

To be an independent force

Dmitry Petrov

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“... Many of us anarchists, especially those who were slightly more theoretically minded, wasted time on futile attempts to find something super-perfect in anarchism that has no basis in real life. Its place, they say, is only in the future, and even then it is unknown in what forms.”

Nestor Makhno. *Memoirs*.

Right now, we are going through a turning point in the history of Eastern Europe. In the maelstrom of events, the small black sail of the anarchist movement is clearly visible. The actions of the Combat Organization of Anarcho-Communists had a great resonance in the Russian resistance. In Ukraine, at the forefront of the struggle against imperialism, groups of our like-minded comrades, both with weapons in their hands and in a multitude of “non-violent” spheres, are affirming the anarchist perspective in the context of current events. In the nationwide uprising against the dictatorship in Belarus in 2020, which echoed in this war with rail sabotage, anarchists were one of the most prominent and articulate forces. These testimonies tell us about the relevance of anarchism in the current political realities.

However, those involved understand that in order to truly become a force for change and a power that influences the minds of the people and society as a whole, we are still lacking something. Perhaps a lot.

Let’s talk about one thing today. There are two approaches that seem to prevent our movement and its active members from adequately understanding themselves and developing a course of action in the current moment. In essence, these are two sides of the same coin.

Nowadays, you can sometimes hear statements that “everything is lost,” “the anarchist movement in Russia and Belarus has been crushed, and in Ukraine it is incredibly weak”... give up, flush the toilet — write your memoirs, or better yet, don’t even bother. And they say this at a very decisive moment, when the entire social reality of the region is shaking and could take the most unpredictable trajectory (and this alone gives revolutionaries a great opportunity).

Firstly, if someone is disappointed, they can simply step aside rather than trying to demotivate everyone around them while narcissistically seeking attention for themselves. Secondly, and most importantly, a moment of historical challenge — such as the one we are facing now — requires maximum effort. It is not surprising that right now some people want to give up — but it is

those who find patience and perseverance within themselves who will reap the rewards of this situation.

The second, seemingly opposite, approach is proactive, but similar to the first in terms of its outcomes. Its supporters argue that anarchism and revolutionary struggle are not on the agenda right now, “first we will defend Ukraine from invasion,” “first we will overthrow Putin/Lukashenko (underline as appropriate),” we will throw ourselves headlong into this work, and then... No, my friends, if at the point of bifurcation you decide to postpone your ideas until better times, you can safely assume that you are shelving them forever.

Fortunately, there are many worthy people among us who devote a great deal of energy and effort to serious tasks. It is vitally important that these tasks and efforts serve the goals of revolutionaries — the restructuring of society on libertarian principles. For such a restructuring, a powerful, organized movement with great ideological and practical influence is necessary.

Anarchists who see themselves as creators of revolutionary politics here and now can afford the luxury of interacting with ideologically alien forces (for example, various factions of the Russian and Belarusian opposition) and state institutions (for example, the Armed Forces of Ukraine). Rather than “selling out our principles” and assimilating into unfriendly figures and structures, the expediency and forms of such cooperation will henceforth be determined by healthy political pragmatism — conformity with the interests of the libertarian revolutionary movement. Whatever serves to the growth our structure, recognition, experience and skill, and an increase in the number of connections, also serves the ultimate realisation of our ideas.

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