

# Interview with an anti-militarist from Odessa

Vadym Yakovlev

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**1) Please introduce yourself briefly to the readers of our magazine. Are you from Ukraine, where you were born and spent your youth?**

Hi. My name is Vadym Yakovlev, I'm Ukrainian queer writer and journalist and I'm against the war and nationalism. I was born in Odesa, the largest southern multicultural city in Ukraine, a few months before the collapse of the USSR. My mother is Ukrainian and my father is Russian. Their fathers were military. My father worked in a factory. With the collapse of the USSR, the factory was closed, and my father lost his job. It affected my family and my childhood. I grew up in Odesa, but one year before I escaped Ukraine I was living in Lviv, the biggest city of the Western part of Ukraine. At home my relatives spoke Russian and Ukrainian, so I never focused on issues such as national identity. My family was an unhappy international family that lost a lot with the collapse of state communism in Ukraine. I guess all of that influenced me a lot in my search of my true political views and my desire to do something that can have influence on society.

**2) You left Ukraine, what led you to this decision?**

On the one hand, I could no longer work in Ukraine because of my political beliefs. The Ukrainian intelligentsia, journalists and artists as a community with the beginning of the war decided to become privileged elite propagandists in the service of the state. I didn't want to be a propagandist, so I lost the opportunity to publish my articles. And if you publicly express in Ukraine the views I have, authorities can put you in the jail. On the other hand, of course due to my views, I didn't want to go to war on the frontline. That's why I escaped.

**3) What is your attitude towards war and antimilitarism?**

Much of my work in Ukraine was related to my anti-patriotic beliefs. My articles and participation in art projects were very often devoted to criticism of Ukrainian patriotism, Ukrainian nationalism and the mainstream privileged "pro-Western" and pro-war civil and cultural Ukrainian elite. I have always been interested in anti-war art and anti-war activism. Since 2022, I had to start doing this, even at the cost of losing the opportunity to stay and work in my native country and the loss of close friends who abandoned me because of my beliefs.

**4) The war in Ukraine changed a lot of things. Are you in touch with your friends back home? What are their attitudes towards the war? How do they live**

As I said in answer to the previous question, I lost most of my friends from the privileged art scene and the journalist-activist community. Almost all of them became propagandists, receiv-

ing support from the state and Western foundations. I also lost touch with the majority of the Ukrainian leftists, who are supporting militarism, nationalism and NATO. This type of leftists is supporting by the state and Western foundations too. But I'm still in touch with my friends, who are don't work with the state and have nothing to do with privileged classes. They support me and my anti-war views. A lot of them, if they are men, are living an awful life now, cause they have to hide all the time at their apartments in the fear of getting outside. Ukrainian army is kidnapping people from the street and sending them on the frontline without their permission. And majority of people with man gender marker in the documents are not allowed by the law to left the country.

**5)Have many people, including anarchists joined the army and left antimilitarism? And not much is known about them? Maybe they are afraid. Do they exist? Are you in contact with them?**

Regarding anti-war anarchists in Ukraine, we have anti-war collective called Assembly. They are from Kharkiv and have their own website where they are publishing anti-war and anti-conscription texts. This group of anarchists is anonymous and they hide the names of their team members. This is the only way to conduct any anti-war activity in Ukraine. There was only one Ukrainian organization that did not hide the names of its members and openly spoke out against the war – Ukrainian Pacifist Movement. The Security Service of Ukraine accused them of support of Russia and sent its leader to court. After that, the organization significantly softened its public position, fearing prison. Many Ukrainian leftists sided with the war, it seems to me, because of conformity. They are afraid to express their real position or simply don't even have one, as it seems to me, and just are following mainstream trend. But these are just my assumptions. In Ukraine, as an authoritarian militaristic country, it is extremely unsafe to be against war.

**6)What about Ukrainians in exile? Are they doing any anti-war activities? Are they organizing in workplaces?**

Lately, many Ukrainian anti-war initiatives have appeared abroad. For example, Ukrainians are now organizing demonstrations against mobilization and human rights violations in Ukraine. These demonstrations are taking place in Germany, Italy, and France. Often, these actions are organized by Ukrainian leftists who have nothing to do with the pro-war Ukrainian left mainstream such as the so-called "Ukrainian anti-authoritarians" or Solidarity Collectives. All these groups of anti-war Ukrainian leftists are not financed by anyone, they are a personal initiative of convinced and active young people. There will be more of these actions, and I am in active communication with the organizers and members of this initiatives, this is very inspiring! In addition, in the West there are a certain number of Ukrainian scientists and artists who are against the war and who are constantly being marginalized and silenced here in the West. But we have all been silenced for too long, our voices have been erased for too long, and now we are increasingly trying to build horizontal connections at various levels, organizing an anti-war front here abroad against the war and the propagandists. There are many more of us than even we think.

**7)The media is silent about the forced mobilization of the Ukrainian government. Rarely does information about deserters leak out? What can you tell us about it?**

Nobody knows the exact number of deserters from the Ukrainian side, but according to official and unofficial statistics, there are about 150–200 thousand people! These are huge numbers. The official Ukrainian media are controlled by the state or the Security Service of Ukraine. Ukrainians mainly consume information from anonymous news channels on Telegram or TikTok. It is there that videos of violence against civilians by the Ukrainian army are constantly published. These

videos, full of terrible scenes and evidence of human rights violations, do not make it into the official media. The Ukrainian authorities are constantly trying to find the authors of anonymous Telegram channels who criticize the actions of the Ukrainian army or advocate for peace, and put them in prison. Sometimes the authorities succeed. The Ukrainian government, police and the Security Service of Ukraine do not hesitate to use any methods to silence alternative voices. For example, the police recently arrested the mother of a blogger who is abroad and speaks out against forced mobilization, for publishing his post! There are also unofficial ways to shut up dissenters. I remember one teenager who had his own channel on Telegram, where he criticized Ukrainian nationalism and mobilization. He identified himself as an anarchist. Fascists came to his home for a “conversation”, after which he publicly renounced his beliefs. But the pro-war Ukrainian leftists, who are propagandists and accomplices of all these crimes against Ukrainians, will never tell you about such things.

**8)Do you have acquaintances who have deserted or evaded the draft? How can we in Czechoslovakia help them?**

I know people who have illegally fled the country, and I have many acquaintances and friends in Ukraine who are hiding from the army and conscription. Perhaps, over time, it will be necessary to create initiatives to help such people within the framework of anti-war Ukrainian movements abroad, which have only just begun to emerge. If such initiatives appear, I hope that there will be people in the Czech Republic and Slovakia who will want to help these Ukrainians.

**9)What message would you give to Ukrainian and Russian workers at home and abroad?**

The only thing I want to convey to those who are not part of the privileged classes (and this is not only the proletariat), regardless of their nationality and location: never trust those who build their happiness on your exploitation, marginalisation and systemic discrimination, and especially do not be fools and do not participate in their wars, it is simply stupid!

**10)Thank you for the interview and if you have anything else to say, we would be happy to.**

Thank you, comrade, for interviewing me.

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<https://anarcomuk.uk/2025/01/05/interview-with-an-anti-militarist-from-odessa/>  
The following interview was carried out by comrades from the Československé anarchistické sdružení – CAS a Czech Internationalist Anarchist Group.

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