

# “The West think that they know better”

## Belarusian Anarchists in Warsaw

2023

In our opinion, the war has highlighted how much anarchists are products of their own local capitalist and geopolitical environment. Specifically, we have seen that colonialism manifested itself in divisions along its usual lines. It is the West (First World) against the East (Second World). People – and anarchists – in the West think that they know better; they predominantly don't ask their comrades who are clashing in the frontlines about what they think and what motivates them, because they have readymade answers. This is the product of a long-term tradition in which the East was oriented to the West in the anarchist movement – we cannot teach Western anarchists anything, we can only cypaste what already exists there and try to apply it in our contexts. This status quo was for a long time convenient for the Western comrades. Now that we suddenly have our own opinion and choose controversial tactics, they are confused.

It is also interesting, that just like the Ukrainian state is completely dependent on the Western “democracies” for resources and arms, so are the Ukrainian, Russian, and Belarusian anarchists who have to go around wealthier Western anarchist places to ask for money to continue their work.

We have also seen that international solidarity is an empty declaration. All anarchists expressed their position against the war and for the people, the working class, and the oppressed, but what did that mean in material terms? We are wondering how many of the oppressed in Ukraine felt any of that solidarity. How many collectives in the West, understanding that they didn't want to support the armed participation in the war, tried to negotiate with the Ukrainian comrades about how else that cooperation could look, if not buying helmets?

The same can be said about the reaction of the Russian movement, which basically remained silent about the war, which started in 2014, and was cautious about trying to build connections with their Ukrainian comrades. It's now the second year of the full-scale invasion, and we still do not see any attempts to create a common antiwar front in the post-Soviet region.

Another thing that is not so clear, and might seem a bit conspiratorial to some, is the power that the “reds” (authoritarian communists) have on the anarchist discourse. The war has shown that it is huge. We can see how in countries like Germany, where there is no clear division between anarchists and communists, the “general left” repeats the old Soviet and now Russian myths of “the West against Russia” and “capitalists against socialists”. The absolute lack of socialism in the Bolshevik USSR was discussed by anarchists, such as Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, as early as 1925 or so. But the Soviets, and then the authoritarian left parties sponsored

by them, who survived in some form until now were much more successful in selling their own version of reality and propagating “oppression by the West”. In most Southern European countries, this discourse is clearly connected to the “reds” propaganda, but is hailed by the anarchist movement, just because it’s convenient.

This war will leave a big schism in the movement for a longer time. The anarchist East stopped blindly taking for granted what is said or done by some of the Western comrades. And it will take a long time to build back the trust and the real international solidarity in our movement.

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Belarusian Anarchists in Warsaw is a group of Belarusian anarchists who had to leave Belarus because of the persecutions. They prefer to remain anonymous. One participator in the group is the author of the Russian-language podcast *Dogma: Uneasy Talks About War*.

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