

1921–1953: A chronology of Russian anarchism

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November 7, 2006

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“But we do not fear you or your hangmen. Soviet ‘justice’ may kill us, but you will never kill our ideals. We shall die as anarchists and not as bandits.”

– The anarchist Fedor Petrovich Machanovski at his trial before the Petrograd Revolutionary Tribunal, 13th and 22nd December 1922

After the crushing of the Makhnovists, the Siberian insurrections and the Kronstadt revolt, anarchist propaganda within the USSR was severely repressed from March 1921. There was a little window dressing, with the toleration of the bookshop/publishing ventures of Golos Truda in Moscow and Petrograd, the Anarchist Black Cross prisoner support group and the Kropotkin Museum – named after Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin. Golos Truda published the complete works of Bakunin and a book by Alexander Borovoi on Russian anarchism. The Kropotkin museum opened in 1921 in the house he had lived in in Moscow and was instigated by a group of anarchists and his widow.

All visitors the museum were photographed by the Cheka. The Black Cross was also tolerated but its activity was low level. The Cheka infiltrated informers into the Black Cross. Outside of Moscow and Petrograd, there was complete repression. The two great cities of Russia have always been openings to the West, and the regime wanted to present an image of tolerance to radicals in Europe and America. Elsewhere, Kropotkin’s works were seized in Yaroslav and similarly with Golos Truda books in Kharkhov

1921

Tsar’s old policy of exile is restored. First victims are three young anarchist women, students at Moscow University, Isayeva, Ganshina and Sturmer, sent to Arkhangelsk for one year and still there years later.

Alexei Borovoi, noted anarchist academic, is sacked from Moscow University (he had been allowed to teach under the Tsar) and has long spells of unemployment. Nevertheless the students of the Communist Academy (which was located in the premises previously occupied by the Moscow Federation of Anarchist Groups) decided to convene a discussion on “Anarchism vs. Marxism” and invited Borovoi and Bukharin to defend their ideas but the discussion was banned by the Bolshevik authorities.

Summer

In Zhmerinka a group of 40 anarchists is uncovered. All are shot
In Odessa several anarchists shot for “State reasons”.

July

Hunger strike of 13 imprisoned anarchists (including Voline and Aron Baron) at the Taganka prison in Moscow

September

Fanya Baron, Lev Tcherny, Potekhin, Tikhon Kachirin, Ivan Gavrilov and 9 other anarchists working underground, shot in the Cheka cellars

17 September

Under pressure the regime releases 10 anarchists from the Taganka- Voline, Vorobiov, Mratchny, Mikhailov, Maximov, Yudin, Yartchuk, Gorelik, Feldman and Fedorov. Most are deported to Berlin.

November-December

The Anarcho-Universalists in Moscow are repressed. Alexander Shapiro, Stetzenko, Askarov are arrested

End

92 "Tolstoyans" are executed for refusing to serve in the military.

Sometime in 1921 the anarchist worker Gordeyev is shot for breaking work discipline at the Izhevsk factory. Also during 1921 the Anarchist Youth organizations are liquidated. The Bolsheviks are particularly keen on anarchist ideas not spreading among the young.

I.S. Bleikhman dies as a result of his treatment in a Bolshevik labour camp.

The anarchist worker Nikolai Beliaiv after serving a sentence is exiled to Arkhangelsk.

Maria Veger (Weguer), teacher, is arrested in Petrograd for having anarchist books. Exiled to Arkhangelsk for 2 years. Gets malaria.

1922

Veger escapes and hides under false name in Petrograd.

Aron Baron after being imprisoned since 1920, is given permission to leave Russia. GPU (the Cheka was renamed GPU in late 1921) opposes this and he is arrested. Condemned without trial to 3 years at Pertominsk camp. In 1923 transferred to Solovki. Contracts serious eye infection. Then exiled to the Altai in Siberia. In 1925 arrested again after corresponding with anarchists abroad and sent to Lenissei. There arrested again and sent to a more isolated hamlet, where the post only came three times a year.

January

Russian-American anarchists Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman, totally disillusioned by the Bolshevik regime, leave the USSR

Spring

New raids on the anarchist movement throughout Russia.

The anarchist worker Fedor Machanovski is arrested in Petrograd and sentenced to death, commuted to 10 years, and is still in the Butirki prison (where Makhno and Arshinov had been imprisoned under the Tsar) in 1927.

22 May

Suicide attempt by trying to burn themselves alive by anarchists in response to the appalling conditions in the Pertominsk camp.

1 November

The anarchists Mollie Steimer and Senya Flechin are arrested and deported to Siberia.

December

More anarchists are expelled from the USSR

End

The anarchist worker Moise Zuckermann is arrested in Moscow. He is imprisoned in the dreadful prison camp of Solovki for 3 years and then in the the Verknei-Uralsk camp and is still there in 1925. Carries out several hunger strikes from between 7 and 13 days. Contracts malaria and intestinal infection. Transferred to Solovki in 1925. Very ill, he is placed in prison infirmary and operated on. Immediately after, still weak and ill, is sent for 3 years exile to Kolpatchevo village in Siberia. This involved long and painful voyage in stages of 3 months.

During 1922 anarchists are sent to one of the first concentration camps, Kholmogory on the White Sea.

1923

Zilberg, anarchist tailor arrested in Moscow for having taken part in a study circle reading anarchist books forbidden by the State censors. Gets 3 years exile in Tobolsk, Siberia. Condemned again to 3 years of exile at Tver.

Yuri Reidmane, arrested and sent to Parabel village, in Tomsk district. Other anarchists are also sent there –Boris Neerzki, and Yuri's brother Alexander.

February 26-April 12

Mass arrests of anarchists, Maximalists and Left SRs in the Far East of the Soviet Union.

Mass shootings of dissidents in Nikolaievsk on the Amur, including the anarchist Triapitzin

Spring

Hunger strike of 17 days at Pertominsk with anarchists taking part

July

Maria Veger is arrested again and sent to the Solovki camp, then to Verkhnei-Uralsk and then exiled in Arkhangelsk in 1926. Contracts malaria and scurvy, loses all her teeth. She goes on hunger strike on several occasions for from six to eleven days.

9 July

Steimer and Flechin are arrested again

19 July

Trial in Chita of some of those rounded up in February in the Far east. Eight shot and ten others get long sentences.

August

In the journal International Correspondence (mouthpiece of the regime) appears Declaration of Russian anarchists and anarchosyndicalists, which announces their support for the Bolshevik regime: Geitsman, Gopner, Vinogradova, Simonovic, Lepin, Tinovitskaia, Bekovski, Rotemberg. Bolshevik tactic also carried out against Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries. The result is that these individuals are shunned by their organisations, whilst still not trusted by the GPU.

End

Tatiana Polosova , working at Golos Truda publishing house, is arrested as a member of Support Committee for Anarchist prisoners. 3 years at Solovki. Transferred to Verhne-Uralsk and then with end of sentence to Tver.

1924

A relatively active anarchist group exists among the Petrograd workers but it ceases all activity when its existence is discovered by the GPU.

Iurtchenko, a worker member of the Karelin group, an anarchist organisation officially tolerated by regime, is arrested in Minsk province for possession of books by Kropotkin and Tolstoy (these books were allowed by the censors). Exiled to Arkhangelsk.

Nicolas Lazarevitch organises an anarcho-syndicalist grouping with several other anarchist workers at the Dynamo factory in Moscow. This publishes several leaflets- against the lowering of wages, against the economic treaty between Britain and the USSR, against the campaigns for Taylorism by the regime, always offering a libertarian alternative. They are distributed at night, stuck over official notices and transmitted under coats.

In the Ukraine the Group of Anarchists of Southern Russia bring out a long document which is transmitted to exiled comrades and published in anarchist journals in the West. This is their only known activity

October

Forced closure of the anarchist commune of Yalta

1925

The Black Cross is liquidated and its principal activists arrested

Yarchuk returns to Russia and joins the Communist Party

A group of anarchist tailors is exiled from Moscow for having led a struggle against the “specialists” in a factory and the high wages given to them.

February

Pavel Uskov, anarchist worker arrested in Petrograd . After hunger strike of six days is beaten by jailers. Sent for three years to Khantaik hamlet, Turukhansk district, Siberia.

8 February

Maria Poliakova arrested in Leningrad with 80 other workers and students. With 15 of these, she is sentenced to 3 years prison. Medical student, abandoned her studies to become a worker, working as a nurse in a hospital and then in a factory. Goes on hunger strike. Sent to Solovki and put among common criminals. New hunger strike. Jailers strip her and throw her in her slip into barracks of common criminals. Finally exiled to Khantaik in 1927.

Raia Chulmann, also arrested then, was sent to Verkhne-Uralsk. The terrible punishments inflicted on prisoners that she witnessed there, caused a complete mental breakdown in 1926. Transferred to a hospital in Moscow, she was then sent back to the camp. On the way there she had two further mental breakdowns.

1926

Grigoriev, anarchist peasant, attempts to kill himself by setting fire to himself rather than be in solitary confinement with no activity. A hunger strike of 7 days takes place among his co-prisoners demanding that he be placed in a cell with the anarchist Kalimassov. Strike fails. Grigoriev succeeds in killing himself on the second attempt.

At Tobolsk, the warders provoke the anarchists of cell No. 6 by refusing to let them slop out. To protest they overturn their toilet bucket in the corridor in the afternoon. The cell is declared collectively responsible, all are punished, and a hunger strike starts. The ninth day of the strike, the prison director withdraws the punishment, but two prisoners, Axelrod and Gurievitch, are transferred to Moscow. They are accused of disobedience and sent to the Solovki camps.

Golos Truda publishes a pamphlet on the 50th anniversary of anarchist Mikhail Bakunin’s death, with the permission of State censors. The Cheka seize it and burn it. A member of Golos Truda, Ukhin, is arrested and then exiled to Tashkent for having distributed the pamphlet.

End of summer

Several dozen anarchists are arrested at Leningrad for forbidden propaganda.

1926/1927

Arrest of a group of anarchosyndicalists in Moscow

1927

According to official figures, 60 anarchists were imprisoned at Verkhne-Uralsk

Summer

The anarchist Jonas Warchawski secretly edits and distributes pamphlets about the hypocrisy of the Soviet regime in taking up Sacco and Vanzetti as a cause whilst persecuting anarchists at home. He is arrested in Odessa

2 October

Nikolai Beliaev and Artyom Pankratov , anarchists in exile at Kizil Orda, arrested when they address a meeting and protest about an airbase being named after Sacco and Vanzetti. They are exiled to Siberia

1928

According to official figures 30 anarchists imprisoned at Verkhne-Uralsk. Late 1928/early 1929 Avraam Budanov and Panteleimon Belochub with 7 or 8 others are arrested for organising an underground Makhnovist-anarchist group in the Ukraine. Budanov and Belochub are shot, the others receive 10 year sentences.

Start of 30s

Socialist-revolutionary, social democrat and anarchist exiles at Tchimbkent start a secret fund to help their comrades exiled in the North. Work was relatively easy to find for the exiles at Tchimbkent, but not in the North, hence the fund.

1930

Ivan Kologriv, anarchist docker, arrested and sentenced for anti-militarist propaganda
50 anarchists and socialists in Verkhne-Uralsk, according to Ciliga

A group of 50 anarchists is smashed at Tchelianbinsk. It has an underground printshop and published anarchist texts, mostly foreign translations, and has contacts with anarchists outside the USSR. Sergei Sergeyevich Tuzhilkin(Tujilkin) (born 1909), a young electrician and a native of Kazan, ran the printshop. He gets 5 years in the political isolator at Verkhne-Uralsk. He tells Ciliga that the anarchists are very active and had succeeded in founding an efficient organisation.

Olga Andreevna, W. W. Kozhukov and Alexander S. Pastukhov organise the underground Workers Union of Anarchists, based on the principles of the Organisational Platform of the Dielo Truda group. They are discovered by the Cheka and arrested.

1931

Bestoujev, “Bolshevik anarchist” (i.e. critical support of the regime) sacked from his workplace for refusing to participate in the elections to the local Soviet.

Nikolai Rogdaev, veteran anarchist dies of a cerebral hemorrhage in exile in Tashkent, after having served a long sentence in Suzdal political isolator, ironically enough on a street named Sacco-Vanzetti! It should be remembered that many anarchists died prematurely because of the conditions and treatment they had suffered in the camps.

1933

80 anarchists and socialists at Verkhne-Uralsk, according to Ciliga

1934

July

An article appears in the Belgian anarchist magazine CQFD, edited by Hem Day, talking about the persecution of anarchists. It refers to Nikolai Rogdaiev and Alfonso Petrini and lists 98 persecuted anarchists among whom Andrei Andreyev exiled at Novosibirsk and Andrei Zolotarev, exiled at Poltava

1935

The Italian anarchist Alfonso Petrini is expelled from Russia to fascist Italy! He had already served 5 years in prison camp from autumn 1927.

November

Borovoi dies in exile at Vladimir

1935–1938

Many anarchists who have rallied to the regime “disappear” during the purges. This is the fate of such notable anarchists as Novomirsky, Sandomirskii, Bill Shatov and Yarchuk in 1936, and Arshinov, Dimitri Venediktov of Tobolsk, and the Italian Otello Gaggi in 1937

1936

Nikolai Lebedev, who ran the Kropotkin Museum dies of natural causes.

1937

January

Last collective strike of prisoners of Solovki prisoners at the Yaroslav isolator. After 15 days of hunger strike, are force fed, but obtain a few demands, which are taken away again several months later. The last collective and united action of anarchist, socialist-revolutionary and social-democrat prisoners.

The Jewish anarchist tailor Aizenberg, who had spent seven years in the Tsar's prisons, is tortured by the secret police in a prison camp for 31 days without giving in — a record, apparently. In the end, he goes mad. "Of the 12,000 detainees, he was the only one who struggled for an idea. We others, we were victims of oppression. Him, he struggled against oppression" — Alexander Weissberg.

The Italian anarchist Francesco Ghezzi is arrested and deported to the prison camp of Vorkuta

On August 5th 1937 NKVD of the Omsk region sentenced the following anarchists to death: Aron Baron, Prokop Evdokimovich Budakov, Zinaida Alekseevna Budakova, Avram Venetsky, Ivan Golovchanskii, Vsevolod Grigorievich Denisov, Nikolai Desyatkov, Ivan Dudarin, Andrei Zolotarev, Andrei Pavlovich Kislitsin (the oldest- born in 1873), Alexander Pastukhov, Anna Aronovna Sangorodetskaya, Mikhail G. Tvelnev, Vladimir Khudolei-Gradin, Yuri I. Hometovskiy-Izgodin, Nahum Aaronovch Eppelbaum (partial list as others like Shabalin also seem to have been condemned to death at same time). They were executed on August 12th in Tobolsk.

On August 19th the anarchist Alexander Lukyanchikov is shot in Novosibirsk.

On August 28th the anarchist communist Fritz Ernestovich Stubis was executed in the Moscow region.

The anarcho-syndicalist Igor Vladimirovich Rimsky-Korsakov is shot on September 7th in Omsk. Vladimir Filippovich Oborin, member of Golos Truda and then a Soviet anarchist is shot in the Moscow region on same day.

On September 3rd Fyodor Lavrentyevich Igoshin , a revolutionary veteran, first an SR and then an anarchist is shot in Moscow . On the same day Yegor Maltsev is, anarcho-syndicalist, is shot in Sverdlovsk.

The old Nabat anarchist Boris Nemiritsky is shot on September 8th 1937 in Leningrad, together with Samuil Grigorevich Riss, who had been active among Petrograd anarchist students in the 1920s and then served long prison sentences.

Georgy Karlovich Weber , anarcho-mystic, also shot in 1937.

1938

The Kropotkin Museum closes.

Olga Taratuta is tried and executed on 8th February. Bulgarian anarchist Hristo Zarezankov executed in MInusinsk on 5th April. Makhnovist Ivan Chuchko executed on April 26th. Sergei Tuzhilkhin is executed on 20th July along with a group of Mensheviks. 40 Gulyai Polye Makhnovists sentenced on April 1st and executed in batches in April, May and July. Makhnovist Nazar Zuychenko executed on July 7th. Lev Zadov and Daniilo Zadov who had been leading lights in the Makhnovist movement executed on September 25th. Another important Makhnovist Viktor Belash is also executed in this terrible year. On August 27th Efrem Borisovich Rubinchik-Meer,

anarcho-syndicalist, was executed in Moscow region. On September 7th, Vladimir Filippovich Oborin, member of Golos Truda and then a Soviet anarchist is shot in the Moscow region.

1941

Ghezzi dies in Vorkuta

1941–1945

Anarchists in partisan groups in the Ukraine during World War II. The Makhnovist Black Cat group operates in Bielorussia. Osip Tsebry forms Green Guard unit organised on Makhnovist and anarchist principles to fight both Nazis and the Red Army in the Ukraine.

Anarchist presence amongst the Russian occupation forces in Eastern Europe, “Bakuninists” in Bulgaria and Zavietti Kronstadta in Germany.

1947

Anarchists take part in revolts at Promyshleny, Jeleznodorjny, Vorkuta, camps. “Religious anarchists” (Tolstoyans) at Vorkuta.

1950

A small “anarcho-marxist” group exists at Moscow.

1952

Spanish anarchists, members of CNT-FAI, involved in camp revolts at Karaganda

1953

Anarchists involved in camp revolts, notably at Norilsk. The black flag flies over the Vorkuta camp revolt.

“In most of the eyewitness accounts of the prisons and camps the anarchists feature, intractable, attached to their convictions, hard like pebbles polished by cruelty and bad treatment”

— Louis Mercier Vega

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