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Me and nationalism

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Recently three comrades one by one have asked me to write a public post about my attitude to nationalism and how it changed over time. If people ask, I have to do it.

My attitude to nationalism? It's undoubtedly negative. There are two main reasons for it. First of all, nationalism shifts the focus of human solidarity from class to nation which is as a rule beneficial for the elites only and often leads to outbursts of chauvinism, intolerance and hatred. Secondly, nationalism doesn't offer answers to actual challenges of modern times: the growth of inequality, devastation of the environment, atomisation and alienation of individuals, etc. There are other reasons, too, but these are the most important. Political nationalism generally is antagonistic to anarchism as it strives for polar aims.

At the same time I should admit that the national problem and national liberation movements are important (somewhere even key) factors of modern politics and we can't just dismiss them by saying that nations are imaginary communities. National liberation movements grow in places where a real national discrimination of people takes place: a prohibition to have their identity, speak in their language, develop their culture, have their schools,

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etc. The people as a whole and individuals have their right to fight for all above-mentioned. Freedom of cultural self-expression, choice of identity or lack of the latter is one the main principles of anarchism. Take Kurds, for example, who are now widely supported by anarchists all over the world. Would anyone condemn them for the fact that after centuries of oppression they want to be called Kurds and not be assimilated by Turkey/Syria/Iran?

The fight for cultural identity and against national discrimination can be based on political nationalism or stay rather far away from it (take General Jewish Labour Bund or the Zapatists).

This is why I believe that while criticising nationalism we as anarchists must offer critical (!) support to those national liberation movements that don't proclaim explicitly reactionary ideas (islamism, racism and the like).

What concerns Belarusian context, almost all my life as a political activist I supported and am still supporting the fight to preserve the Belarusian language, culture, to liberate Belarus from imperialist and colonial oppression. I have considered myself a Belarusian, which is probably quite natural for a person who was born and grew up in Belarus. However, I never called myself a nationalist and all the support I expressed to Belarusian national liberation issues was critical. Take, for example, one of my 9-year old statements which is now causing unhealthy excitement on the side of a few people (who at that time were not even part of any movement) mikola-a.livejournal.com, mikola-a.livejournal.com Indeed, I consider the foundation of Belarusian Popular Republic one of the key dates in our history. Indeed, in many ways it predetermined the fact that we are Belarusians now and not Russians. Is March 25 a holiday for me? At the moment it's rather not. Firstly, while the date has some positive aspects, it is still the day of creation a state. Secondly, present-day political context (that the state is taking on board the nationalist agenda as well as an attempt of several groups to push nationalism into the anarchist movement) makes

any attempt to call this date a holiday politically short-sighted and dangerous. In 2008 the context was totally different.

Conversely, I think any rational person understands that the words 'Long live Belarus' doesn't necessarily make someone a nationalist, as well as an anarchist avatar doesn't make someone an anarchist.

To sum it up, from the moment I became an anarchist, my position on nationalist has almost not changed, staying the same as I described in the first paragraphs. What was changing are only the form of expression of my views, the symbols and statements that I considered acceptable. And this is normal, since any words are understood in certain way depending on a context in which they are said, and if I want to be understood correctly, I adapt to the context.

The proof is on the surface: in the past my posts, mentioned above, were understood in another way than now. I hope that people who are very much interested in my ideas of 8 years ago will think a bit more before judging them.