

Russian Anarchists on the Wagner Mutiny

Statements from Three Anarchist Organizations

Иркутск анархистский (ДИАна), ВОАК, Автоном

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Early on June 24, Vladimir Putin addressed Russia about the unfolding rebellion of the Wagner private military company, saying that Yevgeny Prigozhin's rebellion is "pushing the country toward anarchy and fratricide."

This is a misuse of words. Fratricide has long been the rule under Putin. Torturing and assassinating dissidents was fratricide. Invading Ukraine was fratricide. Both the Wagner company and the Russian military have made fratricide their profession. Anarchy is the opposite of fratricide: it is the condition that prevails when people do not compete to rule each other. Totalitarianism always leads to bloody conflicts over power.

Looking at the situation in Russia, one can't help but think of the civil war that erupted in Sudan between the army and the Rapid Support Forces earlier this year. Looking to suppress powerful social movements for liberation, the government equipped the mercenaries of the Rapid Support Forces, only to end up fighting with them for control of the country.

This sort of widespread violence is the inevitable end result of militarization. As governments and corporations rely more and more on brute force to suppress social unrest, channeling more and more resources towards police and private security, they are creating the conditions for horrific civil wars on an ever-widening scale. The civil strife that prevails in Sudan and looms in Russia today may well break out elsewhere tomorrow if we do not succeed in shifting the course of our society on a global scale.¹

Here, we have hurriedly translated three statements from Russian anarchist groups. All of them, of necessity, are underground groups. The first is based in Siberia; the second is the Anarcho-Communist Combat Organization, which we interviewed last year; and the third is the editorial collective of Avtonom, arguably Russia's most significant surviving anarchist publishing platform.

Since the following statements appeared, Prigozhin has announced that his forces that were bound for Moscow have turned around, following negotiations with the ruler of Belarus, Aleksandr Lukashenko. Prigozhin may have bitten off more than he can chew, but so has Putin in Ukraine—or else he would not have needed Prigozhin in the first place.

It remains to be seen how this crisis will play out in Russia in the long run. In Turkey, the failed coup attempt of 2016 enabled President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to consolidate power, but any sign of weakness and disunity can only imperil Putin. The volatile and unpredictable situation that our comrades predict in Russia is likely still ahead of us. It will be for the best if the forces contending in it are not two rival totalitarian despots, or at least, not *only* them.

Movement of Irkutsk Anarchists

In the current situation around the Wagner mutiny, there is no side we can choose but ourselves.

The same can be said for the large part of the population—neither the Putin regime nor those competing with it for authority will act in the interests of all the peoples in Russia.

At the moment, we can prepare for a variety of possible outcomes. One cannot rule out the possibility that people's self-defense groups, whose main task in a scenario of civil war inside the country might be organizing the safety of the people, as well as the logistical networking

¹ In retrospect, the events of January 6, 2021 in Washington, DC may give us the slightest foretaste of what a conflict pitting far-right police officers and soldiers against the United States government might look like.

for providing food and basic necessities. No one should be completely defenseless against the mercenary military formations and the Russian army, and one of the main weapons available to us all is solidarity and mutual aid.

At the same time, we should think about what to do if the current state authority collapses in the city of Irkutsk or in the entire Irkutsk region.

We advocate for organizing open popular councils, assemblies, and forums on all the most important issues of public life, including economy, provisioning, the conservation of nature, human rights, self-defense, education, and city services. In all of these structures, we would like to see independent committees of women and Indigenous peoples.²

In the meantime, we are watching the situation unfold. Putin is already talking on the television, saying that he fears the destruction of the state system and the onset of “anarchy”! As anarchists, we can say that the dictator is rightly afraid of anarchy: after all, it implies that his power and the idea of “the Russian world” will cease to exist, and that instead, society will begin to function according to the principles of self-government, decentralization, and federalism.

We believe that anarchy is still quite a long way off in this country. But we are not powerless in the current situation; we can prepare ourselves for anything that may happen and watch carefully to see if there will be a moment that will be favorable to all those here who yearn for freedom, tired of Putin’s regime. We would like all who consider this to think about what they would do in that case, and team up with others who can be trusted and relied upon.

This is the least and most basic thing that can be done right now.

Combat Organization of Anarcho-Communists

We have indeed moved into a new phase of this turning point in history. It has long been clear that those at the top of the power structure would begin to gnaw at each other soon; it was only a matter of time.

Now, the main task of the anarchist and liberation movements both in Russia and abroad is to consolidate the available forces, to acquire what is needed, to analyze the moment, to establish communication channels that have fallen apart, and to be ready to act.

We do not flatter ourselves: the onset of this moment could take some time. From the February revolution (during which the generals participated in removing the Tsar) to the October revolution, nine months passed. From the Kornilov rebellion to October, two months.

But one thing is clear. First, the moment of direct armed confrontation is nearer than ever before. Second, neither the Putin regime nor Prigozhinsky are our friends. In this fight between two cannibals, anarchists should stay away—let them bleed each other as much as possible. That way, they won’t be able to disturb people in the future.

But this period of waiting for the right moment should be spent to our benefit. And all the time, at every moment—to prepare and increase your readiness to act—but also to analyze the situation every moment, to be ready to start acting, leaving everything behind, even if the readiness is insufficient. Because even worse than starting early, rushing ahead of the moment, is to oversleep the moment when you could turn the story in the right direction.

² The region known as Irkutsk is located in Southeastern Siberia and is home to several Indigenous peoples; the history of the colonization of Siberia roughly parallels the timeline and events of the colonization of the so-called Americas.

Also, we would like to say something on the topic of calls to attack military registration and enlistment offices and other government buildings right now.

We strongly disagree with this call. Right now, the enemy is preparing to repel an attack—not from partisans, but from mutineers with weapons. Attacking such objects right now means wasting your resources, practically attacking the fortified fortresses of the enemy with bare hands.

The guerrilla must strike where the empire is vulnerable, not where the armor is. Strike where the enemy is not waiting. Therefore, right now, it is possible to attack objects far from cities. The enemy has gathered forces all together for defense? That means he has exposed the distant frontiers and access roads. Attack gas and oil pipelines, attack railroad tracks leading to military facilities (but far from them), attack power lines and water pipes that feed police and military bases. But not the objects themselves, where the enemy is waiting.

Or, if the risk is too great—spend this time preparing for an armed uprising.

A lively and combat-ready partisan who can take part in future confrontations is now a hundred times more important than a partisan who threw an improvised munition at a cop and was shot dead by a stressed out cop.

And don't forget the Counter-Terrorist Operation regime.³ Even if you decide not to attack a cop, but a power line 5 kilometers away, the risks of being caught on the way under the CTO regime increase many times over. Evaluate sensibly and do not take unnecessary risks.

Avtonom / Autonomous Action

Now, as this statement is being published, we still cannot fully predict the development of events around the “Wagner rebellion” in a relatively long-term view. But we can definitely expect two seemingly opposite trends: first, increased repression against ordinary citizens, not only by state security forces, and second, simultaneously, an increase in chaos, when the opposing sides leave people facing the problems that they themselves created.

Of course, Prigozhin is no better than Putin: now some fascists are fighting against others. Any authoritarian power eventually gives rise to bloody conflicts.

In such a situation, the demand for self-organization, the creation and strengthening of grassroots social ties, and mutual assistance will spread. People will create new initiatives, new movements. The task of anarchists is to make every effort to help to create and participate in grassroots structures, creating new associations and strengthening the interaction between existing ones.

We have already written that there is no “our side” in the clash between the “Wagnerites” and the “official” state structures. In the ongoing squabble, all of them pursue only their own interests and will only defend themselves. It is better for all other people not to risk themselves in someone else's struggle and, if possible, stay away from collision points.

But if we want to create an alternative to both of these monsters, then we must learn to unite to solve our problems, support the struggle to end the war and repression, defend ourselves against violence, and defend our interests and rights. Only in this way will we be able to take part in the construction of a new society to replace the bankrupt regime and the gangs of thugs that it has raised.

We stand in solidarity with our comrades from Irkutsk who write:

³ In Moscow, the Moscow region, and the Voronezh region, the government introduced a Counter-Terrorist Operation regime on June 24 in response to the mutiny of Yevgeny Prigozhin and the Wagner company.

Putin is already talking on the television, saying that he fears the destruction of the state system and the onset of “anarchy”! As anarchists, we can say that the dictator is rightly afraid of anarchy: after all, it implies that his power and the idea of “the Russian world” will cease to exist, and that instead, society will begin to function according to the principles of self-government, decentralization, and federalism.

Where state control over society and repression will weaken, anarchists should use the opportunities that open up to spread anarchist ideas both in word and in deed. Now, news of riots in the prison colonies and pre-trial detention centers is coming. We need to push for the release of political prisoners and other victims of arbitrary power.

No matter how the rebellion that is unfolding right now ends, a new life must grow from below, from the demands of the broad sectors of society. To make this possible, we all need structures of self-government and self-organization. Unite.

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