

Anarchist with a gun

Phil Kuznetsov

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In 2012, forces associated with the Kurdistan Workers' Party in Northern Syria successfully ousted the authorities of the Assad regime. As a result, an autonomous territory emerged, claiming to build self-government in the wake of Murray Bukchin's ideas. In recent years, a significant number of anarchists from different countries of the world went on a long journey to this region – Rojhava, to help the revolution with arms. Thus a new (well forgotten old) phenomenon was born. Its name is an anarchist with a gun.

Perhaps since the civil war in Spain (1936–1939) the world has never seen anarchists participated in armed struggle. There were separate anarchist armed groups like the Spanish MIL but it wasn't a mass movement. By the 1990s, this small stream had almost dried up. The falling banner was picked up by heroic loners, such as the Greek Revolutionary Struggle. The situation has dramatically changed with the advent of the Rojhava. But why is the return of the anarchist with a gun so important?

The fact is that the revolutionary process, cardinal changes in society are not possible without armed struggle, since oppressors held political, economic and social power relying on the violence. And now, decades later, in the European and international movement a noticeable number of people have appeared who have the experience and skills of armed struggle.

The flow of left-minded volunteers from the West to the Rojhava Self-Defense Forces is often compared with the Interbrigade of the Spanish Civil Forces. Of course, it's a great exaggeration. The mismatch is in the amount of volunteers. The number of International Brigades is estimated at about 60,000 people. Some time ago, in one of the documentaries, the representative of the Self-Defense Forces estimated the number of foreign volunteers at about 600 people. Several years have passed since the filming, but during this time the number has hardly exceeded a thousand.

This is not a reason for great despondency. It seems that the era of mass politics with gigantic trade unions and parties is a thing of the past. However, dissatisfaction with the authorities and active anti-government protests in the last decade have increased noticeably. So it is still possible to change the world.

The good news is that these 600+ volunteers from Europe are mostly anarchists. At least two anarchist unions are known in the Self Defense Forces – IRPGF and RUIS, as well as a scattering of individual volunteers in different parts of the YPG. After returning home, these people will bring to the movement a different radical tradition and combat experience. They have the potential to change the vector of modern anarchism. However, it is not only about practical experience. An

anarchist with a gun, an armed revolutionary is also an important image and symbol. Even more than just a symbol.

It is easy to argue: all these poses with guns are continuous infantilism and bravado. And gun fetishism – boyishness and show but... Do not hurry! The ideological meaning of the armed struggle is that when people take up arms they break with the system completely. Since that moment they are totally out of submission. And here comes the idea of the struggle till the victory, till the state and its oppression system are destroyed. And all this can be done only with arms.

That is why, and not at all because of fetishism, the view of organized like-minded people with Kalashnikovs in their hands gives us optimism and strong belief that the transformation of the world is possible.

Also it is necessary to say that there is also a tragic aspect of the return of anarchists to arms. Since 2012, at least a dozen of our like-minded people died in the fields of the Syrian war. This sad reality is at the same time a moment of power. It should fill us with an understanding of the seriousness and danger of our goals. The victims are real, they are not on the pages of books, but here.

The memory of the fallen comrades, as well as armed determination, are the most important factors of our struggle. The anarchist of our time, the optimist of changes – that is what a man with a gun means.

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Long live Revolution!

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“Phil Kuznetsov” has been identified as Dmitry Petrov, who died fighting in the Battle of
Bakhmut on 19 April 2023.

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