

The Evolution of Militant-Anarchism

Revolutionary Action

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Revolutionary Action, as an organization that promotes militant anarchism and has been promoting this concept for almost ten years now, has decided to talk about the significant evolution of this concept. The evolution has touched not only the views on practice and methods, but also the views on the organization, on the strategy and tactics of the anarchist movement. In general, we believe that no concept should stand still, but on the contrary, it should keep up with the times, respond to new challenges that reality throws at us and the movement.

The classical concept of militant anarchism was born in deep contradiction with the subcultural environment and anarchism of the way of life. It became obvious to some anarchists that the further development of subcultural anarchism would lead nowhere, that lifestyle anarchism as a whole could not be considered a political movement. There were also obvious problems with anarchists in relation to violence and the possibility of its use. Some of the subcultural anarchists were principled pacifists, some, despite their declared readiness to use it, in practice could not oppose anything to either the police or the ultra-right. The social march in 2007 clearly showed that there were only a few among the anarchists who were ready to fight the Nazis, and many of our comrades who participated could not give any rebuff. For some activists then it became clear that without a clearly articulated concept of anarchism as a radical political, specifically political, movement, our ideas will remain the lot of narrow music venues and gatherings after concerts. A manifesto for militant anarchism was written, followed by the publication of a pamphlet called *Militant Anarchism: Theory and Practice*.

In the manifesto and, in more detail, in the brochure, the view of the anarchist movement as a disciplined movement with a high responsibility of each participant is revealed. It was proposed not to wear flashy clothes, give up addictions, go in for sports, organize the defense of anarchist events. Practical advice was given about activism and the need to make the ideas of anarchism more open and accessible to people who are outside the subculture. In many ways, questions were raised there for the first time about how the movement looks from the outside for those who were not familiar with anarchism at all. It was proposed to work on a common image of the anarchist and the anarchist movement in order to increase the popularity of the movement and attract potential activists from different backgrounds that had nothing to do with the hardcore or punk environment.

Despite the fact that this approach was perceived negatively by supporters of lifestyle anarchism and subculturists, it brought its results. Now, among the activists organizing around the

concept of militant-anarchism, there are no systematically drinking anarchists, using drugs, and few smoking. Sport was no longer perceived as a “fascist” practice, elements of hardcore and punk subcultures left the clothes and appearance.

The events in Greece in 2008 brought a new milestone in the development of the concept. Then, in connection with the murder of a Greek anarchist, the streets of Athens were on fire, and the anarchists participated in some of the loudest street battles with the police. The event could not but affect the anarchists in Belarus, who lived under constant pressure from the police dictatorship. In 2009, the first insurgent cells (“Friends of Freedom”) appeared and began to actively operate. From more timid actions, they moved on to more decisive and courageous ones, the culmination of which can be called an action against the Russian embassy in August 2010. The consequences for the anarchists were quite devastating — the movement, for the most part not faced with a repressive system, survived dozens of arrests and hundreds of searches. People across Belarus were arrested, searched, interrogated with a lie detector. The Belarusian state was noticeably frightened by the radical struggle of the anarchists and, under the silence of the opposition media, decided to use the entire arsenal against the anarchists (including re-detention, press chambers, recruitment of former comrades).

After the repressions of the anarchists in 2010, the insurrectionary concept in militant-anarchism was developed in the form of a brochure — Anarchy 21. There, insurrectionists (rebel anarchists) talk about the practice of radical autonomous groups, about their vision of the organization and movement as an autonomous federation, and so on. Unfortunately, it can be stated that the organizational and practical plans of Anarchy 21 in many respects have never been translated into reality, and have remained recommendations. This can be associated with a noticeable decline in the movement after the arrests, the lack of a sufficient number of experienced activists, sometimes a noticeable overestimation of the possibilities of the movement and underestimation of law enforcement agencies. In general, despite this, Anarchy 21 laid down important ethical and aesthetic aspects of modern Belarusian anarchism. The brochure drew attention to the roots of the anarchist movement, to the need to plan actions, organize our internal work, competently conduct media work and promote our aesthetics.

After some decline between 2011 and 2013, the anarchist movement began to assert itself again. Together with him, the anarchist militants began to make themselves known. They increasingly moved away from the senseless holding of actions without purpose and planning. Anarchist agitation has almost completely gone from concerts to the streets, social conflicts and factories. After the repressions, the attitude towards insurgent practices was revised. Arson and radical actions with damage to property began to be seen as a method, and not as an end in itself and a way of war with the state. It became obvious that in the conditions of the total domination of the state, the absolute apathy of the masses and the lack of mass support for the anarchist movement, the insurrectionists are very quickly neutralized by the security forces. At the same time, such actions were not rejected in principle as a method, now they were approached from the point of view of an instrument, finding specific situations for it to be used when it was expedient and effective and did not cause catastrophic destruction in the movement. Anarchists increasingly began to get into the opposition and non-state media in the form of the most radical and determined street force. A significant aspect of the movement was the security and anonymity of the participants. Anarchist collectives and organizations have written a number of articles and brochures on the topic of interrogations, information security, security at actions.

More often, questions were raised about attracting more people to the movement, how to achieve this, how to ensure the growth of anarchist militants and help newcomers become experienced activists. At the same time, ideas of survivalism (the practice of survival in the natural environment) and preparation for major cataclysms began to slightly penetrate the concept. The view of the anarchist organization also transformed, and the concept of concentric circles became increasingly popular among supporters of militant anarchism. This concept, proposed by the Brazilian platformists, turned out to be the very method of organization that our organization already used. It was based on the opinion that the influence of anarchists or any other political force extends to their environment with different strengths and, therefore, it is required to plan some serious campaigns or, moreover, create organizations with the most convinced comrades. In fact, the concept of the Brazilian anarchists only systematized our practice and gave it a practical justification (which was expressed in its adaptation to Belarusian conditions in the Regional Practice brochure)

Anarchists close to militant anarchism began to think along the lines of an organized political movement. Set specific goals for the foreseeable future, look for methods to achieve them, think more about how accessible and understandable our agitation and propaganda is, what kind of people the movement is looking for and who joins it, what methods to use to popularize ideas.

Two important events in the world helped to finalize the concept of militant-anarchism as it is now, which changed the entire political landscape on the planet as a whole. The first is Maidan in Ukraine. The successful and radical uprising of the masses, which, despite the killings and the resistance of the security forces, was able to succeed, inspired many. Despite the lack of influence of anarchists on the events on the Maidan, despite the hegemony of the right on radicalism in Ukraine, anarchists saw something that could give the radical movement strength and opportunity. Denying the goals of the ultra-right, their values and, often, their methods, we realized that the dizzying success of the nationalists in Ukraine is connected not with their ideas, but with successful participation in a landmark event for Ukrainian society. The right-wingers have established themselves as fighters against dictatorship (in practice they are by no means being) and from this they have received unprecedented growth.

The second event was the war in Syria (although this also includes the events in the ATO zone, in Ukraine). After the outbreak of the civil war in Syria and its culmination in 2013, all illusions about the peaceful possibility of resolving the conflict with the state were dispelled. The Syrian conflict shows that even if the issue is just a change of one elite to another, then those in power can arrange a real “bloodbath” in order not to cede their throne to anyone. The general lack of principle, the readiness to sacrifice thousands of people on the fronts of the war, emphasized the classic anarchist notion that power can never be “disbanded” peacefully. The conflict in the ATO zone showed that even if some serious changes take place in a single country, the threat of foreign invasion remains as relevant as before.

For anarchists, the military conflicts described above became the wake-up call that showed that the ability to fight and throw Molotov cocktails alone is not enough. Modern conflicts require from us not only the ability to fight, not only the ability to make a Molotov cocktail. They require the ability to create their units, tactics and military affairs. If we want to successfully resist obscurantists and oppressors, we must be able to fight. Similar ideas have been raised before, but they were able to finally take shape and become an important aspect of the movement only in 2014. The same time coincided with an increase in the activity of anarchists on the streets and the repressions that followed.

Militant-anarchism in the course of its evolution has become closer and closer to merge with the concept of militant in its original understanding. Reality itself, the historical experience of anarchists and the events around us led to an understanding of anarchism as a decisive, revolutionary force that aims at liberation not through the “evolution of consciousness”, but through a struggle that could take on an armed character. We realized that every method and tool needs to have its place, and that this place must be relevant in the context of the existing situation around us. What may be extremely effective at one moment may not make sense at another. What makes sense in one context is meaningless in another.

Strategic thinking, the need for agitation and propaganda work, the creation of a suitable aesthetic image of anarchists, training in military and tactical practices, the concept of concentric circles — this is what formulated the ideological and practical provisions of militant-anarchism at the moment.

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