

Interview with ‘Priama Diia’ union members

Solidarity Collectives

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Anti-authoritarian self-organization in Ukraine today encompasses a wide range of initiatives, projects, organizations, ideas, and practices.

Today, we would like to present a short interview with members of the “Priama Diia” (Direct Action) student union about their recent actions and projects, their views on contemporary activism in Ukraine, and the pressure the union has faced from law enforcement agencies.

“Priama Diia” is a student trade union and a successor to a grassroots anarchist tradition whose modern history dates back to 2008. After several generations of activists and periods of inactivity, the current fourth generation of the organization brings together hundreds of students across Ukraine.

One of the union’s recent campaigns focuses on the struggle for affordable public transport in Kyiv — an issue that, under wartime conditions, directly affects people’s ability to study, work, and move around the city.

Tell us about your role in the campaign against the increase in public transport fares. Why did you join the campaign?

“Priama Diia” became an active participant in the campaign: our activists joined protests, put up posters, took part in public consultations, sent official appeals to the Kyiv City Administration, and shared information about the protests through our social media platforms. This active involvement stems from the fact that the issue of affordable public transport directly affects students. Because dormitories are located far from universities and private means of transportation are unaffordable, students are forced to rely constantly on marshrutkas, trolleybuses, and the metro to get to their places of study. This means that the cost of transportation—which under the new fares will amount to *at least* a quarter of a standard scholarship—is a constant and unavoidable expense for students. A nearly fourfold increase in fares will only intensify the financial pressure on students, who will now find it even harder to meet their basic needs.

Who will be most affected by the increase?

The change will be particularly noticeable for students who live on the outskirts or outside the city and are forced to plan their trips carefully and count every penny. At the same time, access to the city will be restricted not only for young people, but also for so-called pendulum migrants: teachers, nurses, shop assistants, construction workers, technical staff, service-sector workers—as well as elderly people, homeless people, and other vulnerable groups.

Why is public transport a political issue for you?

Public transport is essential for living a dignified life in the city and for equal access to its infrastructure. When we are forced to pay more in order to exercise the basic right to freedom of movement—and, along with it, the rights to work, education, and so on—our freedom is being restricted. The fact that neoliberal policies make low-income sections of the population less mobile and less free is a political problem. This decision embodies a particular vision of who should have access to the city and who should be excluded from social life. Cuts to the social sphere can limit the ability of the majority of citizens to participate equally in society, the economy, and politics.

Social protests during wartime are often criticised with the argument that “now is not the time.” Do you encounter this, and how do you respond?

We encounter this accusation quite often, but by the fifth year of the war it has lost all credibility. What benefits the enemy is precisely the idea that people should put their lives on hold and surrender their civil liberties. Freedom and security are a false dichotomy. For many people, resistance to Russian imperialism has acquired not only a negative but also a positive meaning: we are fighting not only *against* subjugation, but also *for* democracy and justice. In other words, we are fighting for a particular vision of Ukraine—one that is independent, autonomous, anti-authoritarian, classless, progressive, feminist, and socialist, in [Davyd] Chychkan’s words.

In this sense, protests against abuses of power, anti-social and authoritarian laws, corruption scandals, and so on become a continuation of this struggle. We have come to see that the Ukrainian people’s victory in the war does not depend on the impunity of those in power, but, quite the contrary, on the free expression of the people’s will.

Unaccountable power also makes it easier to profit from the war and deepens social inequality, which only increases resentment among the population and destabilises civil society by leaving people unable to meet their basic needs. All of this has a negative impact on our country’s military capacity. So social protest is, in fact, a very timely issue.

Has your strategy of activism changed following the public pressure on former Priama Diia activist Maksym Shumakov?

The criminal case against Shumakov has deepened our distrust of the security services, heightened concerns about the safety of our activists, and highlighted the importance of remaining visible. It became the culmination of prolonged pressure from the law enforcement agencies on our organisation and on progressive initiatives more broadly. Many comrades felt anxious because of how close and personally relevant these repressions had become.

However, the worst thing we can do in this situation is become frightened and start self-censoring. We must not stop speaking about anarchist and democratic-socialist issues. Additionally, we should critically examine the decommunization laws under which attempts are being made to imprison Maksym, because reactionary forces promoted them, contain numerous contradictions, and pose a threat to academic freedom. More broadly, we need to resist attempts to suppress independent trade union activity and marginalise left-wing ideas, gradually shifting the Overton window in our direction.

Where do you draw the line between necessary wartime restrictions and a situation in which the war begins to be used to justify the curtailment of social and political rights?

The line is drawn where authorities could avoid restricting civil liberties but choose not to. The fare increase clearly illustrates this selectivity in deciding who is expected to tighten their belts and who, instead, is granted privileges. In particular, the Kyiv City Council still undercharges for renting municipal land or doesn’t implement adequate taxation of the oligarchs’ predominantly

offshore businesses. We are constantly being forced to make concessions and are told that such changes are “necessary” or “unavoidable”. Yet the authorities’ actions reveal a deliberate policy of protecting private wealth while creating public scarcity.

Just as with the pressure on the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU) and Specialised Anti-Corruption Prosecutor’s Office (SAPO), the push to pass the new Civil Code, and Fedorov’s dismissal, we see policies that create more room for corruption while undermining Ukraine’s defence capabilities and silencing independent journalists and military personnel. Systematic restrictions on the most powerless can no longer be justified by the war.

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