

Notes of a co-conspirator

Autonomous Action

16 November 2011

Today, two years have passed since our comrade Ivan Khutorskoy was murdered in Moscow. On occasion, we publish an article which was written for Avtonom journal in Russian, and translated for Abolishing the Borders from Below in English.

“You are made of some different fabric. You are way more prepared than me for this kind of shit. I figured it out, when you told me by telephone, that Vanya is not anymore” — a young comrade put it like this once, in the frame of one discussion. We were standing on the platform of a metro, wagons of steel were scurrying on metallic rails. Their metallic clamps were squeezing my insides. Yes, my young friend, I am definitely ready for this shit.

Upon the death of Vanya, in spirit I was already in my 4th decade, although my physical age will correspond to that much later. My twenties I had spent in a skinhead-casual frenzy, spiced with an anarcho-communist baggage of ideas. For me, all those years passed side by side with two guys. One of them left all of that behind a long time ago, now he is more into stuff like wives/mistresses/kids/cars. Another one was Vanya. If I will be alive, healthy, and out of jail my fourth decade will not be boring either, but it will not be the same.

We met around the year 2004. I was looking for new comrades, to get busy with some good old ultra-violence. It was already about a year after the collapse of the crew around FC “Mosenergo”, and nothing much was going on. Practically, there were none of the right people around me. Back then, it was considered that you needed a mob of ten, 20 or 30 to give the enemy a decent beating.

And who was around? Mostly stupid kinds from the forum of antifa.ru website, even some total morons from the youth organisation of liberal “Yabloko” party. The only person from antifa.ru, who made any sense was Dzhey, for whom the first album of “Proverochnaya Lineyka” was later dedicated. But there are no obstacles, over which you may not run with some persistence. Morons vanished, normal people kept coming around. And step by step, we gathered a crew, of maybe twenty, which was capable of some action. Some people, who later became widely known, were around: DJ Stalingrad, Fedyay, Vanya. Later on, Shkobar came around (I already knew him from the times of the Mosenergo, but for a while he dropped out of Antifa, attempting to make a career as a Spartak hooligan). Later on, Tigran, whose house was bombed, came around, as well as Ilya Dzhaparidze. And of course, a number of other other impressive personalities were around as well. But Loshak is right “it’s better to only write about the deceased antifa, and those who area already famous, and not to uncover those who are not yet famous.”

Before Vanya met us, he was fighting boneheads at punk concerts. Just as Dzhey was fighting Nazis with his hip-hop friends; unaffiliated with the infamous White Smoke Clan gang, famous due to its street war with boneheads in the late 1990's and early 2000's. Back then, in the middle of the 2000's, Antifa in Moscow was a clear minority. There were no any obvious ways to meet them anywhere. But if you began to trash boneheads, there would always be some common acquaintances, who connected you with colleagues. And this is how Vanya joined.

His first action with us was a total disaster. Some foolish kids invited around 15 of us to the military town of Zarya in Moscow region. There, converged a mixed crowd of local boneheads, football hooligans and just rednecks defending "the reputation of their town" against Muscovites, a crowd several times bigger than ours. I was lucky and did not end up going to that one. Taking into account that our side came with iron bars, it is still a mystery that nobody ended up in the morgue. Nobody got anything worse than a concussion, but this adventure did not break Vanya's spirits, and he began to come around.

We made two or three attacks each month. In the middle of the 2000's there were plenty of places in Moscow (known park benches, metro entrances), where you could drop in and find Nazis. There were also plenty of more or less right-wing gigs. Some of them were easy, you could target whoever came out from the hall, with other ones you had to be more careful, as right-wingers were only 20–30% of the crowd. Back then, there were almost no "travmats" (rubber-bullet guns) and the habit of carrying knives was just emerging; fights took place mostly without weapons, sometimes pepper gas was used, sometimes beer bottles and iron bars.

This relative harmlessness resulted in a carefree life; there were way more fights than nowadays, often they took place in public places, even under CCTV cameras. For example, nowadays I would not be very much into attacking a Nazi in a running metro wagon. If he pulls a knife, it is highly likely that he must be killed, your face will be taped, and even if you are not arrested at the next station you are in big shit. But back in the days it was the most common thing to give a Nazi a boot in a a running train: the length of travel between two stations in the Moscow metro is pretty much one boxing round, and in the next station you disappeared from the spot, with a light sweat under your shirt.

Some Nazis got seriously wounded after coming across us. Although a couple of times cops nicked one or several of us at the spot of such fights, there was never a single felony case. Mostly we were just lucky, every time when someone got nicked, no Nazi had been seriously hurt. On the other hand, the word "Antifa" was familiar to FSB (x-KGB) only, and to a small minority of younger and more clever cops. Back then cops did not have any quota of extremists they were required to catch, and thus they were thinking like average lads: maybe these guys had reasons not to like each other, and if nobody got permanently injured or killed, it was apparently not worth it to dig into the reasons behind it.

We were not creating a spin around these fights, but they gained us notoriety amongst Nazis and youth subcultures in general. Nazis tried to find us, without a success, jumping random alternative kids. A few years later, I met a RASH-skinhead who told me a story of how he became an anarchist skinhead. One day, he was walking down the street, with a Yegor Letov-shirt on; Nazis beat him up, arguing that he was a redskin. He got interested in what that was about, he read about it from the internet and came to the conclusion that redskins are cool. A very typical story.

A couple of words about "United Brigade 46" (OB46), a fake antifa project of Nazis. They succeeded in trapping and beating up, now deceased, Vanya and Fedyay, as well as Shkobar and a

fourth person, and to make a video out of it. This footage is still often shown on TV, usually in the wrong context, as part of programs about Nazis and antifa in the mainstream media. OB46 began to make itself name for about half a year before this famous day came for them. They made a website, and wrote rather stupid things, but in the antifa-style. People started an exchange with them, during which their stupidity became even more obvious.

I did not suspect them of being Nazis, but cops from Petrovka 38, and I tried to persuade people not to have anything to do with them. The fourth person from the video decided that they were normal lads, who just write stupid things due to their lack of enlightenment. Once, he almost exposed us, which would could have had horrible consequences. It was during the time of the Nazi-pagan music festival “Koloyar”. After several such festivals, someone got hurt. It became clear to organisers that someone is after their visitors and they decided to take measures to defend themselves.

Before yet another edition of the festival, which was organised not far from the “Oktyabrskoye pole” metro station, they made a deal with local cops, who promised to dispatch extra patrols in the region. We decided that this was not worth it, and we also changed tactics. Temnozor was about to perform, and we found an excellent quote from their lyrics “I see the hour is coming, when crosses are burning, when there will be no mercy for priests in churches, when once again the gods of Russia are praised, and people are splitting to the deceitful eyes of the crucified kike”. We started to spread it all over the internet that such a group was going to perform. Our efforts gave results and even some deputies wanted to interfere.

The only thing we had to do was to call them, but then Shkobar figured out that with such a big PR campaign the festival could be called off altogether and in that case there would be no chance to kick some Nazi ass. We agreed, and did not get deputies involved. Besides cops, around 100 Nazis from their leading crews came around, eager to find us. We were about twenty, but we managed to deceive them and to smash a group of people going to the concert, thus making our point. However, without asking anyone’s opinion, aforementioned the “fourth hero of the video” met the representatives of the OB46 around one hour before our action, and told them “well we are going to jump them now, bring your crew and join us.” However, Nazi reconnaissance was too cowardly and therefore, never learned our convergence point. Thus, in the end the “OB46” project was way less successful than it could have been.

We organised gigs as well. Now most of the hip-hop, punk, ska and hardcore are more or less anti-fascist, but back then, antifa-scene was totally underground, secret and marginal. Concerts were usually organised by DJ Stalingrad. We rented small clubs in the suburbs(the main income of which was trashy discos on the weekends), on the weekdays and Sundays. Sound systems were horrible, our gathering spots a tightly guarded secret. The first such concert was legendary, above any praise. No Heads and Klowns were to play. Around 60 people stuffed themselves in a small rehearsal basement. The owner of the place figured out what was going on, and came asking “what is this shit, I am not a fool, ‘Korroziya Metalla’ is practicing here and you are organising a concert without asking me anything”. This did not put DJ Stalingrad off, he made few phone calls and we all moved to the metro station “Vodny Stadion” where, after one and a half hour the gig started, with a sound system straight from the USSR in a ballet rehearsal space in some obscure building.

I’ve been involved in plenty of anarchist projects in which we put in a lot of time and effort, and tried to be creative about, but nevertheless without any result whatsoever. When it comes to Antifa, what is different from a number of Western countries is that, in Russia the phenomena

appeared around a somewhat narrow issue of self-organisation of subcultural youth to counteract bonehead outrage in concerts. Not that much effort was put in Antifa, but at some point it began to grow like an avalanche.

At one moment we figured out that our human resource was no longer 20 fighters, but around one hundred. We had to decide what to do in these new circumstances. It was my opinion, that we should split into crews of 10–20 people and become more and more professional, terrorize Nazis in such a way which that it would not annoy police. Shkobar, Fedyay, DJ Stalingrad, on the contrary, considered that it was cool to organise high-profile fights. We had conflicts, tensions, and dislike came into the picture; for several years I did not even shake hands with Fedyay; the first time after a long break was around half a year before he was murdered.

Vanya was hesitating, uncertain of which of the two approaches would be the best one, but he was tending more towards picking mine. Then he was jumped at his doorway, his head was hit with a baseball bat, face and neck were pierced all over with a sharpened screwdriver. He had to spend five months in a hospital, and obviously, it took much more time to be fit for fighting again.

And so, the show-off strategy prevailed. Mobs were from 30 up to 110, the highest number being reached in the action against a right-wing concert in the “Tochka”-club. With bottles, iron bars and flares, various nationalist concerts and events were attacked. This went on for a year or year and a half, maybe ten or 15 such attacks. Recognition came from the mainstream media and even more on internet forums. I was an opponent of such actions, the risk was too big and not worth it, and my relations with the organisers of those actions were somewhat cold.

I do not want to set the record straight in public, I just want to say that around the group of people, which organised all these things, the further it went, the more all the kinds of pointless shit came down. People started to come up, who wanted to trash Nazis but not with the “main group”. In general, there more and more people all the time with no chances whatsoever to organise them all into one mob. There was also the story with the inquiry of Duma deputy Alksnis, about the criminal case he insisted be opened against “a group organising riots”. This limited the activities of “main group” a lot, although I still have not figured out why they did not jail all of them back then. Either the cops were too lazy, or from the point of view of the state propaganda it was not considered beneficial to have a court process against antifascists in “the country which defeated fascism.” Especially, as back then, the official opinion of the police force was that there are no fascists whatsoever in Russia, just the occasional hooliganism by restless youth.

Finally, Vanya was back in shape and a group got organised around him. Later, either Nazis, or investigators from Petrovka called it “the Kostolom gang”. The “main group” was not happy with this new initiative, during the first half a year their relations with us were rather cold. We could mobilize from 15 to 30 fighters of varying quality, from 16 to 25 years old. From time to time we acted together with other groups. We had a detachment of scouts, frail 16–19 years old girls. Almost all of them found boyfriends among those for whom they did reconnaissance work. A couple of these girls, however, found guys from the opposite camp, which of course was an epic fail; obviously they were excluded from everything, but they already knew way too much.

Vanya organised trainings. In the beginning, it was an all-out trashy gym at the very edge of Moscow: With rusty irons, boxing pearls, and no shower. It was straight from Romper Stomper or Russia 88. Then we lost it, and for some time we had a way better gym, without irons but with a shower and mats, Vanya was teaching us Sambo. We also went to forest to beat each other with

gloves, we called it “Boycovski klub”, “Fight Club”, which was later shortened to Beka. Since then, Beka has become a word widely adopted into the jargon of Russian Antifa.

There were plenty of fights. I liked most the one when we were riding in the metro around yet another “Russian march.” Some kids entered the wagon, all around full of Russian imperial (black-golden-white) flags. One of them was especially distinguished by his black “shitcrushers” (combat boots), black ski-mask and an imperial flag armband. The new passengers looked around the wagon, and one of them said “Let us make a ‘White wagon’”(a Nazi slang term for a pogrom in the metro). “It is our people here!” We were laughing so much we were about to drop. “What if they are Antifa?” – another young patriot was wondering. He had barely uttered the words, when the doors closed, and from then on imperial flags were just flying all over the wagon. We were almost caught by the cops, but retreated successfully. I think we actually saved those morons, if they had just jumped on someone with such an outlook, most likely they would have been sent to Kolyma straight from the underground. But with us they just lost few teeth and got few concussions, but could roam free.

The violence was constantly escalating. The murder of Timur Kacharava was political news at a national level, as well as the murder of Aleksandr Ryukhin. Even the attack by Nazis against musicians returning from a concert in the Moscow region (the bassist of the group “Shlyuz” was seriously wounded) was generally considered a senseless outrage. But actually, there is nothing surprising in such an escalation. Nobody has extra ribs and kidneys to be wasted. A knife in your pocket is some minimal guarantee that you will save them. And, if you know that a person you are about to jump has a knife in his pocket, most likely you would like to have one as well.

Once, we caught some Nazis around an event of the NSO, “National-Socialist Society” (later its members were sentenced in a series of court cases for some heavy racial serial killing). We were around fifteen in the center of Moscow, we walked down the street with the distance growing between each other. I saw two big boneheads, around fifteen meters from me, jumped by those of us who were closest to them. One of us gasses them, another one aims to the head and shoots with rubber bullets. Then a shout – “he has a knife!”. I move towards them and unconsciously open my knife. One Nazi is lying on the ground, another scoundrel, also gassed, runs away fast, although the road is jammed with cars. He gets away. We figured out that two of us had been stabbed. Rubber bullets had made it through an open door of a bank, security was running out with machine guns, dressed in bulletproof vests. They started to help the wounded, and advised us to get the fuck out before police showed up. We gave the lying Nazi some goodbyes and vanished.

Due to the escalation of violence, many people left Antifa for good. I think this was because they understood the conflict in the frame of the subculture, and obviously not so many people are ready to risk their lives for some nice music. I do not consider myself as an especially brave person, but to me the conflict with fascism was always an ideological one. If you look at the “fa/antifa” issue in a political, instead of subcultural context, you might be more prepared for such situations.

It became clear that back then the mob was not prepared for the toughness of it all. We invited maybe half a hundred persons to each fight, once we had a meeting with maybe the 15 most active people. We checked the list of people who we invited, and figured out that none of the persons present knew more than five of them. And this was under the threat of police provocations, fascist infiltration, danger from the persons we simply never double-checked, and from side of blowhards as well...

Besides that, amongst us and amongst the skinheads around our crew, there were not only friends of the bottle, but also people who when boozing were into beating up someone, whoever came around. Once, such a case ended up in a shootout with local rednecks in one of the cities of the Moscow region. Fortunately, the rednecks decided not to pursue the conflict any further, whereas it was 50 of our people waiting in the bushes for 3 hours with iron bars. And in case there had been a fight, someone could have gotten killed. All because someone got drunk and had his nose broken...

Due to all of this, our group got reorganised. How, you will learn if I reach my fifth decade.

I kept contact with Vanya, we had various projects. Last time I saw him alive was in our mixed martial arts tournament "No surrender!". Then I called him a couple of times, wanted to have a talk... around the time he got shot. I wanted to have a talk about his role as a public person, in a situation where everyone understood that he was a key person. I was afraid that after any bullshit, if cops got annoyed, Vanya would be the first person they would send to jail. They had just trumped up a case against Shkobar and he did one year in prison, there were some fresh stories for which they could nail Vanya on... I wanted to explain that to Vanya, to sit down and to think what to do with his image. But a Nazi bullet to the back of the head canceled all that.

Vanya was one of those people, in the way of whom even trams don't want to get. He was an anarchist, dropped in at editorial meetings of the Avtonom-journal, even wrote something for us. But for him, the first priority was always the war between Nazis and RASH. I would not say that he was one of my best friends, but he was often around at my birthday, I visited his, a couple of times we celebrated the new year together. It is hard to say, but I think that during the last years of his life, he did not have much more involvement in it than recreational activities and resistance with us, the co-conspirators.

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