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Anarchism in Georgia

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The national liberation movement in Georgia began like that of many other countries, with an initially liberal and literary “national awakening” that was most often headed by poets and essayists. Ironically, as Georgia became more assimilated into the Russian empire in the mid-1800s, its liberation movement grew more radical due to the fact that its Russian-educated intelligentsia was exposed to “dangerous ideas” within the Russian university system. By the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the Georgian revolutionary movement was fully radicalized with the Russian populist brand of socialism as its prime ideological current.

Prince Varlaam Cherkezishvili (1846– 1925), whose name is often Russified as Tcherkesoff or Cherkezov, was one of Georgia’s first professional revolutionaries and was at the heart of the Georgian anarchist movement since its inception. Cherkezishvili was among the first militant socialist revolutionaries agitating during the late 1860s in Russia. By the mid-1870s, however, he was fully committed to the cause of anarchism and worked with both the Armenians and Turks in an attempt to create a national liberation solidarity movement within the Balkans.

Although anarchism was only a marginal voice within the larger revolutionary nationalist movement (which was dominated by the Georgian Mensheviks or social democrats), after the 1905 Revolution in Russia there was a brief and intense flare-up of anarchist activity in Georgia, lasting a little under two years between 1905 and 1907. During this time, Giorgi Gogeliia (a.k.a. K. Orgeiana, K. Illiashvili, d. 1921), a member of Peter Kropotkin's *Khleb i Volya* (*Bread and Liberty*) circle in Geneva along with his partner Lidia, was active in Tbilisi, championing anarchosyndicalism (Nettlau 1996: 258).

Thus, in 1906, Tbilisi supported two daily anarchist newspapers, *Musha* (*The Worker*) and *Khma* (*The Voice*), and the highly influential "legal" weekly, *Nobati* (*The Call*), which included contributions from both Cherkezishvili and Kropotkin. This relative wealth of anarchist publications can be viewed as part of an attempt by the Georgian anarchists to win control of the revolutionary nationalist movement. The content of these periodicals generally comprised critiques of Marxism and the ideological basis of the social democrats who dominated the revolutionary movement.

The Georgian anarchists were opposed to the social democratic idea of using the state as a revolutionary tool and furthermore opposed the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat as yet another form of domination. A young Joseph Stalin engaged in polemics with the anarchists and wrote a response called *Anarchism or Socialism?* that was serialized in 1906 in the Georgian Bolshevik journal *Akhali Tskhovreb* (*New Life*). Perversely, some of the best information in the English language about Georgian anarchism of this period comes from Stalin's opposition piece.

After this brief resurgence, the effect of anarchist activity on Georgian political or social life seems to have been somewhat negligible – national support for the social democrats was near universal within the Russian empire. After the October Revolution in Russia, the Georgian social democrats were able to repel

Bolsheviks and establish the Democratic Republic of Georgia in May 1918. Cherkezishvili, having realized his ambitions for an independent Georgia, obtained a seat in the Constituent Assembly. The republic would not last long, and in 1921, after a short uprising and rebellion, the Soviet-supported Red Army took control of Georgia, effectively ending opposition to state socialism.

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