

Hoods Hoods Klan Interview

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I met Eugene at the Dublin Anarchist Bookfair, 2023. He came by the event and gave an impromptu talk at a panel on challenging imperialism. Afterwards, he agreed to meet me to be interviewed for the Independent Left website about his experiences with the Arsenal Kyiv, Hoods Hoods Klan, who have been the subject of a powerful documentary by Jake Hanrahan: *Frontline Hooligan*. I found what Eugene had to say inspiring and important for the future of the left internationally.

Eugene: My name is Eugene and I'm a member of the group of Arsenal Kyiv hooligans, who are called Hoods Hoods Klan. This organisation was founded in 2007 and I have had a connection with all of these lads since that time.

Conor: How did you meet them? How did you get started?

Eugene: Actually, we were a group of punk hardcore kids. At that time, football hooligans in Ukraine were right-wing: racists, Nazis, or something like that. And they always wanted to fight, especially against certain people like anti-fascists.

They went looking for anti-fascists for street violence because they need street violence. So they started to attack the punk gigs. And we wanted to protect the punk gigs, which were happening every single week. I was sixteen or seventeen at that time; we were a young generation and we were Straight Edge. Straight Edge meant that we didn't drink, didn't smoke, didn't fuck. And most of us did some sport. The older generation of Nazi skinheads were much more into alcohol; so we were much younger, but also fitter. We became a group of people who understood each other without any words. In any gig where someone said, "Boneheads," we would group together and go outside on the street and look for right-wing hooligans. And then in 2004, some older anti-fascists, older than me, they understood that Arsenal Kyiv was the only team for us.

Arsenal Kyiv had a huge working-class background, because the arsenal was one of the biggest manufacturing centres in Ukraine. It started in the eighteenth century or the seventeenth. And it was huge. The Arsenal Kyiv football team was founded in 1925, but they only played in the second, or maybe third, Soviet Union division. And in 1964 they ran out of money and stopped. But it was a really working-class football team. And then in 2001 the club was founded again and in 2004 a group of maybe just five or six anti-fascists from Kyiv started to support this team. And then our group, the Hoods Hoods Klan was founded in 2007. In 2007, it was maybe nine or ten people, something like that.

Year after year we gained more people because of Nazi attacks. Some people always want to offer protection and you're very happy when you find someone who has the same ideas: anti-fascist, anti-racist and all the other positive values. There were a lot of people from the hardcore punk scene in the movement. It was one of real unity. So for example, I was living in Chernihiv, it's the north part of Ukraine, but we had a strong connection with the guys from Kyiv. Five lads in my town started to do some hooligan things with the Hoods Hoods Klan because the bands from Kyiv played in my hometown, and the bands from Chernihiv played in Kyiv. We were young kids with the same ideas of anti-homophobia, anti-racism, anti-fascism, anti-terrorism, anti-imperialism.

I'm also vegan and there's a lot of vegans in my group. Because my childhood was very political. So most of us, we're like human rights and animal rights activists from the very beginning. When I was a kid, we had a Food Not Bombs in my hometown. I was the member of the Food Not Bombs group. We had everything in my childhood: Critical Mass; Food Not Bombs; all of the charity foundations; the eco campaigns; the animal liberation campaigns.

Conor: It's unusual for football hooligans to be revolutionaries.

Eugene: It's a very unique thing for Eastern Europe, because most of the Eastern European hooligans are really right wing. And in Ukraine in 2008 most of the right wing hooligans united against us. We were against everyone and everyone was against us. We were the only group that fought against everyone many times. And many times we won the fights.

Conor: Did you earn respect from your enemies?

Eugene: Yes, I think a lot. We went out to fight even in smaller numbers, despite the fact that we knew that we could be defeated. And if we managed to fight with an equal number, most often we won. We call it the psychology of a winner.

Even our women are brave. Today women from Arsenal Kyiv supporters are in the front line, like medics. If feminists in Ireland want to support women in the front line, I can say that we have this.

Conor: Was it dangerous?

Eugene: Street violence is always dangerous. At the same time, Hoods has always had a code of honour: we did not use knives, traumatic weapons or firearms in fights. Although, I confess that in 2012, in one of the street fights with right-wing hooligans, I was shot three times with a traumatic pistol. But I didn't get hit. I think that with the help of force, we managed to convince the Nazis that they do not need to use knives or guns in fights. Because we were not afraid to use them in their direction. But we preferred fists.

Speaking of weapons, I will say that the Ukrainian neo-Nazis have always imitated their comrades-in-arms from Russia. Unfortunately in 2008 in Russia, the boneheads – Nazi skinheads – had a strong relationship with the FSB, which is the new KGB. And after the new presidential election in Russia, the Medvedev election of 2008, they wanted to show the Russian people that a strong power was needed. So the FSB did a deal with the boneheads and they started to kill the anti-fascists in Russia.

They killed Ivan Khutorskoy, Fyodor Filatov, and Ilya Dgaparidze. These were supporters of Arsenal Kyiv. And they killed Anastasia Baburova, she was journalist investigating Nazis and she was murdered on 19 January 2009 along with anti-Nazi lawyer Stanislav Markelov.

Conor: Did you have to fight for your life?

Eugene: Since 2005, I think, a lot of times I was fighting. I remember the time when I walked into a punk hardcore gig with my girlfriend and a group of Nazis, maybe seven, I don't know, hit me first on the back of my head. One of them broke my eyebrow. I think they wanted to knock me down. But they couldn't bring me down. I turned around and told them: go fuck yourself and they ran away. So, it was a quick fight and I think for me, everything started at that moment. You protect yourself. One memorable fight for me with Nazis in Ukraine was in 2018 at a hardcore punk gig. A group of Nazis tried to come in and I just came to them and asked, "What are you doing here?" And they were laughing, "We just want to watch the real gay, trans people: this scum." And soon we're just fighting, one by one, and it's finished. They go away. If a Nazi or racist or homophobic person got inside the concert, we were there to protect our ideas.

Conor: You were involved in the Maidan uprising, right? Even though there was some far right involved in that as well?

Eugene: Far right? It's a good question. I was in Maidan from the very, very first day. Maidan started as a student action. Students were in the city centre and the cops beat them. One of the students was my classmate, he's not Nazi, I know him well. And the next day there were a million people in the city centre. There were no right-wing flags, just flags of Ukraine: no political parties.

I'm someone who joined the Maidan movement and I can truly say that it was not a right-wing revolution.

We had online broadcasts from Maidan. So even if you're working, you're watching the revolution. I saw the cops were gathering to beat people and immediately we were there, like within twenty minutes I think. They were armed with guns and shooting. And they had the Crimean special forces. This was the first time that I saw cops firing guns.

Then we started to build barricades in Maidan. I was one of the very first people who were there at that time who started to build the barricades from all of the stuff that was there. I had just walked in there. Everyone from Kyiv was there. If you're a Nazi, maybe you were there too, but there were no Celtic Cross or swastikas there. Actually, even if you had a t-shirt with Nazi symbols, we also had people who wore anarchist t-shirts or something like that. So if you can say that it was a Nazi revolution, I can say that it was an anarchist revolution. But you can't say this about ninety-nine per cent of people, those who were just working-class people without right wing ideas.

One night there was a clash and fires in the street from Molotov cocktails and it was really cold – minus thirteen – everything was burning. And the cops tried to stop the fire with hoses and water and it was like you were covered in ice. Someone said that the Right Sector is coming.

Until midnight there were a lot of people there. But after the last metro train, it was down to just hundreds of people. And we are very lucky that a huge wind carried the smoke over the cops, and they didn't know how many people were there because if they had seen how few we were, they would have killed us.

Someone nearby said, "Okay, right now the Right Sector would be help." And for the next minute, me and my friend who is also antifascist, we were just laughing because the famous Right Sector turned out to be just fifteen-years-old kids with wooden shields. Maybe one per cent of the people that night were right wing, but there were even people of color there. It was a revolution of the Ukrainian people. All of the Ukraine people were there.

Hoods Hoods Klan Interview: the War with Russia

Conor: Russia responded to Maidan by attacking Ukraine. How did Hoods Hoods Klan react?

Eugene: In 2014, immediately after Maidan, Russia grabbed the Crimea. And then in May were battles in the Donetsk region and a couple of our lads were involved. It was a tragedy. There were huge losses for the Ukrainian army and two anarchist guys from Arsenal Kyiv were captured and they were put in prison. Russia occupied our land and my friend – his nickname is Doc – had an injury to his back from a rocket. He had called for medical help but the Russians put him in prison for three months. We collected money for him: I made t-shirts with his image and the line from our national anthem, *We will allow no masters to rule us in our motherland*. It's a very anarchist line! After that, more of Hoods Hood Klan joined the army.

Conor: When you joined the Army, were you able to stay as the Hoods Hoods Klan? Were you able to stay anti-fascist or did you just have to go wherever you were told?

Eugene: You could stay as a group. Even right now. We are still anti racist, anti-homophobic, anti-imperialist, anti-authoritarian. And we are fighting against a government, Russia, which is a hundred per cent homophobic; a hundred percent imperialistic. I'd like to say they are racist but it's not quite the right term. More accurate is that they are a hundred percent xenophobic.

They are very chauvinistic and their idea is that there is no Ukrainian nation. Like Hitler wanted to say that there is no Jewish people. So Putin, maybe you saw the video two days ago?

Conor: The map?

Eugene: ...he showed a seventeenth century map and said, "...there is no Ukrainian people at all." It was funny, because in fact the map shows the opposite. But it shows Putin's intention: to make Ukraine disappear. We are fighting against a chauvinistic, right-wing, terrorist country. So yes, we are still fighting with the same ideas we had fifteen years ago.

Conor: Right now there are insurgents, Russian insurgents, trying to overthrow Putin. Some of them say that they're football hooligans. And they are carrying out raids. One of these movements seems to be fascist, and another one seems to be a left movement. So how do you feel about that? Is it okay to be working with far-right units? Is there a kind of a truce between you and the fascists until you beat Russia? How does that work?

Eugene: Firstly, it's important to say that these are Russian people fighting on their territory. I mean the fight against the Putin regime. Ukrainians just protect their own territory. At the moment, Ukrainian cities are being shelled by people of the same skin colour. As we understand, the Ukrainian army is at war with representatives of the same race. Therefore, it is ridiculous to talk about some kind of Racial Holy War. As we understand it, Ukrainian women and children were not raped by defenders of LGBT rights or feminism.

In my opinion, the vast majority of the Russian military are homophobic and transphobic. I think that many Russians support the idea of the Russian world, being nationalists and xenophobes. One way or another, the ideas of Russian imperialism, chauvinism and even Ukrainophobia are close to many. The Russian state has long met all the signs of fascism. Therefore, it is difficult for me to understand the logic of those who fight against Russia and call themselves a Nazi or even a representative of the right ideology.

If these Russian movements say that they're racist or fascist or right wing, I can say that I'm a hundred percent against their ideas. Because those are the values which we're fighting against. If Russian fascists want to have a strong leader, they already have it. If they want to have the power of one religion, they already have it. There are no human rights at all in Russia. Ukraine is not perfect because it's an eastern European country with the huge legacy of the USSR. And we still need to help with the free press. But at least we have some freedoms: in Russia, you can be in prison for fifteen years just because you call the war a war.

Conor: If Ukraine wins, do you think that Putin could be toppled? And do you think there is hope for the left in Ukraine?

Eugene: That is an interesting question. Yes. I think, yes. The majority of people, working-class people, are democratic people. For me Maidan was about fighting for freedom, fighting for human rights, fighting for liberation, fighting for equality, fighting for our ideas. I think it's the younger generation of people who could go in the direction of socialist ideas. But still, we have the bad experience of the USSR. We need to know that actually you can be a progressive left, not an authoritarian left.

Conor: Not a communist left. Speaking of which, some of the left in Ireland and internationally, they don't agree with Putin, obviously, but they see NATO as blame for the war and they refuse to support arming Ukraine. What do you think of that position?

Hoods Hoods Klan Interview: NATO

Eugene: This is different to Yugoslavia, where NATO really was fighting and was involved in the war. If you say we can't have the weapons, well okay, how are you going to help us protect Ukraine without them? I remember the day when my home town was bombed from the air and my grandmother lost her memory. My life was ruined. It was the hardest day in my whole life. My parents had no electricity, no mobile connection, no internet. And of course no gas. They cooked food on the street. I remember how I felt when I couldn't call them while knowing that the Russians were bombing my hometown, Chernihiv, from the air. In that small town seven hundred houses were destroyed; twenty-four from thirty-seven schools were bombed and thirty-four from fifty kindergartens. My uncle died during this occupation period, because he had no medicine.

We need weapons to protect ourselves, not to attack someone. Remember we asked for the skies to be closed and no one helped us. I think Putin uses this anti-NATO propaganda. Ukraine is being blamed for our connection with NATO. But it's not like that: we just want to be able to protect civilians. This is attempted genocide against Ukrainian people, directed against the civilians. They're fighting civilians. There are hundreds of martyrs in my home region: hundreds of rapes; hundreds murders of children and the elderly.

The left should be smarter than to blame the victims. We shouldn't listen to Putin and his speeches about NATO. We should think more and read more.

Conor: And speak more to the Ukrainian left.

Eugene: Speak to Ukrainian people. What they are actually feeling at this moment. I had a call from my mother yesterday. She works with the people who lost houses, they're refugees inside the country. Because Russians fight in the northern part of my region and two thousand families have left their homes, maybe forever. And she starts from work at 5:30am and it never finishes because it's like every single day that people lose someone.

I lost my classmate in Bakhmut last month and every single day it happens. And you can ask my mom why she stopped her normal life so as to start to help these people. And where is NATO at this moment? I don't know. Where is their invasion? Where is their threat to Russia?

Russia is the biggest danger and not just to Ukraine. It's like Nazi Germany.

Conor: What do you think about Zelensky and his politics?

Eugene: I want to explain to you about the Ukrainian people. The Ukraine people are the real power in Ukraine. Not Zelensky. I think that most old-fashioned countries in the world, they still believe in politics like the United States, they still think politics is about presidents. Our army before 2014 was like the worst army in the world because after soviet corruption there was no technique, no interest from the people, nothing. If you are anarchist, you can understand me. People fight well not because they are told to but because you have someone you want to protect.

During Maidan, everyone began to fight for a better, freer Ukraine. There was no crime and it was very clean on Maidan, even though there were no police and no services. Can you imagine no cops in your town because all the cops were against you? This is the key, most important question. If there are no cops, why is there no crime? The answer is that we had groups in every zone in the city, in every block. And we protected our houses. We didn't need the cops. We protected each other and shared the food.

And the same happened in 2022 during the invasion. In every single city it was the people who joined the Territorial Defence. No one told us to organise. You just did it. My mom and sister,

they cooked food for the soldiers. My father made Molotov cocktails. I believe if that people can manage the tasks in a country, we don't even need the president, to be honest. So Zelensky's just a representative person, like the CEO of a company. That's it. This is the answer about the Zelensky. The real power is not Zelensky: the real power is Ukrainian people.

It's something new that the left in Europe can learn from. Even right now, the solidarity of people in Ukraine is coping with everything. It's a very socialistic thing; a very anarchist thing.

Conor: What can we do to help?

Eugene: We have a group of anti-fascists on the front line. They still have a need for help. They think that the European left don't care about this work. So if you can show them solidarity, that it's actually important, it would be a huge help. Because we need cars, we need drones, we need body armour, we need a lot of medical equipment. We have a fundraiser for this. (PayPal xkemanx@gmail.com <https://www.instagram.com/hoodshoodsklan/>)

And if you really don't want to support the front line, I have friends who help rebuild the houses in the Chernihiv region. (<https://send.monobank.ua/jar/yrN9K9nJX> <https://www.instagram.com/varyalushchyk/>) So that can be useful. Also, my sister, she's a lawyer and she's like a social worker helping the kindergartens and schools in my home family in Chernihiv (<https://www.savedschools.in.ua/donate/>). They also have a foundation to build the schools and kindergartens. There's a lot of ways to help Ukraine.

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