FBIS.

<sup>262</sup> S. Samoylyuk, “A Strike? It Is Necessary To Think,” *Donbass*, 11 October, 1995, FBIS.

<sup>263</sup> “Independent Miners Strike, Reject Political Demands,” *UNIAR*, November 1, 1995, FBIS; Parakhonya, “Reforms or the Outward Appearance of Them?”

<sup>264</sup> “Unions ‘Losing Control’ of Situation in Donetsk,” *Interfax*, November 13, 1995, FBIS.

NPGU, even as the government's debts remained at more than 20 trillion *karbovantsy*.<sup>265</sup> As this debt ballooned to 170 trillion *karbovantsy*—according to Viktor Derzhak—by February 1996, still, only 29 mines went out of strike, a significant gap from the 80 mines which the strike committees and trade unions had initially named as strike participants.<sup>266</sup> To make matters worse, amid power cuts and fuel shortages, representatives from thermoelectric power stations began openly criticizing the exorbitant prices and poor quality of Donbas coal which was inferior “on all counts” when compared to imported Polish coal.<sup>267</sup> Between a halted start to the strike “movement,” growing problems in the electricity industry, and overt political actions against the Kuchma administration, the stage was set for a government-led blitz on the most prominent malcontents amongst the colliers.

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<sup>265</sup> Natalia Petiakh, Oleksandr Shtolko, and Olha Burda, “Special to IntelNews,” *IntelNews*, November 15, 1995, FBIS.

<sup>266</sup> Ilina, “Viktor Derzhak: We Are Not the Enemies of Our People.”

<sup>267</sup> Bohdan Pasichnyk, “The Power Industry Warns: Prospects Are Gloomy, but Reversible,” *Za Vilnu Ukrainyu*, November 15, 1995, FBIS.

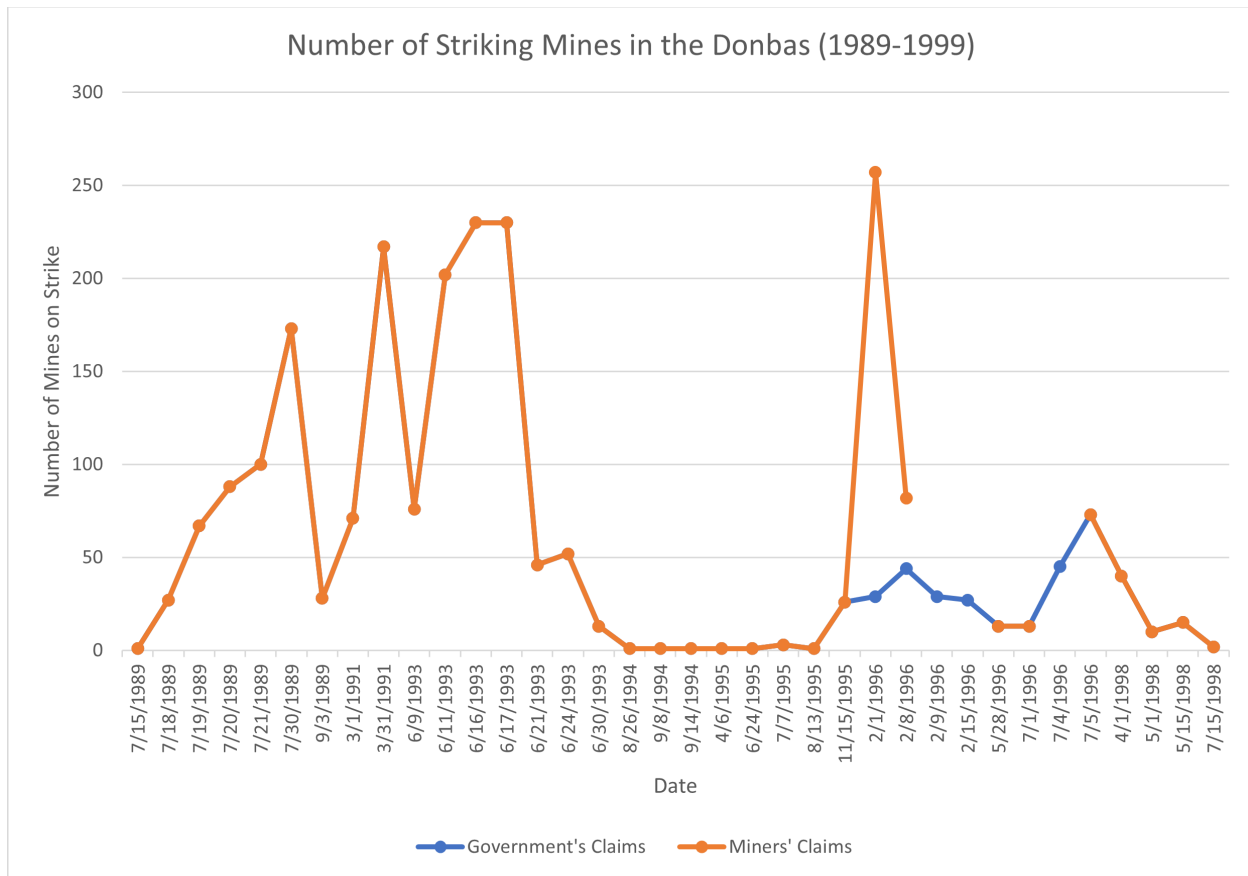


Figure 16. Number of striking mines in the Donbas (1989-1999). The data shown only reflects dates and mines which could be concretely identified as reportedly taking part in a strike. Source: original dataset, see appendix.

### The Government Hardens Its Resolve

Beset by the omnipresent threat of social upheaval in the mines, President Kuchma faced nascent threats to his power and legitimacy from would-be opportunists and growing voices of dissent. Rumors had already spread since 1995 that a schism had developed within the government. According to the Kyiv newspaper *Most*, by June 1995, the “elite” had “split into two parts: the supporters of the program of Minister of the Coal Industry Viktor Poltavets and the supporters of Yuliy Ioffe, chairman of the Commission on Questions of Structural Reorganization of the Coal Industry under the Office of the President of Ukraine.” The same article went on to detail that “the opposition’s method of playing havoc is already beginning to

revert to the plane of 1993, when in like manner at the miners' hands, the newly fledged Israeli Yukhym Zvyahilsky was seated on the prime minister's throne." Simultaneously, the increasingly militant central committee of PRUP—already accused of subservience to Poltavets—threatened “the initiation of an all-Ukraine referendum on the early retirement of the president of Ukraine and on the dissolution of the Supreme Council.”<sup>268</sup> The recently reformed Communist Party of Ukraine (CPU) also seized on the political strife, publishing an appeal to miners to once more support the communists, while the Luhansk Oblast Administration issued a statement criticizing the president's reform program.<sup>269</sup>

Alongside Poltavets and the CPU, another political actor emerged as a legitimate challenger to Kuchma: the governor of Donetsk Oblast, Volodymyr Shcherban. Shcherban governed outside the inner circle of red directors in Kyiv and put forth his own ideas for reform in the coal industry.<sup>270</sup> These ideas were initially endorsed by both Kuchma and the miners, and Shcherban quickly proved himself as an adept compromiser.<sup>271</sup> Donetsk Mayor Volodymyr Rybak commented that Shcherban “brought together the representatives of all the political parties and movements of Donetsk Oblast and urged them to work together with the local authorities.”<sup>272</sup> In the short-term Shcherban's presence was a boon to Kuchma. He provided a stabilizing presence and was even an outspoken critic of Poltavets, whom he blamed for blocking coal industry reforms in open letters to the minister of coal. But Shcherban was a long-term

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<sup>268</sup> Aleksandr Mischenko, “Volodymyr Hrynyov at the Donbass Battlement,” *Most*, June 5–11, 1995, FBIS.

<sup>269</sup> “Statement of the ‘Ukrainian Communists for Social Justice and People's Power’ Deputy Faction of the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet,” *Golos Ukrainy*, March 1, 1995, FBIS; H. M. Basakin, “If We Seriously Conduct Reform,” *Golos Donbassa*, February 9, 1996, FBIS.

<sup>270</sup> Yuriy Dotsenko, “Volodymyr Shcherban: The Giant—the Miners' Donbass—Will Straighten Its Cossack Shoulders,” *Golos Ukrainy*, April 14, 1995, FBIS; Oleksandr Savytsky, “Reviews, Commentaries, Outlooks,” *UNIAN*, August 29, 1994, FBIS.

<sup>271</sup> “In Voting for V.P. Shcherbanya You Are Voting for the Revival of the Donbass,” *Vechniy Donetsk*, July 8, 1994, FBIS; Mikhail Yermakov, “Miners Give OK to Reforms,” *Donbass*, September 23, 1994, FBIS.

<sup>272</sup> Mykola Lisovenko, “Following the Path of Social Accord,” *Uryadovyy Kuryer*, October 20, 1994, FBIS.

potential challenger.<sup>273</sup> Indeed, directly following his election as chairman of the Donetsk Oblast Council, the L'viv newspaper *Post-Postup* wrote that “observers noted a certain agitation at Kuchma’s victory in the position of Volodymyr Shcherban’s followers, as he was wary of expressing his sympathy to either of the Leonids. Today the governor’s team assumed the expected position toward Kuchma.” The same article noted that Shcherban took steps to purge the ranks of the administrative apparatus, introducing new people who would not display “special piety towards the *nomenklatura* dynasties on the oblast level.” These efforts were viewed as “preventative measures on the part of Volodymyr Shcherban against the potential resistance of [red] directors.” Describing his ambition, the article wrote that “the calculations of the Shcherban team” were based on the idea that whoever “will be capable of introducing the most effective, primarily economic, policy will easily win the sympathy of all Ukraine, and of course, will sit on the Kyiv throne.”<sup>274</sup> Another report from the Ukrainian news outlet *UNIAN* offered a similar assessment, reporting that “Shcherban undoubtedly deserves attention. People in his retinue are sure that once economic prosperity is achieved in Donetsk Oblast, he will become President of Ukraine.”<sup>275</sup> For Kuchma, a first-term president already under fire from multiple political opponents, Shcherban became an unwelcome rival, rather than a useful subordinate. The fact that Shcherban might have leveraged the miners’ anger against Kuchma—much as Kuchma had done with Kravchuk—was an unacceptable possibility.

Kuchma’s administration answered every challenge on every front. Poltavets was the first victim of Kuchma’s constricting grip on power in Kyiv. In December, Kuchma sacked Poltavets from his post and replaced him with Sergei Polyakov, a former mine electrician and mine

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<sup>273</sup> Volodymyr Shcherban, “If No Reforms Are Made From Above—They Will Start From Below!” *Vecherniy Donetsk*, October 20, 1995, FBIS.

<sup>274</sup> Oleksandr Savitsky, “The Chairman of the Donetsk Oblast Council Smells the Scent of the Mariyinskyy Palace in the Air,” *Post-Postup*, July 21–27, 1994, FBIS.

<sup>275</sup> Savitsky, “Reviews, Commentaries, Outlooks.”

director turned politician. Polyakov was a protégé of the Dnipropetrovsk clan, a group of oligarchs and their associates which dominated the Ukrainian government under Kuchma. Polyakov immediately declared his support for closing uneconomic mines and pushed for Kuchma's planned reforms in the coal industry.<sup>276</sup> More importantly, he stressed his opposition to strikes, professing in 1996 that "I have repeatedly expressed my point of view in meetings with the labor collectives during the strike and I can repeat it again: my attitude towards strikes is extremely negative attitude towards strikes! Because not a single strike has brought any benefits, other than the subsequent deterioration of business at coal enterprises. Moreover, I have asserted and continue to assert that there was no real economic ground for the emergence of this strike."<sup>277</sup> Although he had once worked as miner, Polyakov now served the interests of the authoritarian Kuchma.

With one critical piece off the opposition's chess board, Kuchma could turn his attention to reform, compromises for willing miners, and a crackdown for unwilling miners. Aiding his efforts, Kuchma operated in a political atmosphere where the public was swiftly losing patience with the miners. For instance, in a 1995 article criticizing the state budget, the L'viv newspaper *Post-Postup* wrote "a total of 17,000,000 million *karbovantsy* went to the coal miners, because without the 15.3 percent of the voters who live in the two oblasts of the Donbas, the government is in trouble." The same article declared that "what we are building is an authoritarian police state with a socialist economy, whose name is the Ukrainian Soviet Independent Empire."<sup>278</sup> Inflammatory rhetoric and sharp anti-government admissions notwithstanding, this article

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<sup>276</sup> Lyudmyla Hordeyeva, "I Count on Support of Miners," *Kiyevskiye Vedomosti*, December 6, 1995, FBIS.

<sup>277</sup> Сергей Кораблев, "Сергей Поляков: ВЧЕРА, СЕГОДНЯ, ЗАВТРА," [Sergey Polyakov: YESTERDAY, TODAY, TOMORROW], *Зеркало Недели*, August 9–16, 1996, [https://zn.ua/politics\\_archive/sergey\\_polyakov\\_vchera\\_segodnya\\_zavtra.html](https://zn.ua/politics_archive/sergey_polyakov_vchera_segodnya_zavtra.html).

<sup>278</sup> Maryana Chorna, "Don't Spit Into the Wind—It'll Turn Into a Budget. The Supreme Soviet Has Approved the Police Empire's Budget," *Post-Postup*, April 14–20, 1995, FBIS.



reflected a growing sense of frustration with the favoritism that many Ukrainians believed the government was displaying towards the miners. Amidst fuel and electricity shortages in the winter, sympathies for the miners' struggle waned.<sup>279</sup> Moreover, only a small, militant contingent of the mining industry was haphazardly organizing a strike and pushing for Kuchma's resignation. As a World Bank report from 1998 noted:

“A looming financial crisis was a necessary but insufficient condition for starting reform in 1996. Traditionally, coal miners were the best-organized group of workers and enjoyed widespread political support. The launch of the reform was made possible by the split of the former ‘official’ union into several competing groups advocating different solutions to the crisis and accepting the need to close the costliest mines.”<sup>280</sup>

Patience ran low, tensions ran high, and the miners were vulnerable to a divide and conquer campaign. Already, employment in the coal sector had declined about 26 percent from 925,000 workers in 1994, or roughly 4.3 percent of Ukraine's labor force, to only 685,000 workers (of whom 410,000 worked directly in extraction).<sup>281</sup> The movement was on its heels, and miners were fleeing from the industry en masse. Kuchma seized this moment of opportunity.

At the start of 1996, multiple reform paths were already underway. The World Bank had offered extensive guidance for dealing with the roughly 275 Ukrainian mines. The main points of their restructuring program focused on the following: 1) liberalization of coal markets; 2) corporatizing economically viable mines and coal enterprises; 3) rapidly closing uneconomic

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<sup>279</sup> This was especially true amongst metallurgists. See, Валентин Пустовойст, “Забастовочный удар,” [A picketing strike], *Зеркало Недели*, February 2–9, 1996, [https://zn.ua/internal/zabastovochnyy\\_udar.html](https://zn.ua/internal/zabastovochnyy_udar.html).

<sup>280</sup> Laszlo Lovei, *Coal Industry Restructuring in Ukraine: The politics of coal mining and budget crises*, World Bank, Public Policy for the Private Sector, Note Number 170 (December 1998): 6, <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/201271468781770714/coal-industry-restructuring-in-ukraine-the-politics-of-coal-mining-and-budget-crises>.

<sup>281</sup> Michael Haney and Maria Shkaratan, *Mine Closure and its Impact on the Community: Five Years After Mine Closure in Romania, Russia, and Ukraine*, World Bank, Policy Research Working Paper 3083 (June 2003): 4, <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/500791468776712950/pdf/multi0page.pdf>.

mines; 4) mitigating the social costs of restructuring through employment transfers and job creation programs; 5) transferring the social assets and responsibilities of the coal industry to other organizations; 6) leaving the financing of investments to the mining companies; and 7) focusing budgetary support on the cost of mine closures, including social costs.<sup>282</sup> On the first five points, Kuchma made important strides with a newly introduced reform program in February 1996.<sup>283</sup> The Ukrainian government moved towards corporatizing the coal industry—even if, in practice, the state remained a major shareholder in many enterprises, providing justification for continued subsidies.<sup>284</sup> Additionally, the government planned on closing roughly 20 mines per year as part of the program in order to mitigate the economic impact of roughly 80-90 uneconomic mines.<sup>285</sup> Beyond these mines, however, the government did not immediately expand the program for mine closures, in part due to what observers described as a fear of a social explosion.<sup>286</sup> Kuchma also slashed considerable subsidies to the mining industry—subsidies as a percentage of overall GDP fell from about 4 percent in 1993 to less than 1 percent in mid-1995—and resisted “considerable political pressure to reverse the trend.”<sup>287</sup> On the final point, however, the government demurred, adopting an approach that would pay the miners, even if it meant taking out excess funds from the state budget.

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<sup>282</sup> See World Bank. *Ukraine Coal Industry Restructuring Sector Report*. Infrastructure Division, Country Department IV, Europe and Central Asia Region, Report No. 15056-UA, March 4, 1996, <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/179841468778209054/pdf/multi0page.pdf>.

<sup>283</sup> Serhiy Lavrenyuk, “At Last, Miners Will Also Benefit From Restructuring,” *Holos Ukrayiny*, February 13, 1996, FBIS.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid.; World Bank. *The Coal Sector and Mining Communities of Ukraine: Advancing Restructuring to the Benefit of All*. The World Bank: International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (September 2003): 4, <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/397471468760527898/pdf/272430English0UA0Coal0sector01public1.pdf>; “Угольный указ Президента Украины,” [Coal decree of the President of Ukraine], *Зеркало Недели*, February 9–16, 1996, [https://zn.ua/internal/ugolnyy\\_ukaz\\_prezidenta\\_ukrainy.html](https://zn.ua/internal/ugolnyy_ukaz_prezidenta_ukrainy.html).

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.; Haney and Shkaratan, *Mine Closure and its Impact on the Community*, 9–10.

<sup>286</sup> Maryana Chorna, “Reform or No Reform, It Is All the Same In the End,” *Post-Postup*, February 10–15, 1995, FBIS.

<sup>287</sup> World Bank. *Ukraine Coal Industry Restructuring Sector Report*, 26.

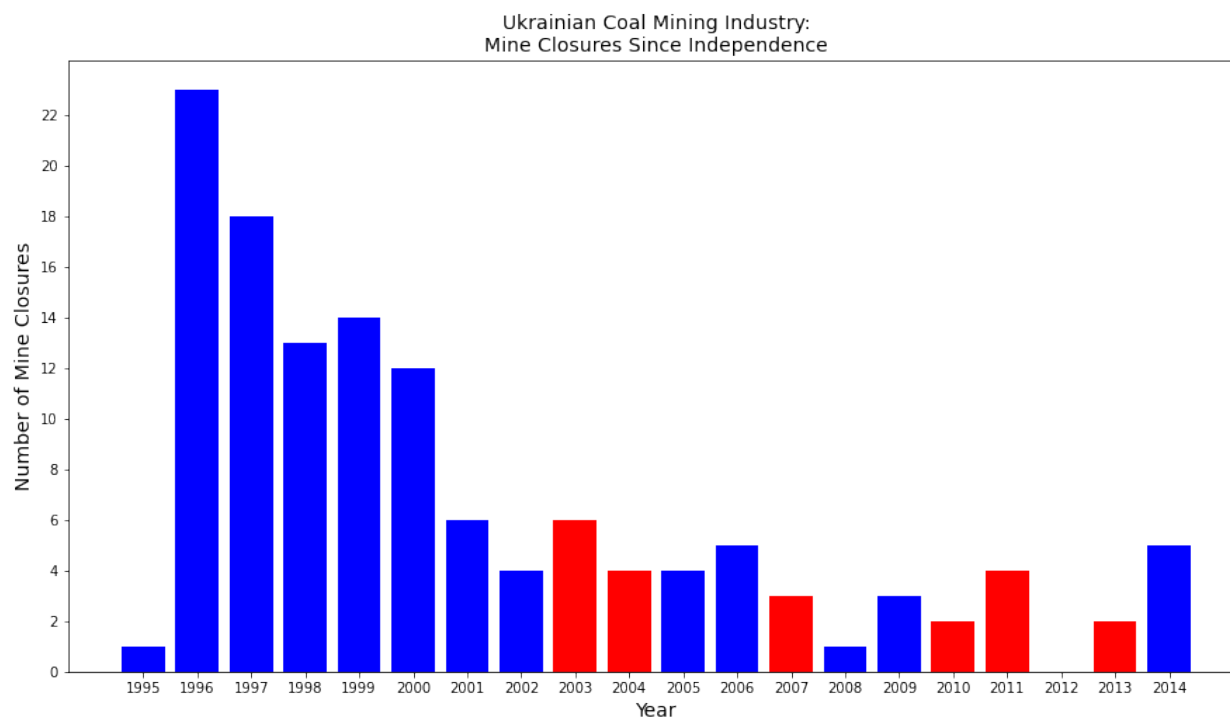


Figure 17. Mine closures in Ukraine since independence. Years in red indicate periods when Viktor Yanukovich spent the majority of the year in power (either as prime minister or president). Source: original dataset, see appendix.

Although the movement as a whole was reeling, the most militant miners still managed to muster a defiant response, especially since government officials continually refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of their claims. On February 1, 1996, miners in Donetsk declared an indefinite, region-wide strike, making the claim that 142 of 278 coal enterprises in Ukraine had ceased coal production and another 115 had canceled coal deliveries—in total roughly 875,000 people.<sup>288</sup> This strike announcement came as a response to an address by Prime Minister Yevhen Marchuk, in which he denied that the government was responsible for rampant inefficiencies and proclaimed that the government’s debt to the miners was “virtually nonexistent.”<sup>289</sup> In a separate interview on the same day, in response to a demand for state subsidies by Mikhail Krylov, head of the RSSKD, Marchuk replied, “It is impossible to meet this demand, and it will never be met

<sup>288</sup> Anatoliy Gordeyev, “Ukraine: Miners Adopt Statement Protesting Government’s Action,” *ITAR-ITASS*, February 1, 1996, FBIS; “Ukraine: Miners Begin ‘Indefinite’ Strike,” *Interfax*, February 1, 1996, FBIS.

<sup>289</sup> “Ukraine: Marchuk Gives Address on Mining Crisis,” *UT-1 Television Network*, February 1, 1996, FBIS.

in the form suggested by Mr. Krylov... They should mandatorily be repaid, too. The state does not have empty money to throw it into a black hole with no hope for reclaiming it.” Invoking the name of Zvyahilsky—by this point the perennial boogeyman of political opportunism in the coal industry—Marchuk insisted that “such large-scale phenomena as general strikes are undoubtedly orchestrated. They are not spontaneous... I cannot say whether the aforementioned people [in reference to Volodymyr Shcherban] stand behind the strike. Undoubtedly, the strike was orchestrated namely by those people who add a political coloring to it.”<sup>290</sup> Once more, the miners argued in a published statement that “the president and the Government of Ukraine government are pursuing a policy of genocide in relation to the working people of Ukraine.”<sup>291</sup> They directed their fury at the highest offices in government, equating their suffering to crimes against humanity.

Kuchma and Marchuk hardly flinched. Recognizing the importance of keeping the miners paid, Kuchma ordered the Cabinet of Ministers to take strict control of the payments to colliers, but the government stopped short of recognizing a debt or financial responsibility.<sup>292</sup> Presidential Chief of Staff Dmytro Tabachnyk stated:

“The country doesn’t owe miners a penny. Miners are not paid by their coal consumers. The state is determined to help. Great work is being done by the government. The government’s position remains unchanged: an hour of strike won’t be paid for.”<sup>293</sup>

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<sup>290</sup> Юлия Мостовая, “Дотации отраслей дискредитировали себя окончательно и бесповоротно,” [Subsidies to industries have discredited themselves completely and irrevocably], *Зеркало Недели*, February 2–9, 1996, [https://zn.ua/internal/evgeniy\\_marchuk\\_dotatsii\\_otrasley\\_diskreditirovali\\_sebya\\_okonchatelno\\_i\\_bespovorotno.htm](https://zn.ua/internal/evgeniy_marchuk_dotatsii_otrasley_diskreditirovali_sebya_okonchatelno_i_bespovorotno.htm) 1.

<sup>291</sup> “Ukraine: Donetsk Miners Accuse Leadership of ‘Genocide,’” *UNIAR*, February 2, 1996, FBIS.

<sup>292</sup> “Ukraine: Kuchma Tells Cabinet To Control Payments to Miners,” *Interfax*, February 5, 1996, FBIS.

<sup>293</sup> Halia Pavliva and Oleksandr Pukhov, “Special to IntelNews,” *IntelNews*, February 8, 1996, FBIS.

The government's hardened resolve seemed to pay dividends. The strike quickly dissipated. By February 8, only a week after the strike declaration, the strike committee reported that 82 coal mines were still shut down. The Ministry of Coal retorted that only 44 coal mines were active participants in the strike, which Marchuk labeled as an increasingly political action.<sup>294</sup> A day later, the government reported that the number of striking coal mines had declined to 29.<sup>295</sup> This number further decreased until only 12 mines were closed, while another 15 were not shipping coal on February 15. According to Viktor Shchipachev, an official with the Ministry of Coal, "many mines kept on working while supplying false data to the press to avoid the pressure from trade unions."<sup>296</sup> Marchuk supported this claim, further accusing the strikers of "forcing" other mines to join them.<sup>297</sup> The Kyiv newspaper *Holos Ukrayiny* similarly reported that "in all likelihood, the strikers have exaggerated their figures somewhat. This is indicated by the fact that, according to the Ministry of Coal, as early as on Tuesday [13 February], 217,000 metric tons of coal were extracted, and this is just 10 tons less than planned." In short, mines had not answered the call to strike, and those that did answer did not strike for long. The same article wrote that Yevhen Marchuk's refusal to negotiate with the miners until the strike ended "played a major role in having the mines gradually go back to work."<sup>298</sup> Rather than concessions, Kuchma issued a presidential edict "On the Restructuring of the Coal Industry," which stipulated that the government would proceed with the corporatization of economic mines, closure of

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<sup>294</sup> "Ukraine: Marchuk Says Coal Strike Becoming Political Action," *Interfax*, February 8, 1996, FBIS; For an alternative figure see "Ukraine: 72 Coal Mines Continue Strike 5 February," *UNIAN*, February 5, 1996, FBIS and "Ukraine: Miners Continue to Strike; Draw Up Statement," *Interfax*, February 5, 1996, FBIS.

<sup>295</sup> Ilina, "Viktor Derzhak: We Are Not the Enemies of Our People."

<sup>296</sup> Oleh Bohatov, "Ukraine: Coal Miners Strike Consequences Reviewed," *IntelNews*, February 19, 1996, FBIS.

<sup>297</sup> "Евгений Марчук: Забастовка украинских шахтёров становится политической акцией," [Yevgeniy Marchuk: The strike of Ukrainian miners becomes a political action], *Зеркало Недели*, February 9–16, 1996, [https://zn.ua/internal/evgeniy\\_marchuk\\_zabastovka\\_ukrainskih\\_shahterov\\_stanovitsya\\_politicheskoy\\_aktseyv.html](https://zn.ua/internal/evgeniy_marchuk_zabastovka_ukrainskih_shahterov_stanovitsya_politicheskoy_aktseyv.html).

<sup>298</sup> Serhiy Lavrenyuk, "The Strike Has Driven the Reform Deep Into the Ground. The Miners Demanded a Lot of Money, but Got the Presidential Edict," *Holos Ukrayiny*, February 17, 1996, FBIS.

uneconomic mines while providing social protections, and privatization for some enterprises.<sup>299</sup> Despite the government's opposition to compromise, the miners reportedly started receiving debt payments and back pay, a demonstration of the fact that the government knew where it needed to act in order to avoid a popular uprising.<sup>300</sup>

However, the more militant miners, still recalcitrant, declared that the strike would continue, and some continued to insist they were not receiving any funds.<sup>301</sup> The deputy chairman of PRUP, Viktor Tumanov, offered the salient prediction that “everyone will calm down, they will stop paying salaries again, and after 2-3 months the situation will be worse than it is now.”<sup>302</sup> Mikhail Krylov defiantly announced that “the next stage of the miners’ movement will be developed in the Romanian scenario,” a reference to the Mineriads in Romania, where Jiu Valley miners had stormed Bucharest while demanding better wages and working conditions.<sup>303</sup> The Romanian miners succeeded in forcing Prime Minister Petre Roman to step down. Kuchma would not meet the same fate.

### **Concessions Set Up a Crackdown**

In May, 31 mines once again went on strike over unpaid wage arrears, prompting President Kuchma to change his schedule and personally visit with the strike leaders.<sup>304</sup> The next

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<sup>299</sup> Президент України, “Указ Президента України № 116-96 Про структуру перебудову вугільної промисловості,” [Decree of the President of Ukraine № 116-96 On the structure of the reconstruction of the coal industry], February 7, 1996, [http://search.ligazakon.ua/1\\_doc2.nsf/link1/U116\\_96.html](http://search.ligazakon.ua/1_doc2.nsf/link1/U116_96.html).

<sup>300</sup> Viktor Tachinskiy, “The Strike. Pending Negotiations,” *Donbass*, February 10, 1996, FBIS; “Kuchma Asks Marchuk To Settle Miners’ Wage Arrears,” *UNIAR*, January 31, 1996, FBIS.

<sup>301</sup> Сергей Кораблев, “Забастовка шахтеров: старт дан. Когда будет финиш – никто не знает,” [Miners' strike: started. No one knows when it will finish], *Зеркало Недели*, February 9–16, 1996, [https://zn.ua/internal/zabastovka\\_shahterov\\_start\\_dan\\_kogda\\_budet\\_finish\\_nikto\\_ne\\_znaet.html](https://zn.ua/internal/zabastovka_shahterov_start_dan_kogda_budet_finish_nikto_ne_znaet.html).

<sup>302</sup> Сергей Кораблев, “Шахтёры – Правительство: боевая ничья?” [Miners vs. Government: Fighting Draw?], *Зеркало Недели*, February 16–23, 1996, [https://zn.ua/internal/shahtery\\_pravitelstvo\\_boevaya\\_nichya.html](https://zn.ua/internal/shahtery_pravitelstvo_boevaya_nichya.html).

<sup>303</sup> Bohatov, “Ukraine: Coal Miners Strike Consequences Reviewed.”

<sup>304</sup> “Ukraine: Kuchma’s Meeting With Donetsk Miners Ends With ‘No Result,’” *Interfax*, May 22, 1996, FBIS; Anatoliy Gordeyev, “Ukraine: Kuchma Notes Enjoying Talks With Chernomyrdin,” *ITAR-ITASS*, May 22, 1996, FBIS.

day, May 23, Kuchma issued an order for the government to undertake measures to repay the miners' debts.<sup>305</sup> Several days later, in a surprising turn, Kuchma also offered up Marchuk as a concession, dismissing the outspoken prime minister in favor of Pavlo Lazarenko. A savvy political move, Marchuk's dismissal caused the miners to call off their proposed march on Kyiv.<sup>306</sup> By May 28, only 13 mines in the Donbas remained on strike.<sup>307</sup> This compromise came at a cost. Although Kuchma had eased tensions, he and Prime Minister Lazarenko used funds from the state budget, loans from the World Bank which had been earmarked for industry modernization, and transfers from commercial banks under the direction of the Ukrainian National Bank in order to pay the miners wage arrears.<sup>308</sup> The total bail out amounted to 35 trillion *korbovantsy* (\$189 million USD).<sup>309</sup> In the short-term, these funds went a long way towards resolving social tensions in the Donbas, but Kuchma and the government had essentially prolonged the reform issue. In particular, by using funds meant for the modernization of the industry, the government perpetuated the dilapidation of the coal industry. As an article on coal industry reforms signed by Ukrainian academicians, economists, mining engineers, and people's deputies had warned in late December 1995, "putting off the 'treatment' 'for later' will aggravate

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<sup>305</sup> "Ukraine: 31 Mines on Strike; Kuchma Orders Payment of Wage Arrears," *UT-1 Television Network*, May 23, 1996, FBIS.

<sup>306</sup> "Ukraine: Miners Call Off March to Kiev After Premier's Dismissal," *UNIAN*, May 28, 1996, FBIS; Kuchma subsequently became a critic of Marchuk's time in office. See "Евгений Марчук. Жизнеописание кандидата в украинские Де Голли. Часть третья," [Evgeny Marchuk. Biography of the candidate on the role of Ukrainian de Gaulle. Part three], *Четверта Влада*, September 15, 2003, <http://4vlada.net/vlast/evgenii-marchuk-zhizneopisanie-kandidata-v-ukrainskie-de-golli-chast-tretya>.

<sup>307</sup> "Ukraine: Mines Committee Discuss Coal Industry Reform," *Ukrinform*, May 29, 1996, FBIS.

<sup>308</sup> "Ukraine: Government Budget Funds To Pay Miners' Wage," *UT-1 Television Network*, May 30, 1996, FBIS; "Ukraine: Commercial Banks Engaged To Pay Miners' Wages," *Infobank*, May 31, 1996, FBIS; Volodymyr Ilchenko, "The Presidential Commission Is Being Implemented," *Uryadovyy Kuryer*, June 1, 1996, FBIS.

<sup>309</sup> Natalya Petyakh, "Ukraine: PM Sets 'Bail Out' For Coal Mining; 'First' Major Problem," *IntelNews*, May 31, 1996, FBIS.

the illness even more and increase the cost of the ‘treatment.’”<sup>310</sup> Kuchma had implemented a medium-term solution to a long-term, deeply ingrained problem.

Despite this apparent compromise, wildcat strikes continued through June and July.<sup>311</sup> Under the direction of the NPGU, 13 mines from Krasnoarmeyskugol’ and Pervomayskugol’ in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblast stood idle while demanding the immediate repayment of miners’ debts at the start of July. According to the government, a total of 45 mines joined the strike by July 4 (32 in Donetsk Oblast, 26 in Luhansk Oblast).<sup>312</sup> Once more, strikers’ estimates exceeded government figures, and the NGPU claimed that 73 mines (42 in Donetsk Oblast, 25 in Luhansk Oblast) were on strike by the fourth shift on July 5. In Donetsk and Luhansk, miners began blocking roads and threatened to block railways. At this time, Mykhailo Volynets, leader of the NGPU, warned that some of the organizations that participated in the strike were fraught with disobedience and there was a real danger that the strike would become politicized.<sup>313</sup>

Ostensibly to help ease social tensions, Donetsk Oblast Governor Volodymyr Shcherban met with strike committees and coal mine managers before departing for Kyiv to resolve the wage debt issues. The miners proclaimed their intent to refrain from blocking roads and railways until Shcherban’s return, but in an indication of the disunited spirit amongst the demonstrators,

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<sup>310</sup> Vladimir Byzov, Nikolai Chumachenko, Gennadiy Pivnyak, Aleksandr Amosha, Aleksey Reshetnyak, Nikolai Surgay, Stanislav Yanko, Yevgeniy Zakharov, Valeriy Kolomoitsev, and Anatoliy Tatarinov, “Donbass: We Will Maintain Heat and Light: Coal Will Save Ukraine, If We Save Coal,” *Pravda Ukrainy*, December 15, 1995, FBIS; Леонид Капелюшний, “Ты сытый, а я – голодный,” [You are well fed and I am hungry], *Известия*, July 16, 1996, [https://sites.ualberta.ca/~khineiko/izvestia\\_93\\_99/1126633.htm](https://sites.ualberta.ca/~khineiko/izvestia_93_99/1126633.htm).

<sup>311</sup> “Ukraine: Wildcat Strikes by Miners in Lugansk Oblast,” *IntelNews*, June 9, 1996, FBIS; Юрий Уздемир, “Забастовка без начала и конца,” [Strike without beginning or end], *Зеркало Недели*, July 5–12, 1996, [https://zn.ua/internal/zabastovka\\_bez\\_nachala\\_i\\_kontsa.html](https://zn.ua/internal/zabastovka_bez_nachala_i_kontsa.html).

<sup>312</sup> “Ukraine: Donbass Mines Strike Over Nonreceipt of Back Pay,” *Interfax*, July 3, 1996, FBIS; “Ukraine: 60 Mines Being Struck Over Wage Arrears,” *Infobank*, July, 1996, FBIS.

<sup>313</sup> “Ukraine: Union Leader Warns Miners Strike May Get Out of Control,” *UNIAR*, July 5, 1996, FBIS.



the blockades continued.<sup>314</sup> In particular, Mikhail Krylov stood out for his unrelenting stance, criticizing any negotiations as fruitless.<sup>315</sup>

As these events unfolded, Kuchma ordered Lazarenko to travel to Donetsk while simultaneously funneling trillions of *karbovantsy* to the coal associations.<sup>316</sup> Meanwhile, the coal associations attempted to alleviate miners' blockades with guarantees of repayment. The miners who imposed the blockade refused to accept these terms.<sup>317</sup> Instead, the miners' actions only became more radical. A contingent of colliers from Menzhinsky mine occupied the city executive committee building, forcing local officials to vacate.<sup>318</sup> Refusing to bow under pressure, the government was similarly obstinate. On July 12, the Cabinet of Ministers issued a statement claiming that the debt had already been resolved after Lazarenko committed 10 trillion *karbovantsy* (\$55 million) to the miners' wages—still far less than the 110 trillion *karbovantsy* (\$550 million) that Mykhailo Volynets claimed was owed.<sup>319</sup> The miners and government had reached an impasse.

Everything radically changed course on July 16, 1996. While en route to Kyiv's Borispol airport for a flight to Donetsk, a bomb exploded near Prime Minister Lazarenko's car at 7:15 am not far from Moskovskiy Bridge. He had been on his way to negotiations with the striking

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<sup>314</sup> "Ukraine: Coal Miners Strike Continues; Wage Negotiations Begin," *Interfax*, July 9, 1996, FBIS.

<sup>315</sup> "Ukraine: Miners Continue Blockade of Roads in Donetsk," *UNIAN*, July 10, 1996, FBIS.

<sup>316</sup> "Ukraine: Kuchma Appeals for International Aid To Pay Miners' Wages," *IntelNews*, July 10, 1996, FBIS.

<sup>317</sup> "Ukraine: Miners Block Railway Lines; Possible Settlement," *UNIAN*, July 12, 1996, FBIS; "Ukraine: Donetsk Miners Set To Continue Blocking Railroad," *UNIAN*, July 13, 1996, FBIS; "Ukraine: More Than 60 Mines Now on Strike," *UNIAN*, July 15, 1996, FBIS.

<sup>318</sup> Сергей Кораблев, "Шахтеры Украины: дорогу взяли, вокзал взяли! На очереди – банки, телефон, телеграф?" [Miners of Ukraine: the road was taken, the train station was taken! Banks, telephone, telegraph next in line?], *Зеркало Недели*, July 12–19, 1996, [https://zn.ua/internal/shahtery\\_ukrainy\\_dorogu\\_vzyali\\_vokzal\\_vzyali\\_na\\_ocheredi\\_banki\\_telefon\\_telegraf.html](https://zn.ua/internal/shahtery_ukrainy_dorogu_vzyali_vokzal_vzyali_na_ocheredi_banki_telefon_telegraf.html).

<sup>319</sup> "Ukraine: Government Issues Statement on Miners' Strikes," *Radio Ukraine World Service*, July 12, 1996; "Ukraine: Premier Promises \$55 Million for Miners' Back Wages," *IntelNews*, July 12, 1996, FBIS.

miners.<sup>320</sup> Lazarenko subsequently canceled many of his early engagements, namely visits to mines, after landing in Donetsk.<sup>321</sup> On the same day as the assassination attempt, the government and representatives from the miners' unions, including Viktor Derzhak (PRUP) and Mykola Volynko (NGPDb) signed a debt payment agreement, paving the way towards an end to the strike.<sup>322</sup> The RSSKD and Mikhail Krylov, meanwhile, maintained that no one had authorized these representatives to sign any agreement.<sup>323</sup> Kuchma's concessions exploited the existing divisions between the miners' organizations. As a result, the battle lines were drawn between the miners who had compromised, and those who had not.

Retribution was swift. In a public statement on July 17, Lazarenko declared that "some are benefitting from uncertainty, instability, and the government's systematic efforts to justify their moves," while promising to name the people who stood behind the strikers.<sup>324</sup> On the same day, having received the first installments of their payments, many of the miners lifted the blockade. Lazarenko further threatened to withhold additional funds if strikes and blockades continued.<sup>325</sup> Krylov continued to deny that the miners had been persuaded to leave, but the evaporating ranks of strikers proved otherwise.<sup>326</sup> With the bulk of the miners removed from the equation, the government launched criminal proceedings against the leaders of the blockade. Mykhailo Volynets warned that "repressions against miners will be equal to that of an explosion, and only aggravate socio-political tensions in the coal regions."<sup>327</sup> No explosion came. With the

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<sup>320</sup> "Ukraine: Bomb Explodes on Prime Minister's Route in Kiev," *UNIAN*, July 16, 1996.

<sup>321</sup> "Ukraine: Lazarenko Cancels Early Engagements During Donetsk Visit," *UNIAN*, July 17, 1996, FBIS.

<sup>322</sup> "Ukraine: Government, Miners Union Sign Debt Payment Agreement," *Interfax*, July 16, 1996, FBIS.

<sup>323</sup> "Ukraine: Miners Reject Leaders' Agreement With Government," *Interfax*, July 16, 1996, FBIS.

<sup>324</sup> "Ukraine: Lazarenko Ready To Name People Behind Miners' Strikes," *Interfax*, July 17, 1996, FBIS.

<sup>325</sup> "Ukraine: Striking Miners Lift Donetsk Railway Blockade," *UT-1 Television Network*, July 17, 1996, FBIS;

"Ukraine: Lazarenko Says Backlog in Miners' Wages Repaid in Full," *Interfax*, July 17, 1996, FBIS.

<sup>326</sup> "Ukraine: Miners Deny Persuasion Reason for End of Blockade," *UNIAN*, July 17, 1996, FBIS.

<sup>327</sup> "Ukraine: Criminal Proceedings Launched Against Rail Picketers," *Interfax*, July 18, 1996, FBIS.

backlog in wages resolved, the mines reopened, providing an unprecedented opportunity for the government.<sup>328</sup>

The primary target of these proceedings became Mikhail Krylov, head of the RSSKD.<sup>329</sup> As the most belligerent of the strike leaders, he was the logical choice to create an example. His arrest, together with several other representatives from the RSSKD, provoked an outcry among some union leaders, but the response was mostly muted.<sup>330</sup> Although the strike leaders were soon released from custody, Krylov remained behind bars.<sup>331</sup> Some observers saw Krylov's arrest as either a part of a political power struggle between the communists and Kuchma, a preventative measure to repress the miners and ease the progression of mine closures, or part of a clan war.<sup>332</sup> While the underlying reason for the arrests may have been a subject for debate, the message was abundantly clear. Kuchma would not tolerate any more dissent in the mines, much less if it meant political or economic vulnerability. With Krylov detained, the Donetsk Oblast Court issued a verdict on August 9 that declared the July strikes illegal, establishing a legal precedent for repressing future labor strikes.<sup>333</sup> Days later, the Donetsk city executive committee banned any demonstrations in support of Krylov.<sup>334</sup> And after several failed petitions and appeals by the miners, the Donetsk Oblast Court forcefully disbanded the RSSKD, ushering in the end of an era.<sup>335</sup> In the short span of a few weeks, the government had flexed its muscle, bringing Krylov to heel and dismantling his organization. The most militant wing of the miners' movement had

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<sup>328</sup> "Ukraine: Tension Subsides in Donetsk Coal Region," *UNIAN*, July 18, 1996, FBIS.

<sup>329</sup> "Ukraine: Proceedings Instituted Against Head of Strike Committee," *UNIAN*, July 18, 1996, FBIS.

<sup>330</sup> "Ukraine: Trade Unions Warn Over Arrest of Miners' Leader," *UNIAN*, August 2, 1996, FBIS; "Ukraine: Party Denounces Actions Against Miners' Leaders," *UNIAN*, August 7, 1996, FBIS.

<sup>331</sup> "Ukraine: Miners Strike Committee Leaders Released From Prison," *IntelNews*, August 6, 1996, FBIS.

<sup>332</sup> Юрий Уздемир, "Донецкие аресты: Три версии "тэтчеровских событий," [Donetsk Arrests: Three versions of "Thatcher events"], *Зеркало Недели*, August 23–30, 1996,

[https://zn.ua/politics\\_archive/donetskie\\_aresty\\_tri\\_versii\\_tetcherovskih\\_sobytyi.html](https://zn.ua/politics_archive/donetskie_aresty_tri_versii_tetcherovskih_sobytyi.html).

<sup>333</sup> "Ukraine: Donetsk Oblast Court Deems Miners Strike Illegal," *IntelNews*, August 9, 1996, FBIS.

<sup>334</sup> "Ukraine: Donetsk Officials Ban Miners Rally," *IntelNews*, August 13, 1996, FBIS.

<sup>335</sup> "Ukraine: Donetsk Strike Committee Appeals Against Dissolution," *ITAR-ITASS*, August 8, 1996, FBIS; "Ukraine: Court 'Forcefully' Disbands Donetsk Strike Committee," *IntelNews*, August 21, 1996, FBIS.

been crushed. Krylov would eventually be released after forty days in prison—on the government’s terms and without any fanfare.<sup>336</sup>

Krylov and the RSSKD were not the only victims of the crackdown. Kuchma’s administration also removed prominent Donetsk politicians and businessmen from power. By July, Ahati Brahin and Aleksandr Momot had already been assassinated. Before 1996 was over, Yevgeniy Shcherban (no relation to Volodymyr) would meet a similar fate, gunned down in Donetsk airport. All three men were prominent Donetsk businessmen and leaders of the Industrial Union of Donbas (ISD), an organization that had consolidated political and economic power in Donetsk during the early 1990s.<sup>337</sup> Lazarenko was later implicated in all of their deaths, while Kuchma was accused of ordering Shcherban’s assassination.<sup>338</sup> One of the only survivors of this ordeal was oligarch Rinat Akhmetov, who emerged from the conflict with a dominant economic position. Akhmetov retained control over some of the most profitable coal mines, steel mills, and thermoelectric plants in the Donbas. Additionally, on July 19, Volodymyr Shcherban was removed from the governorship of Donetsk Oblast by Kuchma and Lazarenko. He was replaced by the minister of coal, Sergei Polyakov.<sup>339</sup> Viktor Yanukovich, a former mine

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<sup>336</sup> Татьяна Дубовая, “Лидер шахтерского движения Донбасса: ‘Сначала Кучма звал в советники, а потом приказал арестовать,’” [The leader of the Donbass miners' movement: “First, Kuchma offered me to become an advisor, and then ordered to arrest me”], *Сегодня*, April 5, 2011, <https://www.segodnya.ua/interview/lider-shakhterckoho-dvizhenija-donbassa-cnachala-kuchma-zval-v-sovetniki-a-potom-prikazal-arectovat-243770.html>.

<sup>337</sup> Aslund, *How Ukraine Became A Market Economy and Democracy*, 112–15; Kuzio, *Ukraine: Democratization, Corruption, and the New Russian Imperialism*, 425–26.

<sup>338</sup> “Владимир Щербань рассказал, кто убил Александра Момота и Ахатя Брагина,” [Vladimir Shcherban revealed who killed Alexander Momot and Akhat Bragin], *Панорама*, February 20, 2013, <http://rama.com.ua/vladimir-shherban-rasskazal-kto-ubil-aleksandra-momota-i-ahatya-bragina/>; “Убийства, перестрелки и становление политиков. Вспоминаем ‘лихие’ 90-е Донбасса,” [Murders, shootings, and the rise of politicians. Remembering the “crazy” 90s of Donbass], *Новости Донбасса*, October 26, 2018, <https://novosti.dn.ua/article/7155-ubyystva-perestrelky-y-stanovlenye-polytykov-vspomynaem-lykhye-90-e-donbassa>; “Партнер Евгения Щербаня: его убийство заказали Кучма и Лазаренко,” [Yevgeniy Shcherban's partner: Kuchma and Lazarenko ordered his murder], *Украинская Правда*, March 25, 2013, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2013/03/25/6986348/>.

<sup>339</sup> Кораблев, “Сергей Поляков: ВЧЕРА, СЕГОДНЯ, ЗАВТРА,” [Sergey Polyakov: YESTERDAY, TODAY, TOMORROW.]

transport driver and manager, was named as his deputy.<sup>340</sup> The Cabinet of Ministers also moved to fire the entire leadership of the Donetsk police and virtually all of the mine directors and directors of mining associations whose workers took part in the strike. These actions were justified as a rational response to threats to national security.<sup>341</sup>

Volodymyr Chernyak, deputy chairman of the People's Movement of Ukraine, was just one observer who characterized this power struggle as a war between Donetsk and Dnipropetrovsk oligarchs. He went on to say that Kuchma was “clutching at a state of emergency and emergency powers” due to his inability to solve economic and political problems. Oleg Soskin, leader of the Ukrainian National Conservative Party, shared a similar viewpoint, arguing that the assassination attempt had provided a “pretext for establishing a fascist dictatorship of Bolshevik or criminal hues.”<sup>342</sup> Indeed, Kuchma declared a state of emergency, which National Security Secretary Volodymyr Horbulin used to threaten a crackdown on miners and Donetsk officials. Horbulin insinuated that the attack on the prime minister was directly connected to the discontent miners and those who had “instigated” the strike.<sup>343</sup> In effect, the miners' strike and the resulting tensions had justified Kuchma's consolidation of power into an authoritarian model. Having bent the knee in exchange for the repayment of wage arrears, the miners would never recover their lost power. Kuchma had summarily crushed the miners' movement.

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<sup>340</sup> Lenta.ru, “Янукович, Виктор,” accessed on April 23, 2021, <https://lenta.ru/lib/14159876/full.htm>; “Янукович переадресовал вопрос о назначении его в 1996 г заместителем главы Донецкой области Кучме,” [Yanukovych forwarded the question of his appointment in 1996 as deputy head of the Donetsk region to Kuchma], *Интерфакс-Украина*, March 1, 2013, <https://interfax.com.ua/news/political/142975.html>.

<sup>341</sup> Vladimir Skachko, “The Special Services Contemplate Sanctions Against the President's Opponents. Politicians Are Still Keeping Silent and Wait for the Results of the Investigation Into the Attempt on the Prime Minister's Life,” *Segodnya*, July 19, 1996, FBIS; “Ukraine: Coal Ministry Warns Miners Against ‘Destructive Actions’ *UT-1 Television Network*, July 27, 1996, FBIS.

<sup>342</sup> “Ukraine: Rukh Official: Attempt on Premier Result of Clan War,” *UNIAN*, July 18, 1996, FBIS; Skachko, “The Special Services Contemplate Sanctions Against the President's Opponents.”

<sup>343</sup> Halia Pavliva, “Ukraine: Security Secretary: Paramilitary Groups To Be Abolished,” *IntelNews*, July 18, 1996, FBIS.

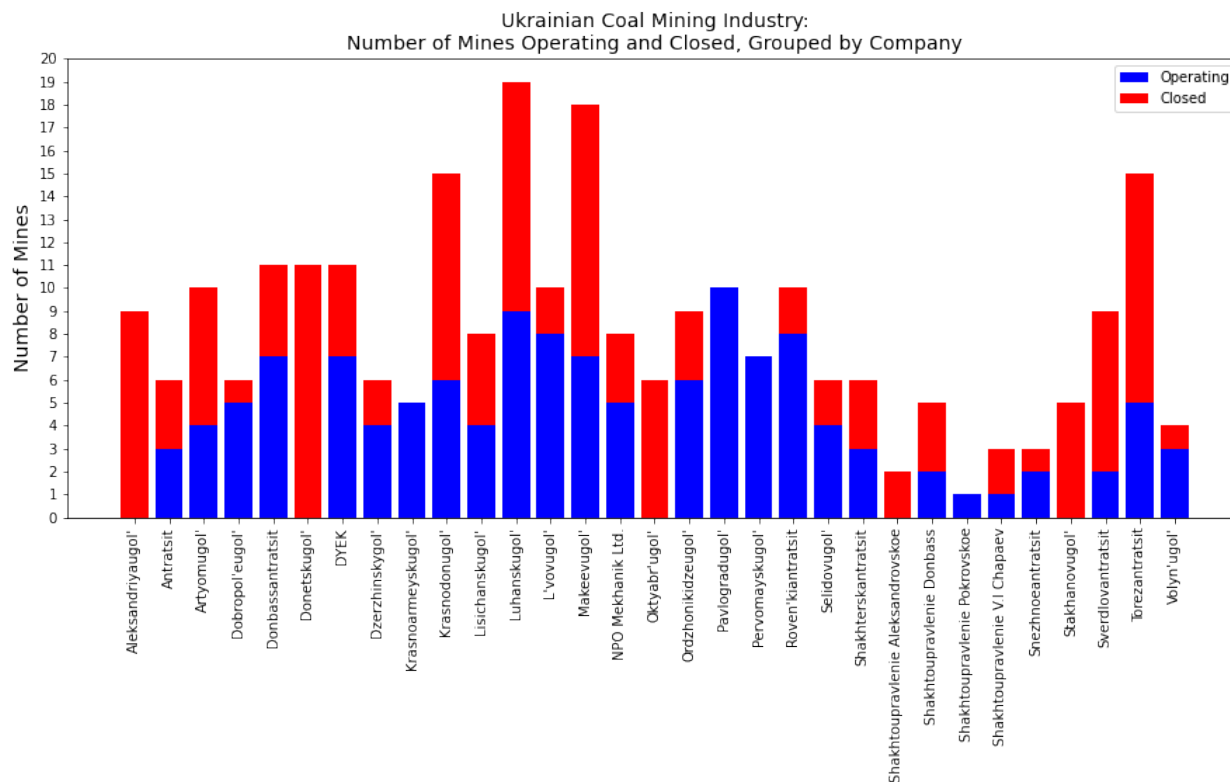


Figure 18. Number of mines operating and closed, grouped by company. This graph reflects the state of the Ukrainian coal industry as of 2014. Source: original dataset, see appendix.

### Debts turn into Desperation

After a brief remission in 1997, the miners' struggles in 1998 intensified, worsening their already damaged position. There was no longer a discernable movement to speak of. Industry restructuring, infighting, and the Kuchma administration's repressions had taken their toll on the formerly unified mining community, and myriad, atomized mining associations and unions struggled to cooperate. As such, when pervasive inefficiencies in the industry and the failure to restructure uneconomic mines led to yet another accumulation of debts, the collective response was drastically different. By mid-1998, these debts amounted to \$4 billion (including nearly \$1 billion in wage arrears),<sup>344</sup> while payments due for coal supplies reached \$1.5 billion.<sup>345</sup> For

<sup>344</sup> Mykhnenko, "State, society, and protest under post-communism," 105.

<sup>345</sup> Lovei, "Coal Industry Restructuring in Ukraine," 1.

periods ranging from a couple months to several years, the colliers received nothing.<sup>346</sup> Wildcat strikes resumed, but without the strength of unity, purpose, or numbers that had characterized the miners' collective action preceding the regime's crackdown.

Also, unlike the preceding strike movements, the miners in 1998 quickly found that they had neither political nor popular support outside of mining communities. The preceding years of power consolidation and “grabitization” (*prikhvatizatsia*) had cemented the new Donbas political elite, who demonstrated that they would not pull the levers of power on behalf of a wildcat strike movement which served them no purpose. Similarly, other industries, unlike during the regional strike movement in 1993, refused to lend their solidarity or join the isolated strikes. According to a World Bank policy paper from December 1998, these representatives from other professions, who “were also suffering from unpaid wages (such as teachers and nurses), argued publicly against giving special treatment to the miners” [parentheses are from the original text].<sup>347</sup> The miners, for their part, refused to acknowledge the validity of the long-standing charge that they simply sought to line their own pockets. Former miner Viktor Bondarenko, recalling the strike, insisted that the colliers told the people to join, but the metallurgists and different industries insisted that they could not. Some offered reasons related to the consequences of work stoppages. Others simply did not join when they said they would. Bondarenko explained that, “afterwards, when we had already been paid our salaries, they started to say that the miners pulled the blanket over themselves.”<sup>348</sup>

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<sup>346</sup> Д.Д. Калитвенцев и Л.Н. Заливняя, “Великий пікет. 20 років,” [The Great picket. 20 years]. *Громадська організація “Чайка,”* August 24, 2018, <http://chaika.org.ua/velykiy-piket/>.

<sup>347</sup> Lovei, “Coal Industry Restructuring in Ukraine,” 6.

<sup>348</sup> Вишницкая и Власова, “Забастовка. Что помнят шахтёры Донбасса о протестах 90-х,” [The strike. What Donbass miners remember about the protests of the 90s].



*Figure 19. Miners from the western Donbas march to Kyiv. Source: Vladikon70*

Eventually forty mines would go on strike after the formation of a new parliament following March elections.<sup>349</sup> On April 1, 1998, almost all the mines in Dnipropetrovsk Oblast in the western Donbas ground to a halt over unpaid debts.<sup>350</sup> A little more than a month later, on May 15, colliers from ten mines in the cities of Pervomaysk, Pavlograd, and Ternovka organized a march to Kyiv. By May 17, these miners presented their demands to the government. They called for the immediate payment of accumulated debts, the restoration of wages and pensions to the level of 1990 (in terms of position on the national pay scale—in 1990, miners were 2<sup>nd</sup> on this scale, while they were only 17<sup>th</sup> in 1998), an end to coal imports, a one-time remuneration

<sup>349</sup> Lovei, “Coal Industry Restructuring in Ukraine,” 6.

<sup>350</sup> Vladikon70, “Забастовка шахтёрів Західного Донбасу. Повна версія. 1998 р.,” [The strike of the miners of Western Donbass. Full version. Year 1998], filmed by Незалежне Павлоградське телебачення, November 13, 2015, YouTube video, 3:30-5:30, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-q2LdISXWU0&feature=share>.



for miners based on seniority, and an investigation into the financial activities of mining enterprises.<sup>351</sup>



Figure 20. Miners from the western Donbas reach Kyiv. Source: Vladikon70

It took roughly a thousand colliers three weeks to reach the capital. Scenes of men and women handing the miners foodstuffs and refreshments in the mining towns were not uncommon. Scores of residents lined the streets in solidarity, even intermittently voicing their support.<sup>352</sup> Bondarenko remembered how people cried and blessed the miners on the road to Kyiv because “they believed that we will overthrow the power that treats the people like cattle.”<sup>353</sup> At a time when “salaries were not paid throughout the whole country,” the miners

<sup>351</sup> Независимый профсоюз горняков Украины (НПГУ), “Історія профспілки,” [History of the union], accessed April 23, 2020, <http://npgu.org.ua/%D0%B8%D1%81%D1%82%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%8F-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%BE%D1%84%D1%81%D0%BE%D1%8E%D0%B7%D0%B0/>.

<sup>352</sup> Vladikon70, “Забастовка шахтёрів Западного Донбасса. Полная версия. 1998 г.,” [The strike of the miners of Western Donbass. Full version. Year 1998].

<sup>353</sup> Вишницкая и Власова, “Забастовка. Что помнят шахтёры Донбасса о протестах 90-х,” [The strike. What Donbass miners remember about the protests of the 90s].

believed they were standing up for their own rights and the rights of others. After weeks of marching and protests outside of the president’s residence and the cabinet of ministers, the miners received their unpaid wages.<sup>354</sup> Moreover, the new parliament immediately asked the cabinet of ministers to revise the 1999 budget to accommodate increases in financial support for the coal industry and state orders for coal.<sup>355</sup> In doing so, the government mitigated the potential for any social explosion and blunted reactionary forces in the Donbas. These colliers who set out for Kyiv proved that they retained some control over their own destiny, at least when it came to engaging with the government on dialogues over wage arrears.



Figure 21. Miners from the western Donbas protest in Kyiv. The banner reads, “We arrived here not to plead, but to demand.”  
Source: Vladikon70

<sup>354</sup> Независимый профсоюз горняков Украины (НПГУ), “Історія профспілки”; “1989 – 2015. Історія шахтёрських протестов в Україні.” [1989–2015. History of miners’ protests in Ukraine]. *Гордон*, April 25, 2015, <https://gordonua.com/news/society/1989-2015-istoriya-shahterskih-protestov-v-ukraine-77697.html>.

<sup>355</sup> Сергей Елкин, “Шахтёры против премьера,” [Miners against the prime minister], *Независимая газета*, March 21, 2000, [https://sites.ualberta.ca/~khineiko/NG\\_00\\_01/1151544.htm](https://sites.ualberta.ca/~khineiko/NG_00_01/1151544.htm); Lovei, “Coal Industry Restructuring in Ukraine,” 5; Калитвенцев и Заливная, “Великий пікет. 20 років,” [The Great picket. 20 years].

The successes of the western Donbas' march would be one of the final examples of independent collective action with a positive outcome over the next two decades. The allocation of additional funds and a temporary reprieve from debilitating wage arrears did not save the coal industry. The government and World Bank moved ahead with their halted restructuring, and by early 1999, fifty-two mines were closed.<sup>356</sup> Although “the closing of uneconomic mines proved less controversial” than initially anticipated—“the attractiveness of the severance package, which [included] the payment of several months of overdue wages to workers in closing mines” reportedly eased the pain of restructuring—the long term effects of privatization, restructuring, and a government with faltering patience for dissidence ensured that the miners' would remain largely pacified. Yet, any concessions were only temporary. Major shortfalls immediately appeared in the funding for mine closures and the associated social mitigation measures.<sup>357</sup> Moreover, the miners lamented the loss of inertia in the strikes, a fact which Bondarenko explained could be attributed to the physical and psychological exhaustion that accompanies daily work in the coal mines, where people worked “to the last drop.” He added that the miners “wanted to throw out the bad people and make life better for others. This didn't work out.”<sup>358</sup> Although the embers of the initial conflagration had not completely burned away, the grassroots political power that had characterized the zenith of the now pacified miners' movement was gone. The colliers had exhausted their physical and mental capacities in a losing war. In the end, the divide and conquer campaign orchestrated by the Ukrainian government succeeded. But the limited tolerance for these dissidents would not last, especially as the government reneged on its assurances.

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<sup>356</sup> Lovei, “Coal Industry Restructuring in Ukraine,” 6.

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>358</sup> Вишницкая и Власова, “Забастовка. Что помнят шахтёры Донбасса о протестах 90-х,” [The strike. What Donbass miners remember about the protests of the 90s].

### Repression in Luhansk, Beatings and Self-Immolation

Following the strike actions in Dnipropetrovsk, the central government promptly retracted its assurances. They froze the debts to the coal industry and once more the miners went without pay. In Luhansk Oblast, more militant elements in the coal mines reacted immediately. Beginning at Sukhodolskaya-Vostochnaya and Duvonnaya mines on July 15, 1998, colliers began picketing outside of the Luhansk regional administration building with the aid of the NPGU. This set off a five-month confrontation between roughly 250 Luhansk miners and the local authorities that stands out as one of the best examples of authoritarian politics in practice during the miners' strikes.



*Figure 22. Miners picket outside of the Luhansk Oblast administration building. Source: Nikolai Sidorov*



*Figure 23. Miners picket outside of the Luhansk Oblast administration building. The banner reads, “Starving government – hilarious farce. Starving worker – fact. Starving pensioner – shame on the state. Starving child – death of the people. Source: Nikolai Sidorov.*

During this time, representatives from the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) did their utmost to harass and demoralize the miners. Under the direction of General Vladimir Budnikov and Colonel Alexander Nikitenko—the two leaders of the Luhansk branch of the MVD—the state police shadowed the protesting miners in force.<sup>359</sup> Anywhere from hundreds to over a thousand state police officers forced the miners to protest in a fenced-off, restricted area, driving a wedge between the colliers and Luhansk residents in an act of intimidation. Indeed, passers-by were fearful of the state police, and these tactics minimized the miners’ impact on the surrounding area. Cut off from the mines and locals, the miners suffered in the blistering summer heat, starving due to their lack of funds. They were accosted for even the smallest perceived infractions. For instance, on July 22, when several starving miners attempted to eat stew, they were seized by state police and taken to the narcological department for testing. Unsurprisingly,

<sup>359</sup> Калитвенцев и Заливная, “Великий пікет. 20 років,” [The Great picket. 20 years].

all of these tests came back negative—the miners were sober. On other occasions, the state police attempted to knock over kerosene stoves which the miners were using to cook for themselves, and a state police lieutenant even set fire to the miners’ belongings while they slept.<sup>360</sup> Despite the abuse, the local population did not rise up, only offering limited, tacit support for the miners.



*Figure 24. A miner cooks for himself using a kerosene stove. Source: Nikolai Sidorov.*

Throughout the picket, the local authorities clamped down on anything that might cause dissent, repeatedly denounced the miners, and refused to meaningfully negotiate. For instance, when asked about the picketing miners, General Budnikov bluntly answered, “The ‘people’

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<sup>360</sup> Калитвенцев и Заливная, “Великий пікет. 20 років,” [The Great picket. 20 years].

[*narod*] are not here. There are a hundred dead idiots here.” Such a contemptuous perspective permeated the attitudes of local officials and the central government. At negotiations with the miners, local officials only offered to pay off two months of the debt, although the governor of Luhansk Oblast, Aleksandr Efremov, never attended these meetings. The miners took this as an affront. Additionally, local government suppressed press coverage of the picketing miners, instead sanctioning press releases that vilified the protesting colliers. Perhaps most egregiously, when the Luhansk picketers attempted to visit the village of Sugan after a mine explosion killed 24 people, they were greeted with riot shields and machine guns. The state police forced the miners to turn back under threat of opening fire. The miners perceived these combined efforts, and the resounding silence in response to their appeals to higher offices, as a sign of collective conspiracy and complicity in the repression of the miners.<sup>361</sup> Every level of the government and industry—the president, prime minister, Verkhovna Rada, judicial system, city government, oblast government, mine directors, and state police—all worked in tandem to maximize the colliers’ suffering while minimizing their options for recourse. The new vertical power structure was flexing its muscle. Tensions continued to build, and the miners braced for more extreme provocations.

The ignominious event that colloquially became known as the “Luhansk massacre,” (*Luganskoye poboishche*)<sup>362</sup> took place on August 24, 1998, during the Ukrainian Independence Day celebrations in Luhansk. By this time the majority of the colliers had not received their salaries for a period ranging from five months to over a year, with only a few exceptions.<sup>363</sup>

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<sup>361</sup> Калитвенцев и Заливняя, “Великий пікет. 20 років,” [The Great picket. 20 years].

<sup>362</sup> Luganskoye Poboishche, Луганское побоище; This event is still seldom discussed or noted, even in academic studies. Although Luhansk miners still hold annual commemorations on August 24, primary source information on this event is sparse.

<sup>363</sup> “Луганское побоище. Шахтёры против ОМОНа,” [The Luhansk massacre. Miners against OMON], *Лива*, August 1, 2011, <https://liva.com.ua/lugansk-battle.html>; Донецьк Україна, “Шахтёры против ‘Беркута’:

Simultaneously, the miners' unions and mine administrations had become a stagnant and ineffective, leaving the shift workers to fend for themselves. As an act of organized protest, the miners planned a torchlight procession towards the square at the Workers of Luhansk Monument and constructed an effigy decorated with images of the miners' oppressors.<sup>364</sup> Although miners in Krasnodon had turned this practice into a tradition in the previous couple of years, combining a work holiday with protest without any acts of provocation or violence, the Luhansk miners would not find their own local leadership as accommodating.<sup>365</sup>



Figure 25. (Left) Miners light torches in preparation for the procession in Luhansk. (Right) A miner voices his frustrations with state police. Source: Nikolai Sidorov.

Although celebrations began normally, the miners who had gathered near Sovetskaya street in Luhansk quickly observed an unusually large concentration of both uniformed and plain-clothes state police descend on the festivities under the pretense of maintaining order.<sup>366</sup> Roughly two thousand state police in total—by far the largest number up until that time—shadowed the miners, tracking their movements as the afternoon approached. Colonel Nikitenko,

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Луганское побоище,” [Miners against the “Berkut”: the Luhansk massacre], produced by Radio Svoboda, May 31, 2015, YouTube video, 0:00-3:30, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3JdXkDYz40U&feature=share>.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid., 3:30-5:30; “Луганское побоище. Шахтёры против ОМОНа,” [The Luhansk massacre. Miners against OMON], *Лива*; this latter account literally refers to this as the “parasite effigy” (чучело паразита). The word for effigy here also has a specific connotation in Russian and Ukrainian culture, as it refers to a Maslenitsa doll, which is typically burned as part of a traditional Eastern Slavic holiday celebrating the arrival of spring. There is no direct translation that captures this meaning.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid.



the apparent leader of this operation,<sup>367</sup> offered the miners a menacing warning, “Today you will regret that you came here from your families.”<sup>368</sup> Following this ominous threat, at around 15:00, Berkut riot police began lining the square. Their presence raised the tension in the atmosphere.

As one miner later recalled:

“But at that time the miners – people who had stared death in the eyes, who had known the cost of life – could not imagine that all of civilization would be cast aside in Ukraine, that the guardians of order would trample the constitution and the working class in the eyes of tens of thousands of people. And that commanding this would be the former Komsomol workers, former deputies – and the present mayors and mayors’ assistants. And that beating them, the bread-winners, the fathers of hungry families, would be young men who are the same age as their sons. The miners would be beaten for being robbed by their bosses and the government, but all the same they want to be people, not scum<sup>369</sup>— as the thieving ‘coal bosses’ are trying to instill in them. They would be since they still believe in the law, and they do not beat their tormentors.”<sup>370</sup>

In a sign of drastically changing relations with local government, the miners, whom politicians of all backgrounds in the Donbas had once actively supported, at least at face value, would now be exposed to beatings and state terror. Between the USSR and an independent Ukraine, the government had been unwilling to use such overt violence for nine years (1989-1998). That time was over.

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<sup>367</sup> In all the accounts cited here, Colonel Nikitenko is mentioned as one of the primary culprits and instigators of the violence. онецьк Україна, “Шахтёры против ‘Беркута’: Луганское побоище,” [Miners against the “Berkut”: the Luhansk massacre], 10:45–11:00.

<sup>368</sup> “Луганское побоище. Шахтёры против ОМОНа,” [The Luhansk massacre. Miners against OMON], *Лива*.

<sup>369</sup> Вудло (Быдло). Literally translated as “cattle.”

<sup>370</sup> “Луганское побоище. Шахтёры против ОМОНа,” [The Luhansk massacre. Miners against OMON], *Лива*.



Figure 26. Miners fight with state police officers. Source: *Історична Правда* and Nikolai Sidorov.

At around 19:00 in the evening, the situation devolved into confrontation. Right before the colliers planned to douse the effigy in kerosene and set it aflame, state police commanders intervened. They accused the miners of planting an explosive device in the effigy.<sup>371</sup> Confronted by this allegation, the colliers initially attempted to cooperate, but quickly became convinced that the state police simply sought to restrict their right to protest. As this discussion took place, the Berkut riot police took up strategic positions around the miners, separating the leaders of the protest from the rest of the picketers. The Berkut officers commenced their assault and mercilessly beat the miners with their truncheons, inflicting head trauma and internal damage.<sup>372</sup> On top of their assault, the riot police employed Teren-2 nerve gas in an attempt to disperse the protestors. The miners immediately responded to this provocation, breaking through Berkut barriers, setting up makeshift tourniquets for the wounded, and calling for ambulances.<sup>373</sup>

<sup>371</sup> “Луганское побоище. Шахтёры против ОМОНа,” [The Luhansk massacre. Miners against OMON], *Лива*; Донецьк Україна, “Шахтёры против ‘Беркута’: Луганское побоище,” [Miners against the “Berkut”: the Luhansk massacre], 5:00–5:30.

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*, 6:10–6:20.

<sup>373</sup> Сергей Кораблев, “Во вторник шахтёров хоронят, в понедельник – бьют, а в воскресенье – поздравляют,” [On Tuesday the miners are buried, on Monday they are beaten, and on Sunday they are congratulated], *Зеркало Недели*, August 28, 1998, [https://zn.ua/LAW/vo\\_vtornik\\_shahterov\\_horonyat\\_v\\_ponedelnik\\_byut\\_a\\_v\\_voskresenie\\_pozdravlyayut.html](https://zn.ua/LAW/vo_vtornik_shahterov_horonyat_v_ponedelnik_byut_a_v_voskresenie_pozdravlyayut.html)

The battle with the riot police was far from over, however, and the rest of the evening turned into a bloodbath as the miners refused to surrender the square to the local authorities. Even the miners who attempted to stage a sit-in protest<sup>374</sup> were subjected to harsh beatings. The riot police savagely beat anyone – those sitting on the pavement, those lying on the ground, and even those who were already unconscious.<sup>375</sup> Despite the mounting casualties, the colliers managed to force the Berkut forces to retreat to the regional administration building. As their weapons of the weak failed, the miners turned to the “weapons of the proletariat.”<sup>376</sup> Using the torches and kerosene originally intended for the effigy of their oppressors, the miners now used these weapons against the real article. These fires kept the riot police at bay, thereby allowing the miners to regroup and count their wounded. In total, nearly fifty people were injured, of whom twenty-two required ambulances. Nine victims were immediately hospitalized.<sup>377</sup>



Figure 27. Wounded miners after the confrontation with state police. Source: Nikolai Sidorov.

<sup>374</sup> Common knowledge and practices at this time dictated that riot police would not beat any protestors who sat down on the pavement.

<sup>375</sup> “Луганское побоище. Шахтёры против ОМОНа,” [The Luhansk massacre. Miners against OMON], *Лива*.

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>377</sup> *Ibid.*; The miner from Донецьк Україна, “Шахтёры против ‘Беркута’: Луганское побоище,” [Miners against the “Berkut”: the Luhansk massacre] alternatively indicated that only six miners were hospitalized.

As the dust settled from the battle, rumors and hearsay began to dominate official narratives on the major events. In the immediate aftermath, local authorities attempted to blame the miners for drunken and rowdy behavior that led to Berkut's intervention.<sup>378</sup> It was difficult to ascertain the root source of culpability in the violence due to the suppression of the press and the apparent restriction of video evidence.<sup>379</sup> Although the Verkhovna Rada created a special commission to investigate the carnage on September 2, 1998, nothing came out of these proceedings.<sup>380</sup> There was no official investigation, and miners speculated on the possibility that lower-level functionaries, such as Colonel Nikitenko, were acting on behalf of local, regional, or state authorities.<sup>381</sup> Governor of Luhansk Oblast, Aleksandr Efremov, was among those suspected of abusing their power.<sup>382</sup> Such accusations and suspicions remained unsupported by any formal legal process, however, and no one—miner, officer, or official—ever faced charges for the violence. Rather, some of them even appeared to benefit. After the Luhansk Brawl, General Budnikov was actually promoted to the position of First Deputy Chief at the main headquarters of the MVD for all of Ukraine.<sup>383</sup> The real perpetrators remain officially unrecognized and unsanctioned to this day.<sup>384</sup>

<sup>378</sup> “Луганское побоище. Шахтёры против ОМОНа,” [The Luhansk massacre. Miners against OMON], *Лива*.

<sup>379</sup> Калитвенцев и Заливная, “Великий пикет. 20 років,” [The Great picket. 20 years].

<sup>380</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>381</sup> Донецьк Україна, “Шахтёры против ‘Беркута’: Луганское побоище,” [Miners against the “Berkut”: the Luhansk massacre], 10:45-12:30.

<sup>382</sup> Efremov would go on to become a member of the Party of Regions and an important underling for future President Viktor Yanukovich. He is the subject of significant controversy in Ukraine today over accusations of financing separatists in the Donbas. He has also faced charges of corruption and abuse of power.

<sup>383</sup> Забытые имена Пермской губернии, “Будников Владимир Васильевич,” [Budnikov Vladimir Vasil'yevitch], June 20, 2017,

<http://www.fnperm.ru/%D0%B1%D1%83%D0%B4%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B2-%D0%B2%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%B4%D0%B8%D0%BC%D0%B8%D1%80-%D0%B2%D0%B0%D1%81%D0%B8%D0%BB%D1%8C%D0%B5%D0%B2%D0%B8%D1%87.aspx>.

<sup>384</sup> Донецьк Україна, “Шахтёры против ‘Беркута’: Луганское побоище,” [Miners against the “Berkut”: the Luhansk massacre], 11:20-11:35.

Over the following months, the situation became even worse as the investigation stalled. In quick succession in September, one miner was run over by a car, miners' children were attacked, and miners' homes were assailed with stones. The police refused to open investigations in every case. By the end of November, the MVD issued orders to the mine directors to cut off workers' compensation payments to injured miners who took part in the strike.<sup>385</sup> With a bleak outlook on the future and still no guarantees of payment, the miners turned to more extreme protest measures. They threatened self-immolation.

In response, the Verkhovna Rada issued a proclamation on December 3, promising to pay the miners by December 15. But the miners had already heard enough promises with no follow through. One of these miners, Alexander Mikhailovich,<sup>386</sup> had been dependent on workers' compensation, since he had an unemployed wife and three children. Before the MVD's order, he had cautioned against self-immolation. The restrictions on these payments broke him. As a result, early in the morning on December 14, 1998, Alexander Mikhailovich left his wife a note:

“I can no longer endure or wait for some kind of promises. I do not believe the debts will be repaid on December 15. As a result, I decided on this action. I am sick of the humiliation from the leaders of the mine and the administration. This is not an exit from life, but maybe, due to my act, things will soon be resolved. I am sober and in a normal condition. I am responsible for my actions.”<sup>387</sup>

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<sup>385</sup> Калитвенцев и Заливная, “Великий пікет. 20 років,” [The Great picket. 20 years].

<sup>386</sup> Sources only give his first name and patronymic.

<sup>387</sup> Дмитрий Никитин, “Голодовки, походы на Киев, самоожжение. Изучаем 30-летнюю хронику протестов шахтеров Донбасса,” [Hunger strikes, campaigns to Kiev, self-immolation. Studying the 30-year chronicle of Donbass miners' protests], Svoi.city, June 10, 2020, <https://svoi.city/read/korotko/84771/30-letnyaya-hronika-protestov-shahterov-donbassa>; Калитвенцев и Заливная, “Великий пікет. 20 років,” [The Great picket. 20 years].

Pushed to the brink, he lit himself on fire in protest of the government's neglect, suffering horrific burns. Three days later, after another demonstration, the debts were paid.<sup>388</sup> Eleven days after the debts were paid, on December 28, Alexander Mikhailovich succumbed to his injuries. The police restricted access to his funeral.<sup>389</sup>

Although they had received the payments for their debt, the cost the miners were forced to pay in exchange was prohibitively high. The events in Luhansk during the months between July and December of 1998 proved that the Kuchma administration had centralized authority and would no longer tolerate dissent from the miners. Indeed, these measures were in large part extremely effective. The miners never challenged Donbas authorities again in the same manner as in Luhansk during 1998. A year later in 1999, the miners' outlook was particularly bleak. Nine miners at Barakova mine in Luhansk slit their wrists, while their co-workers threatened to join them in mass suicide. Even after these threats, new Prime Minister Viktor Yushenko and Deputy Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko refused to compromise or offer any promises to the Donbas colliers.<sup>390</sup> The miners' pleas fell on deaf ears.

By carefully managing and repressing the threats to his regime, Kuchma successfully forced the miners into line. In an interview in 1999, Mikhail Krylov referred to Kuchma as the "main grave digger of the coal industry." He further condemned Kuchma's administration for appointing ministers on the basis of loyalty rather than merit while forcing the colliers to submit "under the force of clan pressure." Krylov also lamented the atrocious state of workplace conditions in the Donbas mines, and the lack of any government measures to resolve high

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<sup>388</sup> Никитин, "Голодовки, походы на Киев, самоожжение. Изучаем 30-летнюю хронику протестов шахтеров Донбасса," [Hunger strikes, campaigns to Kiev, self-immolation. Studying the 30-year chronicle of Donbass miners' protests].

<sup>389</sup> Калитвенцев и Заливная, "Великий пикет. 20 років," [The Great picket. 20 years]

<sup>390</sup> Елкин, "Шахтеры против премьера," [Miners against the prime minister].

mortality rates and underinvestment. According to Krylov, the miners were “forced to go down to the pits of hell to get themselves and their family at least some pennies for a miserable existence.”<sup>391</sup> On the back of this suppression, Kuchma consolidated the government’s power and secured the loyalty of officials and industry leaders in the Donbas. The miners and authorities who resisted, refused to bend the knee, or were unwilling to compromise were beaten, arrested, and eliminated. In turn, the new Donbas elite who were co-opted by the Kuchma administration—namely Viktor Yanukovych and Rinat Akhmetov—would reshape the political landscape of the Donbas into the 2000s. During their rise, the miners would not act as independent social, political, and economic actors on the national stage. Instead, the changing power dynamic in the Donbas shifted away from the mines to the centers of political power, effectively smothering the strike movement. Amidst this uncertain environment and vulnerable to another crackdown, the Donbas miners would be forced to strike a fateful Faustian bargain with the new authoritarian power players in the region to ensure their survival.

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<sup>391</sup> Александр Подолян, “Михаил Крылов: ‘Вижу нашу общую шахтерскую вину в том, что мы позволяем до сих пор обращаться с собой по-скотски,’” [Mikhail Krylov: “I see our common miner's fault in the fact that we still allow ourselves to be treated like dogs”], *День*, September 17, 1999, <https://day.kyiv.ua/ru/article/obshchestvo/mihail-krylov-vizhu-nashu-obshchuyu-shahterskuyu-vinu-v-tom-cto-my-pozvolyaem>.

**Chapter 3: 1999-2013: Deal with the Devil**



Figure 28. "Dance, You Lice." Miners before a stylized businessman portrayed as a deity. The top left reads, "White House," while the top right reads, "Black House." Source: Roman Minin.

After a comprehensive crackdown, the Donbas miners were in disarray. Residents of mining communities felt the impact of the drastic power shift from labor to central and local government almost immediately. In the short period between 1996 and 2000 alone, 83 coal mines were shuttered, leaving hundreds of thousands of Donbas residents unemployed. There were no effective measures in place to prevent the devastating negative consequences that accompanied these closures. Mine waters flooded villages and townships, destroying infrastructure and polluting local water supplies. Meanwhile, corruption flourished as the abandoned mines were stripped of mining equipment and raw materials. Amongst the state-



owned mines that survived this ordeal, privatization finally took hold in the early 2000s, albeit at a slow pace. The most profitable coal mining enterprises were immediately privatized, leaving behind an overpriced, underproductive, and heavily subsidized state-owned coal sector.<sup>392</sup>

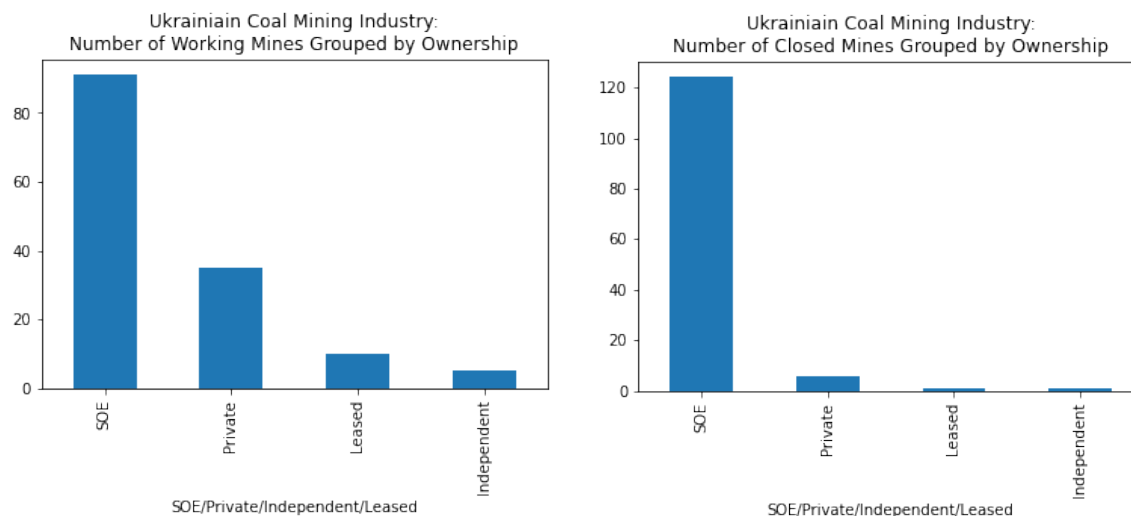


Figure 29. Working and closed mines grouped by ownership. Source: original dataset, see appendix.

After the brief period of unrest in the 1998, the majority of miners were forced to yield. Faced with no real political alternatives in the Donbas and without a party to represent unions' interests, the miners elected to subordinate themselves to the increasingly centralized, authoritarian political powers that emerged in the Donbas. In doing so, they struck a Faustian bargain—a pact whereby a person trades something of supreme moral or spiritual importance for some material benefit—forefeiting their right to widespread independent collective action in exchange for small benefits, the perpetuation of the status quo, and the stalling of reform programs and mine closures. Their co-option by eastern political forces coincided with the rise of the Donetsk Clan, an oligarchic clan built around the friendship and business interests of mining,

<sup>392</sup> Д. Казанський, А. Некрасова, О. Савицький, Ю. Павлов, П. Смірнов, С. Тарабанова і Г. Янова, *Справжня ціна вугілля в умовах війни на Донбасі: погляд крізь призму прав людини* [The real price of coal during the war in Donbas: a look through the prism of human rights], Східноукраїнський центр громадських ініціатив and Heinrich Boell Stiftung, Київ: Видавництво ТОВ "АРТ КНИГА," 2017, 23, [https://ua.boell.org/sites/default/files/real\\_price\\_of\\_coal\\_in\\_war\\_time\\_donbas.pdf](https://ua.boell.org/sites/default/files/real_price_of_coal_in_war_time_donbas.pdf).

steel, and metallurgy mogul Rinat Akhmetov and political upstart Viktor Yanukovich. Unlike his predecessors, Yanukovich allied himself with Kuchma until he became the heir apparent to eastern Ukraine's grip on power. Yanukovich's Party of Regions of Ukraine (PRU) subsequently set up a vertically integrated political power structure that mirrored the vertical integration of every link in the mining, steel, and metallurgy production chain controlled by Akhmetov and his associates. Thereafter, as part of this tacit agreement, the miners would only act within the confines of the actions afforded to them by the new dominant elites.

This chapter details the Donbas colliers' transformation from a pacified labor movement to a constituency of the same forces that brought them to heel. The miners' Faustian bargain, though a willing arrangement, carried significant consequences for the Donbas region as Luhansk and Donetsk Oblast slipped deeper into an authoritarian, kleptocratic stronghold with little tolerance for dissent. However, this bargain was not struck from equal negotiating positions. Compliance was asymmetrical. Party and workplace discipline returned in force, but the mining industry did not flourish under authoritarian rule, and there was no enforcement mechanism to compel a different response. The miners survived, but at dear cost.

### **Yanukovich's Appeal and the Donetsk Clan's Rise**

The main beneficiaries of the wave of privatization in the early 2000s were a small circle of Donetsk oligarchs who emerged from the crackdown with their lives and fortunes intact. In 2000, Rinat Akhmetov, the son of a coal miner, founded System Capital Management in Donetsk, a holding company that would become the center of his future monopoly on the Donbas fuel and energy industry.<sup>393</sup> He quickly became the foremost business magnate of the Donbas as

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<sup>393</sup> "SCM (System Capital Management) Limited, "About Us," accessed April 23, 2021, <https://www.scm.com.cy/about#us>.

he gained ownership over some of the most promising and best-equipped mines in the region, including ten mines from the Pavlogradugol' association and Komsomolets of the Donbas mine. He and his business partners then grouped these mines along with natural gas holdings and energy plants into the Donetsk Fuel Energy Company (DTEK) in 2005.<sup>394</sup> Naturally, DTEK was held under SCM, along with other companies such as Metinvest, a metallurgy company founded in 2006 which dominated the Ukrainian steel industry. In effect, Akhmetov established a vertically integrated business empire built around the coal-coke-metal and coal-energy-electricity production chains.<sup>395</sup>

Akhmetov's power and influence in the region was aided by Donetsk Oblast Governor Viktor Yanukovich, who represented the political interests of their partnership. Yanukovich, a former mine transport driver and manager, had previously become governor of Donetsk Oblast with the help of Akhmetov.<sup>396</sup> As a politician, he drew support from the same place Akhmetov drew his fortune—the coal mines. Colliers, together with many others in the Donbas, perceived Yanukovich as self-made man with humble beginnings despite his perceived illiteracy, criminal history, and connections with Kuchma and Akhmetov.<sup>397</sup> These negative factors were largely irrelevant in the eastern oblasts, particularly when considering the long history of criminality and violence in the Donbas.<sup>398</sup> Amongst all of the available political options, the Swedish economist

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<sup>394</sup> DTEK, "DTEK History," accessed April 24, 2021, <https://dtek.com/en/about/history/>.

<sup>395</sup> Oleg Savitsky, "Towards the end of the coal age in Ukraine?!: A review of the Ukrainian Coal Sector in the context of the Donbass crisis." Kyiv: Heinrich Boell Foundation, n.d.. 33, [https://ua.boell.org/sites/default/files/a5\\_web\\_layout\\_kiev\\_boell.pdf](https://ua.boell.org/sites/default/files/a5_web_layout_kiev_boell.pdf).

<sup>396</sup> Mark Rachkevych, "Wikileaks: Nation's businessmen tell tales on each other in chats with US ambassadors," *Kyiv Post*, September 15, 2011, <https://www.kyivpost.com/article/content/business/wikileaks-nations-businessmen-tell-tales-on-each-o-112933.html>.

<sup>397</sup> "Тімідж Януковича – хлоркою!" [Yanukovich's image – wash it with bleach!], *Українська Правда*, May 13, 2004, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2004/05/13/2999853/>; "Янукович шапок не воровал. Его осудили за кражу часов," [Yanukovich did not steal any hats. He was convicted of stealing watches], *Украинская Правда*, May 27, 2004, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2004/05/27/4378868/>.

<sup>398</sup> See Kuzio, *Ukraine: Democratization, Corruption, and the New Russian Imperialism*, 327–34, 358–66, 413–19, and Kuromiya, *Freedom and Terror in the Donbas*.

Anders Aslund noted, “nobody was more at ease with the Donbas miners than Yanukovych, and he captured the eastern working class from the communists.”<sup>399</sup> To the miners, Yanukovych was *svoy chelovek*, an understanding in Russian akin to “one of us” or an “inside man.” The miner trusted him as a man of the people. This fundamentally separated Yanukovych from the Kuchma and made him an ideal candidate to coopt the miners’ support.



Figure 30. Yanukovych meets with miners in the Donbas. Source: Українські Новини.

It was this connection with the miners that allowed Yanukovych, in part, to ingratiate himself with President Kuchma. During the 1999 presidential elections, Kuchma defeated Communist challenger Petro Symonenko in Donetsk Oblast thanks to Yanukovych’s lobbying and support, a decisive contribution that paved the way to Kuchma’s re-election.<sup>400</sup> In 2000, Yanukovych established what would become the most dominant, unchallenged political force in

<sup>399</sup> Aslund, *How Ukraine Became a Market Economy and Democracy*, 181.

<sup>400</sup> Сергей Горский, “Донецкие идут! Станет ли следующий президент Украины представителем края угля и металла?” [“Donetsk people are coming!” Will the next president of Ukraine become a representative of the region of coal and metal?], *Иамикъ*, April 13, 2004, <https://iamik.ru/news/tema-dnya/42055/>.

the Donbas when he united five smaller parties into the Party of Regional Revival, soon to be renamed in March 2001 to the Party of Regions.<sup>401</sup> Yanukovych's ability to convert a traditionally left-leaning voter base into a constituency of the authoritarian government and Akhmetov's lobbying with Kuchma earned him a place in the central government, where he was appointed prime minister on November 21, 2002.



Figure 31. (Left) Akhmetov with Yanukovych (right). Source: Argument

Akhmetov and Yanukovych acted as the leaders of the so-called Donetsk Clan, the close circle of politicians and business magnates who held a tight grip on power in the Donbas and the coal industry. Their leadership, while certainly authoritarian, was not without its benefits for the working class. For instance, Yanukovych raised pensions twofold to the level of disability payments in September 2004, only a month before the presidential elections.<sup>402</sup> This tactic, soon

<sup>401</sup> Kuzio, *Ukraine: Democratization, Corruption, and the New Russian Imperialism*, 195.

<sup>402</sup> “Янукович даёт новую взятку пенсионерам – поднимает пенсии вдвое,” [Yanukovych gives new bribe to pensioners by doubling pensions], *Украинская Правда*, September 14, 2004, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2004/09/14/4381084/>.

to become a familiar one for Yanukovych, was particularly effective amongst the miners. According to two public opinion polls from the Razumkov Center in 2004, working miners, unemployed people, and pensioners in the mining regions all indicated that low salaries and pensions were their number one concern, far outstripping any other problems (72% of respondents chose this option in the first poll; 62% of respondents chose this option in the second poll).<sup>403</sup> The same report also stated that mining regions held a negative attitude towards former Ukrainian prime minister Viktor Yushchenko, whom they believed wanted to close the mines. In truth, Yushchenko had done little to endear himself to the miners during his tenure as prime minister. Conversely, the mining regions trusted that Yanukovych would not expose the mines to the socio-economic consequences of comprehensive coal industry reform.<sup>404</sup> After the immense suffering of the 1990s, the miners placed their hopes in Yanukovych. His authoritarian disposition did not deter their support. Rather, the colliers saw him as a protector and a patron.

### **The Orange Revolution**

Following the tumultuous 1990s and the first years of the 2000s, Ukraine stood at a crossroads on the eve of the 2004 Ukrainian Presidential Election. The Russian Federation's re-election of President Vladimir Putin on March 14, 2004—where independent observers commented on overt bias in state media, the mobilization of state resources in the incumbent's favor, instances of ballot stuffing, and an overall lack of any real opposition—stoked fears of a similar result in Ukraine.<sup>405</sup> At a time when “the old regime was tired, divided, and increasingly

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<sup>403</sup> Микола Снугуровський и Віталій Лях, “Проблеми і настрої жителів Шахтарських регіонів,” [Problems and moods of residents of Mining regions], *Національна безпека і оборона* 59, no. 11 (2004): 23. [https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/journal/ukr/NSD59\\_2004\\_ukr.pdf](https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/journal/ukr/NSD59_2004_ukr.pdf).

<sup>404</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>405</sup> Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, *Russian Federation Presidential Election 14 March 2004: OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Report*, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Warsaw: June 2, 2004, 1–2, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/7/b/33100.pdf>; Galina Michaleva, “After the Presidential Elections. The Political Regime: Regional Variations,” within *Russian Election Watch* 3, no. 5

authoritarian,” the Ukrainian people were presented with a choice between pro-Eurasian forces that sought to usher in a new era of Russian hegemony and pro-European forces that advocated for democratic reforms and a path westward.<sup>406</sup> Two Viktors emerged as the banner carriers of these respective paths: Yanukovych, incumbent President Leonid Kuchma’s prime minister; and former Ukrainian Prime Minister (1999-2001) Yuschenko.

The first round of the 2004 Ukrainian Presidential Elections passed as expected on October 31. Yuschenko and Yanukovych moved on to the run-off second round with 39.90% and 39.26% of the vote respectively. However, on November 21, long-standing concerns over fraudulent electoral results came to fruition, and Yanukovych emerged as the dubious winner of the election with 49.46% of the vote. Yuschenko finished in second place with 46.61% of the vote. Evidence of voter fraud was particularly evident according to the turnout rate of voters in Luhansk and Donetsk Oblasts, where voter turnout increased from 75.6% and 78.08% to 89.49% and 96.64% respectively between the first and second round.<sup>407</sup>

The opposition immediately took to the streets and coalesced into the Orange Revolution, so called because of Yuschenko’s campaign color, which had no traditional meaning and resembled the color of chestnut trees in the fall.<sup>408</sup> Protestors flooded the streets of Kyiv and Maidan square, demanding a review of the election results. Millions of Ukrainians mobilized across central and western Ukraine to condemn this stolen election.

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(February 2004): 8, <https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/legacy/files/rew204.pdf>; Aslund, *How Ukraine Became a Market Economy and Democracy*, 176.

<sup>406</sup> Taras Kuzio, “Ukraine’s 2004 Presidential Election: The Orange Revolution,” in *Democracy At Large* 1, no. 2 (2005), section “Elections Today,” edited by Dorin Tudoran, Kathryn Camp, and Marguerite K. Colston, 8; Askold Krushelnycky, *An Orange Revolution: A Personal Journey through Ukrainian History* (London: Harvill Secker, 2006), 1.

<sup>407</sup> Центральна Виборча Комісія України “Підсумки голосування по регіонах України. Порівняння,” [Voting results in the regions of Ukraine. A comparison], accessed April 23, 2021, <https://cvk.gov.ua/pls/vp2004/wp0011>.

<sup>408</sup> Aslund, *How Ukraine Became a Market Economy and Democracy*, 179; Kuzio, *Ukraine: Democratization, Corruption, and the New Russian Imperialism*, 71.

During this time, the miners upheld their end of the Faustian bargain and demonstrated the power of the new status quo under the rulership of the Donbas political elite. The 2004 Ukrainian Presidential Election marked the first occasion where this relationship was mobilized. Miners were called to strike at the behest of politicians, rather than from amongst their own ranks. The independent collective action of the 1990s was gone, crushed under the vertically integrated power of the Donetsk Clan, whose members did not tolerate widespread dissent, as well as the greatly altered circumstances of the coal industry and the miners who worked in its now fractured privatized, corporatized, and state-owned infrastructure. The state-owned mining associations, privatized mines, and the rapidly growing illegal mining industry was prone to political influence from the Party of Regions' political machine. As part of this arrangement, miners received middling benefits in exchange for their support as they continued to vote for Viktor Yanukovich as one of their own.

### **Astroturfing: Miners as an Authoritarian Constituency**

An important part of Viktor Yanukovich's reelection campaign was generating a top-down popular movement that could rival Yushenko's grassroots coalition. As part of this strategy, Yanukovich and the Donbas political elite mobilized the coal miners as the vanguard of his constituency—an unsurprising choice given the miners pronounced political presence during the independent miners' movements of the 1990s. The popularity that Yanukovich enjoyed amongst the Donbas coal miners provided the justification necessary for a “grassroots” movement to manifest. Unlike a real genuine grassroots movement, which is organized at the local level, this fake grassroots movement was mobilized from the top-down. In this way, it resembled a form of astroturfing, or a “grassroots program that involves the instant manufacturing of public support for a point of view in which either uninformed activists are



recruited or means of deception are used to recruit them.”<sup>409</sup> Through this “conflict expansion,” Yanukovich and the Party of Regions sought to “mobilize supporters and direct their actions so that they [would be] supportive of organization goals.”<sup>410</sup> Although the term astroturfing is typically reserved for covert forms of corporate lobbying, the term applies in this instance due to the Donetsk Clan’s tendency to operate their political machine as a front for their business interests. The coal miners were both willing victims of deception and underinformed pro-Yanukovich activists that mobilized under direct orders from their corporate managers, who in turn responded to higher-ups in the vertical power structure that dominated Donbas politics. As part of this relationship, the miners could not be characterized as “dupes”—their support for Yanukovich was real. All the same, they did not organize independently to support him. While it is difficult to ascertain the miners’ clarity or understanding of Yanukovich’s brand of kleptocracy and authoritarianism, the fact remains that Yanukovich appealed to the issues that they cared about after years of socio-economic hardship—higher pensions, higher salaries, economic stability, and stalled reform programs and mine closures.

Prior to the first round of the presidential election on October 31, eastern managers and political functionaries began rallying the coal miners. By October 26, rumors emerged that the Donbas miners were being ordered to travel to Kyiv to demonstrate in support of Yanukovich. Local authorities remained silent and the regional administration in Donetsk Oblast refused to comment on any developments.<sup>411</sup> Lyudmila Fedorenko, authorized representative for the

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<sup>409</sup> Sharon Beder, “Public Relations’ Role in Manufacturing Artificial Grass Roots Coalitions,” *Public Relations Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 21, <http://www.herinst.org/sbeder/PR/PR.html#.X6DRptBKjD4>.

<sup>410</sup> Mitchell Hobbs, Hannah Della Bosca, David Schlosberg, and Chao Sun, “Turf Wars: Using social media network analysis to examine the suspected astroturfing campaign for the Adani Carmichael Coal mine on Twitter,” *Journal of Public Affairs* 20, no. 2 (May 2020): 2, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/pa.2057>.

<sup>411</sup> Сергей Гармаш, “Шахтёры как пушечное мясо. Или ‘Ты готов к гражданской войне?’,” [Miners as cannon fodder. Or “Are you ready for civil war?”], *Украинская Правда*, October 26, 2004, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2004/10/26/4382197/>.

Communist Party of Ukraine (CPU) presidential candidate Petro Symonenko, reported the following:

“From trustworthy sources it became known, that the mining association ‘Donbass’ (Director Y. I. Baranov, authorized representative for presidential candidate V. F. Yanukovych in district №41), under orders from the mining administration is sending 450 miners to Kiev (150 from the mine “Glubokaya” and 300 from the mine under the name of Pochenkov). The miners must take absentee ballots and take a special train to Kiev on October 30, 2004. The return trip will be on November 1, 2004. They will have to vote in Kiev.”<sup>412</sup>

Around the same time, a letter from a resident of Yenakiyevo, Yanukovych’s hometown, Igor Karavaev added the following:

“In Yenakiyevo (Donetsk Oblast), especially in the mining towns, these days a panic rules that is transforming into shock. According to the testimony of trustworthy sources, job assignments came down as a command in some of the coal mining enterprises in the city. The essence is as follows: 50 people from the mine should leave for Kiev for a period of three days. The purpose of this mission is not disclosed, instead specifying the following: a nurse must be with every group of miners sent to the elections in the capital.”<sup>413</sup>

As underinformed activists, most of these miners remained unaware of the purpose behind their journey. Those that were informed were told they would be acting as observers, though they lacked any of the prerequisite legal knowledge or training to act in this capacity. Furthermore, the presence of nurses with the miners created cause for angst amidst the possibility that the Party of Regions would provoke conflict in the capital. Regardless, these miners willingly travelled under orders to demonstrate their support for Yanukovych and resist the opposition.

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<sup>412</sup> Гармаш, “Шахтёры как пушечное мясо. Или ‘Ты готов к гражданской войне?’,” [Miners as cannon fodder. Or “Are you ready for civil war?”].

<sup>413</sup> Ibid.

The regional organization of the Committee of Voters of Ukraine claimed that at least some of these miners had been registered in advance as election observers but demurred when asked about instances where this was impossible or factually incorrect. Leonid Martynov, deputy chairman of the Central Committee of PRUP—notably headed by Viktor Tyrmanov, a member of the Party of Regions—alongside the head of the NPGDb Mykola Volynko both denied any knowledge or refused to comment on the developments in the mines. Only the leader of the NPGU, Mykhailo Volynets, a people’s deputy and member of the pro-Yuschenko opposition, revealed any information about mobilization in the mines, commenting:

“I have information from Pavlograd, where there are ten mines, that they are mobilizing 50 people from each mine. They will be transported by train to Kiev. Accommodations are planned on the trains until November 2. We do not know the details of how they will be dealt with. As for Donetsk Oblast, the management of the mining association ‘Donbass’ has been given the task of mobilizing from 200 to 300 people, at ‘Krasnoarmeyskoy-Zapadnoy №1’ – 400 people. In Dobropolsky district, this is similarly taking place. In the mines of Dmitrivo it is the same way.”<sup>414</sup>

Volynets elaborated further, pointing to the fact that many people were being “influenced” under the suggestion that “they should support their candidate from Donetsk,” referencing Yanukovych. Others, however, believed they would act as election observers, a proposition that Volynets insisted was impossible given that the October 25 deadline to submit lists of election observers had already passed. Journalists from *Ukrainskaya Pravda* speculated that these miners’ real purpose was either to commit voter election fraud by voting in both Kyiv and Donetsk or to

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<sup>414</sup> Гармаш, “Шахтёры как пушечное мясо. Или ‘Ты готов к гражданской войне?’,” [Miners as cannon fodder. Or “Are you ready for civil war?”].

act as provocateurs in counter demonstrations positioned against the opposition.<sup>415</sup> But the feared outbreak of violence did not take place in the capital. Instead, as the Ukrainian Supreme Court's later decision would show following Ukraine's descent into electoral confusion and popular upheaval after the second round of elections, concerns over voter fraud and the abuse of absentee ballots proved prescient.<sup>416</sup> The Donbas miners had become willing participants in a stolen election.

### **Congress at Severodonetsk: Open Separatism and Appeals to the Miners**

The falsified results in the second round of the 2004 Ukrainian Presidential Elections ushered in two waves of reactions. The first brought about a colossal revolution in west-central Ukraine, in a movement that Swedish economist Anders Aslund jokingly referred to as “a revolt of the millionaires against the billionaires.”<sup>417</sup> Indeed, a diverse cross-section of business owners, middle-class Ukrainians, and students raised their voices against overt tampering in the election results. Even wealthy businessmen from the eastern oblasts quietly affirmed their respect for Yuschenko.<sup>418</sup> In stark contrast, the second wave from the east represented the first attempt at organized, top-down political separatism in the eastern oblasts in the history of an independent Ukraine. One of the primary targets and constituencies of this political messaging was the miners, whose growing relationship with authoritarian elements would only become more radical with the injection of separatist rhetoric and sympathies.

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<sup>415</sup> Гармаш, “Шахтёры как пушечное мясо. Или ‘Ты готов к гражданской войне?’” [Miners as cannon fodder. Or “Are you ready for civil war?”].

<sup>416</sup> Верховний суд України, “Справа № 6-388-1 інст. 2004р,” [Case No. 6-388-1 from year 2004], December 3, 2004, 5, <https://web.archive.org/web/20051102073528/http://www.msspecial.com/media/rishennya.pdf>.

<sup>417</sup> Anders Aslund, “Ukraine Whole and Free: What I saw at the orange revolution,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, December 27, 2004, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2004/12/27/ukraine-whole-and-free-what-i-saw-at-orange-revolution-pub-16285>.

<sup>418</sup> Ibid.

In a display of regional solidarity and the power of the Party of Regions political machine, 3,576 deputies from Crimea, Dnipropetrovsk, Donetsk, Zaporozhye, Kirovograd, Luhansk, Nikolaev, Odessa, Poltava, Sumy, Kharkiv, Kherson, and Chernigov<sup>419</sup> assembled on November 28 in the city of Severodonetsk at the First All-Ukrainian Congress of Deputies of All Levels. Over raucous applause, deputies levied frequent attacks on the “Nashists” (*Nashisty*)—a disparaging name for supporters of Our Ukraine (Nasha Ukraina) which plays off a combination of the Russian words for “our” (*nasha*) and the Russian words for “fascists” (*fashisty*)—and Yuschenko. They also repeated long-standing tropes about the disproportionate contribution that eastern oblasts made to the state budget,<sup>420</sup> called for the protection of Russian linguistic rights, and proclaimed Yanukovich the democratically elected president of Ukraine under threat of impending conflict and the dissolution of Ukraine if the results of the second round of the election were not upheld. In a break from preceding norms, the deputies also condemned sitting President Leonid Kuchma for his inaction during the electoral chaos, calling for his resignation if he did not cede power to Yanukovich.<sup>421</sup>

Amidst this aggressive separatist rhetoric, direct appeals to the mining industry and colliers for legitimacy were commonplace. Understanding their base of support, deputies took advantage of their relationship with the miners to fuel separatist sympathies. For instance, in his opening address to the congress at Severodonetsk, leader of the Luhansk Regional Council Viktor Nikolaevich Tikhanov praised Yanukovich’s intimate knowledge of the Donbas and

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<sup>419</sup> Deputies from Transcarpathia also intended to join the congress but were unable to due to bad weather conditions.

<sup>420</sup> This phrase often appears as follows: “The [Donbas/East] feeds Ukraine” (Donbass/Vostok kormit Ukrainu).

<sup>421</sup> “Стенограмма Всеукраинского съезда депутатов Верховной рады АР Крым, местных советов всех уровней,” [Transcript of the All-Ukrainian Congress of Deputies of the Verkhovna Rada of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, local councils of all levels], *Городские Новосты*, November 28, 2004, <http://www.citynews.net.ua/stenograma.html>; <https://v-variant.com.ua/article/stenohramma-severodonetskoho-s-ezda-28-noiabria-2004-hoda/>.

emphasized Yanukovych's role in preserving stability in the east and supporting economic growth in the mining industry, declaring:

“[Yanukovych] inherited a difficult legacy from his predecessors: massive wage arrears, beggarly pensions and social benefits, the need to quickly refit morally and physically obsolete assets, and the revival of agriculture on a new qualitative foundation. I must say that the Prime Minister's team suitably managed these tasks. The wage arrears to the miners were repaid, something that many did not hope for, millions of pensioners received significant increases to their pensions, the size of social benefits, stipends, and salaries in the public sector increased, there was a significant increase in the average salary in industry. The country maintains unprecedented high rates of economic development, according to this indicator we place first among all of the countries in the CIS. Unprecedented volumes of investment are being obtained at the enterprises of the metallurgical industry, coal enterprises are working steadily, machine building is experiencing a revival, and the energy grid powered by Rovensky nuclear power plant has been launched.”<sup>422</sup>

Such proclamations fell in line with the image Yanukovych projected of himself as an ally of the working class and the coal mining industry. Only months earlier on August 28, during memorial meeting for Miner's Day in Ukraine, Yanukovych had professed his commitment to the mining industry in Luhansk. He promised to pay wage arrears from the state budget, raise safety standards for mines, and increase coal production.<sup>423</sup> Such overtures formed the bedrock of Yanukovych's popular appeal amongst the colliers.

Similarly, the other deputies pronounced their own connections to miners and the coal industry, placing their interests in diametric opposition to the Orange Revolution. For instance,

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<sup>422</sup> “Стенограмма Всеукраинского съезда депутатов Верховной рады АР Крым, местных советов всех уровней,” [Transcript of the All-Ukrainian Congress of Deputies of the Verkhovna Rada of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, local councils of all levels], *Городские Новости*.

<sup>423</sup> Луганская областная администрация, “Погашение задолженности – это наш долг перед шахтёрами. – Виктор Янукович,” [Debt repayment is our obligation to the miners. - Victor Yanukovich], August 28, 2004, [http://mpe.energy.gov.ua/oda/press/archive/archive\\_3972.html?template=33](http://mpe.energy.gov.ua/oda/press/archive/archive_3972.html?template=33).

during a speech before the congress, Luhansk Oblast Deputy Yuliy Yakovlevich Ioffe condemned the Orange Revolution for provocations against the east, arguing:

“There is malice and hatred on the streets of Kiev today. The so-called socialists approach me and tell me to choose my country of residence...My country is here, and I cannot and will not disgrace my grandfather, a steam locomotive machinist, or my father a simple miner, or my thirty years of experience in the coal industry in Luhansk Oblast.”<sup>424</sup>

Ioffe explicitly underscored his deep connection to coal mining in Luhansk Oblast, foregoing any direct mention of Ukraine. Building upon this same regional separatist trend through the lens of coal mining, an unidentified speaker from Perevalsk professed his belief that “Yanukovych knows how to create, and we have felt this in two years: the mines began to develop, people received their wages, we should not lose this just because the orange supporters have flooded Kyiv, and I am interested in such a small move, but what if we transfer power not to Kyiv, where those oranges<sup>425</sup> crawl on the asphalt, but to Kharkov. Who is for this?”<sup>426</sup> His question was met with uproarious applause.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the tone and content of these words was recreated in mining communities across the Donbas. At the convergence of miners and authoritarians’ interests, support for Yanukovych and separatism found fertile ground. For instance, *Ukrainian Truth* reported that rumors, myths, and conspiracies became commonplace in the Donbas. Residents of the mining regions claimed that “under Yuschenko, salaries were not paid for five years. The children had nothing to eat. But under Yanukovych, they paid off all the arrears [and]

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<sup>424</sup> «Стенограмма Всеукраинского съезда депутатов Верховной рады АР Крым, местных советов всех уровней,” [Transcript of the All-Ukrainian Congress of Deputies of the Verkhovna Rada of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, local councils of all levels], *Городские Новости*.

<sup>425</sup> The speaker uses the literal word for the fruit (apel’siny) to describe the protestors in a degrading manner.

<sup>426</sup> Стенограмма Всеукраинского съезда депутатов Верховной рады АР Крым, местных советов всех уровней,” [Transcript of the All-Ukrainian Congress of Deputies of the Verkhovna Rada of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, local councils of all levels], *Городские Новости*.

compensation [and] recourse. I bought an apartment and paid my debts. We all felt like people again.” More radical residents proclaimed that “it’s necessary to arm ourselves and go to Kyiv. Rinat [Akhmetov], if he wants, can drive the wagon of machine guns.” Moreover, they declared that if Yuschenko came to power, the government would buy Polish coal, the mines would close, Americans would hold sway over Ukraine, the Russian language would be banned, the miners would go to Kyiv, and Russia would bring its forces into Ukraine. Almost verbatim, these people also repeated the separatist deputies’ appeals, announcing that “if Yuschenko wins, there will be a referendum...And there will be a federation,” while others predicted that “there will be a capital in Kharkov. Kyiv has never been the capital, perhaps sometime in antiquity, but that was not Ukraine, but Rus. But Kharkov – that is the first capital!”<sup>427</sup> The separatists’ appeals had hit home in the intended audience.

The deputies at Severodonetsk propped up Yanukovych’s importance to the colliers in an attempt to bolstering his legitimacy—and the idea of separatism—in the eyes of the miners. It worked. Alongside warnings of a coming conflict and threats to the Ukraine’s existence as a unitary state, Tikhonov offered a grim but clear message to Donbas residents: “The hungry eyes of the elderly and the desperate marches of the miners are still fresh in our memory.”<sup>428</sup> For neither the first nor the last time, Donbas politicians pitted a declining mining industry against liberal reform in west-central Ukraine, equating the results of the presidential election to a referendum on their survival and prosperity. The miners, for their part, readily accepted these deputies’ patronage in a bid to preserve their livelihoods.

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<sup>427</sup> Константин Могильник и Дмитрий Каратеев, “В Донбассе говорят,” [In Donbass, they are talking], *Украинская Правда*, January 31, 2005, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2005/01/31/3006623/>.

<sup>428</sup> «Стенограмма Всеукраинского съезда депутатов Верховной рады АР Крым, местных советов всех уровней,” [Transcript of the All-Ukrainian Congress of Deputies of the Verkhovna Rada of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, local councils of all levels], *Городские Новости*.



Eventually the deputies adopted resolutions affirming their conviction to protect the rights of citizens of the southeastern regions in the event of an illegitimate president taking office. These eastern oblasts would, in theory, join a new regional confederation with Kharkiv as its capital.<sup>429</sup> In this swell of emotions and radical polarization, the territorial integrity of Ukraine hung in the balance. In a surprising move, it was Yanukovych himself who tempered these separatist agitators, refusing to stand at the helm of the separatist movement if it meant bloodshed in Ukraine and declaring his commitment to the rule of law in Ukraine. As one observer recalled a year later, “If Yanukovych had simply said ‘Yes’ on that day, we would already live in separate countries.”<sup>430</sup> Regardless, the results of the congress would have devastating implications. Miners and authoritarians had ratified their common cause at the altar of separatism, a fact which would reverberate in the not-so-distant future.

### **Miners on the Maidan, A Political Threat**

As the events in Severodonetsk unfolded, Yanukovych’s camp quickly mobilized miners to confront the ever-expanding waves of protestors in Kyiv. As the focal point of the Orange Revolution, over a million protestors were already congregating on Maidan Square, donning the color of Yuschenko’s campaign while opposition leaders addressed their sea of supporters.<sup>431</sup> As part of the counterprotest effort, Deputy Chairman of the Central Committee of PRUP Leonid Davydov announced a collective effort to transport representatives from almost all of the mining associations and independent mines to Kyiv. According to Davydov, these miners were offended

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<sup>429</sup> «Стенограмма Всеукраинского съезда депутатов Верховной рады АР Крым, местных советов всех уровней,” [Transcript of the All-Ukrainian Congress of Deputies of the Verkhovna Rada of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, local councils of all levels], *Городские Новости*; “Янукович и Лужков приехали в Северодонецк,” [Yanukovych and Luzhkov arrived in Severodonetsk], *Грани.ру*, November 28, 2004, <https://graniru.org/Politics/World/Europe/Ukraine/m.80421.html>.

<sup>430</sup> “Северодонецкий съезд: Правда очевидца,” [Severodonetsk Congress: An Eyewitness’ Truth], *УРА-Информ.Донбасс*, November 28, 2005, <http://ura.dn.ua/28.11.2005/4871.html>.

<sup>431</sup> Aslund, *How Ukraine Became a Market Economy and Democracy*, 192.

by the Orange Revolution's unwillingness to accept Yanukovich's victory. The PRUP Central Committee also issued an appeal to President Kuchma, expressing their deep indignation at the "illegal actions of irresponsible politicians who are provoking mass psychosis."<sup>432</sup> In doing so, they actively lent their support to Yanukovich's campaign and his populist authoritarianism.

Echoing the arguments put forth at Severodonetsk, these miners stood behind their desire for stability and national acceptance of the popular will, which they believed was reflected in the mines. Attaching their fate to Yanukovich, these miners remained steadfast in their support, closing ranks within the political machine spanning the Donbas region and the mining communities. Speaking at the time, Sergei P. Pashkov, a brigade leader of 160 miners at Trudovskaya mine in Donetsk, stated simply, "We are for Yanukovich. That is the opinion of all of the mine." At the same mine, 51-year veteran collier Viktor P. Sorokovoy lamented, "Imagine a miner, who worked his whole life, finding out his vote did not count."<sup>433</sup> In an industry where feelings of rampant economic injustice had long shaped the miners' anger, their decades-long intolerance of political and even more social injustice now festered. For those who made the journey to Kyiv, this anger continued to boil over. They were joined by other "strong men," namely workers and athletes. One Odessa resident recalled years later how "rigid order was implemented."<sup>434</sup> Once they reached Kiev, this uniformity quickly dissipated as the miners were left without orders from their regional leaders. Crowds of miners wearing helmets decorated with

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<sup>432</sup> "Все новые группы шахтёров отправляются в Киев для поддержки В. Януковича," [More and more new groups of miners are sent to Kiev to support V. Yanukovich], *Ведомости*, November 24, 2004, <https://www.vedomosti.ru/library/news/2004/11/24/vse-novye-gruppy-shahterov-otpravlyayutsya-v-kiiev-dlya-podderzhki-vyanukovicha>.

<sup>433</sup> C.J. Chivers, "In a World Below, Bedrock Resistance to Protests in Kiev," *The New York Times*, November 30, 2004, <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/11/30/world/europe/in-a-world-below-bedrock-resistance-to-protests-in-kiiev.html>.

<sup>434</sup> Наталья Ионычева и Александр Сибирцев, "Воспоминания о 2004-м: бизнесмены носили на Майдан лимоны, а сторонники Януковича плакали," [Memories of 2004: businessmen brought lemons to the Maidan, and Yanukovich's supporters cried], *Сегодня*, July 5, 2011, <https://www.segodnya.ua/newsarchive/vocpominanija-o-2004-m-biznecmeny-nocili-na-majdan-limony-a-ctoronniki-janukovicha-plakali-255494.html>.

slogans such as “Donetsk and Odessa for Yanukovych!” and “To the Orange supporters – ass!” were left restless and agitated. In the words of the same Odessa resident, “We did not receive any directives, how exactly to ‘stand’ for Yanukovych – but all of the guys burned with the desire to fight the Orange supporters.”<sup>435</sup> Demonstrating their lack of grassroots initiative sans orders from the top of the political machine, the Yanukovych camp, while present, was timid and unsure of their next move.<sup>436</sup>

Part of the explanation for this indecision can be attributed to the concurrent negotiations which took place alongside the protests in the capital. Watching the turmoil on Maidan Square, President Leonid Kuchma kickstarted a mediation process on November 23 by contacting Polish President Aleksandr Kwasniewski. After brief consultations between the European Union, Polish authorities, the Yanukovych camp, and the Orange representatives, the first Polish mediators arrived in Kyiv on November 24. Round table discussions initially stalled due to proposals from Kuchma and Yanukovych on the potential for power sharing, in this case giving Yushenko the position of prime minister.<sup>437</sup> These rejected proposals, alongside the mediators’ insistence that the election should be free and fair in the eyes of the global community, incensed the Yanukovych camp.

With their grip on power gradually slipping away, the authoritarians threatened the use of force. Their foot soldiers in this campaign would be the miners. Chief of Staff for the Prime Minister Serhiy Leonidovych Tihipko shouted this threat at the Polish committee, claiming that

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<sup>435</sup> Ионычева и Сибирцев, “Воспоминания о 2004-м: бизнесмены носили на Майдан лимоны, а сторонники Януковича плакали,” [Memories of 2004: businessmen brought lemons to the Maidan, and Yanukovych's supporters cried].

<sup>436</sup> Aslund, *How Ukraine Became a Market Economy and Democracy*, 195.

<sup>437</sup> “Закулисная история революции,” [The behind-the-scenes history of the revolution], *Украинская Правда*, April 18, 2005, translated by ИноСМИ from *Gazeta Wyborcza*, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2005/04/18/3008917/>.

twenty thousand miners from Donetsk would soon descend on Kyiv “in order to lift the blockade of institutions and create the possibility for President Viktor Yanukovich, elected by the Ukrainian people, to work.”<sup>438</sup> In another display of underwhelming grassroots support and initiative, only five thousand miners materialized in Kyiv to take part in this operation. The hungry, tired, and partially intoxicated miners were quick to dissipate once Orange revolutionaries offered them food and warm tea. Despite this, tensions still hung in the air, and the possibility of violent confrontation between Yanukovich supporters and the Orange Revolution or armed suppression of the opposition still remained.

These fears never came to fruition. Rather, as Yushenko supporter and Orange protestor Aleksandr Vorontsov recalled years later, “We calmly discussed with the representatives of the white-blue camp of Viktor Yanukovich, engaged normally with the miners who arrived from Donetsk, and there was not any confrontation between us.”<sup>439</sup> Indeed, Yanukovich’s unwillingness to push the miners into confrontation avoided bloodshed. As Yanukovich himself attested a year later in 2005:

“A year ago, we stood on Prestation Square, and there were 40,000 of our supporters. They were only waiting for the signal to defend our election. With deep pain, I called them to return home, but I also said that we would soon be back.”<sup>440</sup>

Peaceful mediation was reached, and after a decision from the Ukrainian Supreme Court on December 3, 2004, an unprecedented third round of elections was planned for December 26, 2004.<sup>441</sup>

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<sup>438</sup> “Закулисная история революции,” [The behind-the-scenes history of the revolution], *Украинская Правда*.

<sup>439</sup> Александр Воронцов, “Хроника пикетирующего Майдана,” [Chronicle of the picketing Maidan], *Житомир*, November 23, 2008, [https://www.zhitomir.info/news\\_31144.html](https://www.zhitomir.info/news_31144.html).

<sup>440</sup> “Янукович розповів, як закликав донецьких повертатися,” [Yanukovich told how he called on Donetsk to return], *Українська Правда*, December 3, 2005, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2005/12/3/3026772/>.

In the intervening time between the second and third round of the elections, Yanukovych returned to campaign amongst the miners, while other colliers in the east continued to hold demonstrations in support of his candidacy.<sup>442</sup> These efforts to shore up support and drive up turnout in the eastern oblasts did not replicate the advantage conferred by ballot stuffing and the abuse of absentee ballots, however, and Yushenko emerged victorious in the third round of the 2004 Ukrainian Presidential Elections. The Donetsk Clan and the Party of Regions eventually accepted the results of the election—albeit after Yanukovych refused to concede and filed hundreds of lawsuits—and the new Orange coalition took power.<sup>443</sup>

### **Subverting an Ineffective Orange Government**

The Orange government turned out to be far less revolutionary than initially anticipated. Personal rivalries and political intrigue hamstrung the new administration from its earliest days due to differing visions of the future and inert legislative reform.<sup>444</sup> Unencumbered by an authoritarian central government, the miners were released to protest the new Orange government, which they believed was not doing enough to support the industry. Once they were no longer in power, eastern authorities stood by as mass protests resumed in late 2005. In October, protest actions attracted between 10,000 and 25,000 miners across Donetsk and Luhansk. The miners demanded additional funding for additional capital and re-equipment totaling \$1.15 billion. One of the local union representatives warned that the budget plan for 2006 “places the coal industry of the country under threat of catastrophe” due to a lack of

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<sup>441</sup> Верховний суд України, “Справа № 6-388-1 інст. 2004р,” [Case No. 6-388-1 from year 2004].

<sup>442</sup> “Янукович в Донецке знакомится с новым местом работы?” [Yanukovych in Donetsk gets to know his new workplace?], *Українська Правда*, December 8, 2004, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2004/12/8/4383745/>; “На митинге в Харькове 16 декабря Януковича поддерживали луганские шахтеры,” [Luhansk miners supported Yanukovych at a rally in Kharkiv on December 16], *CXID.info*, December 17, 2004, [https://cxid.info/13722\\_na-mitinge-v-xarkove-dekabrya-yanukovicha-podderzhivali-luganskije-shaxtery.html](https://cxid.info/13722_na-mitinge-v-xarkove-dekabrya-yanukovicha-podderzhivali-luganskije-shaxtery.html).

<sup>443</sup> Aslund, *How Ukraine Became a Market Economy and Democracy*, 201–202.

<sup>444</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

support from the Yushenko government.<sup>445</sup> These protests did not develop into a coherent movement, there was no apparent widespread coordination, and there were no demands leveled at local Donbas authorities. In short, these protests hardly mimicked the strikes of the 1990s, and they did not disturb Yanukovich and the Party of Region's political campaigns in advance of the March 2006 parliamentary elections.

Yanukovich returned to power on August 4, 2006, when he became prime minister under President Yushenko.<sup>446</sup> Once more, he rode a wave of support from the coal mining regions of the Donbas. For instance, Anna Bychkova, a pensioner from Alchevsk in Luhansk Oblast remarked ahead of the election that "Yanukovich speaks Russian more, and he's more for the simple people." Stanislav Belich, the head of the miners' union at Bazhanov mine in Donetsk Oblast, declared he would vote for the Party of Regions because he fondly recalled Yanukovich's term as prime minister between 2002 and 2004. According to Belich, "they stopped closing the mines. Factories increased production. This happened when Yanukovich was in power, so the eastern regions have been supporting him."<sup>447</sup> The powerful holdover of support from Yanukovich's earlier policies, such as raising pensions, was a form of populist appeal that Yanukovich readily leveraged into political support.

The miners' belief in Yanukovich was not unfounded. Only weeks after assuming his post as prime minister, Yanukovich delivered a statement on August 22, declaring that he would take the mining industry under his personal control. He asserted his intent to repay miners' debts

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<sup>445</sup> "Донецкие шахтёры провели митинг протеста," [Donetsk miners held a protest rally], *Vesti*, October 14, 2005, <https://www.vesti.ru/article/2350844>; "На Украине продолжаются массовые акции протестов шахтёров," [Mass protests of miners continue in Ukraine], *Deutsche Welle*, October 13, 2005, <https://p.dw.com/p/7IcP>.

<sup>446</sup> "Премьер-министром Украины стал Виктор Янукович," [Viktor Yanukovich becomes Prime Minister of Ukraine], *Deutsche Welle*, August 4, 2006, <https://p.dw.com/p/8u6j>.

<sup>447</sup> David Holley, "Ukraine is the Winner as Nation Heads to the Polls," *Los Angeles Times*, March 26, 2006, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2006-mar-26-fg-ukraine26-story.html>.

and work directly with the trade unions on industry reforms. Furthermore, he advocated for the construction of vertically integrated supply chains in the mining industry—similar to those already operated by his friend Akhmetov at the time—and privatizing additional mines to this end.<sup>448</sup> Unsurprisingly, Yanukovych initiated mine sales to Akhmetov in the same month.<sup>449</sup> Days after this announcement, at a meeting with miners at the Luhanskugol’ association, Yanukovych declared, “If we do not build new mines, then the coal industry will not have a future.” He envisioned new mines in every major oblast in the Donbas, including Luhansk, Donetsk, and Dnipropetrovsk.<sup>450</sup> This was accompanied by his professed desire to limit the powers of President Yushchenko.<sup>451</sup> Yanukovych was courting the miners’ support while undermining the presidency.

This trend of projecting a pro-miner stance at the expense of Yushchenko continued throughout Yanukovych’s term as prime minister. On November 10, Yanukovych ordered wage increases for all miners and the immediate payment of outstanding debts to the mining industry.<sup>452</sup> Eight days later, the worst mining disaster in the history of Ukrainian independence

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<sup>448</sup> “В. Янукович взял угольную отрасль под ‘личный контроль’,” [V. Yanukovych took the coal industry under “personal control”], *Лига*, August 22, 2006, <https://news.liga.net/economics/news/v-yanukovich-vzval-ugolnuyu-otrasl-pod-lichnyy-kontrol>; «“Премьер возьмёт угольную отрасль под личный контроль,” [The prime minister will take the coal industry under personal control], *Вечерний Харьков*, August 22, 2006, <https://vecherniy.kharkov.ua/news/5595/>; “Виктор Янукович объявил о реформе угледобычи,” [Viktor Yanukovych announced coal mining reform], *Коммерсантъ*, August 23, 2006, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1701827>.

<sup>449</sup> “Виктор Янукович продаст шахты Ринату Ахметову,” [Viktor Yanukovych will sell the mines to Rinat Akhmetov], *УкрРудПром*, August 14, 2006, <http://ukrrudprom.com/news/nahdyej140806.html>.

<sup>450</sup> “Виктор Янукович: ‘Если мы не будем строить новые шахты, у угольной промышленности не будет будущего’,” [Viktor Yanukovych: “If we don’t build new mines, the coal industry will have no future”], *Укринформ*, September 18, 2006, [http://old.kmu.gov.ua/kmu/control/ru/publish/article?art\\_id=48145649&cat\\_id=244314008](http://old.kmu.gov.ua/kmu/control/ru/publish/article?art_id=48145649&cat_id=244314008); “За новыми шахтами - будущее Украины. - Виктор Янукович,” [The future of Ukraine depends on the new mines. - Victor Yanukovych], *Луганська обласна державна адміністрація*, September 18, 2006, [http://old.loga.gov.ua/oda/press/archive/archive\\_7679.html?template=33](http://old.loga.gov.ua/oda/press/archive/archive_7679.html?template=33).

<sup>451</sup> «Ющенко мешает Януковичу погрузиться в работу с головой,” [Yushchenko prevents Yanukovych from plunging into work headlong], *Известия*, September 18, 2006, <https://iz.ru/news/385152>.

<sup>452</sup> “Янукович требует повысить зарплату шахтёрам и отдать им все долги,” [Yanukovych demands to raise miners’ wages and pay all debts], *Новый День*, November 10, 2006, <https://newdaynews.ru/donbass/91245.html>.

took place at Zasyadko mine in Donetsk. A gas explosion killed 106 coal miners and mine rescue specialists. Almost immediately, Yanukovich introduced legislation to raise the federal minimum wage and pensions on a quarterly basis for the 2008 state budget.<sup>453</sup> Amidst national shock and mourning, Yushchenko ordered Yanukovich to close the mine. Yanukovich initially agreed that further deaths must be prevented, but he further added:

“Zasyadko mine yields three million tons of coal a year, and considering that there is a six million ton deficit of coking coal in Ukraine, we are confronted with colossal economic consequences. This question [mine closures] has not been discussed today.”

The mine never closed.<sup>454</sup> At the cost of future lives, Yanukovich kept Zasyadko open and preserved the income stream of the oligarchic interests that stood behind the mine. This event was emblematic of Yanukovich’s complex relationship with the mining industry. On the one hand, he condemned future miners to death at a mine that was well known for its atrocious safety record and extraordinarily hazardous conditions. On the other hand, he kept those miners employed, while keeping his underlings satisfied and subverting Yushchenko’s authority. Additionally, he sought to ease any potential challenges to his politics with wage and pension increases. Following these issues, Yanukovich was replaced as prime minister in late

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<sup>453</sup> «“Пенсии и зарплаты будут увеличивать ежеквартально,” [Pensions and salaries will be increased on a quarterly basis], *Голос України*, November 22, 2007, <http://www.golos.com.ua/rus/article/197236>.

<sup>454</sup> “Ющенко требует закрыть донецкую шахту, на которой погибло 106 шахтеров,” [Yushchenko demands closing Donetsk mine where 106 miners have died], *Reuters*, December 3, 2007, <https://www.reuters.com/article/orutp-ukraine-mine-blast-20071203-idRUKAL33488720071203>; “Ющенко требует закрыть шахту в Донецке,” [Yushchenko demands to close the mine in Donetsk], *Российская Газета*, December 3, 2007, <https://rg.ru/2007/12/03/ushenko-anons.html>; Дмитро Донський, “10 лет назад на шахте Засядько заказали 106 гробов, люди продолжают гибнуть на шахтах Украины,” [10 years ago, 106 coffins were ordered at the Zasyadko mine, people continue to die in the mines of Ukraine], *Радио Свобода*, November 20, 2017, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/donbass-realii/28865019.html>.



December.<sup>455</sup> Notably, across his tenure, the few miners' protests that did take place were limited to localized efforts.<sup>456</sup>



Figure 32. Miners bury their dead after the explosion at Zasyadko mine. Source: MiningWiki

Deposed from his position as prime minister, Yanukovych returned to the opposition with his eyes on the 2010 presidential elections. In 2009, the Party of Regions began drumming up support amongst the miners. Yanukovych and his supporters accused the government of intimidating the directors of the mine, while criticizing their efforts to reform laws on the prestige of miners' labor.<sup>457</sup> Yet the discontent that Yanukovych mustered was managed. Any

<sup>455</sup> Aslund, *How Ukraine Became a Market Economy and Democracy*, 221–22.

<sup>456</sup> “Шахтёры Рината Ахметова грозят наведаться в Киев,” [Rinat Akhmetov's miners threaten to visit Kiev], *Українська Правда*, February 9, 2007, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2007/02/9/4412968/>; “Шахтёры-инвалиды в шоке: Янукович забрал пособие,” [Disabled miners are shocked: Yanukovych took away their allowance], *Українська Правда*, October 24, 2006, <http://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/articles/2006/10/24/4407342/>.

<sup>457</sup> “Янукович: директора донбасских шахт продали душу дьяволу,” [Yanukovych: directors of Donbass mines sold their souls to the devil], *Українські новини*, November 18, 2009, <https://ukranews.com/news/15829-yanukovych-dyrektora-donbasskykh-shakht-prodaly-dushu-dyavolu>.

major protest actions that took place were carefully directed to avoid internal threats to party unity and the existing Donbas power structure. For instance, in late February, local cells from the Party of Regions supported striking miners at Izvestiya mine in Krasniy Luch in Luhansk Oblast. The miners began protesting as a result of depressed coal prices, unpaid wages, and debts to the coal industry totaling over 1 billion *hryvnia*. The Party of Regions representatives reportedly helped direct the miners' fury against new Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko's government and her allies. The miners blamed them for the worsening conditions in the coal industry and haphazard privatization.<sup>458</sup> Such a protest fell well within the bounds of acceptable collective action for the Party of Regions.

In sharp contrast, miners at the state-owned Makeevugol' association also went on strike at the same time, but their aims interfered with the Party of Regions' political agenda, thereby leading to an intervention. The mine leadership's decision to lease the state mine brought them into direct confrontation with local authorities, who opposed this measure. Both the coal management and the local authorities belonged to the Party of Regions' sphere of influence. Despite this fact, the miners prepared for massive rallies in open defiance of the local government. To avoid this unsanctioned protest, Yanukovich personally intervened, reprimanding the Party of Regions' members involved in the dispute.<sup>459</sup> The miners' rallies never took place. This kind of undirected militancy, particularly when both sides belonged to the same vertical power structure, served Yanukovich no purpose apart from demonstrating a lack of internal unity and potentially jeopardizing the Party of Region's chances ahead of the next election.

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<sup>458</sup> Александр Мищенко, "Кадровые перестановки в угледобывающей отрасли: от перемены начальников результат не меняется," [Personnel changes in the coal mining industry: the result does not change from the permutation of the chiefs], *Время*, February 23, 2009, [http://lib.rada.gov.ua/static/about/monitor-09/reg\\_09/reg\\_09\\_13.htm](http://lib.rada.gov.ua/static/about/monitor-09/reg_09/reg_09_13.htm).

<sup>459</sup> Ibid.

This pattern continued up until the 2010 elections. The Party of Regions galvanized miners' protests against the government, while more unwieldy strike actions were reined in and postponed.<sup>460</sup> Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko accused the Party of Regions of provoking the miners and attempting to discredit the government at every step. Moreover, she declared:

“Today, members of the Party of Regions go and raise the mines, saying: ‘Take up your hard hats, go, knock underneath the government, call everyone to strike.’ While we are aware of this situation, today we do not owe a single kopeck for miners’ wage arrears. And there will not be [a debt] in the course of the entire year. And they will not do what they want for the miners.”<sup>461</sup>

Irrespective of Tymoshenko's claims to the contrary, Yanukovich homed in on the issue of debt payments and miners' salaries. In November, Yanukovich met with miners at the state-owned mining association Artyomugol' in the city of Horlivka, Donetsk Oblast. He promised the miners that in the event of victory, he would repay debts on their pensions and wages, retroactive to November 1. He further claimed that “as soon as we get rid of this government, we will solve this problem, this will be the first question which I will resolve.”<sup>462</sup> The appeal to the miners paid off for Yanukovich at the ballot box. For instance, during the elections, Donetsk miner Oleg Novchin remarked, “We lost five years of life. Thanks to Yushenko and Tymoshenko. When it was Viktor Fyodorovich, everything was there – both the gross product and everything

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<sup>460</sup> “Юлия Тимошенко обвинила ПР в провокации шахтёров,” [Yulia Tymoshenko accused the Party of Regions of provoking miners], *Шахтёр*, April 1, 2009, [http://shahter.net/1028\\_yuliya-timoshenko-obvinila-pr-v-provokacii-shaxterov.html](http://shahter.net/1028_yuliya-timoshenko-obvinila-pr-v-provokacii-shaxterov.html); Евгений Шибалов, “Летние бунтари, или Приводной ремень отечественного капитала,” [Summer rebels, or The Drive belt of domestic capital], *Зеркало Недели*, March 20, 2009, [https://zn.ua/internal/letnie\\_buntari\\_ili\\_privodnoy\\_remen\\_otechestvennogo\\_kapitala.html](https://zn.ua/internal/letnie_buntari_ili_privodnoy_remen_otechestvennogo_kapitala.html).

<sup>461</sup> “Тимошенко пожаловалась на ‘собачьи бои,’ где ‘загрызают до смерти,’” [Tymoshenko complained about “dog fights” where “they gnaw everyone to death”], *Украинская Правда*, March 30, 2009, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2009/03/30/4478354/>.

<sup>462</sup> “Янукович обещает вернуть долги и доплатить зарплаты и пенсии,” [Yanukovich promises to repay debts and pay extra salaries and pensions], *Левый Берег*, November 18, 2009, [https://lb.ua/news/2009/11/18/14390\\_yanukovich\\_obeshchaet\\_vernut\\_dolgi\\_i.html](https://lb.ua/news/2009/11/18/14390_yanukovich_obeshchaet_vernut_dolgi_i.html).

was rising.”<sup>463</sup> Riding this wave of belief in a return to economic growth and stability—as well as disillusionment with the lackluster Orange government—Yanukovich emerged as the victor in the 2010 presidential elections. Authoritarianism had once more returned to power on the backs of Donbas miners.

### Coal under Yanukovich—Kopanky, Kleptocracy, and Concessions



Figure 33. (Left) An illegal mine (kopanky). (Right) A miner emerges from an illegal mine.

Yanukovich’s presidency was a mix of rampant corruption, criminal activity, overt kleptocracy, and minimal concessions to one of his most important constituencies—the Donbas colliers. After assuming office, Yanukovich followed through on some of his campaign promises to the miners. After unrest stirred in the Donbas mines in early March 2011, Yanukovich ordered Prime Minister Serhei Tihipko to immediately eliminate and repay all 1.3 billion *hryvnia* in debts and wage arrears.<sup>464</sup> Yanukovich’s knack for managing social unrest in the mines became a common theme. For instance, while the head of the NPGU, Mikhail

<sup>463</sup> “Украина выбирает строителя властной вертикали,” [Ukraine chooses the builder of the power vertical], *Forbes*, February 7, 2010, <https://www.forbes.ru/news/41928-ukraina-vybiraet-stroitelya-vlastnoi-vertikali>.

<sup>464</sup> “На родине Януковича шахтёрам не платят зарплату,” [“In the homeland of Yanukovich, miners are not paid their salaries], *Фокус*, March 3, 2011, <https://focus.ua/ukraine/173195>; “Янукович поручил ликвидировать долги по зарплате,” [Yanukovich ordered to eliminate wage arrears], *МинПром*, March 18, 2011, <https://www.minprom.ua/review/63896.html>.

Volynets, threatened an all-Ukraine strike, Yanukovich introduced legislation to raise the minimum wage and pensions before the 2012 parliamentary elections.<sup>465</sup> Moreover, by October, Yanukovich allocated an additional 2.1 billion *hryvnia* for miners' wages in the state budget, raising total state expenses on the coal industry to 10 billion *hryvnia*.<sup>466</sup> He repeated this process in 2013, when he signed into law yet another pay raise, this time a 10 percent increase over the previous year. At the time, Yanukovich declared, "Everything that we are doing for the development of the coal industry, we do, first and foremost, for the people."<sup>467</sup> At least based off his rhetoric and legislative actions, Yanukovich was upholding his end of the bargain with the mining regions which had supported him.

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<sup>465</sup> Наташа Шевченко, "Шахтёры-инвалиды угрожают общеукраинской забастовкой," [Disabled miners threaten a nationwide strike], *Зеркало Недели*, February 22, 2012, <https://zn.ua/SOCIETY/shahtery-invalidy-ugrozhayut-obscheukrainskoy-zabastovkoy.html>; "Янукович перед выборами поднимет пенсии и зарплаты бюджетникам и военнослужащим," [Yanukovich will raise pensions and salaries of state employees and military personnel before the elections], *Зеркало Недели*, February 16, 2012, <https://zn.ua/ECONOMICS/yanukovich-pered-viborami-podnimet-pensii-i-zarplaty-byudgetnikam-i-voennosluzhashchim.html>.

<sup>466</sup> "Янукович подписал закон о повышении зарплат шахтёрам," [Yanukovich signed a law to raise miners' wages], *UBR*, October 1, 2012, <https://ubr.ua/labor-market/ukrainian-labor-market/ianukovich-podpisal-zakon-o-povyshenii-zarplat-shahteram-167336>; "Депутаты добавили 2 млрд грн на зарплаты шахтёрам," [Deputies added 2 billion UAH for miners' salaries], *UBR*, September 18, 2012, <https://ubr.ua/market/industrial/deputaty-dobavili-2-mlrd-grn-na-zarplaty-shahteram-164220>.

<sup>467</sup> "Янукович в Донецке рассказал о росте уровня шахтёрских зарплат," [Yanukovich in Donetsk spoke about the growth in the level of miners' wages], *Новости Донбасса*, August 22, 2013, <https://novosti.dn.ua/news/192379-yanukovich-v-donecke-rasskazal-o-roste-urovnya-shakhterskykh-zarplat>; "Янукович дал денег на зарплаты шахтёрам," [Yanukovich gave money for salaries to miners], *Сегодня*, July 24, 2013, <https://economics.segodnya.ua/economics/enews/YAnukovich-dal-deneg-na-zarplaty-shahteram-449997.html>.

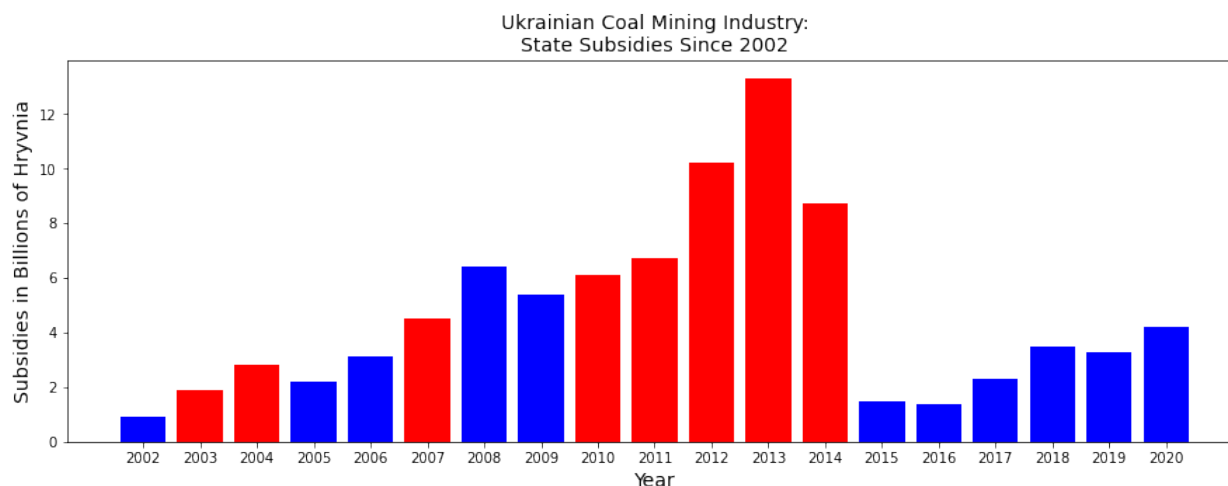


Figure 34. State subsidies to the Ukrainian coal industry since 2002. Years in red indicate periods when Yanukovich began the year in power at the time when budgets would be set. Source: original dataset, see appendix.

Underneath the glossy veneer of increased wages, pensions, and subsidies, however, the actual use of these funds diverged from their earmarked purpose. Although subsidies for the coal industry grew steadily from 10 billion *hryvnia* to a peak of 13.3 billion *hryvnia* in 2013—a record at the time—most of these funds never reached the miners’ pockets. These funds also did not pay for refurbishing or re-equipping mines, despite orders to this effect. Furthermore, the government refused to fund mine closures during this time out of fear of social upheaval. Instead, nearly all of these funds were stolen.<sup>468</sup>

The scale of the this kleptocracy was immense, and it took place at every level of governance. For example, in 2011 alone, gross violations of financial and budgetary discipline at the Makeevugol’ association created a staggering loss of 1,823,500 billion *hryvnia*. The budget of the entire city of Makeevka was only 877 million *hryvnia*.<sup>469</sup> And although Yanukovich

<sup>468</sup> Казанський et al., *Справжня ціна вугілля* [The real price of coal], 32–33; “Дотації в українській угледом: польза и вред,” [Subsidies to the Ukrainian coal industry: benefits and harms], *Дело*, December 23, 2013, <https://delo.ua/business/dotacii-v-ukrainskij-ugleprom-polza-i-vred-222989/>; “На угольну отрасль ежегодно выделяют 10–13 млрд грн дотаций,” [The coal industry is allocated 10–13 billion UAH of subsidies annually], *РБК-Україна*, June 25, 2012, <https://daily.rbc.ua/rus/show/80-ukrainskih-shaht-ubytochny-iz-za-iznoshenosti---istochnik-25062012092800>.

<sup>469</sup> Казанський et al., *Справжня ціна вугілля* [The real price of coal], 33.

modestly increased coal production over the first several years of his presidency, this only resulted in artificial expansion and overproduction. Meanwhile, overruns on production costs continued to increase, necessitating yet more subsidies ripe for theft and exploitation.<sup>470</sup> At this time, Yanukovich was systematically stripping the state of its assets and draining its coffers to the benefit of both himself and a close circle of family, friends, allies, and business partners.<sup>471</sup> Yanukovich's privatization program, which aimed to privatize the whole industry by 2014, gave away mines for a single *hryven* to Yanukovich's circle of kleptocrats. The symbolic price was supposedly intended to attract buyers with the resources to turn around the mine's fortunes. However, in 2013, the German newspaper *Deutsche Welle* reported that some of these mines were being artificially bankrupted and then sold off to debt holders.<sup>472</sup> The entire landscape of the coal industry was being redrawn as Yanukovich and his associates effectively monopolized entire supply chains, coal mining equipment providers, and the burgeoning illegal coal industry. The resulting shadow economy of this illegal coal industry—conducted at so-called *kopanky* (illegal coal mines)—siphoned funds away from the state budget and produced 6.5 million tons of excess coal, roughly 10 percent of Ukraine's total coal output. One of the primary owners of these illegal enterprises was Yanukovich's son, Oleksandr. The president was buying illegal coal from his son, whom he paid with money from the state's finances.<sup>473</sup> By 2014, Oleksandr

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<sup>470</sup> Savitsky, "Towards the end of the coal age in Ukraine?!", 37–39.

<sup>471</sup> Сергей Щербина, "Уголь 'Семьи.' Кому и как достались пять государственных фабрик," ["Family's" coal. Who and how got the five state factories], *Экономическая Правда*, May 21, 2013, <https://www.epravda.com.ua/rus/publications/2013/05/21/375749/>.

<sup>472</sup> Карина Оганесян и Роман Гончаренко, "Приватизация по-украински: шахта за гривну," [Privatization Ukrainian-style: a mine for one hryvnia], *Deutsche Welle*, January 22, 2013, <https://p.dw.com/p/17O6I>; "Янукович возьмёт под личный контроль приватизацию шахт," [Yanukovich will take personal control of the privatization of mines], *Левый Берег*, August 28, 2010, [https://lb.ua/news/2010/08/28/62677\\_yanukovich\\_vozmet\\_pod\\_lichniy\\_kont.html](https://lb.ua/news/2010/08/28/62677_yanukovich_vozmet_pod_lichniy_kont.html); "Приватизация в угольной отрасли должна быть завершена до конца 2014г – Янукович," [Privatization in the coal industry should be completed by the end of 2014 - Yanukovich], *Интерфакс-Украина*, August 22, 2013, <https://interfax.com.ua/news/economic/165098.html>.

<sup>473</sup> Gulliver Cragg, "The coal-mining racket threatening Ukraine's economy," *BBC*, April 24, 2013, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-22170976>; "Вугільні генерали здали погони фельдмаршалу," [The

Yanukovych obtained 50 percent of all state tenders, while Rinat Akhmetov pulled in 31 percent of the remaining tenders.<sup>474</sup>

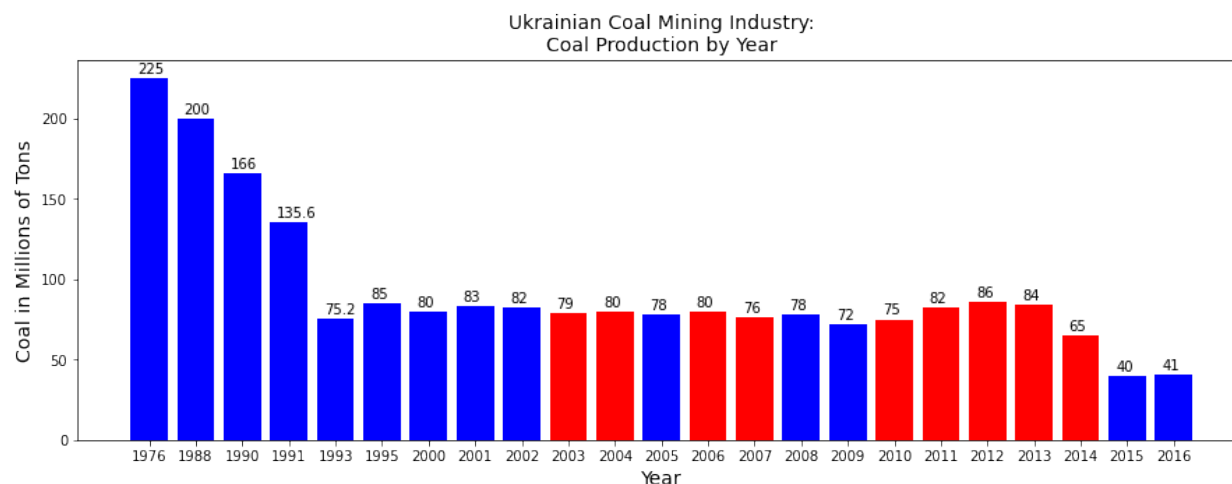


Figure 35. Coal production by year in the Ukrainian coal mining industry. Years in red indicate periods when Yanukovych was in power (either as prime minister or as president). Source: original dataset, see appendix.

And yet, despite the fact that this unprecedented fraud and racketeering was public knowledge, there was no widespread unrest in the Donbas mines. On the contrary, the miners were seemingly more concerned with potential mine closures or layoffs, which languished in bureaucratic limbo during the Yanukovych presidency in the absence of both a concrete plan and the political will to carry out these measures.<sup>475</sup> On the whole, the situation in the mines themselves hardly improved. Working conditions remained abysmal.<sup>476</sup> However, Yanukovych

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coal generals handed over the epaulets to the field marshal], *Економічна Правда*, September 11, 2012, <https://www.epravda.com.ua/publications/2012/09/11/334746/>; Казанський et al., *Справжня ціна вугілля* [The real price of coal], 36–38; Savitsky, “Towards the end of the coal age in Ukraine?!”, 46–47.

<sup>474</sup> Orysia Lutsevych, “Ukraine crisis: Oligarchs are Yanukovych’s weak link,” *BBC*, February 24, 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26277970>.

<sup>475</sup> «“Центр Донецка может уйти под воду по воле обозленных шахтёров,” [The center of Donetsk may drown at the behest of angry miners], *Вестни*, May 30, 2013,

[http://ukrudprom.com/digest/TSentr\\_Donetska\\_moget\\_uyti\\_pod\\_vodu\\_po\\_vole\\_obozlennih\\_shahterov.html](http://ukrudprom.com/digest/TSentr_Donetska_moget_uyti_pod_vodu_po_vole_obozlennih_shahterov.html); Шахтёры пригрозили затопить центр Донецка,” [Miners threatened to flood the center of Donetsk], *Главред*, May 30, 2013, <https://glavred.info/life/251124-shahtery-prigrozili-zatopit-centr-donecka.html>; “Закриття шахт: нешвидко і неболеяче?” [Mine closures: slow and painless?], *BBC Україна*, February 11, 2013, [https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/politics/2013/02/130211\\_mine\\_closing\\_protests\\_lviv\\_donbas\\_sd](https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/politics/2013/02/130211_mine_closing_protests_lviv_donbas_sd).

<sup>476</sup> See Robert Lincoln Derick, “Ukraine Grant Evaluation,” *United States Department of Labor International Labor Affairs Bureau*, April 7, 2011,



offered appealing rhetoric and promises that no other politician was making at the time. The relative feasibility and follow through on these promises were of little consequence. After all, at bare minimum, Yanukovych offered a perpetuation of the status quo in the mines, with some small benefits that trickled down through the funds that were not outright pilfered. Even if he did not do much to actually help the miners, he did not pose a direct threat to their interests and provided a degree of stability for their wages and employment.

But outside of the mining regions, the rest of Ukraine grew tired of Yanukovych's morally bankrupt presidency. Eventually, Yanukovych exhausted what little rope he had left with many Ukrainians when he spurned the European Union and cancelled preparations for signing a much-anticipated Association Agreement and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) agreement in favor of renewed negotiations with President Vladimir Putin on a customs union with the Russian Federation, Belarus, and Kazakhstan.<sup>477</sup> Yanukovych's actions came as an affront to proponents of European integration, especially in western and central Ukraine, where the president's about face sparked outrage and protest. Yanukovych's authoritarian regime responded with violent repressions and draconic anti-protest laws. The outcry was immediate, as millions of Ukrainians called for Yanukovych to step down. Diverse strata of Ukrainian society wanted a comprehensive change at every level of government after years of authoritarianism, nepotism, kleptocracy, corruption, and the collective hangover of

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[https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ILAB/evaluation\\_type/final\\_evaluation/Ukraine%20Evaluation%20-Final%20%20Draft\\_0.pdf](https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ILAB/evaluation_type/final_evaluation/Ukraine%20Evaluation%20-Final%20%20Draft_0.pdf)

<sup>477</sup> Оля Шульга, "Правительство Азарова остановило подготовку к ассоциации и начинает переговоры с Россией," [Azarov's government has stopped preparations for the association and begins negotiations with Russia], Зеркало Недели, November 21, 2013, <https://zn.ua/POLITICS/pravitelstvo-azarova-otkazalos-ot-associacii-s-es-v-polzu-tamozhennogo-soyuza-133327.html>.

persistent Soviet-era practices. In this way, the Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity was born out of the Euromaidan.<sup>478</sup>

As Yanukovich's regime fought for its life, the miners were faced with a difficult situation. The primary patron of their industry at the highest level of government was an open, unapologetic authoritarian and kleptocrat. But European integration under a new government would threaten the very existence of countless mines in the bloated, unprofitable coal industry. Yet, in response, the miners did not self-organize to articulate their interests. They had long since struck a deal with the devil. The Party of Regions had manipulated public opinion for over a decade, promoting increased interregional hostilities. As such, when revolution turned to armed conflict, the miners stood at a crossroads between terrible options, and their regional leaders fed them inflammatory rhetoric every step of the way. The Party of Regions primed the miners to believe that only Yankovich and other Donbas residents could protect their interests and restore the prestige that the colliers had lost. As a result, the Donbas miners' inability to generate grassroots collective action outside of the Party of Regions superstructure would set the stage for a separatist advent and hybrid warfare invasion, thereby resulting in their co-option into yet another authoritarian structure.

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<sup>478</sup> For a comprehensive timeline and analysis of these events, see Wynnyckyj, *Ukraine's Maidan Russia's War: A Chronicle and Analysis of the Revolution of Dignity*.

**Chapter 4:** *2014: Coal Mines on the Frontlines: Separatism in the Donbas*

*Shakhtyorskiy zaboï – front peredovoi*

*(The miners' coalface is the frontline)*

—*Miners' Proverb*

As the events surrounding the Euromaidan and Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity unfolded in western and central Ukraine, the Russian Federation acted in southeastern Ukraine. Conceived within the walls of the Kremlin, the Annexation of Crimea and the War in Donbas developed in a kaleidoscopic reality characterized by conflicting narratives and half-truths that challenged the very essence of the phrase “facts on the ground.” Leon Trotsky’s sentiment that “one can’t go to the Donbas without a [political] gas mask”<sup>479</sup> became as true in 2014 as it was during the February and October Revolutions in 1917. As part of the Russian Federation’s comprehensive hybrid warfare campaign in the Donbas, a torrent of disinformation (*dezinformatsiya*, a component of so-called active measures, *aktivnye meropriyatiya*) fundamentally altered the local population’s understanding of facts and the existing social order in Ukraine.

If “whatever passes for ‘knowledge’ in a society, regardless of the ultimate validity or invalidity (by whatever criteria) of such ‘knowledge’”<sup>480</sup> indeed creates social realities, then knowledge in the Donbas, particularly for those who relied on Russian television programs for their news, became synonymous with rumors and “fake news.” Within this maelstrom of conflicting truths, reality was upended by a top-down, Kremlin-driven information war, which sowed chaos and confusion towards the ultimate goal of a politically pliant region, ripe for

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<sup>479</sup> Kuromiya, *Freedom and Terror in the Donbas*, p. 3, 334.

<sup>480</sup> Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 15.

exploitation. In effect, this created an atmosphere where a small, aggressive minority openly supported separatism, and a larger, passive majority tacitly supported separatism or stood by without widespread resistance.

The Donbas colliers were one of the primary targets of disinformation. Capitalizing on the media preferences of the local populace, material insecurity generated by decades of economic decline, and the colliers' political relationship with Yanukovich and the Party of Regions' political machine, disinformation exploited existing rifts in Ukrainian society. These fractures did not, however, occur at the fault lines that the Kremlin—and many Western observers—might have anticipated. The myth of a pro-Russian eastern Ukraine was exposed as such. Moreover, given the presence of ethnic Russians and Russian speakers on both sides of the resulting conflict, these divisions can hardly be characterized as ethnolinguistic.<sup>481</sup>

Rather, in an environment where the coal miners would gain little from European integration, disinformation amplified separatist rhetoric from the previous decade along pre-existing fault lines of conflict in the Donbas. Indeed, the association agreement that President Yanukovich refused to sign was hardly accommodating for the roughly 450,000 employees of the Ukrainian coal industry (273,820-302,000 coal miners)<sup>482</sup> in 2013, the vast majority of whom worked in the 131 Donbas coal mines (72 in Donetsk Oblast, 49 in Luhansk Oblast, and 10 in Dnipropetrovsk Oblast).<sup>483</sup> Passages in this agreement called for “efficient and clean coal

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<sup>481</sup> Kuzio, *Putin's War Against Ukraine*, 17–18, 95, 320–27.

<sup>482</sup> Of these 120,000 worked in state-owned mines. See Radu Dudau, Gabriel Ghinea, Kostiantyn Krynytskyi, Volodymyr Kryzhanivskiy, Pao-Yu Oei, Martin Schon-Chanishvili, Klara Sutlovicova, Zuzana Vondrova, and Timon Wehnert, “Transformation Experiences of Coal Regions: Recommendations for Ukraine and other European countries,” *Germanwatch*, Center for Environmental Initiatives Ecoaction, 2019, 20 <https://www.germanwatch.org/sites/germanwatch.org/files/Transformation%20Experiences%20of%20Coal%20Regions.%20Recommendations%20for%20Ukraine%20and%20other%20European%20countries.pdf>.

<sup>483</sup> Larger employment data encompasses all workers in the vertically integrated coal industry (mining/extraction, processing, and thermal power). For employment statistics, see Savitsky, “Towards the end of the coal age in Ukraine,” 55, and International Labour Organization. *Occupational safety and health in the mining industry in*

technologies” and the “restructuring of the coal sector (steam coal, coking coal, and lignite) in order to increase competitiveness, enhance mine safety and occupational safety and reduce its environmental impact.”<sup>484</sup> Such measures described the veritable antithesis of the Donbas coal mines, where workplace safety, industry efficiency, profitability, and coal quality were all abysmal. Based on existing precedent at the time, and as would prove to be true following the post-Euromaidan government’s reforms, such stipulations could only mean mine closures and unemployment. The only consideration for the consequences of reform and restructuring in this agreement stated that these measures should be carried out, “while bearing in mind the regional and social impact.” There was no description of how this would be accomplished, nor was there

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*Ukraine*. Kyiv: ILO DWT and Country Office for Central and Eastern Europe, 2018.

[https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-geneva/---sro-budapest/documents/publication/wcms\\_670764.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-geneva/---sro-budapest/documents/publication/wcms_670764.pdf). Statistics on the number of coal mines in 2013 and at the beginning of 2014 (pre-conflict) vary widely, ostensibly due to the unclear operating status of some mines and the presence of illegal mines. Rechlowisc’s numbers have been used here for the Donbass given the clear division by oblast. Most statistics on the total number of coal mines and mining enterprises cite the overall number across Ukraine; Мартин Рехлович, “Основные направления реструктуризации горной промышленности в Донецком угольном бассейне,” [The main directions of restructuring the mining industry in the Donetsk coal basin], *Acta Geographica Silesiana* 18 (2015): 74, [http://www.ags.wnoz.us.edu.pl/download/wydawnictwa/ags/ags\\_18\\_9.pdf](http://www.ags.wnoz.us.edu.pl/download/wydawnictwa/ags/ags_18_9.pdf). For additional statistics, see Igor Yashchenko, “State Policy of Ukraine in Capturing and Utilizing Coal Mine Methane,” *Ministry of Energy and Coal Industry of Ukraine*, 2012, 4, [https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/energy/se/pp/coal/cmm/8cmm\\_nov2013/7\\_Ukraine\\_e.pdf](https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/energy/se/pp/coal/cmm/8cmm_nov2013/7_Ukraine_e.pdf) (155 coal mines in 2012), and Global Methane Initiative, *Ukraine: Summary of Coal Industry*, Global Methane Initiative: CMM Country Profiles, June 2015, 5, [https://www.globalmethane.org/documents/toolsres\\_coal\\_overview\\_ch34.pdf](https://www.globalmethane.org/documents/toolsres_coal_overview_ch34.pdf) (143 coal mines in 2013), and Maksym Chepeliev, “Coal Production Subsidies Elimination in Ukraine: A CGE Analysis,” *Institute for Economics and Forecasting, Ukrainian National Academy of Sciences*, August 2014, 5, <https://www.gtap.agecon.purdue.edu/resources/download/8192.pdf> (135 coal mines in 2013), and V. Snihur, D. Malashkevych, and T. Vvedenska, “Tendencies of Coal Industry Development in Ukraine,” *Mining of Mineral Deposits* 10, no.2 (2016): 2, <https://www.researchgate.net/deref/http%3A%2F%2Fdx.doi.org%2F10.15407%2Fmining10.02.001> (243 mines with 150 in operation at the beginning of 2014). For a commonly cited greater estimate (>400), see Alexander Ignatov and Jonathan Rowland, “Ukrainian coal: an industry in crisis,” *World Coal*, September 10, 2015, <https://www.worldcoal.com/special-reports/10092015/ukrainian-coal-an-industry-in-crisis-2383b/> (402 coal mines in 2013), and International Labour Organization, “Occupational safety and health in the mining industry in Ukraine,” 2 (431 coal mines and 2,098 mining enterprises in 2013).

<sup>484</sup> European Commission, “Annex: Association Agreement between the European Union and its Member States, of the one part, and Ukraine, of the other part: Annex I to the Proposal for a Council Decision on the conclusion of the Association Agreement between the European Union and its Member States, of the one part, and Ukraine, of the other part,” May 15, 2013, 198–

99 [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/docs\\_autres\\_institutions/commission\\_europeenne/com/2013/0290/COM\\_COM\(2013\)0290\(PAR2\)\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/docs_autres_institutions/commission_europeenne/com/2013/0290/COM_COM(2013)0290(PAR2)_EN.pdf); “Association Agreement between the European Union and its Member States, of the one part, and Ukraine, of the other part,” *Official Journal of the European Union*, May 29, 2014, 138, [https://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2016/november/tradoc\\_155103.pdf](https://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2016/november/tradoc_155103.pdf).

a plan to accommodate or compensate the miners or the impacted regions. Furthermore, any radical restructuring of the mines would extend to broader Donbas society, given the historical and cultural significance of the mines as one of the main sources of Donbas regional identity. Actively supporting these measures would be tantamount to a rebuke of the sacrifices in the labor conflict that had characterized the preceding decades.

At a crossroads between the Euromaidan and separatist sympathies, the latter emerged as a distasteful, though palatable, option for the miners, at least when their existing logic was based on distorted premises. Liberal democratic reform and an adherence to economic norms in the European Union would almost certainly spell disaster for the dilapidated, subsidized coal industry, especially when increasing numbers of illegal coal mines and coal mines marked for closure continued to operate in the Donbas. Although the separatists also created obstacles to the miners' self-realization, liberal democracy and the associated economic reforms posed a greater existential threat to the coal mining industry, at least from the miners' perspective.

This chapter explores the underlying reasons for miners' reactions to separatism in 2014 after years of authoritarian rule, including their overt and tacit support for separatist forces. At the outset of war, a period of historic state-dependency—in terms of subsidies and patronage—coincided with a historic sense of self-sufficiency and self-importance in the Donbas. As a result, when confronted with distorted myths about the Donbas' economic viability, enough coal miners, though by no means a majority, chose the option that, at bare minimum, seemed to guarantee they would be able to continue working their shifts, even if the separatists failed to uphold their end of an extended Faustian bargain. Beyond this key minority, the relative inaction and ambivalence the majority of Donbas miners also allowed the separatists to establish a foothold. To compound the crisis, the miners who opposed the separatists failed to coalesce into

a pro-Ukrainian movement or were otherwise repressed. All of the miners, however, were exposed for their inability to organized mass collective action and revealed themselves as a long-term constituency of authoritarianism.

### **Disinformation as a Weapon of War**

As part of the Russian Federation's comprehensive hybrid warfare campaign in the Donbas, the Kremlin waged a devastating information war. To understand the information war and its impacts, it is first important to note that the Russian concept of an information war (*informatsionnaya voyna*) entails "an ongoing activity regardless of the state of relations with the opponent."<sup>485</sup> As such, the influence of *dezinformatsiya* cannot be reduced to a short-term explosive attempt at shifting public opinion. Rather, the escalation of these tactics was aimed at a population which had already been exposed to propaganda for an extended period under the authoritarian influence of the Party of Regions, therefore making them prone to suggestion at the climax of the Ukrainian crisis in spring 2014.<sup>486</sup> The Party of Regions had nurtured interregional hostilities and separatist sympathies for more than a decade with their appeal to the miners and intraregional solidarity in the Donbas. This produced a cyclical effect, wherein the miners' regional allegiance and the Party of Regions' ability to exacerbate regional divisions worked in tandem to push the Donbas farther away from the rest of Ukraine.

Disinformation is also only a single aspect of so-called active measure (*aktivnye meropriyatiya*), which on the whole are used to influence the policies of another government, undermine confidence in its leaders and institutions, disrupt the relations between other nations,

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<sup>485</sup> Kier Giles, "Handbook of Russian Information Warfare," *NATO Defense College: Research Division*, Fellowship Monograph 9, November 2016,

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/313423985\\_Handbook\\_of\\_Russian\\_Information\\_Warfare](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/313423985_Handbook_of_Russian_Information_Warfare), p. 4.

<sup>486</sup> This subject deserves entire volumes on its own, and it is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss the origins and progressive shifts in Russian influence in the Donbass.

and discredit and weaken governmental and nongovernmental opponents.<sup>487</sup> The principle means of conducting these actions are attempts to deceive the target and attempts to distort the target's perception of reality. Both were used to great effect in the Donbas, where many of the miners had already been willing supporters of Yanukovich's kleptocratic authoritarianism.

Additionally, the media habits of Donbas residents in 2014 were conducive to the goals of a hybrid warfare campaign. According to a 2018 Rand Corporation Report on Russian social media influence, "Given the wide presence of Russia in Ukrainian media space and popularity of Russian social networks, Russia was able to actively use social media to mobilize support, spread disinformation and hatred, and try to destabilize the situation in Ukraine."<sup>488</sup> In 2014, 87% of Donbas residents trusted Russian state-sponsored television programming, and 82% of Donbas residents either regularly or sometimes watched Russian state-sponsored television programming, both by far the highest such rates in Ukraine. This fact was complimented by the lowest regional rate of trust in Ukrainian television programming, which stood at only 57%.<sup>489</sup> The predominant means of obtaining information and learning about the world in the Donbas was owned and operated by the global frontrunner in information warfare. As such, when the separatists began seizing local government buildings, the local population had already been softened up for an invasion.<sup>490</sup>

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<sup>487</sup> Katri Pynnöniemi and András Rácz, "Fog of Falsehood: Russian Strategy of Deception and the Conflict in Ukraine," *The Finnish Institute of International Affairs*, FIIA Report 45 (2016): 38, [https://www.fii.fi/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/fiiareport45\\_fogoffalsehood.pdf](https://www.fii.fi/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/fiiareport45_fogoffalsehood.pdf).

<sup>488</sup> Todd C. Helmus, Elizabeth Bodine-Baron, Andrew Radin, Madeline Magnuson, Joshua Mendelsohn, William Marcellino, Andriy Bega, and Zev Winkelman, *Russian Social Media Influence: Understanding Russian Propaganda in Eastern Europe*. National Defence Research Institute, Rand Corporation, 2018, [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research\\_reports/RR2200/RR2237/RAND\\_RR2237.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR2200/RR2237/RAND_RR2237.pdf).

<sup>489</sup> Ліана Новікова, "ЗМІ та довіра до українських і російських ЗМІ," [Media and trust towards Ukrainian and Russian media], *Київський Міжнародний Інститут Соціології*, October 29, 2014, <https://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=ukr&cat=reports&id=425&y=2014&page=2>.

<sup>490</sup> "Как сепаратисты захватывали админздания на востоке Украины," [How separatists seized administrative buildings in eastern Ukraine], *Delo.ua*, May 12, 2014, <https://delo.ua/economyandpoliticsinukraine/kak->



### Flawed Logic: Disinformation and the Miners' Position in 2013-2014

The rise of the separatists presented the miners with a difficult decision on how to cast their support. Early indications made it seem that they would favor separatism. The miners had not been overwhelming supporters of the Euromaidan and the Revolution of Dignity. Indeed, while protestors gathered in western and central Ukraine, many colliers in the Donbas continued to espouse the belief that “while we work at industrial enterprises and the mines in the east, filling the budget, Galicians<sup>491</sup> compose songs and dances on Maidan Square in Kiev.”<sup>492</sup> Although the feeling was not universal, these miners equated the signing of the proposed association agreement with European integration and its economic consequences for the mining industry. The leader of PRUP, Yuri Zayets, explained what he believed to be the majority opinion amongst the miners during the Maidan protests as follows:

“European integration is not good for Ukraine. The Association Agreement is an overly complicated document and we do not fully know what consequences its signing will bring. We do not want to be deprived of our places of work. And its signing, I think, will nevertheless lead to the loss of miners’ jobs.”<sup>493</sup>

Sentiments from other Donbas miners echoed this statement. A collier from the state-owned mining association Makeevugol’ claimed:

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[separatisty-zahvatyvali-adminzdanija-na-vostoke-ukrainy-233467/](https://news.liga.net/articles/politics/1280196-vtorzhenie-v-ukrainu-poslednie-sobytiya-v-krymu-i-na-yugo-vostoke.htm); «“Вторжение России в Украину: хроника за 5–15 апреля,” [Russia's invasion of Ukraine: April 5–15 Chronicle], *Ліга Новості*, April 15, 2014 (web-archived on April 18, 2014), <https://web.archive.org/web/20140418173002/https://news.liga.net/articles/politics/1280196-vtorzhenie-v-ukrainu-poslednie-sobytiya-v-krymu-i-na-yugo-vostoke.htm>; “Вторжение России в Украину: хроника за 16–24 апреля,” [Russia's invasion of Ukraine: April 16-24 Chronicle], *Ліга Новості*, April 24, 2014., <https://news.liga.net/articles/politics/articles/vtorzhenie-v-ukrainu-poslednie-sobytiya-v-donbasse-i-v-krymu>; “Вторжение России в Украину: хроника за 25–30 апреля,” [Russia's invasion of Ukraine: April 25–30 Chronicle], *Ліга Новості*, April 30, 2014, <https://news.liga.net/politics/articles/vtorzhenie-v-ukrainu-poslednie-sobytiya-v-donbasse-i-krymu>.

<sup>491</sup> Residents of the western-most region in Ukraine.

<sup>492</sup> Елена Колгушева и Ксения Нестеренко, “Шахтеры: Янукович – слишком мягкий, а Евромайдан – дело сложное,” [Miners: Yanukovich is too soft, and Euromaidan is difficult], *УНІАН*, December 16, 2013, <https://www.unian.net/politics/864561-shahteryi-yanukovich-slishkom-myagkiy-a-evromaydan-delo-slojnoe.html>.

<sup>493</sup> Ibid.

“In our mine everyone is against European integration, insofar as we believe that due to the signing of the Association Agreement, the industry will be killed. And this means the mines will be killed.”<sup>494</sup>

His colleague reaffirmed this position, further questioning the fact that the “nobody, absolutely nobody” on the Maidan was saying that “no one will lose their job, everyone will be protected, and everyone will have money, everything will be normal, and, when we sign the agreement, we will be better off.”<sup>495</sup> This kind of intense economic insecurity plagued the Donbas miners in 2013 and 2014. At risk of losing their livelihoods, these colliers could not support a movement they saw as antithetical to their economic wellbeing. Understandably, these concerns were loudest at the state-run mines, where vast state subsidies belied general unprofitability and economic unviability. As Zayets ominously predicted during the Maidan protests “if the situation will continue to escalate, Ukraine will split.”<sup>496</sup>

For miners in this position, the allure of Russian integration was immense, and the messaging of Russian disinformation was particularly effective. Both of the aforementioned miners at Makeevugol’ unapologetically professed their preference for a turn towards Russia, admitting “we are for friendship with Russia” and “I am more predisposed towards the Customs Union with Russia.” Both miners’ statements on Russia coincided with the clear recitation of common refrains from Kremlin-sponsored media. Both miners managed to recite the following in two short statements: labeling western Ukrainians “banderovites”; proclaiming a shared history with Russia; emphasizing the use of the Russian language in the east; questioning the legitimacy of the protests; claiming a mine shaft works in the east so that residents in Kyiv can

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<sup>494</sup> Колгушева и Нестеренко, “Шахтеры: Янукович – слишком мягкий, а Евромайдан – дело сложное,” [Miners: Yanukovich is too soft, and Euromaidan is difficult].

<sup>495</sup> Ibid.

<sup>496</sup> Ibid.

study at university; peddling conspiracy theories about the protests being rigged and bought off; and stating the students who were beaten on the Maidan were not “children,” since in a “normal country,” at the age of eighteen “they put a machine gun in your hands and you go to defend the Motherland” and the students “knew what they were standing for.”<sup>497</sup>

These were not isolated incidents. In December, such views were also espoused by miners who were transported to the capital from the southeastern oblasts during the Maidan protests, fulfilling a role akin to the pro-Yanukovych rallies in Kyiv during the 2004 Orange Revolution.<sup>498</sup> At these rallies, miners from Luhansk emphasized the need to “prepare” for European integration, so that they would not live like “bums,” alongside a commitment to preventing the “fascists” from taking power.<sup>499</sup> As the situation in Kyiv spiraled into chaos, these positions hardened. In January, colliers at Zasyadko mine were recorded on video saying “we will no longer tolerate this lawlessness!”<sup>500</sup> At another separatist congress of regional deputies in February, miners from Torez carried signs reading, “Miners of Torez – against fascism!”<sup>501</sup> In March, newly appointed Chairman of the Donetsk Regional Administration Sergei Taruta warned:

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<sup>497</sup> Колгушева и Ксения Нестеренко, “Шахтеры: Янукович – слишком мягкий, а Евромайдан – дело сложное,” [Miners: Yanukovych is too soft, and Euromaidan is difficult].

<sup>498</sup> “Студенты, шахтеры, пенсионеры: Донецк отправляет в Киев целый поезд на ‘антимайдан,’” [Students, miners, pensioners: Donetsk sends a whole train to Kiev to participate in ‘anti-Maidan’], *Цензор.нет*, December 13, 2013,

[https://m.censor.net/news/263307/studenty\\_shahtery\\_pensionery\\_donetsk\\_otpravlyayet\\_v\\_kiev\\_tselyyi\\_poezd\\_na\\_antimaydan](https://m.censor.net/news/263307/studenty_shahtery_pensionery_donetsk_otpravlyayet_v_kiev_tselyyi_poezd_na_antimaydan); “Из Донецка и Луганска отправляют спецпоезда с митингующими для участия в акции регионалов,” [Special trains with protesters are sent from Donetsk and Luhansk to participate in the Party of Regions protest action], *Гордон*, December 13, 2013, <https://gordonua.com/news/maidan/iz-donecka-i-luganska-otpravlyayut-specpoezda-s-mitinguyushchimi-dlya-uchastiya-v-akcii-regionalov-2572.html>.

<sup>499</sup> Юрий Маловерьян, “Киев: рядом с ‘Евромайданом’ отшумел ‘антимайдан,’” [Kiev: next to Euromaidan, an “anti-Maidan” happened], *BBC Русская Служба*, December 14, 2013, [https://www.bbc.com/russian/international/2013/12/131214\\_antimaidan\\_and\\_maidan](https://www.bbc.com/russian/international/2013/12/131214_antimaidan_and_maidan).

<sup>500</sup> Ксения Ларина, Сергей Шаргунов, и Лилия Шевцова, “Евромайдан: пример гражданского сопротивления или бессмысленного бунта?” [Euromaidan: an example of civil resistance or senseless rebellion?], *Московский Центр Карнеги*, January 24, 2014, <https://carnegie.ru/2014/01/24/ru-pub-54339>.

<sup>501</sup> “Съезд депутатов всех уровней в Харькове. Текстовая трансляция,” [Congress of deputies of all levels in Kharkov. Text broadcast], *MediaPort*, February 22, 2014, <https://www.mediaport.ua/sezd-deputatov-vseh-urovney-v-harkove-tekstovaya-translyaciya>.

“In fact, if you ask every resident, I think that, most likely, every resident of the Donbas will say that he feeds Ukraine...we have a myth that Donetsk Oblast feeds everyone. But if you look at the statistics, then it is apparent that the governmental budget contributes to us, and we are subsidized.”<sup>502</sup>

Across the region, people divorced from reality failed to recognize this dangerous paradox. Those who did failed to raise the alarm loud enough.<sup>503</sup> Under such economic circumstances, all roads would lead to ruin. Neither European integration, nor the Eurasian Customs Union, nor independence, nor Russian annexation could resolve the underlying economic crisis in the coal industry.

Unfortunately for many miners, the media sirens had already steered them away from “truth.” With each claim about “banderovites,” fascists, “lawlessness,” economic injustice, and their own self-sufficiency, the miners were progressively lulled into ambivalence or antagonism towards western and central Ukraine. At maximum, this turned their desire for self-preservation into support for separatism. At minimum, the miners hesitated to resist the separatist advance. In the words of Donetsk journalist Stanislav Kmet:

“This false belief [that the laboring Donbas feeds everyone] determined the miners’ line of behavior during the events of spring-summer 2014. The miners supported separatists and became victims of Russian propaganda.”<sup>504</sup>

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<sup>502</sup> “Тарута развенчал миф о том, что Донбасс кормит Украину,” [Taruta debunked the myth that Donbass is feeding Ukraine], *Украинская Правда*, March 27, 2014, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2014/03/27/7020492/>.

<sup>503</sup> See for instance Nikolai Volynko’s warning about “psychosis” and “zombification.” “Шахтеры Донбасса дали отпор сепаратистам, - профсоюзный лидер,” [Donbass miners rebuffed separatists, says trade union leader], *Украинская Правда*, April 8, 2014, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2014/04/8/7021732/>.

<sup>504</sup> Станислав Кметь, “Правда шахтёра. Почему не бастуют горняки Донбасса,” [The truth of a miner. Why Donbass miners are not on strike], *Украинская Правда*, December 11, 2014, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/articles/2014/12/11/7047109/>.

It was hardly a mystery where these ideas originated. As head of the NPGDb Mykola Volynko remarked, “Our local, regional television just zombifies the population, deceiving them with untrue, one-sided information.”<sup>505</sup> In line with this explanation, a miner from Makeevugol’ insisted that he had seen video evidence that affirmed the theory that the opposition was carrying out false flag operations in Kyiv.<sup>506</sup> On April 14, when the violent conflict commenced, *Ukrainian Truth* reported that “Ukraine is losing the information war to Russia on all fronts. Russian propaganda dominates...in the east of Ukraine.”<sup>507</sup> Ukrainian wrestler Bogdan Gritsai expressed surprise when his peers tried to prove to him that “not Russians, but regular miners, are fighting us in the Donbas,” “Russia is not the aggressor, but a friend,” and “life was a lot better in the Soviet Union.”<sup>508</sup> Moreover, as the conflict continued to escalate, the focus on miners as a source of potential support increased. Russian media outlets regularly reported on the miners alleged support for the separatists and Russian annexation. Four days after the *Ukrainian Truth* article warned of Russia’s information war, an article from the Kremlin-run newspaper *Russian Gazette* described the separatist movement as a grassroots movement, declaring:

“Miners do not want to hear anything about the Kiev powers. The bravest cry for accession to Russia. The words ‘referendum’ and ‘federalization’ have even penetrated kindergartens. And one more word: special operation [*spetsoperatsiya*]. Kiev has already been scaring the miners

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<sup>505</sup> Колгушева и Нестеренко, “Шахтеры: Янукович – слишком мягкий, а Евромайдан – дело сложное,” [Miners: Yanukovich is too soft, and Euromaidan is difficult].

<sup>506</sup> Ibid.

<sup>507</sup> Павел Шеремет, “Передел Украины,” [Redistribution of Ukraine], *Украинская Правда*, April 14, 2014, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/articles/2014/04/14/7022350/>.

<sup>508</sup> Влад Власенко, “Борец Грицай: ‘Был удивлен, когда мои одноклассники говорили, что на Донбассе с нами воюет не Россия, а обычные шахтеры,’” [Wrestler Gritsai: “I was surprised when my peers said that it’s not Russia, but ordinary miners who are fighting with us in Donbass”], *sportarena*, May 10, 2020, <https://sportarena.com/more-sports/olympics/wrestling/borets-gritsaj-by-l-udivlen-kogda-moi-odnogodki/>.

with this for a week. But each day, they seize even more police stations and city administrations.

They are acting exactly according to the recipe of the Kiev ‘Euromaidan.’”<sup>509</sup>

The false equivalency between the seizure of buildings in the east and the occupation of government building in Kiev was a favored justification for separatist actions in 2014. Of course, the *Russian Gazette* article overlooked the fact that many of people who seized buildings in the east were not miners, and the crowds of pro-Russian demonstrators hardly resembled the million-strong groundswell of support in Kyiv. Such minutia, however, did not concern the Russian government. They were attempting to speak a miners’ revolt into existence, and in some instances, they found a receptive audience.

### **Miners Mixed Response to Separatism**

Miners’ support was not monolithic, and the vast majority of miners did not scramble to take up arms against the Ukrainian government’s anti-terrorist operation (ATO) and enlist in separatist militias. Regardless, in some locales the miners stood in support of the “people’s republics” and Russian annexation. Although almost certainly provoked by agent-provocateurs, the miners’ agency in the decision to support separatism cannot be reduced to “zombification.” Instead, at the confluence of disinformation, years of authoritarian messaging, economic insecurity, and a bleak future, the miners’ chose the option that seemed “best,” at least based on the existing logic in the Donbas during 2014. Indeed, many of the miners remained loyal to their local authoritarian figures. Sergei, a miner at Sutogan mine in Luhansk Oblast, commented that “people are angry with instability, they don’t trust the new government, the majority of us supported Yanukovich.” He added that “when the referendum on the recognition of the

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<sup>509</sup> Ironically, the same article also claimed an information war was being carried out against Donbass residents by central and western Ukrainians. Георгий Порожняк, «Порожняк, Георгий. “Весна в Донбассе,” [Spring in Donbass], *Российская Газета*, April 18, 2014, <https://rg.ru/2014/04/18/vesna.html>.

independence of the Luhansk Republic took place, many people voted in favor,” either because of real support for an independent Donbas or out of spite for the new government in Kyiv.<sup>510</sup> Having previously struck a Faustian Bargain with authoritarian powers in the region, the miners’ binding agreement transferred to the new authoritarians: the separatists whom the Party of Regions aided. Consequently, these miners were forced to defend their livelihoods, with neither the unity nor the strength for independent collective that at one time had characterized the miners’ movement.



Figure 36. Miners rally in support of the Donetsk People’s Republic. The banner reads, “Miners will restore the might of the Donbas!” Source: Reuters

As early as April, western media began reporting some miners’ preference for the separatists. On April 9, *Vice News* posted footage of the separatist occupation in Donetsk. One of the separatists, who said he worked in a plant,<sup>511</sup> explained that the supporters of the DNR had arrived “to stand up for their rights and beliefs.” More importantly, he elaborated that people had gathered “so that the mines will not perish. The Donbas has, for the most part, always been an

<sup>510</sup> Константин Скоркин, “Голос Донбасса. Шахтеры — о событиях на Востоке,” [Voice of Donbass. Miners on the events in the East], *Hubs*, June 16, 2014, <https://hubs.ua/authority/golos-donbassa-shahteryi-o-sobyitiyah-na-vostoke-12375.html>.

<sup>511</sup> It is unclear what kind of plant he is referring to. However, many of the power plants in Ukraine use coal as fuel.

industrial region.” Notably, this man used the word “perish” (*gibnut*’, гибнуть) in reference to the mines, a term typically reserved for living things in the Russian language.<sup>512</sup> For these miners, the quite literal survival of the mines hung in the balance, and so, they threw their support behind the separatists.

Two days later, on April 11, the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* reported on the miners amongst the separatists who seized the regional administration building in Donetsk. Roman Romanenko, a former paratrooper and coal miner, professed that his “miner’s soul” told him to help organize the seizure of the building. In his words, the ultimate goal of the seizure was “the right to hold a referendum on federalization,” ostensibly the same demand that had been put forth during past miners’ movements. Feelings of injustice rode high for Romanenko, who believed that “those people in Kyiv spat on us” and “they think Ukraine is only western Ukraine.”<sup>513</sup> The echoes of economic injustice reverberated in his words.

On April 12, *The Guardian* wrote that a group of 200 miners had joined the separatists on the barricades in Donetsk. The crowd of demonstrators reportedly shouted phrases such as “The miners are coming!”, “Glory to the miners!”, and “Glory to the Donbas!” A miner named Vitaly proclaimed that there was “only one position, only in support of the referendum.” Another miner named Andrei explained the “need to fight for our rights and protect the Donbas from Bandera supporters.” Adding to these justifications, Oleg Obolents, a retired miner and leader of yet another newly formed independent miners’ union, expressed concern for the miners’ economic

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<sup>512</sup> VICE News, “Donetsk Demands a Referendum: Russian Roulette,” April 9, 2014, YouTube video, 3:20–3:35, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wetleAB1XmY&list=WL&index=56>. See also, semen bumbarash, “ШАХТЕРЫ ДОНБАССА НА ЗАЩИТЕ ДНР 07 05 2014,” May 7, 2014, YouTube video, 2:45, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ha0gnuZOquc&list=WL&index=46>.

<sup>513</sup> Volodymyr Verbyany, “Miners don camouflage as Donetsk revolt mimics Kiev,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, April 11, 2014, <https://www.post-gazette.com/business/powersource/2014/04/11/miners-don-camouflage-as-donetsk-revolt-mimics-kiev-1/stories/201404110157>.



circumstances if Ukraine signed the association agreement. In his view, such an arrangement would cause a collapse in the coal industry and cost the miners their jobs. Such a reality, along with wage arrears, would lead to more support for the protests and building seizures, since “the hungry have nothing to lose.” More to the point, a miner named Valera predicted that “if [the mines] stop, there will be war.”<sup>514</sup> Once more, economic insecurity played a major role in motivating these miners’ support for separatist actions.

Eleven days later, on April 23, an article from the Russian newspaper *Moscow Komsomolets* reported five mines from the Krasnodonugol’ association in Luhansk (owned by Metinvest, one of Rinat Akhmetov’s companies) went on strike in favor of the referendum and higher pay, demonstrating the intersection of separatist rhetoric and concerns over economic hardships. At the same time, colliers at Kalinin mine and the Artyomugol’ association in Horlivka replaced Ukrainian flags with the DNR tri colors.<sup>515</sup> *Ukrainian Truth* also reported that miners had seized the Krasnodonugol’ mining association in Luhansk Oblast. Building on demonstrations that began two days earlier, the militant miners voiced their outrage over not being allowed to rally in support of the separatist movement. They called on Akhmetov, the owner of the enterprise, to provide buses to the occupations in Luhansk. In the opinion of journalist Andrei Dichtyarenko, who reported on the situation, “Now these individuals who are provoking the people have decided to focus on the miners.” Akhmetov was evidently lukewarm to the idea and considered these miners to be radicals outside the scope of the normal political

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<sup>514</sup> Alec Luhn, “East Ukrainian protestors joined by miners on the barricades,” *The Guardian*, April 12, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/12/east-ukraine-protesters-miners-donetsk-russia>.

<sup>515</sup> Евгения Скибина, “В Донбассе бастуют шахты ‘пророссийского’ олигарха Ахметова,” [The mines of the “pro-Russian” oligarch Akhmetov are on strike in the Donbass], *Московский Комсомолец*, April 23, 2014, <https://www.mk.ru/politics/world/article/2014/04/23/1018838-v-donbasse-bastuyut-shahtyi-prorossiyskogo-oligarha-ahmetova.html>.

and economic situation.<sup>516</sup> However, the Party of Regions power structure had already collapsed by this time, having been absorbed by a new authoritarian status quo built on separatist sympathies and armed coercion.

Meanwhile, other Russian media outlets seized on the miners' purported desire to join the pro-Russian demonstrators and separatist militias. On April 23, the Kremlin-run news agency *Russia Today* reposted and translated a clip from *Österreichischer Rundfunk* (*Austrian Broadcasting Corporation, ORF*). According to the Russian translation, the Austrian broadcast reported:

“They still produce coal here, but on the whole, the economy of the region is experiencing hardships. The political crisis is making itself known. And these are the miners who have joined the pro-Russian rebels. Their animosity towards the central government in Kyiv is great.”

Building on this narrative of economic hardship turned separatism, the broadcast also interviewed pro-Russian former miners. They reiterated these economic woes, expressing frustration at the fact they had lost their jobs. In the words of one of the demonstrators, Maksim, “No one has a job, they do not pay anyone anymore.” Based on the report, these economically disadvantaged miners wanted to secede from Ukraine in order to improve their lives in Russia.<sup>517</sup>

On May 4, the Estonian media outlet *Postimees* and the Russian media outlet *Rosbalt* both reused information from an article written by the Russian information agency *Interfax*, wherein a representative of the “People’s Self-Defense Headquarters of Krasnyi Luch” claimed

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<sup>516</sup> «“Шахтеры требуют от Ахметова поднять зарплаты и возить на митинги,” [Miners demand from Akhmetov to raise salaries and provide transportation to rallies], *Украинская Правда*, April 23, 2014, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2014/04/23/7023350/index.amp>; “На шахті Ахметова в Луганській області мітингують шахтарі,” [Miners are protesting at Akhmetov's mine in Luhansk oblast], *Українська Правда*, April 23, 2014, [https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2014/04/23/7023323/mode\\_amp/](https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2014/04/23/7023323/mode_amp/).

<sup>517</sup> “ORF: ‘Получив’ Россию, донецкие шахтеры потеряют работу,” [ORF: By 'getting' Russia, Donetsk miners will lose their jobs], *Russia Today*, April 23, 2014, <https://russian.rt.com/inotv/2014-04-23/ORF-Poluchiv-Rossiyu-doneckie-shahteri>.

that “miners from all seven mines in Krasniy Luch” joined the separatists at makeshift separatist checkpoints. According to him, “all the miners of the Donbas intend to support this initiative.”<sup>518</sup> Although it would be difficult to verify these claims, this episode demonstrated how the new authoritarian power players—the separatists—were attempting to co-opt the Party of Regions’ former constituency.



Figure 37. Miners from Trudovskaya mine march in support of the Donetsk People’s Republic. Source: UAinfo

On May 28, during a widely documented miners’ demonstration in Donetsk, *Moscow Komsomolets* published a video of the rally on their website with a miner’s quote as the headline:

<sup>518</sup> “Горняки семи шахт в Луганской области присоединились к ополченцам,” [Miners from seven mines in the Luhansk oblast joined the militias], *Postimees*, May 4, 2014, <https://rus.postimees.ee/2782726/gorniyaki-semi-shaht-v-luganskoy-oblasti-prisoedinilis-k-opolchencam>; “Луганские шахтеры присоединились к противникам властей Украины,” [Luhansk miners joined the opponents of the Ukrainian authorities], *Росбалт*, May 4, 2014, <https://www.rosbalt.ru/ukraina/2014/05/04/1264382.html>.

“The miners must break the serpentine neck of the fascists on the land of Donbas!”<sup>519</sup> The DNR reported that miners from Abakumov mine, Chelyuskintsev mine, Skochinsky mine, Trudovskaya mine, Panfilov mine, and Yuzhnodonbasskaya mine took part in the demonstration, while the Ukrainian media agency *Ostrov* reported that only colliers from the state-run mines Oktyaberskiy Rudnik, Abakoumov, Skochinsky, and Trudovskaya had participated. The miners reportedly shouted “Donbas!” and “Fascism will not pass!” One miner expressed his belief that “the Bandera junta attacked the laboring Donbas; the miners will be the foundation of the army of the laboring Donbas.”<sup>520</sup> Such aggressive rhetoric reflected the attitudes of a minority of miners who wished to take up arms to defend the mining regions.



Figure 38. Miners from Skochinsky mine rally in favor of the Donetsk People’s Republic. From left to right the banners read, “Fascism will not pass!”, “A.A. Skochinsky Mine,” and “Miners will restore the might of the Donbas!” Source: Deutsche Welle

<sup>519</sup> Анастасия Седленек, “Митинг в Донецке: ‘Шахтеры должны сломать змеиную шею фашистов на земле Донбасса!’,” [Rally in Donetsk: “The miners must break the snake necks of the fascists in the land of Donbass!”], *Московский Комсомолец*, May 28, 2014, <https://www.mk.ru/video/2014/05/28/miting-v-donetske-shahteryi-dolzhnyi-slovat-zmeinyu-sheyu-na-zemle-donbassa.html>.

<sup>520</sup> Кира Котова, “Шахтеры вышли на митинг в Донецке. По городу ездят БТР и ‘КамАЗы’ с флагами РФ,” [Miners went to a rally in Donetsk. APCs and ‘KamAZs’ with Russian flags are driving around the city], *Московский Комсомолец*, May 28, 2014, <https://www.mk.ru/politics/2014/05/28/shahteryi-vyishli-na-miting-v-donetske-po-gorodu-ezdyat-btr-i-kamazyi-s-flagami-rf.html>.

On the same day, *The Guardian*, *Reuters*, *BBC Russian Service* and the Ukrainian news outlet *Left Wing* all reported on the situation. *The Guardian* and *Left Wing* estimated that 300 miners participated. *Reuters* claimed that “up to 1,000 coal miners” were at the rally. According to all the reports, miners carried flags of the DNR and banners that read “We will revive the power of the Donbas.” Some wore the ribbons of St. George, the same symbol that deputies had worn at the separatist congress in February. Valery, a miner from Abakumova mine, expressed his desire to live in peace, as he only wanted to “work and make money.” For Valery and others like him, they wanted “the mercenaries who had arrived to murder and plunder” and “the occupying soldiers” to “leave and return to their Kiev junta.”<sup>521</sup> These miners, unlike their more aggressive counterparts, simply wished to carve out a living for themselves amidst the quickly intensifying conflict. This reflects a stronger attachment to the mining industry and the mining regions rather than the territorial integrity of Ukraine itself.

Nine days later, the Ukrainian media outlet *Channel 24* cited information posted by a member of the All-Ukrainian Union “Fatherland” party (Batkivshchyna). According to Oleksandr Briginets, separatists were planning a “provocation with the participation of women, children, and miners” in Sverdlosk, a city near the Russian border in Luhansk Oblast. Rinat Akhmetov reportedly stood behind the demonstrators, offering his support from the background. This accusation contradicted earlier reports of Akhmetov’s hesitancy to support separatism.<sup>522</sup>

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<sup>521</sup> Luke Harding and agencies in Donetsk, “Miners hold pro-Russia rally in Donetsk,” *The Guardian*, May 28, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/28/miners-russia-rally-donetsk>; Gabriela Baczyńska, “Miners rally in favor of separatists in eastern Ukraine,” *Reuters*, May 28, 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-miners/miners-rally-in-favor-of-separatists-in-eastern-ukraine-idUSKBN0E80VX20140528>; “В Донецке сепаратисты согнали на митинг против фашизма 300 шахтеров,” [In Donetsk, separatists corralled 300 miners to a rally against fascism], *Левый Берег*, May 28, 2014, [https://rus.lb.ua/society/2014/05/28/268034\\_donetske\\_separatisti\\_sognali.html](https://rus.lb.ua/society/2014/05/28/268034_donetske_separatisti_sognali.html); “Шахтеры Донецка проводят митинг против АТО,” [Donetsk miners hold a rally against counter-terrorism operations], *ВВС Русская Служба*, May 28, 2014, [https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/ukraine\\_in\\_russian/2014/05/140528\\_ru\\_n\\_donbas\\_kushch](https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/ukraine_in_russian/2014/05/140528_ru_n_donbas_kushch).

<sup>522</sup> “В Свердловске готовится провокация с женщинами, детьми и шахтерами, - Бригинетц,” [A provocation involving women, children, and miners is being prepared in Sverdlovsk, Briginets says], *24 Канал*, June 6, 2014,

Regardless, the separatist-directed protests followed the mold that had been cast by the Party of Regions in the preceding decade, thereby commandeering the miners' support.

On June 18, Russian media outlets *Vesti.Ru* and *Komsomolets Truth*, as well as the state-run *Channel One* and *Russia Today*, reported that “ten thousand miners of the Donbas are ready to take up arms.” These articles emphasized the miners' opposition to fascism and the “genocide of the Russian people” alongside the fact that this would be the last “ultimatum” before the miners joined the separatist forces. This accompanied claims that “many had already taken up arms” and “units of the [DNR] are primarily replenished by miners.” The *Channel One* report even recycled a phrase that the political opportunist Zvyahilsky had used during the protests in the 1990s, reporting that miners were saying that “Donbas will never live on its knees!” Moreover, the *Vesti.Ru* article attempted to draw parallels between the miners' support of separatism in 2014 and the miners' movements in the 1990s, calling the “proposals” at the core of both movements “the same.” The Shakhty<sup>523</sup> online news outlet *KVU.Su* also supported the notion that miners were taking up arms. In an exclusive interview with the outlet, a separatist known as “Grey” explained the phenomenon of local support and his own admiration for his commander:

“The militia members are people who defend their interest, their home, their family, the piece of land on which they live. For example, my platoon commander is a real warrior, a former miner. He is fifty years old and served in the Marine Corps Special Forces.”<sup>524</sup>

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[https://news.24tv.ua/ru/v\\_sverdlovske\\_gotovitsya\\_provokatsiya\\_s\\_zhenshinami\\_detmi\\_i\\_shahterami\\_briginets\\_n\\_451262](https://news.24tv.ua/ru/v_sverdlovske_gotovitsya_provokatsiya_s_zhenshinami_detmi_i_shahterami_briginets_n_451262).

<sup>523</sup> A city in Rostov Oblast in the Russian Federation. It is located on the eastern side of the Donetsk Coal Basin.

<sup>524</sup> Александр Егоров, “Эксклюзив: Изнанка войны на Украине глазами ополченца,” [Exclusive: The other side of the war in Ukraine through the eyes of a militia member], *KVU.Su*, July 16, 2014, [http://kvu.su/news/Ukraine/eksklyuziv\\_iznanka\\_voyny\\_glazami\\_opolchentsa/](http://kvu.su/news/Ukraine/eksklyuziv_iznanka_voyny_glazami_opolchentsa/).

The reverence for miners was not accidental. As the most important constituency up for the taking in 2014, their support was a motivating factor on both sides of the conflict. The image of a miner-turned-militia member emblemized the desired message of the separatists and part of the reality on the ground: economically desperate and politically motivated miners were ready to fight and die for their land, their homes, and their industry. But not all of these articles detailed purely aggressive support for the militias. In another example of the schism between overt and tacit support for separatism, a miner reportedly explained they had arrived “in order to say ‘no’ to the war and aggression that the government of Ukraine is carrying out against peaceful residents of the Donbas.”<sup>525</sup>

### The Miners’ Failed Opposition to Separatism

Although some colliers’ support for separatism was a clear phenomenon in spring-summer 2014, this was not the case for many others in the mines. Mykhailo Volynets, chairman of the NPGU, and Mykola Volynko, chairman of the NGPDb—both pro-Euromaidan members of opposition blocs in the government—were two of the most outspoken and often cited representatives of resistance to separatism in the mining community.<sup>526</sup> Both union leaders were frequent commentators on the events in the Donbas during 2014. However, old animosities and divisions between the trade unions and miners’ leaders were still pervasive. For instance,

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<sup>525</sup> “10 тысяч горняков Донбасса готовы взять в руки оружие,” [10 thousand miners of Donbass are ready to take up arms], *Вести.ру*, June 18, 2014, <https://www.vesti.ru/article/1806591>; “Шахтеры Донбаса готовы бросить шахты и взять в руки оружие, если Киев не остановит карательную операцию,” [Donbas miners are ready to abandon the mines and take up arms if Kiev does not stop the punitive operation], *Комсомольская Правда*, June 18, 2014, <https://www.kp.kg/online/news/1766229/>; Евгений Лямин, “В Донецке тысяча шахтеров вышли на митинг против силовой операции на юго-востоке Украины,” [In Donetsk, a thousand miners rally against the military operation in the south-east of Ukraine], *Первый Канал*, June 18, 2014, [https://www.1tv.ru/news/2014-06-18/44097-v\\_donetske\\_tysyacha\\_shahterov\\_vyshli\\_na\\_miting\\_protiv\\_silovoy\\_operatsii\\_na\\_yugo\\_vostoке\\_ukrainy](https://www.1tv.ru/news/2014-06-18/44097-v_donetske_tysyacha_shahterov_vyshli_na_miting_protiv_silovoy_operatsii_na_yugo_vostoке_ukrainy;); “Тысячи шахтёров приняли участие в митинге в Донецке,” [Thousands of miners took part in a rally in Donetsk], *Russia Today*, June 18, 2014, <https://russian.rt.com/article/37033>. See also, “Шахтеры Донбасса могут взяться за оружие, если Киев не остановит спецоперацию за два дня,” [Donbass miners can take up arms if Kiev does not stop the special operation in two days], *ТАСС*, June 18, 2014, <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/1264820>.

<sup>526</sup> Despite the similarity of their names, these are two distinct entities.

Mikhail Krylov, the former head of the RSSKD and a noted supporter of the separatists, stated bluntly in August 2014 that “those who have a head on their shoulders have already for a long time who can be trusted, and who can’t. Yes, there are individuals [who support Kyiv]...such as Volynko. But almost everyone left him. People just laugh at him.”<sup>527</sup> Krylov accosted a man with whom he had served on the original Donbas strike committees in 1989.<sup>528</sup> Such was the reality of the miners’ situation in 2014. Conflict between the miners was equivalent to fratricide.

Volynets and Volynko collectively insisted that “the miners will not support separatism.”<sup>529</sup> One of the primary reasons that they indicated for the general lack of support, and one of the explanations they frequently used to convince the miners that separatism was unnecessary, was the example set by Rostov Oblast in Russia. Volynko mentioned that “there are no mines in Rostov Oblast. There were 64, now 3 remain” and “unification with Russia will kill mines and leave Ukrainians without work.” Volynets took this warning a step further, lambasting Rostov:

“The miners are well aware of the situation with the mines in Rostov part of the Donbas. They closed more than 100 mines there, and what did they get in exchange? The degradation of the mining territories, drug addiction, drunkenness, a death rate that is two times higher than the birth

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<sup>527</sup> “В Донецке все шахты стоят,” [In Donetsk, all the mines are standstill], *Взгляд*, August 18, 2014, <https://vz.ru/society/2014/8/18/700801.html>.

<sup>528</sup> Александр Калинин, “Отступить некуда,” [Nowhere to retreat], *Правда*, February 28–March 1, 2017, <https://kprf.ru/pravda/issues/2017/20/article-57674/>.

<sup>529</sup> «Шахтеры Донбасса не будут поддерживать сепаратистов», *Укррудпром*, 8 апреля, 2014, [https://ukrrudprom.com/news/SHahteri\\_Donbassa\\_ne\\_budut\\_poddergivat\\_separatistov.html](https://ukrrudprom.com/news/SHahteri_Donbassa_ne_budut_poddergivat_separatistov.html); «Шахтеры Донбасса не поддержат протесты, так как присоединение к России убьет угледобывающую промышленность», *Girnyk.dn.ua*, 10 апреля, 2014, [http://girnyk.dn.ua/news/shahteryi\\_donbassa\\_ne\\_podderzhat\\_protestyi\\_tak\\_kak\\_prisoedinenie\\_k\\_rossii\\_ubet\\_ugled\\_obyivayuschuyu\\_promyishlennost/2014-04-10-4178](http://girnyk.dn.ua/news/shahteryi_donbassa_ne_podderzhat_protestyi_tak_kak_prisoedinenie_k_rossii_ubet_ugled_obyivayuschuyu_promyishlennost/2014-04-10-4178); Павел Лобков, «Николай Волюнко, профсоюз горняков Донбасса: «Шахтеры продолжают работать, администрацию захватили гопники, иждивенцы и путинские туристы»», *Дождь*, 9 апреля, 2014, [https://tvrain.ru/teleshov/lobkov/nikolaj\\_volynko\\_profsojuz\\_gornjakov\\_donbassa\\_shahtery\\_prodolzhat\\_rabotat\\_a\\_dministratsiju\\_zahvatili\\_gopniki\\_izhdiventsy\\_i\\_putinskie\\_turisty-366626/](https://tvrain.ru/teleshov/lobkov/nikolaj_volynko_profsojuz_gornjakov_donbassa_shahtery_prodolzhat_rabotat_a_dministratsiju_zahvatili_gopniki_izhdiventsy_i_putinskie_turisty-366626/); Александр Савицкий, «Тысячи жителей Донецка вышли на митинг за единство Украины», *Deutsche Welle*, 17 апреля, 2014, <https://p.dw.com/p/1BkVV>.



rate. The young men left; the women remained with children. There is a heap of problems. And our miners are well informed [about this].”<sup>530</sup>

Alongside these horrific conditions, Volynets also pointed out that “in the last year in Russia, investment in the mining industry has been reduced by 40%.”<sup>531</sup> For Volynets, Volynko, and others like them, accession to Russia would be a sentence worse than death.<sup>532</sup>

Throughout the conflict, both men continually castigated the separatists and reported on the replacement of mine directors with separatist figureheads, difficult working conditions, mine seizures, coercion to attend demonstrators, torture, and mine closures throughout the separatist-occupied region.<sup>533</sup> There was hard evidence to support their claims. Almost immediately after the beginning of the separatist movement, reports began to emerge that miners were being kidnapped and tortured by the extremists.<sup>534</sup> The miners in Rovenky, a city in Luhansk Oblast,

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<sup>530</sup> Павел Лобков, «Николай Волюнко, профсоюз горняков Донбасса: «Шахтеры продолжают работать, администрацию захватили гопники, иждивенцы и путинские туристы»»; «Николай Волюнко: Федерализация или объединение с Россией убьет украинские шахты», *Ukraine Crisis Media Center*, 15 мая, 2014, <https://uacrisis.org/ru/2643-mykola-volynko-federalization-or-unification-with-russia-will-kill-the-ukrainian-mines>.

<sup>531</sup> “Шахтеры не будут поддерживать сепаратистов – Волюнец,” [Miners will not support separatists, says Volynets], *Сегодня*, April 7, 2014, <https://politics.segodnya.ua/politics/shahtery-ne-budut-podderzhivat-separatistov-volynec--510885.html>.

<sup>532</sup> Артур Гор, “Шахтеры грозят восстанием, если Донбасс достанется России,” [The miners threaten with an uprising if Russia gets the Donbass], *Сегодня*, May 13, 2014, <https://www.segodnya.ua/regions/donetsk/shahtery-grozyat-vosstaniem-esli-donbass-dostanetsya-rossii-519808.html>.

<sup>533</sup> “Луганские сепаратисты пытаются заручиться поддержкой шахтеров,” [Luhansk separatists try to enlist the support of miners], *Слово і Діло*, July 16, 2014, <https://ru.slovoidilo.ua/news/3714/2014-07-16/luganskie-separatisty-pytautsya-zaruchitsya-podderzhkoj-shahterov.html>; “Ужасы прямого эфира: украинец говорит правду - у российского ведущего паника,” [The horrors of live broadcast: the Ukrainian is telling the truth - the Russian presenter is in panic], *Главком*, June 12, 2014, video of the news report, 5:31, <https://glavcom.ua/video/325200-uzhasy-prjamogo-efira-ukrainets-govorit-pravdu--u-rossijskogo-vedushchego-panika.html>; Клэр Бигг и Анна Клевцова, “В борьбу в Восточной Украине вступают шахтеры,” [Miners join the fight in Eastern Ukraine], *Радио Азаттык*, May 21, 2014, <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/miners-enter-the-fray-in-eastern-ukraine/25392601.html>.

<sup>534</sup> “Украинский шахтер о пытках сепаратистов,” [Ukrainian miner on being tortured by separatists], aired May 16, 2014, on *Радио Азаттык*, Радио Азаттык video, 2:14, <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/ukrainian-miner-describes-torture/25389806.html?pe=0&pr=0&pm=1&pa=1&t=MoreOn>; В Донецкой области сепаратисты захватили в плен шахтеров,” [In Donetsk oblast, separatists captured miners], *Левый Берег*, May 4, 2014, [https://rus.lb.ua/society/2014/05/04/265266\\_donetskoy\\_oblasti\\_separatisti.html](https://rus.lb.ua/society/2014/05/04/265266_donetskoy_oblasti_separatisti.html); “Шахтеры, которых похитили и пытали террористы в Донецке, оздоравливаются на Львовщине,” [Miners kidnapped and tortured by terrorists in Donetsk are recovering in Lviv oblast], *24 Канал*, June 6, 2014, [https://lviv.24tv.ua/ru/shahteri\\_kotorih\\_pohitili\\_i\\_pitali\\_terroristi\\_v\\_donetske\\_ozdoravlivayutsya\\_na\\_lvovshhine\\_n](https://lviv.24tv.ua/ru/shahteri_kotorih_pohitili_i_pitali_terroristi_v_donetske_ozdoravlivayutsya_na_lvovshhine_n)

were apparently being forced to attend pro-Russian demonstrations under the threat of terrorist attacks. Their commander, a man named “Ilyich,” reportedly said that “they did not need the mines, and they would blow them up together with traitors (this about the miners).” Thereafter, the mines were handed DNR and LNR flags by “Cossacks” on their way to these rallies.<sup>535</sup> In other mining districts, the roads were blocked by checkpoints, mines were looted for their explosives, mine managers were kidnapped, and the miners were generally prevented from working.<sup>536</sup> First Deputy Minister of Energy Yuri Zyukov reported that “in this complex situation, by the initiative of the workers at the mines, so-called self-defense units have been created.” However, he cautioned that “these units are powerless against people with machine guns.”<sup>537</sup> In effect, violent authoritarianism had descended on the mines.

Not all of the miners remained silent about this inhumane treatment and the separatists’ threats. Some miners attended pro-Ukrainian rallies in both Donetsk and Luhansk.<sup>538</sup> In one of the only large instances of miners’ open resistance to separatism, roughly 1000 miners at the Komsomolets of Donbas mine in Kirovskoye, Donetsk Oblast, demonstrated against the armed conflict. On June 23, they proclaimed their opposition to war and political radicalization, carrying signs reading “miners need peace” and “miners are for peace, stability, and order!” This

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[451275](https://www.svoboda.org/a/25373787.html); Арслан Саидов, “Пленные Донецкой республики,” [Prisoners of the Donetsk Republic], *Радио Свобода*, May 6, 2014, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/25373787.html>.

<sup>535</sup> “На Луганщине боевики выгоняют на митинг людей и угрожают взорвать шахты,” [In Luhanshchina, militants make people to go to a rally and threaten to blow up mines], *День*, June 20, 2014, <https://m.day.kyiv.ua/ru/news/200614-na-luganshchine-boeviki-vygonyayut-na-miting-lyudey-i-ugrozhayut-vzorvat-shahty>.

<sup>536</sup> Инна Ивершень, “Боевики похитили директора шахты, которая фактически была оплотом ДНР,” [The militants kidnapped the director of the mine, which was basically a stronghold of the DPR], *Газета*, July 8, 2014, [http://gazeta.ua/ru/articles/politics/\\_boeviki-pohitili-direktora-shahty-kotoraya-fakticheski-byla-oplotom-dnr-glava-profsoyuza-shahterov/568613](http://gazeta.ua/ru/articles/politics/_boeviki-pohitili-direktora-shahty-kotoraya-fakticheski-byla-oplotom-dnr-glava-profsoyuza-shahterov/568613).

<sup>537</sup> “Безопасностью шахт на мятежном Донбассе занимаются отряды самообороны,” [Self-defense units are engaged in the safety of mines in the rebellious Donbass], *Слово і Діло*, June 19, 2014, <https://ru.slovovidilo.ua/news/3297/2014-06-19/bezopasnostyu-shaht-na-myatezhnom-donbasse-zanimayutsya-otryady-samooborony.html>.

<sup>538</sup> Here again, Volynko made the report. “В Донецке и Луганске пройдут митинги за единство Украины,” [Rallies for the unity of Ukraine will be held in Donetsk and Lugansk], *Радио Свобода*, April 17, 2014, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/25352295.html>.

demonstration was largely motivated by the seizure of the mine, the kidnapping of mine directors, and general looting.<sup>539</sup> Other miners opted for a less peaceful route. On multiple occasions Volynko reported that “among the miners of the Donbas, there are many who went to fight against the separatists in the Ukrainian army at the start of the АТО.”<sup>540</sup> Evidently, during the recruitment process for miners, in which they expected 300-400 volunteers, they instead received enough manpower to form “three battalions.”<sup>541</sup>

In at least one instance, these anti-separatist sentiments produced results. Beginning on May 15, coal miners and steelworkers in Mariupol, a major city in Donetsk Oblast, established citizen patrols to maintain peace and dismantle barricades. Together they drove out the pro-Russian militias and agitators.<sup>542</sup> However, these laborers only acted after the mercurial oligarch Rinat Akhmetov came out in support of a unified Ukraine, declaring:

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<sup>539</sup> For a video of the demonstration, see the following: Новости Донбасса, “Митинг шахтеров в г.Комсомолец (шахта Комсомолец Донбасса),” [Miners’ rally in Komsomolets (“Komsomolets Donbassa” mine)], June 23, 2014, YouTube video, 4:35, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nI0-3GJqZmo&list=WL&index=31/>; “Шахтеры ‘Комсомольца Донбасса’ провели митинг с призывом прекратить вооруженные противостояние на Донбассе,” [Miners of the “Komsomolets Donbassa” mine held a rally calling for an end to the armed confrontation in Donbass], *Интерфакс-Украина*, June 22, 2014, <https://interfax.com.ua/news/general/210435.html>; “Шахтеры Донбасса митинговали против террористов ДНР,” [Donbass miners held a rally against DPR terrorists], *Украинская Правда*, June 22, 2014, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2014/06/22/7029797/>.

<sup>540</sup> Александра Индюхова, “Лидер горняков Донбасса: Разберемся с террористами и займемся люстрацией,” [Leader of Donbass miners: Let’s deal with the terrorists and start lustration], *Deutsche Welle*, August 5, 2014, <https://p.dw.com/p/1Cp64>.

<sup>541</sup> Battalions include roughly 300-1000 servicemen. Volynko did not specify the exact number. Татьяна Орёл, “Волюнко: Шахтеры в ‘ДНР’ уже воюют за еду. Рыло замочили, как в народе говорят, теперь им деваться некуда,” [Volynko: Miners in the “DPR” are already fighting for food. They stuck their snouts in someone else’s business, as the people say, now they have nowhere to go], *Гордон*, December 18, 2014, <https://gordonua.com/publications/56371.html>.

<sup>542</sup> Andrew E. Kramer, “Workers Seize City in Eastern Ukraine From Separatists,” *New York Times*, May 15, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/16/world/europe/ukraine-workers-take-to-streets-to-calm-Mariupol.html>; Scott Neuman, “Separatists Abandon Government Buildings In Eastern Ukraine,” *NPR*, May 16, 2014, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2014/05/16/313139278/separatists-abandon-government-buildings-in-eastern-ukraine>.

“I call everyone to unite in our fight! For a Donbas without weapons! For a Donbas without masks!”<sup>543</sup>

Critics immediately noted that Akhmetov’s indecisiveness on the separatist issue had already cost the region dearly. Some of the pro-Russian demonstrators expressed a similar view. One lamented:

“We were duped. Akhmetov used to keep his eyes closed (to what was happening), but now he decided to make a deal with Kyiv.”<sup>544</sup>

Indeed, Akhmetov’s timing was suspicious. Unlike local elites and authorities in Kharkov—who almost immediately helped suppress the separatists—Akhmetov had remained on the sidelines for months, apparently weighing his options.<sup>545</sup> It was hardly coincidental that Akhmetov’s shift came on the front end of a massive retreat by separatist forces at the beginning of June.<sup>546</sup> Even this apparent success was limited, however, and reports from Mariupol in late May indicated that the separatists had not been entirely removed. Complicating matters, the separatists did not appear to oppose the citizen patrols, amongst whom they were trying to gather support. Still, the miners and steelworkers preserved this precarious order in the political power vacuum.<sup>547</sup>

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<sup>543</sup> Бигг и Клевцова, “В борьбу в Восточной Украине вступают шахтёры,” [Miners join the fight in Eastern Ukraine]; See also Akhmetov’s remarks in “Донбасс провел забастовку по призыву Ахметова,” [Donbass went on strike at the call of Akhmetov], *BBC Русская Служба*, May 20, 2014, [https://www.bbc.com/russian/international/2014/05/140520\\_ukraine\\_akhmetov\\_call\\_protests](https://www.bbc.com/russian/international/2014/05/140520_ukraine_akhmetov_call_protests).

<sup>544</sup> Danielle Wiener-Bronner, “Ukrainian Steelworkers Keep the Peace with Citizen Patrols,” *The Atlantic*, May 16, 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/05/ukraine-pushes-back-separatists-in-east/371036/>.

<sup>545</sup> For more on the events in Kharkov, see Tomasz Piechal, “The Kharkiv oblast: a fragile stability,” *OSW Centre for Eastern Studies*, Commentary no. 172, June 3, 2015,

[https://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/commentary\\_172.pdf](https://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/commentary_172.pdf); Святослав Хоменко, “ХНР: Харьковская неудавшаяся республика,” [KhFR: Kharkiv Failed Republic], *BBC Русская Служба*, April 8, 2015, [https://www.bbc.com/russian/international/2015/04/150407\\_kharkiv\\_peoples\\_republic](https://www.bbc.com/russian/international/2015/04/150407_kharkiv_peoples_republic).

<sup>546</sup> “Ukraine crisis: Donetsk rebels in mass withdrawal,” *BBC News*, July 5, 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-28177020>.

<sup>547</sup> Richard Allen Greene, “Who’s in charge here? In one eastern Ukrainian city, answer isn’t clear,” *CNN*, May 19, 2014, <https://edition.cnn.com/2014/05/18/world/europe/mariupol-ukraine-leadership-vacuum/>; Charles Recknagel, “Gray Zone: Mariupol Sinks Into Power Vacuum,” *Radio Free Europe: Radio Liberty*, May 17, 2014 (web-archived

Eventually, the city was fully retaken after a major military offensive by Ukrainian forces in June.<sup>548</sup>

But events such as those in Mariupol and Kirvoskoye were the exception, rather than the rule. Speaking on July 23, Volynets observed that “a few hundred miners is not much for Donetsk” in reference to pro-Russian miners’ rallies in the city.<sup>549</sup> True as this was for the separatists’ base of support,<sup>550</sup> the same logic also applied to those miners who rallied in favor of a unified Ukraine. A few hundred, at most a thousand, was not enough. At the outset of the conflict, Yuri Zyukov, Mykhailo Volynets, and Mykola Volynko all provided the same assessment. Zyukov claimed that “for the most part, the miners do not support the separatists.”<sup>551</sup> Volynets assured the media that miners were not afraid of bullets from the armed separatists, and, in fact, they wanted weapons from Kyiv to drive them out.<sup>552</sup> Volynko stood firm in his belief that if the separatists entered the mines, the miners would beat them. However, as Ukrainian political scientists Igor Bukarovsky pointed out:

“Many people in the east carry weapons now. In fact, it is possible to expect that the miners and metallurgists will go and seize the strongholds of the separatists. In terms of protest actions, the miners will easily outmatch the separatists. However, the situation is completely different.”

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on May 17, 2014), <https://web.archive.org/web/20140517171406/http://www.rferl.org/content/gray-zone-mariupol-sinks-into-power-vacuum/25388574.html>.

<sup>548</sup> Christopher Miller, “Ukrainian Forces Seize Crucial Port City From Pro-Russia Separatists,” *Mashable*, June 13, 2014, <https://mashable.com/2014/06/13/ukraine-seize-port-city-russia-separatists/>.

<sup>549</sup> Татьяна Заровная, “Генерального директора шахты приковали к вагону на 15 часов,” [The general director of the mine was chained to a train car for 15 hours], *Конфедерация вільних профспілок України*, July 23, 2014, <https://kvpu.org.ua/uk/profnews/7/394-generalnogo-direktora-shakhty-prikovali-k-vagonu-na-15-chasov>.

<sup>550</sup> Separatists sometimes expressed frustration at this fact. See “Сепаратисты в Донецке огорчены, что шахтеры почти не митингуют,” [The separatists in Donetsk are upset that the miners almost don’t participate in rallies], *Українська Правда*, April 8, 2014, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2014/04/8/7021760/>.

<sup>551</sup> Сергій Головнюв, “Юрій Зюков: ‘Шахтеры не поддерживают этих самозванцев,’” [Yuri Zyukov: “The miners don’t support these impostors”], *The Insider*, June 27, 2014, <http://www.theinsider.ua/business/53ac1e95ec16b/>.

<sup>552</sup> “Шахтеры Донбасса хотят получить оружие для отстрела сепаратистов,” [Donbass miners want to get weapons to shoot separatists], *TCH*, May 5, 2014, <https://tsn.ua/ru/politika/shahtery-donbassa-hotyat-poluchit-ozuzhie-dlya-otstrela-separatistov-365584.html>.

Bukarovsky words rang true across the region. If there had been a mass miners' movement on the level that Volynets, Volynko, and Zyukov envisioned, then perhaps the separatists would have been driven out.<sup>553</sup> But no such movement emerged. Worse yet, few miners emerged to support the views put forth by all three men. After two decades of economic decay, unemployment, halting industry restructuring, mine closures, general obsolescence, political chaos, authoritarian rule, separatist messaging, and now war, the Donbas miners were in no position to express the will or capacity for well-organized collective action. One miner from Luhansk Oblast, Vitaliy, even referred to the miners as a “controllable people” with a mentality that pushed them to support the DNR and LNR.<sup>554</sup> They were a desperate remnant of a unified labor force that had morphed into a constituency of political authoritarianism.

### **The Aggressive Minority**

In 2014, an aggressive minority of miners emerged to fight in support of the DNR and LNR. One of the primary drivers behind their actions was overwhelming sense of economic insecurity, particularly with regards to the European integration. Although disinformation informed and radicalized the miners' views and decisions in 2014, their circumstances were sufficiently horrendous, and the alternatives sufficiently undesirable, so that they were driven to separatist support.

The circumstances of war only compounded these issues. Across the spring and summer, the separatists continued to seize mines, looting any explosive ordinance and forcing some mines

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<sup>553</sup> Others shared this view as well. See Александр Горобец, “Сепаратистов из Донбасса угомонят... шахтёры,” [Separatists from Donbass will be calmed down by... miners], *Радио Эхо Москвы*, April 20, 2014, <https://echo.msk.ru/blog/jura777/1303688-echo/>.

<sup>554</sup> Скоркин, “Голос Донбасса. Шахтеры — о событиях на Востоке,” [Voice of Donbass. Miners on the events in the East].

to cease working.<sup>555</sup> Salaries stopped coming in and wage arrears mounted, especially for those working at state-run mines. Many mines were destroyed or flooded. According to one report, 64 mines had stopped work, leaving 100,000 miners jobless. Wage arrears for June and July alone amounted to 347 million hryvnia (26.8 million USD).<sup>556</sup> The resulting state of unemployment and the dearth of wages produced several outcomes in favor of separatism amongst the miners. For some, they joined the separatists “because it provided an income after their coalmines and factories had closed or were destroyed in the conflict.”<sup>557</sup> Others blamed Kyiv, rather than the DNR and LNR, for their financial woes, believing that instead of paying the miners and factory workers, the central government “sent this money to the Ukrainian army.”<sup>558</sup>

These miners felt compelled to defend the mines from the perceived aggressors in Kyiv and the threat of European integration, either because of the misplaced belief in the mines’ economic viability or in order to avoid potential mine closures. Bulletproof rational economic logic was not necessarily the driving force. As one miner pointed out in 2014, “I ask them: ‘Well, you are voting for separation from Ukraine, and who will pay your salary for May?’ They answer: ‘Ukraine.’”<sup>559</sup> But by 2014, state subsidies to coal mines for the payment of salaries and

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<sup>555</sup> “Сепаратисты захватили госпредприятие ‘Донбассантрацит’ в Луганской области,” [The separatists seized the state-owned enterprise ‘Donbassantratsit’ in the Luhansk oblast], *Левый Берег*, May 15, 2014, [https://rus.lb.ua/news/2014/05/15/266554\\_separatisti\\_zahvatili.html](https://rus.lb.ua/news/2014/05/15/266554_separatisti_zahvatili.html); “Террористы захватили шахту ‘Комсомолец Донбасса’,” [Terrorists seized the “Komsomolets Donbassa” mine], *День*, June 21, 2014, <https://m.day.kyiv.ua/ru/news/210614-terroristy-zahvatili-shahtu-komsomolec-donbassa>; “В Донецкой области террористы захватили и ограбили шахту,” [In Donetsk oblast, terrorists seized and robbed a mine], *34 Телеканал*, June 23, 2014, [https://34.ua/v-doneckoj-oblasti-terroristy-zahvatili-i-ograbil-shahtu\\_n30340](https://34.ua/v-doneckoj-oblasti-terroristy-zahvatili-i-ograbil-shahtu_n30340); “Террористы захватили четыре шахты в Луганской области,” [Terrorists seized four mines in the Luhansk oblast], *Экономическая Правда*, May 22, 2014, <https://www.epravda.com.ua/rus/news/2014/05/22/456197/>.

<sup>556</sup> «“Тысячи украинских шахтеров потеряли работу,” [Thousands of Ukrainian miners have lost their jobs], *IndustriALL Global Union*, October 10, 2014, <http://www.industriall-union.org/ru/tysyachi-ukrainskih-shahterov-poteryali-rabotu>.

<sup>557</sup> Kuzio, *Putin’s War Against Ukraine*, 164.

<sup>558</sup> VICE News, “Donetsk Demands a Referendum: Russian Roulette,” 3:45-3:55.

<sup>559</sup> Скоркин, “Голос Донбасса. Шахтеры — о событиях на Востоке,” [Voice of Donbass. Miners on the events in the East].

the coverage of losses had ballooned to 34 billion hryvnia (2,874,049,027 USD).<sup>560</sup> The Ukrainian government was paying roughly 1,500 hryvnia for every ton of coal. The market price was only 600 hryvnia per ton, leaving the government with a ghastly bill of 900 hryvnia for every ton mined in the Donbas.<sup>561</sup> The head of the board of the Institute for Economic Research and Political Consulting, Igor Burakovsky, morbidly concluded that “half of Ukrainian mines” were “economically impractical.”<sup>562</sup> Unable to come to terms with this reality and presented with no clear employment alternatives, some miners chose to fight for these operations. These miners became the “marginalized locals from economically distressed areas” who joined separatist divisions such as the “Kalmius” brigade.<sup>563</sup> This militia group was originally drawn from a group of miners, and thereafter played an outsized role in Russian and separatist propaganda.<sup>564</sup>

Others were compelled to join the separatists at their workplaces, adhering to the strict, authoritarian discipline that was characteristic of the Donbas coal mining industry. As the leader of the NPGU, Mykhailo Volynets, explained in an interview in June 2014, “I know directors of

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<sup>560</sup> USD based on the exchange rate on June 3, 2014.

<sup>561</sup> “Дотации убыточных шахт Донбасса составляют 34 млрд гривень,” [There are 34 billion hryvnia in subsidies to unprofitable mines of the Donbass]. *VHIAH*, June 3, 2014, <https://www.unian.net/economics/industry/924889-dotatsii-ubytochnyih-shaht-donbassa-sostavlyayut-34-mlrd-griven.html>.

<sup>562</sup> “Работа половины украинских угольных шахт экономически нецелесообразна – эксперт,” [The work of half of Ukrainian coal mines is economically inexpedient, says the expert], *VHIAH*, June 26, 2014, <https://www.unian.net/politics/933479-rabota-polovinyi-ukrainskih-ugolnyih-shaht-ekonomicheskii-netselesoobrazna-ekspert.html>.

<sup>563</sup> Franklin Holcomb, “The Kremlin’s Irregular Army: Ukrainian Separatist Order of Battle,” 10, [http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/ISW%20Separatist%20ORBAT%20Holcomb%202017\\_Final.pdf](http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/ISW%20Separatist%20ORBAT%20Holcomb%202017_Final.pdf).

<sup>564</sup> See reports on the creation of “miners’ divisions” in the Russian state-controlled media: “Батальон ‘Кальмиус’,” [The ‘Kalmius’ battalion], *PIA Новости*, March 6, 2015, <https://ria.ru/20150306/1051219376.html>; Руслан Мельников, “В ДНР формируется Шахтерская дивизия,” [A Miners’ division is being formed in the DPR], *Российская Газета*, July 9, 2014, <https://rg.ru/2014/07/09/shahter-site-anons.html>.



state mines who agitated towards separatism.”<sup>565</sup> Some of these directors acted of their own volition while others were coerced. The effect on the workers was similar in either case.<sup>566</sup>

### The Tacit Majority

As the war in the Donbas intensified, the miners’ support moved in a constant state of flux. The main battleground was situated on the miners’ worst psychological predilections. Even so, the majority of miners outside of the aggressive minority preferred to remove themselves from politics entirely, instead opting to focus on their labor.<sup>567</sup> They wanted peace, not a continuation of the ATO to ultimate victory. However, this desire for economic security and stability predetermined their fate. The miners’ attachment to their work at the mines proved to be a powerful determining factor behind the majority of miners’ political pliability across 2014.

In part, the miners’ hesitancy to support Kyiv was born out of a desire for federalism—a goal that did not necessarily entail overt support for separatism and annexation to Russia. For instance, at a rally of roughly two-to-four thousand colliers in Krasnodon, a mining town in Luhansk Oblast, the local strike committee representatives went to great lengths to avoid being characterized as separatists, a label they believed was being unfairly attached to every miners’ rally in the east. Their demonstration began with a desire to support federalism in Ukraine. Essentially, they wanted the same thing that Donbas miners had struck for across two decades: greater regional autonomy to deal with the regional economic political and economic issues as

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<sup>565</sup> Павло Вуєць, “Михаил Вольнец: Я знаю директоров государственных шахт, подстрекавших к сепаратизму,” [Mikhail Volynets: I know directors of state mines who agitated for separatism], *Главком*, June 12, 2014, <https://glavcom.ua/interviews/125168-mihail-volynets-ja-znaju-direktorov-gosudarstvennyh-shaht-podstrekaivshih-k-separatizmu.html>.

<sup>566</sup> From an interview with Mikhail Volynets. Татьяна Заровная, “Генерального директора шахты приковали к вагону на 15 часов,” [The general director of the mine was chained to a train car for 15 hours].

<sup>567</sup> Александр Савицкий, “Большинство жителей Донбасса ждет, пока ситуация разрешится сама собой,” [Most residents of Donbass are waiting for the situation to resolve by itself], *Deutsche Welle*, April 20, 2014, <https://p.dw.com/p/1BINE>.

they saw fit. In an even more standard course of action, the miners' demonstration reportedly changed the agenda and lost sight of their original goal, instead preferring socio-economic demands. In the words of one of the strike organizers, Nikolai, "if they give the miners money, they will immediately disperse from here, no one will stand for something incomprehensible, they do not have anything else to do."<sup>568</sup>

For many in the Donbas in 2014, such economic concerns took primacy over most other issues. Survey results from the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) in April 2014 indicated that 44.3% and 42.7% of respondents in the Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts respectively were anxious about the "collapse of the Ukrainian economy." Echoing this concern, Vitaliy, a miner from Luhansk Oblast, stated that "Poroshenko needs to offer the Donbas a plan for the resolution of economic problems."<sup>569</sup> A further 32.4% and 28% of respondents were anxious about the "non-payment of salaries and pensions." Additionally, 24.5% and 20.3% of respondents in each oblast were anxious about "the risk of losing work."<sup>570</sup> In this sense, federalism, along with the perception that such an arrangement would bring economic benefits and stave off mine closures, served as a means to an end that was rooted in a long history of opposition to the central government. In the Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts, 19.1% and 21.6% of respondents in the aforementioned survey expected the central government to enact federalization in order to preserve the unity of Ukraine. Moreover, 24.8% and 36% of respondents expected Kyiv to lend support to the enterprises of the region. Residents in the

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<sup>568</sup> Дмитрий Галко, "Краснодон: Шахтеров склоняют к сепаратизму," [Krasnodon: Miners are being pushed towards separatism], *Радио Эхо Москвы*, April 26, 2014, <https://echo.msk.ru/blog/budimir/1308158-echo/>. Despite the title of the article, the author explains that the miners were not quite separatists, at least, not in the way they believed the media was reporting them to be.

<sup>569</sup> Скоркин, "Голос Донбасса. Шахтеры — о событиях на Востоке," [Voice of Donbass. Miners on the events in the East].

<sup>570</sup> "Думки та погляди жителів південно-східних областей України: квітень 2014," [Thoughts and views of residents of the south-eastern oblasts of Ukraine: April 2014], *Київський Міжнародний Інститут Соціології*, April 20, 2014, <https://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=ukr&cat=reports&id=302&y=2014&page=9>.

Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts demanded these measures more than any other region in the southeast.<sup>571</sup> The Ukrainian government did not enact either one in any meaningful capacity.

In 2014, the Ukrainian government, either out of a lack of will or a lack of resources, failed to support the Donbas economy, namely the coal industry, during the conflict. In truth, this proposition would have been impossible under the circumstances of war. All the same, the colliers' worst fears were recognized, and the government stopped paying the miners in occupied territories. By December, Volynets acknowledged that miners at state-owned mines had not been paid since June.<sup>572</sup> Experts expressed doubts that the government would be willing to pay for the enterprises in occupied territories and emphasized the need to reform the industry and close the mines.<sup>573</sup> Once more the central government was tone-deaf to the lack of alternative options for employment. By this point, the trade unions had already warned about job losses stemming from the conflict.<sup>574</sup> The threat to miners' jobs was not just coming from the separatist side, however, and government threats overshadowed these concerns, especially when the media the miners' digested focused on shifting the blame on Kyiv.

The miners were effectively placed in an economic no-man's land. A month before the salaries stopped, Yevgeniy Bondarenko, chairman of the Donetsk territorial committee of the PRUP, warned that the miners would remain politically uninvolved "only so long as they pay the

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<sup>571</sup> "Думки та погляди жителів південно-східних областей України: квітень 2014," [Thoughts and views of residents of the south-eastern oblasts of Ukraine: April 2014], *Київський Міжнародний Інститут Соціології*.

<sup>572</sup> Кметь, "Правда шахтера. Почему не бастуют горняки Донбасса," [The truth of a miner. Why Donbass miners are not on strike].

<sup>573</sup> Инна Куприянова и Ксения Польская, "Шахтерам Донбасса сепаратизм принес только безработицу," [For Donbass miners, separatism brought only unemployment], *Deutsche Welle*, October 10, 2014, <https://p.dw.com/p/1DS1b>.

<sup>574</sup> Независимый Профсоюз Горняков Украины, "Донецкие шахтеры могут потерять работу," [Donetsk miners may lose their jobs], accessed September 23, 2020, <http://npgu.org/novosti/813-donetskie-shakhtery-mogut-poteryat-rabotu.html>.

salaries. If there will not be a salary, then there will be a social explosion here.”<sup>575</sup> In April, at the outset of the conflict, even the union leaders had relied on the refrain that federalization and separatism were meaningless given that salaries were being paid and the mines were open.<sup>576</sup> When scarcely a month later this was no longer a given, the miners were faced with a choice. Oleg Obelants had predicted that “when they haven’t received their pay for two or three months, they’ll come out. The hungry have nothing to lose. The hungry are willing to do anything.” In the summer and fall of 2014, many miners had lost their jobs or stopped receiving their salaries. At the same time, for those who joined the separatists, in the words of Volynko, “at the beginning [the separatists] paid them good money.”<sup>577</sup> Even for those miners who may have wished to resist the separatists, the Ukrainian authorities failed to deliver them arms. Volynko later expressed regret and disappointment over the government’s inaction.<sup>578</sup>

Although trade union leaders like Volynko and Volynets insisted that “deception,” “zombification,” and “psychosis” was a problem in the mining communities during this time, they insisted these issues were restricted to only a small group of people who were swayed by fantasies, such as higher pensions.<sup>579</sup> However, this minimized the appeal of such messaging to the mining regions. As one miner, Ivan, from Sverdlovsk lamented in 2014, “miners have lost their sense of reality, it was replaced by the television. My relatives are zombified by Russian propaganda, everyone supports the Luhansk People’s Republic. They watch Russian channels

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<sup>575</sup> Ольга Ившина, “Неясное будущее шахт Донбасса,” [The uncertain future of the Donbass mines], *BBC Русская Служба*, May 14, 2014, [https://www.bbc.com/russian/international/2014/05/140514\\_ukraine\\_donetsk\\_mines](https://www.bbc.com/russian/international/2014/05/140514_ukraine_donetsk_mines).

<sup>576</sup> “Шахтеры Донбасса не будут поддерживать сепаратистов,” [Donbass miners will not support separatists]. *Укринформ*.

<sup>577</sup> Орёл, “Волюнко: Шахтеры в ‘ДНР’ уже воюют за еду,” [Volynko: Miners in the “DPR” are already fighting for food].

<sup>578</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>579</sup> “Шахтеры Донбасса дали отпор сепаратистам, - профсоюзный лидер,” [Donbass miners rebuffed separatists, says trade union leader], *Украинская Правда*; Вуець, “Михаил Волюнец: Я знаю директоров государственных шахт, подстрекавших к сепаратизму,” [Mikhail Volynets: I know directors of state mines who agitated for separatism].

and believe everything that they see.”<sup>580</sup> By December, Volynko reaffirmed this sentiment, remarking that “zombification” was possible because the miners were “a population whose feeling of self-respect has atrophied.”<sup>581</sup> Indeed, the miners, under the collective pressure of mine closures, mounting wage arrears, and the ATO were extremely vulnerable to suggestion that economic fortune could be found with the separatists. Even for those miners who opposed separatism or maintained a neutral disposition, disinformation had the dual effect of both swaying some while demoralizing others. When the ATO commenced and both sides began shelling the mining regions with artillery fire, it mattered little which side fired the opening salvo. A destroyed mine was a destroyed mine in either case. It produced nothing and employed no one.

Such circumstances pushed Donbas residents away from a pro-Kyiv stance, even if it did not push them into the separatist camp. Yuri Zyukov even claimed the separatists intended to escalate the conflict with this impact in mind.<sup>582</sup> In effect, the presence of the separatists created a self-fulfilling prophecy. The “phantom threat” of an attack from the west materialized during the ATO, creating an environment where people were losing their minds “from the sound of shelling” and were at their “wit’s end with the Ukrainian government.” Some of these formerly anti-separatist residents even considered joining the ranks of the “low-class fools” they had previously opposed.<sup>583</sup> For instance, in his recent book *The Long Hangover: Putin’s New Russia and the Ghosts of the Past*, Shaun Walker, *The Guardian* correspondent for central and eastern

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<sup>580</sup> Скоркин, “Голос Донбасса. Шахтеры — о событиях на Востоке,” [Voice of Donbass. Miners on the events in the East].

<sup>581</sup> Орёл, “Волюнко: Шахтёры в ‘ДНР’ уже воюют за еду,” [Volynko: Miners in the “DPR” are already fighting for food].

<sup>582</sup> Головнёв, “Юрий Зюков: ‘Шахтеры не поддерживают этих самозванцев,’” [Yuri Zyukov: “The miners don’t support these impostors”].

<sup>583</sup> See the case of *The Guardian* correspondent Shaun Walker’s driver in Donetsk, a man named Andrei: Shaun Walker, *The Long Hangover: Putin’s New Russia and the Ghosts of the Past* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 223–24.

Europe, recounts the story of Igor, a miner whose funeral he attended in Donetsk. Igor had “kept working his shifts at the mine, even as more and more of his friends and co-workers joined the rebel armies.” Despite his initial hesitation to join the separatist militias, the hardened miner made the decision to fight when, according to his wife, “they said they were going to kill everyone in the east.” Igor, like countless other miners in the Donbas, had received his information on the war through Russian television. After learning about the “fascist plan for ethnic cleansing,” Igor reportedly announced, “That’s it. I’m going to fight.” He was killed several weeks later, another casualty of both war and propaganda.<sup>584</sup> He was one of many miners that pro-Ukrainians often derided as “cannon fodder.”<sup>585</sup> His wife saw him as a hero.<sup>586</sup>

### Same Constituency, New Authoritarians

Though not completely deprived of agency (after all they had agreed to this “deal”), the miners were a hollow shell of their former selves in 2013-2014. They voted, organized, and protested according to the demands of mine directors and regional authoritarian figures for fear of losing the precious economic stability they had fought so hard to obtain. As one shift boss at a steel mill declared during the citizen patrols in Mariupol:

“Everybody can have their own opinion, but not at work. At work, you have to do what the factory demands.”<sup>587</sup>

The same principles equally applied to the mines, if not more due to the extremely hazardous nature of their work. The Party of Regions, Yanukovych, the Donetsk Clan, and by extension the

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<sup>584</sup> Walker, *The Long Hangover*, 224–26.

<sup>585</sup> Literally “cannon meat,” пушечное мясо, otherwise known as cannon fodder. See Дмитрий Тымчук, Тымчук, Дмитрий. “Местные на Донбассе – это пушечное мясо: что собой представляют боевики ДНР и ЛНР,” [Locals in Donbass are cannon fodder: what are the DPR and LPR militants], *Аностроф*, September 9, 2016, <https://apostrophe.ua/article/society/2016-09-09/mestnyie-na-donbasse--eto-pushechnoe-myaso-chto-soboy-predstavlyayut-boeviki-dnr-i-lnr/7197>.

<sup>586</sup> Walker, *The Long Hangover: Putin’s New Russia and the Ghosts of the Past*, 226.

<sup>587</sup> Kramer, “Workers Seize City in Eastern Ukraine From Separatists.”

workplace had demanded discipline and absolute obedience from the miners. For over a decade, the miners obliged, even reaping some benefits, small as they may have been. As such, when this power structure collapsed following Yanukovich's failure in February 2014, the miners were left with a power vacuum. Separatists stepped in to fill the void, actively taking advantage of the miners' hostility towards Kyiv. As Vladimir Sadovoy, the head of a Donbas factory trade union, explained in 2014, "Some people are for joining Russia and others are for staying in Ukraine. But everyone is against the current Kyiv government."<sup>588</sup> Regardless of their disposition, such sentiments made the miners prone to separatist cooption as part of the renewal of their Faustian bargain.

Unlike the late Soviet period, circumstances did not favor collective action or the defense of the coal mining industry during this time. In the twenty-five years since the 1989 miners' strikes, a combination of political opportunists, red directors, local elites, oligarchs and shifting economic fortunes in the coal industry had progressively whittled away the miners' independence until there was hardly anything left. As part of their Faustian bargain to avoid widespread mine closures and comprehensive reform, the miners had forfeited their unity and independent political power. The exploitative signatories to this deal coopted the loyalty of leadership at mining enterprises, eroded the miners' capacity to organize without direct orders, and incorporated the miners into a strict, vertical political power structure emanating from Donetsk. In February 2015, Volynets described how the directors of state enterprises and three trade unions had immediately sworn allegiance to the DNR and LNR. He explained that "it has always been like this, under any power. Whatever power arrives, they serve – this is what

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<sup>588</sup> Shaun Walker, "Ukrainian oligarch backs Kiev rule, urging factory workers to daily strikes," *The Guardian*, May 20, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/20/ukrainian-oligarch-akhmetov-backs-kiev-workers-strikes>.

happened now.”<sup>589</sup> Even Mikhail Krylov, the former head of the RSSKD, took the side of the separatists, remarking in August 2014:

“It is useless to turn to someone and talk about your problems. We have already grown out of children’s pants... Therefore, two miners’ divisions have already been formed here (fighting under the flag of the DNR). And 15-20 people enlist in them every day, and sometimes more.”<sup>590</sup>

Another demonstrative example of this troubling trend was Yuri Boldyrev, who had been a notable strike leader turned people’s deputy of the Party of Regions from the 1990s miners’ movement. Described by Volynets as a “an official of the 1<sup>st</sup> rank of the 1<sup>st</sup> category,” who “played an important role in the history of the miners’ movement,” Boldyrev agitated for miners to join the separatist movement and fight the “banderovites” in 2014.<sup>591</sup>

For those former Power of Regions functionaries and pro-Russian mine directors who agitated for separatism, they found a politically pliant source of early support in these miners. For the rest of the miners, they were crippled from the outset of the confusion. During the critical months between February and April, they lacked the independent structures necessary to organize a meaningful miners’ movement. There was no longer any comprehensive platform for political cooperation between miners across the Donbas. In the past two decades, the miners had refused to form a political party and frequent schisms amongst trade unions had produced a lack of central authority. The Party of Regions had served in that capacity for over a decade. Put simply, when confronted with the precarious Ukrainian political environment in spring 2014, the miners were paralyzed. To make matters worse, the barricades, work stoppages, and checkpoints

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<sup>589</sup> Виталий Портинков, “Трагедия шахтёрского Донбасса,” [The tragedy of the miners’ Donbass], *Радио Свобода*, February 7, 2015, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/26828512.html>.

<sup>590</sup> “В Донецке все шахты стоят,” [In Donetsk, all the mines are standstill]. *Взгляд*.

<sup>591</sup> “Регионал Болдырев призвал шахтеров воевать против Украины,” [Party of Regions Member Boldyrev called on miners to fight against Ukraine], *Trust.ua*, July 25, 2014, <http://www.trust.ua/news/98210-regional-boldyrev-prizval-shahterov-voevat-protiv-ukrainy.html>.



set up first by the separatists, and later by Ukrainian government forces, further divided the miners geographically, isolating them in pockets where they were now physically unable to conduct marches and protest actions akin to the movements in the 1990s.

### **Conclusion: The Making of an Authoritarian Working-Class Constituency**

The events of 2014 and the War in the Donbas exposed the fact that the miners had transformed into radically different political actors. If the remnants of the miners' movement were still willing to beat local police to defend their rights and economic interests in 1998, then by a decade and a half later in 2014, that political will had vanished. As one blogger noted in 2014, "the state police mercilessly beat the strikers, and only the most reckless fantasizer could imagine then that after 16 years, those same Luhansk miners would cry 'Glory to Berkut!' in the squares."<sup>592</sup> Contrary to Volynko's prediction, the miners did not meet the early separatist rallies with their fists. In his own words months later, Volynko reflected:

"A miner who went out to the strikes in 1989 and a miner in 2014 – this is heaven and earth. The local authorities did their job."<sup>593</sup>

Between heaven and earth, the miners had been through hell, but they never came back. This present state of affairs is a direct result of the historical arc of collective action, repression, coercion, and cooption in the Donbas.

Beginning with the miners' strikes in 1989, the early 1990s brought a new age of collective actions and organization to a powerful, unified miners' movement. This movement shook the Soviet Union to its core and contributed to the collapse of one of the most influential superpowers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But the move from Soviet power to an independent Ukraine did not lead to economic prosperity. Instead, the miners bemoaned their "worker's paradise" lost as anemic economic reforms, hyperinflation, rent-seeking, and *prikhvatizatsiya* created conditions

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<sup>592</sup> Frankensstein, "Почему шахтеры Донбасса не бастуют против 'ДНР'," *UAinfo* (blog), December 11, 2014, <https://uainfo.org/blognews/457873-pochemu-shahtery-donbassa-ne-bastuyut-protiv-dnr.html>.

<sup>593</sup> Орёл, "Волянка: Шахтеры в 'ДНР' уже воюют за еду," [Volynko: Miners in the "DPR" are already fighting for food].

that only became worse with time. In response, the miners paired with local opportunists to topple yet another government in the vain hope that regime change would further their interests and protect the mines. Although this alliance with political opportunists from the Donbas paid short-term dividends, in the long-term, it placed the authoritarian President Leonid Kuchma on the throne. He betrayed the interests of the miners who had forced pre-term elections and acted as the “grave digger” of the coal industry. To this end, he implemented a carefully managed reform program that shuttered countless mines, offered small concessions to avoid a social explosion, and harshly repressed militant pockets of miners in its wake. These reforms took advantage of the general disarray that ensured after various schisms amongst the ranks of miners’ unions and strike committees. The atomization of the movement presaged a divide-and-conquer campaign that pacified the movement. Thereafter, the desperate miners turned to increasingly extreme measures to elicit a response from the government. But these efforts were to no avail.

Without a political wing to represent the miners’ interests, the colliers submitted to the authoritarian structures that emerged in the Donbas. Future President Viktor Yanukovich, whom the colliers trusted as *svoy chelovek*, aided this process and coopted the coal mining regions. He helped establish a Faustian bargain where the miners forfeited independent collective action for material benefits and the perpetuation of the status quo in the coal industry. Across the 2000s, Yanukovich and his Party of Regions readily mobilized these miners to serve their interests, doling out middling concessions in return for acquiescence. The Party of Regions concurrently instilled separatist sympathies and regional loyalties into their constituents. As such, when Yanukovich’s kleptocratic authoritarianism catalyzed the Euromaidan and the Revolution of Dignity, the miners generally resisted European integration. Thereafter, at the confluence of

economic insecurity and Russian disinformation, separatism established a foothold, and the miners' Faustian bargain was renewed with separatist authoritarian figures.

In 2014, the long-term consequences of the Faustian Bargain with authoritarianism came to bear in full force on the miners. Thus, as one resident of Sverdlosk noted, when a dozen “communists and regionals [a name for members of the Party of Regions]” held a rally for the “Russian World”—President Vladimir Putin’s revanchist alternative to the Western liberal order that encompasses populations supposedly bound by a shared language, religion, culture, history and worldview<sup>594</sup>—in March 2014, they were met with the “silently lowered eyes of people.” As she recalled, it was “one people’s deputy...one regional mayor, two communist deputies of the local councils, a pair of workers from the regional committee of coal miners, drunk *afghantsy* [Afghanistan war veterans], and half-witted pensioners. Against a city. And if this silent crowd had simply driven out the agitators... Would the ‘Russian World’ have come to Sverdlosk? I do not know. Whether we were doomed or whether we had a chance, time and the Hague Tribunal will answer this question.”<sup>595</sup> The miners did not resist the separatists in force, and in doing so exchanged their old Faustian Bargain with an authoritarian regime for a new authoritarian regime with far fewer guarantees for stability.

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<sup>594</sup> Dominic Cruz Bustillos and Alexander S. Vindman, “It Is Time to Stop Looking for a Reset With Russia,” *Lawfare*, April 19, 2021, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/it-time-stop-looking-reset-russia>.

<sup>595</sup> Олена Степова, “Есть ли жизнь в России. Часть II. Два мира Донбасса, или смертоносные шахты России,” [Is there life in Russia. Part II. The two worlds of Donbass, or the deadly mines of Russia], *Информационное сопротивление*, April 7, 2016, [https://sprotyv.info/obshchestvo/est-li-zhizn-v-rossii-chast-ii-dva-mira-donbassa-ili-smertonosnye-shahty-rossii?cf\\_chl\\_jschl\\_tk=ae05ccd28d7c8591d9025656b9bee33be6e8edc2-1614740590-0-AZypzofiUC-LeqSwFvzIz3DNFlwRRx3QBgcvt6-hde3IPnc2BZZ8nVJrdaM6PxNG67w6kJ7hDUEllYC1IIPyAWZezwINp8C79mQjGPzNytDiASnYXtQoFN2CT9ObPkt3WAG-NAAd0IIXpOg6Yn5Q1LPT0rilkG4Qe\\_czVgDEBiTQp4Ua6Gjyq\\_T1mO\\_0tK\\_38NBg59yb-7qz6o51t0MqqJfkSp5Bxiw2UZEE84AAK7W7zgAW8oc\\_PrVzd8\\_a24OsGbL3Q3-aRXfGgZCF5iu\\_KMleTSht3ET2P6Akh5T1pQmxZCvy4bYqj-MX-b5DU0oCJqgIiu1x4AAk9tNofs1Z6ZhV2Q2NjEX7hRROBShPTJtLPiFpfUmyHIKxXbGgoKIJ6Q0t8nYoEm0wsf03skruRBwXjX76VxC6WNIgQTKeuBuMf46q7eS126DNSzJIApoYheIDuvoL75EActmF4sxUA5qQHrm8eck72n5as1AD](https://sprotyv.info/obshchestvo/est-li-zhizn-v-rossii-chast-ii-dva-mira-donbassa-ili-smertonosnye-shahty-rossii?cf_chl_jschl_tk=ae05ccd28d7c8591d9025656b9bee33be6e8edc2-1614740590-0-AZypzofiUC-LeqSwFvzIz3DNFlwRRx3QBgcvt6-hde3IPnc2BZZ8nVJrdaM6PxNG67w6kJ7hDUEllYC1IIPyAWZezwINp8C79mQjGPzNytDiASnYXtQoFN2CT9ObPkt3WAG-NAAd0IIXpOg6Yn5Q1LPT0rilkG4Qe_czVgDEBiTQp4Ua6Gjyq_T1mO_0tK_38NBg59yb-7qz6o51t0MqqJfkSp5Bxiw2UZEE84AAK7W7zgAW8oc_PrVzd8_a24OsGbL3Q3-aRXfGgZCF5iu_KMleTSht3ET2P6Akh5T1pQmxZCvy4bYqj-MX-b5DU0oCJqgIiu1x4AAk9tNofs1Z6ZhV2Q2NjEX7hRROBShPTJtLPiFpfUmyHIKxXbGgoKIJ6Q0t8nYoEm0wsf03skruRBwXjX76VxC6WNIgQTKeuBuMf46q7eS126DNSzJIApoYheIDuvoL75EActmF4sxUA5qQHrm8eck72n5as1AD).

Since the outbreak of war, miners on both sides of the conflict line in the Donbas have suffered immensely. The miners “try to show they are having a normal life, but you can see in their faces a kind of anger and frustration and depression.”<sup>596</sup> Countless mines have stopped working and for several years, neither the Ukrainian government nor the separatist statelets lent comprehensive support to the mining industry.<sup>597</sup> Following the Ukrainian government-imposed blockade on the separatist statelets, the LNR and DNR “nationalized” mines within their unrecognized borders.<sup>598</sup> This decision leveled the economy in the separatist regions, and the mines primarily survive by exporting illegal coal through Russia onto the global market.<sup>599</sup>

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<sup>596</sup> Andrew Katz, “Beneath the Front Lines of the War in Eastern Ukraine,” *Time*, January 9, 2015, <https://time.com/3636632/ukraine-coal-miners-jerome-sessini-conflict/>.

<sup>597</sup> “Separatist rebels seize factories and mines in eastern Ukraine,” *Deutsche Welle*, March 1, 2017, <https://p.dw.com/p/2YUX7>; Дмитро Донський, “Из 94 шахт, доставшихся боевикам, работает только 25,” [Of the 94 mines inherited by the militants, only 25 are in operation], *Радио Свобода*, January 15, 2018, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/donbass-reali/28976930.html>; Hanna Sokolova, “In Ukraine’s Donbas, mines are facing flooding — and environmental disaster,” *openDemocracy*, March 12, 2019, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/ukraine-donbas-mines-flooding-and-environmental-disaster/>.

<sup>598</sup> Игорь Бурдыга, “К чему приведёт ‘внешнее управление’ предприятиями в Донбассе,” [What will the “external management” of enterprises in Donbass lead to], *Deutsche Welle*, March 1, 2017, <https://p.dw.com/p/2YU9O>.

<sup>599</sup> Joby Warwick and Steven Mufson, “Dirty Fuel,” *The Washington Post*, June 12, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2020/06/12/dirty-fuel-ukrainian-separatists-sell-pilfered-coal-keep-war-economy-rolling/>; Томаш Фьорро, Михал Потоцки, и Каролина Бака-Погоржелска, . “Антрацит с кровью. Как уголь из оккупированного Донбасса попадает в Польшу, Чехию, Словакию — логистика, схемы прикрытия, главные игроки.” [Anthracite with blood. How coal from the occupied Donbass gets to Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia — logistics, cover schemes, main players], *Новое Время*, October 27, 2019, <https://nv.ua/biz/economics/kontrabanda-uglya-iz-donbassa-v-evropu-kurchenko-kopanki-novosti-ukrainy-i-mira-50047451.html>; Анастасия Одинцова, “Как “национализация” боевиков развалила экономику в ОРДЛО,” [How the “nationalization” of militants destroyed the economy in the uncontrolled portions of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts], *Новое Время*, September 2, 2017, <https://nv.ua/biz/economics/kak-nacionalizaciya-boevikov-razvalila-ekonomiku-v-ordlo-1767666.html>.

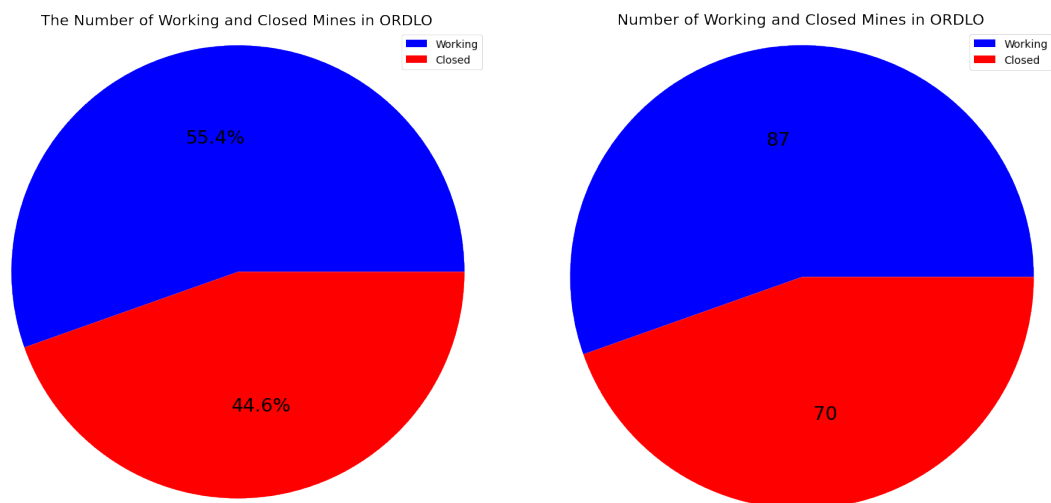


Figure 39. Number of working and closed mines in the separatist-controlled regions of the Donbas. Source.<sup>600</sup>

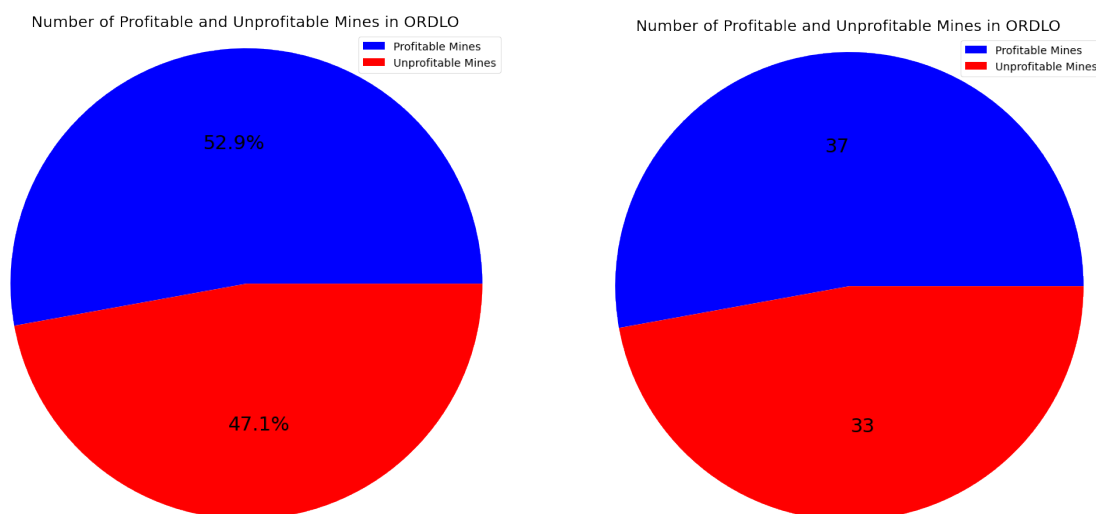


Figure 40. Number of profitable and unprofitable mines in the separatist-controlled regions of the Donbas. Source<sup>601</sup>

If the miners anticipated that separatism would delay mine closures and revive the coal industry, this has not been the case. The separatist governments have proceeded with closures,

<sup>600</sup> И.В. Кочура, “Анализ развития экономического потенциала угольной промышленности Донбасса в современных условиях хозяйствования,” [Analysis of the development of the economic potential of the Donbass coal industry in modern economic conditions], *Вестник института экономических исследований* 12, no. 4 (2018): 59, <http://vestnik.econri.org/vestnik/index.php/vestnik/article/view/214>.

<sup>601</sup> Ibid.

and in the LNR alone, 22 mines have been closed.<sup>602</sup> By 2018, of the 94 mines seized by separatists, only 25 remained in operation.<sup>603</sup> Tragically, these abysmal conditions have also led to unacceptably high casualties. In the years since the conflict began, more than 200 miners have perished at work, while another 2,000 have been severely injured.<sup>604</sup> Issues with debts, wage arrears, ecological disasters, and the socio-economic consequences of mine closures persist.<sup>605</sup> In the past, such issues might have led to a mass movement. In fact, the Ukrainian government has declared that it anticipates that miners will revolt in the separatist-controlled regions. President Volodymyr Zelensky has stated:

“Everything is terrible for the miners in the occupied Donbas: they do not receive normal salaries and they have to pay high prices for water and electricity. If the people’s patience runs out at some point, then unrest may arise as well.”<sup>606</sup>

Although these continued affronts to a basic standard of living have led to hunger strikes and protest actions—most recently in the summer of 2020—this unrest has been too diffuse and small-scale to enact the kind of political change that was commonplace decades ago. Moreover,

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<sup>602</sup> «“В ОРЛО закрыли 22 угольные шахты за шесть лет,” [Over six years, 22 coal mines were closed in the uncontrolled portions of Luhansk oblast], *Зеркало Недели*, August 3, 2020, <https://zn.ua/ECONOMICS/v-orlo-zakryli-22-uholnye-shakhty-za-shest-let.html>; Дмитрий Кириллов, "Жрут себя, жрут людей. Последствия закрытия шахт в ‘ДНР’ и ‘ЛНР’," [They devour themselves, they devour people. Consequences of the closure of mines in the “DPR” and “LPR”], *Радио Свобода*, July 26, 2020, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/30748012.html>.

<sup>603</sup> Донський, “Из 94 шахт, доставшихся боевикам, работает только 25,” [Of the 94 mines inherited by the militants, only 25 are in operation].

<sup>604</sup> Юлия Москаленко, “Правозащитники сообщили, сколько горняков в ОРДЛО погибли или получили травмы во время работы на шахтах,” [Human rights activists reported how many miners in the uncontrolled portions of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts were killed or injured while working in the mines], *Зеркало Недели*, November 26, 2020, <https://zn.ua/UKRAINE/pravozashchitniki-soobshchili-skolko-hornjakov-v-ordlo-pohibli-i-poluchili-travmy-vo-vremja-raboty-na-shakhtakh.html>.

<sup>605</sup> Mathilda Dorcadie, “In the Donbass, Ukrainian miners are in the pits” *Equal Times*, November 2, 2018, <https://www.equaltimes.org/in-the-donbass-ukrainian-miners?lang=en#.XuB3XTpKjD5>; Kazansky, et. al., “The Real Price of Coal in the Wartime in Donbas: A Human Rights Perspective”; В трех областях Украины бастуют шахтеры,” [Miners are on strike in three oblasts of Ukraine], *Зеркало Недели*, December 9, 2020, <https://zn.ua/UKRAINE/v-trekh-oblastjakh-ukrainy-bastujut-shakhtery.html>.

<sup>606</sup> Радио Свобода. “Зеленский ждет восстания против ‘ДНР.’ | Радио Донбасс Реалии,” [Zelensky is waiting for the uprising against the “DPR.”] Radio Donbass Realiy], September 15, 2020, YouTube video, 20:05 (quote in the description as well), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jWt02WQ5Y4k>.

these protests have been met with cruel repressions, internet blockages, and arrests.<sup>607</sup> Miners are also restricted from traveling to the government-controlled Donbas.<sup>608</sup> But perhaps most importantly, after the previous decades of authoritarian co-option, the Donbas miners' ability to organize and act as a collective group has been eviscerated. In place of labor activism, a survivalist mentality has set in which gives new meaning to the fatalistic Russian saying, "so long as it doesn't get worse" (*lish' by khuzhe ne stalo*). Even under present conditions, the Donbas miners avoid collective action and continue to insist:

"The Donbas is our home, our Motherland. We were born here, our children were born here. We live and work in the Donbas. It can be difficult, but you have to cope with the problems to survive."<sup>609</sup>

As has been the case for decades both before and after the fall of the Soviet Union, survival in this sense is inextricably tied to the mines. As one employee of Makeevugol' explained during an interview in 2020:

"The Donbas is a coal mining region. We live in the mines. We need to work. If we don't work, then there won't be anything here."<sup>610</sup>

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<sup>607</sup> Илья Барабанов, "'У нас нет другого выхода.' Почему в самопровозглашенных республиках Донбасса бастуют шахтеры," ["We have no other choice." Why miners are on strike in the self-proclaimed republics of Donbass], *ВСС Русская Служба*, June 17, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-53084931>; Дмитрий Кирилов, "'Это не последний протест!' Что стоит за митингами шахтеров в 'ЛНР' и 'ДНР'," ["This is not the last protest!" What is behind the rallies of miners in "LPR" and "DPR"], *Радио Свобода*, June 14, 2020, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/30670208.html>.

<sup>608</sup> Юлия Москаленко, "Оккупанты закрыли в ОРДЛО большинство шахт, а горняки вынуждены ехать в РФ – правозащитник," [Invaders closed most mines in the uncontrolled portions of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, and miners are forced to go to Russia, human rights activist says], *Зеркало Недели*, November 26, 2020, <https://zn.ua/UKRAINE/okkupanty-zakryli-v-ordlo-bolshinstvo-shakht-a-hornjaki-vynuzhdeny-ekhat-v-rf-pravozashchitnik.html>.

<sup>609</sup> Сергей Кузмицкий, "Слухи о шахтёрах Донбасса. Развееваем мифы," [Rumors about Donbass miners. Dispelling myths], *Добывающая промышленность*, February 26, 2020, <https://dprom.online/chindustry/sluhi-i-pravda-o-shahtyorah/>.

<sup>610</sup> Сергей Кузмицкий, "Слухи о шахтёрах Донбасса. Развееваем мифы," [Rumors about Donbass miners. Dispelling myths].



Although this battle for survival moves against them more every day, the miners continue to toil at their craft, seeking whatever path that they believe will, at minimum, lead to a reprieve from the decades-long decline and deindustrialization in their single-industry communities.

These difficulties are only made worse by the ongoing ineffectiveness of reforms programs in the government-controlled parts of the Donbas. There have been promising signs from the current Zelensky administration, including the repayment of miners' debts and proposals to create economic development zones in the mining regions of the east.<sup>611</sup> Funds have also increasingly been redirected from paying for exorbitant production costs to funding industry restructuring.<sup>612</sup> Zelensky has even affirmed that not a single mine should be closed until the miners receive job security and appropriate compensation.<sup>613</sup> However, long-term solutions to the deep-rooted, decades-long crises in the coal mining industry remain frustratingly out of reach. The war has left miners with little economic stability, and even less hope for the future. The weakness of both top-down and grassroots measures to remedy this situation mean that the

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<sup>611</sup> «“Зеленский спросит народ о свободной экономической зоне на Донбассе: что это, зачем и как работает,” [Zelensky will ask people about a free economic zone in Donbass: what is it, why, and how it works], *Svoi.city*, October 15, 2020, <https://svoi.city/articles/105442/zelenskij-sprosit-narod-o-svobodnoj-ekonomicheskoy-zone-na-donbasse-cto-eto-zachem-i-kak-rabotaet>; Ирина Балачук, «“Зеленский хочет оставить правительство без зарплат, пока не рассчитаются с шахтерами,” [Zelenskiy wants to leave the government without wages until the miners will be paid], *Украинская Правда*, February 25, 2020, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2020/02/25/7241608/>; “Зеленский заявил о ликвидации задолженности по зарплатам бастующих шахтеров,” [Zelensky announced the elimination of wage arrears of striking miners], *ТАСС*, December 18, 2020, <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/10300569>; Президент України. “Владимир Зеленский призвал представителей правительства посетить шахтерские города, чтобы лучше понять потребности регионов,” [Vladimir Zelenskiy urged government representatives to visit mining towns to better understand the needs of the regions], February 25, 2020, <https://www.president.gov.ua/ru/news/volodimir-zelenskij-zaklikav-predstavnikov-uryadu-vidvidati-59949>.

<sup>612</sup> “Дотации в украинский углепром: польза и вред,” [Subsidies to the Ukrainian coal industry: benefits and harms], *Дело*; “Угольная отрасль в Украине: количество шахт и уровень добычи,” [The coal industry in Ukraine: the number of mines and the level of production], *Слово і Діло*, April 30, 2020, <https://ru.slovoidilo.ua/2020/04/30/infografika/jekonomika/ugolnaya-otrasl-ukraine-kolichestvo-shaxt-i-uroven-dobychi>.

<sup>613</sup> Президент України, “Президент: Ни одну шахту нельзя ликвидировать, пока сотрудники не получат другой безопасной работы с достойной оплатой,” [President: No mine can be liquidated until employees get another safe job with decent pay], February 25, 2020, <https://www.president.gov.ua/ru/news/prezident-zhodnu-shahtu-ne-mozhna-likviduvati-poki-pracivnik-59941>.

image of reconciliation from Zelensky's television series remains a fantasy restricted to the realm of dreams and entertainment.

One of the primary origins of this present debacle is the miners' transformation from a traditionally left-leaning, pro-union constituency into a desperate, neglected constituency of political authoritarianism. Indeed, the Donbas colliers' gradual co-option into multiple authoritarian structures should create cause for concern in the observant reader. Their fight for survival is hardly unique in the global history of deindustrialization and decay in formerly prosperous sectors of world economies. It is no mystery that in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century, the global coal industry is in decline. The advent of a global pandemic has only hastened the turn away from coal, driving previous consumers towards more efficient energy alternatives with less carbon production. Moreover, the increasing number of countries that have pledged to move towards net-zero carbon emissions has created a bleak outlook for the revival of these anachronistic enterprises.<sup>614</sup> By all indications, COVID-19 and the climate crisis are sounding the death knell for coal production. Although this future may be lauded as a necessary part of the preservation of the earth's ecology, the shift is not without consequences. When faced with their own impending redundancy, many coal miners have chosen, and likely will continue to choose, to support authoritarian figures in exchange for a momentary pause on the industry's decline.

This pattern is not restricted to distant corners far outside the mainstream of contemporary discourse. Close to home for many Americans, coal miners in Appalachia, particularly those in West Virginia, have been staunch supporters of President Donald Trump.<sup>615</sup>

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<sup>614</sup> International Energy Agency, "World Energy Outlook 2020," *International Energy Agency*, October 2020, <https://www.iea.org/reports/world-energy-outlook-2020>.

<sup>615</sup> Zoe Thomas, "Coal country West Virginia feels forgotten by politics," *BBC*, November 2, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-37791302>; Dalton Bennett, "Anger greets Hillary Clinton in West Virginia's

The parallels between Trump and Yanukovych are unsettling. Both men have been rapacious businessmen and peddlers of conspiracy theories, and they even share the common experience of refusing to concede legitimate elections with baseless claims of voter fraud. Neither man succeeded in reviving the coal industry or resolving the underlying socio-economic issues in coal regions. And yet, both have proven capable of gaining, nurturing, and growing a powerful base of working-class voters with promises for the perpetuation of the status quo, delayed reform programs, and the expansion of coal mining regions. Whether authoritarian figures like Yanukovych and Trump follow through on these promises is far from the main concern for many voters in economically depressed regions. The very fact that they are willing to lend their support for these dying industries is enough to distinguish them from other political candidates. This earns them additional votes, even when outside observers voice their belief that the miners are “voting against their self-interest.”

These efforts are only aided by the tone-deaf approach of traditional pro-labor forces, such as the Democratic Party in the United States. For instance, in December 2019, current United States President Joe Biden suggested to a coal mining town in Derry, New Hampshire that “anybody who can go down 300 to 3000 feet in a mine sure in hell can learn how to program as well...give me break, anybody who can throw coal into a furnace can learn how to program for God’s sake.”<sup>616</sup> His statement was met with silence from the crowd.<sup>617</sup> Besides the rather problematic oversimplification of switching between these industries, and the assumption that it is somehow easy to become a professional programmer, Biden’s words were a reflection of the

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coal country,” *The Washington Post*, May 3, 2016, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/video/politics/anger-greets-hillary-clinton-in-west-virginias-coal-country/2016/05/03/b798987e-10ff-11e6-a9b5-bf703a5a7191\\_video.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/video/politics/anger-greets-hillary-clinton-in-west-virginias-coal-country/2016/05/03/b798987e-10ff-11e6-a9b5-bf703a5a7191_video.html).

<sup>616</sup> Americans for Tax Reform, “Biden to Miners: Learn to Code,” December 31, 2019, YouTube video, 0:16, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VDRK0MyuuIM>.

<sup>617</sup> Alexandra Kelley, “Biden tells coal miners to ‘learn to code,’” *The Hill*, December 31, 2019, <https://thehill.com/changing-america/enrichment/education/476391-biden-tells-coal-miners-to-learn-to-code>.

miners' worst fears; they were being lost in the political shuffle. As former presidential candidate Andrew Yang pointed out shortly thereafter, "Someone who suggests that coal miners become coders is generally neither of those things."<sup>618</sup> Speaking past the miners without a solid understanding of their concerns or their history is an almost certain path to alienating their support. If the authoritarians are the only ones presenting agreeable options—regardless of their feasibility—then coal miners are presented with few alternatives, especially when their entire lives revolve around single-industry towns.

The same trend has played out in Germany, Poland, and the United Kingdom as well. In Germany, the Ruhr valley and the rust belt of former East Germany were once the home of a thriving coal industry. After comprehensive restructuring and energy reform, those mines have been shuttered, leaving behind a legacy of poverty, unemployment, and lost purpose. Voters who feel "left behind" and "forgotten" have forsaken the ruling Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) in favor of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD). Their primary concern is not migrants, but economics.<sup>619</sup> In Poland, the ruling Law and Justice Party (PiS) has positioned itself as a pro-coal regime with its continual deferral and outright refusal to reform the coal industry. The government has even opened new coal mines despite resistance and criticism from the European Union. All of these acts have earned the PiS votes from the largely unprofitable coal mines. Meanwhile, the birthplace of Solidarity continues its backslide into

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<sup>618</sup> MSNBC, "2020 Dem Yang Hits Biden Over Coal Miner-Tech Remarks | The Beat With Ari Melber | MSNBC," January 3, 2020, YouTube video, 4:52-5:01, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7zjb2holPME>.

<sup>619</sup> "In East German rust-belt, economic fears boost far right," *France24*, August 16, 2019, <https://www.france24.com/en/20190816-in-east-german-rust-belt-economic-fears-boost-far-right>; Rainer Buergin, "In German Rust Belt, Anti-Merkel Populists Campaign for Her Exit," *Bloomberg Quint*, September 8, 2017, <https://www.bloombergquint.com/business/in-german-rust-belt-anti-merkel-populists-campaign-for-her-exit>; Guy Chazan, "Germany's working class turns away from SPD," *Financial Times*, August 20, 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/ac8f5060-7da7-11e7-9108-edda0bc928>; Rebecca Staudenmaier, "'Forgotten' Duisburg voters turn to Germany's far-right AfD," *Deutsche Welle*, September 25, 2017, <https://p.dw.com/p/2kghQ>.

authoritarianism.<sup>620</sup> But the most demonstrative example of the Donbas model of strikes, repression, co-option, and consequences has been the United Kingdom. After Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher broke the miners' unions and the coal communities with uncompromising reforms, mine closures, and violent repressions in the 1980s (similar to Kuchma, albeit on a much larger, more complete scale), she left the United Kingdom's mining towns hollowed out and impoverished. Decades later, the residents of these coal mining regions cast their vote for Brexit, voicing support for the same conservatives who had laid them low. They did so on the fleeting hope that Brexit might resuscitate the mines and bring prosperity once more to the dying cities of middle and northern England. Much like their counterparts in Ukraine, the United States, Germany, and Poland, these voters felt invisible and forgotten.<sup>621</sup>

Coal mining is far from the only industry under threat in the current shift towards renewable energy. In the far-off future, there are important lessons which must be drawn from the past in order to avoid extreme political outcomes such as the War in the Donbas. Otherwise, when pressed up against a wall, coal miners and other employees in anachronistic industries may

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<sup>620</sup> Hanna Brauers and Pao-Yu Oei, "The political economy of coal in Poland: Drivers and barriers for a shift away from fossil fuels," *Energy Policy*, 144 (September 2020): 111621, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0301421520303578>; "Poland shelves major coal restructuring plans," *Deutsche Welle*, August 29, 2020, <https://amp.dw.com/en/poland-shelves-major-coal-sector-restructuring-plans/a-54363275>; Paul Hockenos, "As Pressures Mount, Poland's Once-Mighty Coal Industry Is in Retreat," *YaleEnvironment360*, October 20, 2020, <https://e360.yale.edu/features/as-pressures-mount-polands-once-mighty-coal-industry-is-in-retreat>; Krystina Shveda, "Revealed: How Poland's coal bailout may break European laws," *Unearthed*, December 7, 2015, <https://unearthed.greenpeace.org/2015/12/07/revealed-poland-coal-bailout/>; Meabh McMahon, "Polish government criticized for opening first new coal mine in 25 years," *Euro News*, September 26, 2019, <https://www.euronews.com/2019/09/26/polish-government-criticised-for-opening-first-new-coal-mine-in-25-years>.

<sup>621</sup> Guy Faulconbridge, "In England's forgotten 'rust-belt,' voters show little sign of Brexit regret," *Reuters*, August 7, 2018, <https://mobile.reuters.com/article/amp/idUSKBN1KS0VM>; Mike Kelly, "Brexit should mean we re-open our coal mines says ex miners' leader Arthur Scargill," *ChronicleLive*, March 29, 2017, <https://www.chroniclelive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/brexit-should-mean-re-open-12815012.amp>; Julia Muir, "Brexit was born at the battle of Orgreave," *The New European*, August 14, 2017, <https://www.theneweuropean.co.uk/brexit-news/brexit-was-born-at-the-battle-of-orgreave-20338>; Oliver Milne, "Brexit means we can reopen mines and cotton mills, says Arthur Scargill," *WalesOnline*, March 28, 2017, <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/politics/brexit-means-can-reopen-mines-12809927.amp>; Ben Quinn, "Mansfield, once the site of miners' strike clashes, becomes top Tory target," *The Guardian*, April 22, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/apr/22/mansfield-miners-strike-general-election-brexit>.

choose to make unsavory compromises in the name of short-term benefits and reprieve.

Although it is unlikely that economically depressed regions will be subjected to a hybrid warfare invasion like the Donbas experienced, the transformation of a working-class voter base into a constituency of authoritarianism, (or in the case of the United Kingdom, supporters of extreme solutions to their ongoing problems, i.e. Brexit) still creates the same internal divisions and opportunities for exploitation. This is especially true when deeply rooted feelings of economic injustice, exploitation, and resentment are directed towards liberal reformers. And although some may wish to cast aside or wholesale ignore employees in dying industries, this does not change the fact that they will remain a voter base that requires due consideration, lest the world reaps the consequences of abject neglect. It is lazy and irresponsible to decry *all* of these individuals as racists, dupes, extremists, ultranationalists, and “zombified” populations without addressing the underlying causes of their trauma and their long-standing struggles for economic survival and prosperity. Meaningful solutions for dying industries, empathy, and the resurrection of long-forgotten historical narratives are necessary if there is to be change. Otherwise, dire political consequences will continue unabated, as they have in the Donbas for 32 years.

## Appendix

The following originally compiled dataset is based on both the bibliographic citations found throughout this thesis and the resources found on MiningWiki.ru. Although nominally a wiki page, MiningWiki.ru claims to be owned and operated by those who work in the mining industry, making it an invaluable data source. This is particularly true when considering the fact that existing data on the Donbas mines is diffuse, and there are large discrepancies over time. Unless otherwise listed, all of the graphs in this thesis are the product of original work combing figures taken from across multiple sources in the bibliography. The datasets for mines and strikes are compiled here for the reader's convenience. The first table includes displays information for every Ukrainian mine that could be identified, including the oblast in which it is found, the name of the mines, the holding company of the mine (if any), the mine's ownership status (SOE stands for state-owned enterprise), the mine's operating status, and the year the mine was closed (if applicable). The second table includes information for strikes in the Donbas, including the date and the number of mines on strike according to both the government's claims and miner's claims. Although there were certainly more strikes than the number listed, only those strikes which could be verified through source information cited in the bibliography have been included.

Oblast	Name	Holding Company	Ownership	Closed	Year Closed
Kirovograd	Verbolozovskaya	Aleksandriyaugol'	SOE	Yes	1997
Kirovograd	Svetlopol'skaya	Aleksandriyaugol'	SOE	Yes	1997
Kirovograd	Medvezheyarskaya	Aleksandriyaugol'	SOE	Yes	2004
Kirovograd	Novomirgorodskaya	Aleksandriyaugol'	SOE	Yes	1995
Kirovograd	Yurkovskaya-Zapadnaya	Aleksandriyaugol'	SOE	Yes	1997
Kirovograd	Bogachevskaya	Aleksandriyaugol'	SOE	Yes	1997
Kirovograd	Vatutinskaya	Aleksandriyaugol'	SOE	Yes	1997
Kirovograd	Strizhevskaya	Aleksandriyaugol'	SOE	Yes	1997
Kirovograd	Kazatskaya	Aleksandriyaugol'	SOE	Yes	1997
Luhansk	Partizanskaya	Antratsit	SOE		

Luhansk	Krepenskaya	Antratsit	SOE		
Luhansk	Komsomol'skaya (Antratsit)	Antratsit	SOE		
Luhansk	50 Years of Soviet Ukraine	Antratsit	SOE	Yes	2011
Luhansk	Tsentral'naya (Antratsit)	Antratsit	SOE	Yes	1996
Luhansk	Luganskaya Pravda	Antratsit	SOE	Yes	1996
Donetsk	M.I Kalinin (Gorlovka)	Artyomugol'	SOE		
Donetsk	V.I Lenin (Gorlovka)	Artyomugol'	SOE		
Donetsk	K.A. Rumyantsev	Artyomugol'	SOE		
Donetsk	A.I. Gaeviy	Artyomugol'	SOE		
Donetsk	Kochegarka	Artyomugol'	SOE	Yes	1997
Donetsk	N.A. Izotov	Artyomugol'	SOE	Yes	1997
Donetsk	Kondrat'evka	Artyomugol'	SOE	Yes	1997
Donetsk	Aleksandr-Zapad	Artyomugol'	SOE	Yes	2007
Donetsk	Komsomolets (Gorlovka)	Artyomugol'	SOE	Yes	2007
Donetsk	Y.A. Gagarin	Artyomugol'	SOE	Yes	2004
Donetsk	Almaznaya (Dobropol'e)	Dobropol'eugol'	Leased		
Donetsk	Belitskaya	Dobropol'eugol'	Leased		
Donetsk	Dobropol'skaya	Dobropol'eugol'	Leased		
Donetsk	Novodonetskaya	Dobropol'eugol'	Leased		
Donetsk	Oktyabr'skaya	Dobropol'eugol'	Leased	Yes	2020
Donetsk	Pioneer	Dobropol'eugol'	Leased		
Luhansk	Krasnoluchanskaya	Donbassantratsit	SOE		
Luhansk	Newspaper Izvestiya	Donbassantratsit	SOE		
Luhansk	Knyagininskaya	Donbassantratsit	SOE		
Luhansk	Krasnokutskaya	Donbassantratsit	SOE		
Luhansk	Novopavlovskaya	Donbassantratsit	SOE		
Luhansk	Khrustal'skaya	Donbassantratsit	SOE		
Luhansk	Miusinskaya	Donbassantratsit	SOE		
Luhansk	Zaporozhskaya	Donbassantratsit	SOE	Yes	1998
Luhansk	Elizavetovskaya	Donbassantratsit	SOE	Yes	2001
Luhansk	No. 4 Miusinskaya	Donbassantratsit	SOE	Yes	1996
Luhansk	Almaznaya (Vakhrushevo)	Donbassantratsit	SOE	Yes	1999
Donetsk	Newspaper Pravda	Donetskugol'	SOE	Yes	1996
Donetsk	Panfilovskaya	Donetskugol'	SOE	Yes	1996
Donetsk	Myshketovskaya	Donetskugol'	SOE	Yes	1996
Donetsk	No. 9 Kapital'naya	Donetskugol'	SOE	Yes	1999
Donetsk	No. 12 Naklonnaya	Donetskugol'	SOE	Yes	1999
Donetsk	No. 6 Krasnaya Zvezda	Donetskugol'	SOE	Yes	1999
Donetsk	Oktyabr'skaya	Donetskugol'	SOE	Yes	2000
Donetsk	Kuybyshevskaya (Donetsk)	Donetskugol'	SOE	Yes	2009
Donetsk	60 Years of Soviet Ukraine	Donetskugol'	SOE	Yes	2007



Donetsk	No. 17-17 bis	Donetskugol'	SOE	Yes	2010
Donetsk	M. Gorkiy	Donetskugol'	SOE	Yes	2009
Donetsk	Lidievka	DYEK	SOE		
Donetsk	Mospinskaya	DYEK	SOE		
Donetsk	Oktyabr'skaya Rudnik	DYEK	SOE	Yes	2014
Donetsk	Trudovskaya	DYEK	SOE	Yes	2014
Donetsk	Yuzhodonbasskaya No. 3	DYEK	SOE		
Donetsk	E.T. Abakumov	DYEK	SOE		
Donetsk	M.I. Kalinin (Donetsk)	DYEK	SOE		
Donetsk	Chelyuskintsev	DYEK	SOE		
Donetsk	No. 4-21	DYEK	SOE	Yes	2013
Donetsk	A.A. Skochinskiy	DYEK	SOE		
Donetsk	Putilovskaya (Butovka-Donetskaya)	DYEK	SOE	Yes	2014
Donetsk	F.E. Dzerzhinskiy (Dzerzhinsk)	Dzerzhinskygol'	SOE		
Donetsk	Severnaya	Dzerzhinskygol'	SOE		
Donetsk	Yuzhnaya	Dzerzhinskygol'	SOE		
Donetsk	Toretskaya	Dzerzhinskygol'	SOE		
Donetsk	Artyom (Dzerzhinsk)	Dzerzhinskygol'	SOE	Yes	2003
Donetsk	Novaya (Dzerzhinsk)	Dzerzhinskygol'	SOE	Yes	2006
Donetsk	Dmitrov	Krasnoarmeyskugol'	SOE		
Donetsk	Stakhanov	Krasnoarmeyskugol'	SOE		
Donetsk	Rodinskaya	Krasnoarmeyskugol'	SOE		
Donetsk	Tsentral'naya (Dmitrov)	Krasnoarmeyskugol'	SOE		
Donetsk	Vodyanaya	Krasnoarmeyskugol'	SOE	Yes	
Luhansk	Orekhovskaya	Krasnodonugol'	Private		
Luhansk	50 Years of the USSR	Krasnodonugol'	Private	Yes	2013
Luhansk	N.P Barakov	Krasnodonugol'	Private		
Luhansk	Molodogvardeyskaya	Krasnodonugol'	Private		
Luhansk	Samsonovskaya-Zapadnaya	Krasnodonugol'	Private		
Luhansk	Sykhodol'skaya-Vostochnaya	Krasnodonugol'	Private		
Luhansk	Duvannaya	Krasnodonugol'	Private		
Luhansk	Donetskaya	Krasnodonugol'	SOE	Yes	1996
Luhansk	Krasnodarskaya-Yuzhnaya	Krasnodonugol'	SOE	Yes	1997
Luhansk	Pobeda	Krasnodonugol'	SOE	Yes	1998
Luhansk	Sukhodolskaya No. 1	Krasnodonugol'	SOE	Yes	1998
Luhansk	Talovskaya	Krasnodonugol'	Private	Yes	2009
Luhansk	No. 1 Bis Sergiy Tyulenin	Krasnodonugol'	SOE	Yes	1996
Luhansk	F.P. Lyutikova	Krasnodonugol'	SOE	Yes	2002
Luhansk	No. 2 Severnaya (Krasnodon)	Krasnodonugol'	SOE	Yes	2006

Luhansk	G.G. Kapustin	Lisichanskugol'	SOE		
Luhansk	D.F. Mel'nikov	Lisichanskugol'	SOE		
Luhansk	Novodruzheskaya	Lisichanskugol'	SOE		
Luhansk	Privol'nyanskaya	Lisichanskugol'	SOE		
Luhansk	Chernomorka	Lisichanskugol'	SOE	Yes	2003
Luhansk	Matrosskaya	Lisichanskugol'	SOE	Yes	1999
Luhansk	Proletarskaya	Lisichanskugol'	SOE	Yes	2000
Luhansk	Kremmenaya	Lisichanskugol'	SOE	Yes	2000
Luhansk	19th Partc'ezda	Luhanskugol'	SOE		
Luhansk	Luhanskoy	Luhanskugol'	SOE		
Luhansk	Mashinskoy	Luhanskugol'	SOE		
Luhansk	Vergelevskaya	Luhanskugol'	SOE		
Luhansk	Nikanor-Novaya	Luhanskugol'	SOE		
Luhansk	Lutuginskaya	Luhanskugol'	SOE		
Luhansk	Artyom (Artemovsk)	Luhanskugol'	SOE		
Luhansk	Fashevskaya	Luhanskugol'	SOE		
Luhansk	Cherkasskaya	Luhanskugol'	SOE		
Luhansk	Leninka	Luhanskugol'	SOE	Yes	1997
Luhansk	Komissarovskaya	Luhanskugol'	SOE	Yes	2003
Luhansk	Krasnopol'evskaya	Luhanskugol'	SOE	Yes	2010
Luhansk	Romanovskaya (Pereval'sk)	Luhanskugol'	SOE	Yes	2002
Luhansk	Pereval'skaya	Luhanskugol'	SOE	Yes	2011
Luhansk	Proletarskaya (Kirovsk)	Luhanskugol'	SOE	Yes	2000
Luhansk	Annensakaya (Bryanka)	Luhanskugol'	SOE	Yes	2000
Luhansk	C.V. Kocior	Luhanskugol'	SOE	Yes	2001
Luhansk	C.M. Kirov (Kirovsk)	Luhanskugol'	SOE	Yes	2008
Luhansk	Slavyanoserbskaya	Luhanskugol'	SOE	Yes	2004
Lviv	Velikomostovskaya	L'vovugol'	SOE		
Lviv	Mezhirichanskaya	L'vovugol'	SOE		
Lviv	Vozrozhdenie	L'vovugol'	SOE		
Lviv	Lecnaya	L'vovugol'	SOE		
Lviv	Vizeyskaya	L'vovugol'	SOE		
Lviv	Zarechnaya	L'vovugol'	SOE		
Lviv	Stepnaya	L'vovugol'	SOE		
Lviv	Chervonogradskaya	L'vovugol'	SOE		
Lviv	Bendyuzhskaya	L'vovugol'	SOE	Yes	2005
Lviv	Chervonogradskaya No. 1	L'vovugol'	SOE	Yes	1996
Donetsk	B.M. Bazhanov	Makeevugol'	SOE		
Donetsk	Kalinovskaya- Vostochnaya	Makeevugol'	SOE		
Donetsk	V.I. Lenin (Makeevka)	Makeevugol'	SOE	Yes	2011
Donetsk	Kholodnaya Balka	Makeevugol'	SOE		

Donetsk	Chaykino	Makeevugol'	SOE		
Donetsk	Butovskaya (Makeevka)	Makeevugol'	SOE	Yes	2014
Donetsk	C.M. Kirov	Makeevugol'	SOE		
Donetsk	Yasinovskaya-Glubokaya	Makeevugol'	SOE		
Donetsk	Severnaya (Makeevka)	Makeevugol'	SOE		
Donetsk	No. 10-bis	Makeevugol'	SOE	Yes	2000
Donetsk	No. 13-bis (Makeevka)	Makeevugol'	SOE	Yes	2006
Donetsk	No. 21 (Makeevka)	Makeevugol'	SOE	Yes	1999
Donetsk	V.M. Bazhanov	Makeevugol'	SOE	Yes	2011
Donetsk	A.B. Batov	Makeevugol'	SOE	Yes	1998
Donetsk	S. Ordzhonikidze	Makeevugol'	SOE	Yes	1997
Donetsk	Proletarskaya-Krutaya	Makeevugol'	SOE	Yes	1997
Donetsk	Sovetskaya	Makeevugol'	SOE	Yes	2001
Donetsk	Tsentral'naya (Makeevka)	Makeevugol'	SOE	Yes	1996
Donetsk	Novodzerzhinskaya	NPO Mekhanik Ltd.	Private		
Donetsk	Putilovskaya	NPO Mekhanik Ltd.	Private		
Donetsk	Svyato-Andreevskaya	NPO Mekhanik Ltd.	Private	Yes	2006
Donetsk	Svyato-Nikolaevskaya	NPO Mekhanik Ltd.	Private		
Donetsk	Svyato-Pokrovskaya	NPO Mekhanik Ltd.	Private		
Donetsk	Svyato-Serafimovskaya	NPO Mekhanik Ltd.	Private	Yes	1997
Donetsk	Prepodobniy Sergiy Radonezhskiy	NPO Mekhanik Ltd.	Private		
Donetsk	Svyatitel' Vasiliy Velikiy	NPO Mekhanik Ltd.	Private	Yes	2000
Donetsk	Krymskaya-Komsomol'skaya	Oktyabr'ugol'	SOE	Yes	1996
Donetsk	Khartsyzckaya	Oktyabr'ugol'	SOE	Yes	1996
Donetsk	Donetskaya (Kirovskoe)	Oktyabr'ugol'	SOE	Yes	2000
Donetsk	Kirovskaya (Kirovskoe)	Oktyabr'ugol'	SOE	Yes	1998
Donetsk	Zuevskaya	Oktyabr'ugol'	SOE	Yes	2004
Donetsk	Zhitomirskaya	Oktyabr'ugol'	SOE	Yes	2003
Donetsk	Bulavinskaya	Ordzhonikidzeugol'	SOE		
Donetsk	Enakievskaya	Ordzhonikidzeugol'	SOE		
Donetsk	Karl Marx	Ordzhonikidzeugol'	SOE		
Donetsk	Ol'khovatskaya	Ordzhonikidzeugol'	SOE		
Donetsk	Poltavskaya	Ordzhonikidzeugol'	SOE		
Donetsk	Uglegorskaya (Uglegorsk)	Ordzhonikidzeugol'	SOE		
Donetsk	Krasnyy Oktyabr'	Ordzhonikidzeugol'	SOE	Yes	1996
Donetsk	Krasnyy Profintern	Ordzhonikidzeugol'	SOE	Yes	1998
Donetsk	Yunyy Kommunar (YunKom)	Ordzhonikidzeugol'	SOE	Yes	2002
Dnipropetrovsk	N.I. Stashkov	Pavlogradugol'	Private		
Dnipropetrovsk	Stepnaya (Pershotravensk)	Pavlogradugol'	Private		
Dnipropetrovsk	Yubileynaya	Pavlogradugol'	Private		

Dnipropetrovsk	Blagodatnaya	Pavlogradugol'	Private		
Dnipropetrovsk	Heroes of the Cosmos	Pavlogradugol'	Private		
Dnipropetrovsk	Pavlogradskaya	Pavlogradugol'	Private		
Dnipropetrovsk	Dneprovskaya	Pavlogradugol'	Private		
Dnipropetrovsk	Zapadnaya Donbasskaya	Pavlogradugol'	Private		
Dnipropetrovsk	Samarskaya	Pavlogradugol'	Private		
Dnipropetrovsk	Ternovskaya	Pavlogradugol'	Private		
Luhansk	Zolotoe	Pervomayskugol'	SOE		
Luhansk	Gorskaya	Pervomayskugol'	SOE		
Luhansk	Karbonit	Pervomayskugol'	SOE		
Luhansk	Toshkovskaya	Pervomayskugol'	SOE		
Luhansk	Pervomayskaya (Pervomaysk)	Pervomayskugol'	SOE		
Luhansk	Lomovatskaya	Pervomayskugol'	SOE		
Luhansk	Pervomayskaya Zapadnaya	Pervomayskugol'	SOE		
Luhansk	Rodina (No. 10)	Pervomayskugol'	SOE	Yes	1998
Luhansk	Raduga (No. 15)	Pervomayskugol'	SOE	Yes	1998
Luhansk	No. 81 Kievskaya	Roven'kiantratsit	Private		
Luhansk	V.V. Vakhrushev	Roven'kiantratsit	Private		
Luhansk	Cosmonauts	Roven'kiantratsit	Private		
Luhansk	M.V. Frunze	Roven'kiantratsit	Private		
Luhansk	F.E. Dzerzhinskiy (Roven'ki)	Roven'kiantratsit	Private		
Luhansk	Roven'kovskoe	Roven'kiantratsit	Private		
Luhansk	No. 1-2 Roven'kovskaya	Roven'kiantratsit	Private		
Luhansk	Luganskaya	Roven'kiantratsit	Private		
Luhansk	No. 3 Dzerzhinskiy	Roven'kiantratsit	SOE	Yes	1996
Luhansk	Voroshilovskoe	Roven'kiantratsit	SOE	Yes	2003
Donetsk	Kyrakhovskaya	Selidovugol'	SOE		
Donetsk	Rossiya	Selidovugol'	SOE		
Donetsk	Ukraina (Ukrainsk)	Selidovugol'	SOE		
Donetsk	1-3 Novogradovskaya	Selidovugol'	SOE		
Donetsk	No. 2 Novogradovskaya	Selidovugol'	SOE	Yes	2001
Donetsk	D.C. Korotchenko (Selidovskaya)	Selidovugol'	SOE	Yes	2005
Donetsk	Shakhterskaya-Glubokaya	Shakhterskantratsit	SOE		
Donetsk	17 Parts'ezda	Shakhterskantratsit	SOE		
Donetsk	Ilovayskaya	Shakhterskantratsit	SOE		
Donetsk	C.P. Tkachuk (Communist)	Shakhterskantratsit	SOE	Yes	2014
Donetsk	Postinovskaya	Shakhterskantratsit	SOE	Yes	2005
Donetsk	Vinitskaya	Shakhterskantratsit	SOE	Yes	2005
Donetsk	No. 4	Shakhtoupravlenie Aleksandrovskoe	SOE	Yes	2000

Donetsk	No. 3	Shakhtoupravlenie Aleksandrovskoe	SOE	Yes	2001
Donetsk	Sheglovskaya-Glubokaya	Shakhtoupravlenie Donbass	Independent		
Donetsk	Kommunarskaya No. 22	Shakhtoupravlenie Donbass	Independent		
Donetsk	Glubokaya (Makeevka)	Shakhtoupravlenie Donbass	SOE	Yes	2006
Donetsk	Zapereval'naya	Shakhtoupravlenie Donbass	SOE	Yes	2000
Donetsk	Zapereval'naya No. 2	Shakhtoupravlenie Donbass	SOE	Yes	2003
Donetsk	Krasnoarmeyskaya-Zapadnaya No. 1	Shakhtoupravlenie Pokrovskoe	Independent		
Donetsk	V.I. Chapaev	Shakhtoupravlenie V.I Chapaev	Leased		
Donetsk	Ternopol'skaya	Shakhtoupravlenie V.I Chapaev	Leased		
Donetsk	1-May	Shakhtoupravlenie V.I Chapaev	Leased		
Donetsk	Zarya (Snezhnoe)	Snezhnoeantratsit	SOE		
Donetsk	Udarnik	Snezhnoeantratsit	SOE		
Donetsk	Snezhnyanskaya	Snezhnoeantratsit	SOE	Yes	2000
Luhansk	Il'ich	Stakhanovugol'	SOE	Yes	1996
Luhansk	Tsentral'naya-Irmino	Stakhanovugol'	SOE	Yes	1996
Luhansk	Zamkovskaya	Stakhanovugol'	SOE	Yes	1996
Luhansk	Bryankovskaya	Stakhanovugol'	SOE	Yes	1996
Luhansk	Luganskaya (Kirovsk)	Stakhanovugol'	SOE	Yes	1997
Luhansk	Maksimovskaya	Stakhanovugol'	SOE	Yes	1998
Luhansk	Bezhanovskaya	Stakhanovugol'	SOE	Yes	1998
Luhansk	Golubovskaya	Stakhanovugol'	SOE	Yes	1999
Luhansk	I.V. Chesnokov	Stakhanovugol'	SOE	Yes	1998
Luhansk	Krivorozhskaya	Stakhanovugol'	SOE	Yes	1996
Luhansk	Dzerzhinskiy	Stakhanovugol'	SOE	Yes	1996
Luhansk	Dolzhanskaya-Kapital'naya	Sverdlovantratsit	Private		
Luhansk	Y.M. Sverdlov	Sverdlovantratsit	Private		
Luhansk	Krasnyy Partizan	Sverdlovantratsit	Private		
Luhansk	Khar'kovskaya	Sverdlovantratsit	Private		
Luhansk	Tsentrosoyuz	Sverdlovantratsit	Private		
Luhansk	Leninskaya	Sverdlovantratsit	SOE	Yes	1996
Luhansk	V.V. Volodarskiy	Sverdlovantratsit	SOE	Yes	1997
Luhansk	Mayskaya	Sverdlovantratsit	SOE	Yes	2000
Luhansk	P.L. Voykova	Sverdlovantratsit	SOE	Yes	2001
Donetsk	Yablonevskaya	Torezantratsit	SOE		

Donetsk	K.I. Kiselyov	Torezantratsit	SOE		
Donetsk	L.I. Lutugin	Torezantratsit	SOE		
Donetsk	Progress	Torezantratsit	SOE		
Donetsk	Removskaya	Torezantratsit	SOE	Yes	1996
Donetsk	Voskhod	Torezantratsit	SOE	Yes	1996
Donetsk	No. 2	Torezantratsit	SOE	Yes	1998
Donetsk	Miuskaya	Torezantratsit	SOE	Yes	1999
Donetsk	No. 43	Torezantratsit	SOE	Yes	1999
Donetsk	Krasnaya Zvezda	Torezantratsit	SOE	Yes	1999
Donetsk	Rassypanyanskaya	Torezantratsit	SOE	Yes	1999
Donetsk	Torezkaya	Torezantratsit	SOE	Yes	1999
Donetsk	Ob'edinennaya (Torez)	Torezantratsit	SOE	Yes	1999
Donetsk	Lesnaya (Torez)	Torezantratsit	SOE	Yes	2002
Donetsk	Donetskaya (Torez)	Torezantratsit	SOE	Yes	1999
Volynsk	Buzhanskaya	Volyn'ugol'	SOE		
Volynsk	Novovolynskaya No. 1	Volyn'ugol'	SOE		
Volynsk	Novovolynskaya No. 5	Volyn'ugol'	SOE		
Volynsk	Novovolynskaya No. 9	Volyn'ugol'	SOE		
Donetsk	Donbass Komsomolets		Private		
Donetsk	Belozerskaya		Private	Yes	2020
Donetsk	Krasnolimanskaya		Leased		
Donetsk	Yuzhnodonbasskaya No. 1		SOE		
Donetsk	A.F. Zasyad'ko		Independent		
Donetsk	Zhdanovskaya		Leased		
Luhansk	Belorechenskaya		SOE		
Luhansk	V. Volodarskiy		SOE	Yes	1997
Luhansk	Danko		SOE		
Luhansk	No. 2 Kolpakovskaya				
Luhansk	Proizvodstvenno-kommercheskaya firma Strong				
Luhansk	Yuzhnaya				
Luhansk	Yanovskoe			Yes	1998
Luhansk	Sadovaya				
Lviv	Nadezhda		Independent		
Donetsk	Rassvet-1		Independent	Yes	2018

Date	Government's Claims	Miners' Claims
7/15/1989	1	1
7/18/1989	27	27
7/19/1989	67	67
7/20/1989	88	88
7/21/1989	100	100
7/30/1989	173	173
9/3/1989	28	28
3/1/1991	71	71
3/31/1991	217	217
6/9/1993	76	76
6/11/1993	202	202
6/16/1993	230	230
6/17/1993	230	230
6/21/1993	46	46
6/24/1993	52	52
6/30/1993	13	13
8/26/1994	1	1
9/8/1994	1	1
9/14/1994	1	1
4/6/1995	1	1
6/24/1995	1	1
7/7/1995	3	3
8/13/1995	1	1
11/15/1995	26	26
2/1/1996	29	257
2/8/1996	44	82
2/9/1996	29	
2/15/1996	27	
5/28/1996	13	13
7/1/1996	13	13
7/4/1996	45	
7/5/1996	73	73
4/1/1998	40	40
5/1/1998	10	10
5/15/1998	15	15
7/15/1998	2	2

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