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Oleksandr Kolchenko

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2023

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Oleksandr Kolchenko is a Ukrainian political activist and anarchist; shortly after the annexation of Crimea, he was detained, tortured, and falsely accused of being a member of the far-right group Right Sector and of preparing terrorist acts in a mock trial and sentenced to 10 years. Now, he actively takes part in the fight against the Russian invasion.

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“The key to peace in Ukraine is not in Ukraine, but in Russia”

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Despite the deep fragmentation of the anarchist movement in Ukraine, Ukrainian anarchists began to prepare for a full-scale invasion sometime before February 24, 2022: they determined who would take up arms and who would volunteer. One way or another, the vast majority of them put aside their quarrels and disagreements on certain issues and stood up in defense of freedom. Remaining true to my anarchist and anti-fascist beliefs, I initially avoided participating in an organized anarchist movement to resist Russian aggression, because I was concerned that discussions on ideological issues, quarrels, and squabbles would take up time that could be used for training, education, and direct participation in combat operations – or more broadly, in something useful and constructive. (It is worth noting that from the moment I was released from prison until the full-scale invasion began, I participated in the anarchist movement only sporadically. First of all, there was a lack of time: work and everyday life took up all my time. But no less important was the anarchist movement’s lack of any clear position on the Russo-Ukrainian war.)

I did not delve too deeply into the position of the Belarusian anarchist movement; I am not competent in this matter. But emigrants from everywhere from Belarus to Poland support Ukraine, and some Belarusian anarchists are fighting in the Ukrainian Defence Forces.

On the contrary, I can write a lot about the Russian anarchist movement. I have already written about it in one of my Facebook posts. And even to this day, despite the number of civilian and military casualties, entire cities wiped off the map, genocide, and ecocide, little has changed in their position in this regard. So I'll quote myself:

I am very grateful to my Russian friends from the movement for their support throughout my imprisonment. I will never forget this and will try to support them as much as possible. But I cannot remain silent (and I am very sorry) about the fact that Russian anarchists, after the start of Russian military aggression, have not been able to launch a large-scale campaign against their state's imperial aggression against the rebellious Ukraine. (Either in the form of calls for a general anti-war strike or attacks on military facilities or defense industry enterprises. In any case, neither before prison nor in prison did I know about any such thing).

From the very beginning of the war in 2014, the KRAS sect (Confederation of Revolutionary Anarcho-Syndicalists) called the Russian aggression a "civil war" and took a so-called "equidistant" position – condemning both sides. The opportunity to have such a position is a privilege on the part of those who are in a safe (or relatively safe) place, who do not go to bed every night thinking: "Will a missile hit my house or someone else's house?"

On February 25, 2022, the day after the full-scale invasion began, KRAS released an "anti-war" statement. I will allow myself to analyze a few quotes from it:

"We demand an immediate cessation of hostilities and the withdrawal of all troops to the borders and lines of separation that existed before the war began." But there is not a single word about

what KRAS considers to be the starting point of the war: if they consider February 22, 2022, to be the starting point, then this is a direct play along with the Kremlin, the Russian state, because the territories that were occupied by Russia from 2014 to February 2022 remain outside the brackets; if they propose to withdraw “all troops to the borders” by 2014, then this is a demand *exclusively* to Russia.

“We call on soldiers sent to fight not to shoot at each other.” If Russian soldiers put down their weapons, the war will end. If the Ukrainians put down their weapons, Ukraine will be conquered, and the war will not end but will continue – only in this case, Ukrainians will be forcibly mobilized by Russia for war with Europe (after all, Russian politicians and propagandists have repeatedly threatened other countries with war and missile attacks). The key to peace in Ukraine is not in Ukraine, but in Russia.

In March 2022, the anarchist women’s group Moiras from Spain interviewed a Russian representative of the KRAS (as a non-imperialist [*sarcasm*]) about the events in Ukraine. In this interview, the representative of KRAS excluded the vast majority of Ukrainian anarchists from anarchists (again, what a non-imperial position [*sarcasm*]). In the same interview, the KRAS representative talks about the numerous anti-war protests in Russia. As you know, practice is the criterion of truth. However, I would like to remind you that the war is still going on – a year and a half after that interview. And all this time, Russians have been going to military registration and enlistment offices at the first call, when there were no criminal or administrative penalties for failing to report to the military registration and enlistment office; many went on their own initiative.

As for the other anarchist organization, Autonomous Action, they barely managed to issue a cautious condemnation of Russian aggression on the eve of the full-scale invasion. I find their “no to the war” position, which they use in their campaign materials, extremely pathetic. Because, in my opinion, any position that does

not include the goal – most importantly – of contributing to the military defeat of Russia and the victory of Ukraine, is pathetic. They publish materials in memory of those anarchists who fought in Ukraine against Russia. But, for example, an article by a great “analyst” Vladimir Platonenko about Dmitry Petrov has a lot of loud pathetic words and phrases, but the factual side is distorted. Take the phrase: “Nevertheless, the Ecologist[8] did not merge with the supporters of the Ukrainian state. It is no coincidence that he was not in the army, but in the home defense forces.” According to the author’s logic, it turns out that standing in the ranks of the army is something shameful and unacceptable for an anarchist. I have to disappoint him, because at the very least, the home defense is an integral part of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the army. I sincerely feel sorry for those who read such analytics. I was also surprised by a section in the news editorial of Autonomous Action called “Trends of Order and Chaos: Our Russian World”. If this were a joke, it would be quite cringey. But no, they write: “Belonging to the culture that has formed around the Russian language is not something to be ‘canceled’ or ashamed of. The ‘Russian world’ is a concept that should be wrested from the Kremlin crooks. In the process of overthrowing the regime, we will definitely succeed in it.” I don’t know whether it is worth explaining to our Western comrades how this “Russian world” was historically created. In a nutshell, it was created by colonizing “non-Russian” lands, by genocides and deportations. “Russian” identity is not ethnic, but cultural, which they themselves admit in their text. “Russian culture” is imbued with imperialism. That is, it is an identity that can be acquired and that can also be abandoned. They don’t want to give up their imperial “Russian” identity, but want to carry this imperial cultural heritage into the future. Well, I’m not on the same road with such “comrades”.

I would also like to mention BOAK (Combat Organization of Anarcho-Communists). A few years ago, this organization wrote a text called “Anarchist Solution for Crimea”, which made me very

As for me personally, since the first days of the full-scale invasion, I have only become more convinced of the vitality of the immortal popular anarchist element, which awakens at critical historical moments, in times of great ordeals. People were lining up at military recruitment offices – they were motivated not by the defense of the state, but by the defense of freedom. There were a lot of grassroots volunteer initiatives aimed at reducing each other's suffering and inconvenience: helping the army, helping evacuated IDPs (internally displaced persons), and helping those who remained in frontline settlements. There is no way to list them all, as there is a large kaleidoscope of grassroots initiatives. Large fundraisers for equipment and transport were closed in a matter of days, sometimes even hours.

As for the disagreements and discussions in the contemporary anarchist movement, they are inherent in the multicolored anarchist movement and have accompanied it throughout its existence. But after being lectured by nobodies, after the dismissals of the anarchist movement by armchair scholars, after the anti-NATO rhetoric and criticism of supplying Ukraine with weapons so desperately needed to repel the aggression of fascist Russia, after the justification of Russian aggression and its crimes in Ukraine, after shifting the responsibility to Ukraine – whether because of “Nazism” in Ukraine or something else – on the part of some European anarchists, I became a little disappointed in the modern anarchist movement, for reasons I outlined in my answers to the previous questions. And to be honest, after that, all these discussions began to disgust me. So I stopped following them closely. Because regardless of the opinions of anarchists from other countries, I firmly believe that this war is existential, and our physical existence depends on its outcome. However, despite all these sad circumstances, international solidarity still exists, and this is very encouraging.

angry because I lost my home and served more than five years in prison due to the occupation of Crimea. So I will quote my other post from FB, this one from August 4, 2020, with my response to this article:

Instead of condemning the Russian aggression and the Kremlin's imperial ambitions and the repressions that followed in the occupied territories (it is also worth noting that 2014 served as a turning point within Russia itself – from that time on, the level of repression only increased; As Aleksey Polikhovich noted when describing the situation, “We were serving prison time in a still-democratic country”); instead of condemning the growing military budget in a country where people permanently live like beggars, these anarchists found nothing better to do than to speculate about the status of Crimea. It takes so much nerve to refer to the “will of the majority of the territory's inhabitants” after six years of terror and repression in the occupied territory, annexed as a result of a “special military operation” launched on February 20(!), 2014, forgetting to mention how the public opinion of Crimeans was prepared for the so-called “referendum” by the state propaganda and kidnappings, how the “Russian World” supporters were brought in from Russia, how the “referendum” itself and the vote count were conducted, and that the observers were friends of Russia from European far-right organizations and parties! I would not even be surprised if these “anarchists” call the armed conflict with Russia in eastern Ukraine a “civil war”.

A truly anarchist solution for Crimea would be an economic and armed struggle against the police state and tyranny, and a preparation for an uprising – so that those who are now in prison on trumped-up criminal cases, as well as those who were forced to leave the peninsula for a variety of reasons (from economic reasons to the threat of criminal prosecution), could return home and “jointly, equally, and in solidarity govern their home”. However, as can be seen from the published reports on the activities carried out, the main activity of those who send reports on the actions is con-

centrated in Kyiv and the Kyiv region. And it would be more logical to suggest that “building ties with neighboring and distant regions” should be offered to Russian regions. “Federalization of relations between communities and regions is one of the main elements of the political concept of the revolutionary anarchist movement.” I cannot but agree with this. Let the Far East, Siberia, Ural, Karelia, the North Caucasus, the Kuban, the Don, and other regions build “their own ties with neighboring and distant regions. Some of them may be closer to Russia, others to Ukraine.” Perhaps Königsberg is closer to Germany, and Karelia to Finland. After all, the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation (which is super-centralized and is not actually a federation), in addition to being expensive for taxpayers (all those who produce wealth), also poses a threat to (not only) neighboring countries and liberation movements in them (including anarchist ones).

However, it is worth noting that since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, BOAK has, not only with words but also with deeds, joined the resistance to Russia’s imperial war of aggression, both domestically through guerrilla actions and in Ukraine. Here, it is worth mentioning once again Dmitry Petrov, who was one of the organizers and leaders of the BOAK, and who joined the Ukrainian Defence Forces from the first days of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Unfortunately, he was killed near Bakhmut. He left behind a rich legacy of deeds, texts, and memories from his comrades. He also left a message in the event of his death, in which he talks about his views and motivation to take up arms and join the Ukrainian Defence Forces. However, even in this message he is not free from the myth of a “free Russia”; he writes about the liberation of Russia from oppression – which is an oxymoron, because Russia itself is oppression for the people/peoples who inhabit it, as well as a constant threat and headache for its neighbors. Literally: “I did it for the sake of justice, for the protection of Ukrainian society, and for the liberation of my country, Russia, from oppression.” If he were alive, after Ukraine’s victory, we could discuss this with him over a

glass of beer. Because, although I think he was wrong, he remained a comrade who chose a side in a difficult time, and did not sit on two chairs in a leg-split, did not teach from a safe place what was right and what was wrong.

So, to briefly summarize: the Russian anarchist movement, despite its declared internationalism, has unfortunately, by and large, failed the test of real internationalism – except for anarcho-partisans (who are bringing the end of the war closer, to the extent of their strength and resources) and except for several individuals (some of whom have left Russia, some of whom have stayed). But, despite all this, I am glad that I still have comrades from Russia who really sympathize with us and wish Russia to be defeated and Ukraine to win.

I have not studied the position of the international anarchist movement on Russian aggression in Ukraine. I know that the anarchist movement in southern countries is more dedicated to repeating anti-NATO rhetoric and Russian myths about supposed “Ukrainian Nazism”. I know that comrades from Poland, the Czech Republic, Germany, and the British left support us and help us. For which I thank them very much. We will not forget it.

It is obvious to me that there has been no united left movement since the First International and the disputes between Marx and Bakunin. Which, in addition to purely personal grievances and purely political ambitions within the organization and the international socialist movement as a whole, were also of a fundamentally irreconcilable nature – both on the methods of fighting for socialism and on what is considered socialism. Even then, Bakunin warned of the danger and threat posed by statist, authoritarian versions of “socialism”. It seems to me that, unfortunately, in those countries that were not under the occupation of the USSR, there is a greater belief in leftist unity – a greater level of tolerance for the Reds, for hammers and sickles, etc. And historical experience does not teach contemporaries.