

Under Fire between the Lines

Russian anarchists during the 1993 Yeltsin coup

Yaroslav Leontyev & Peter Ryabov

2001

Moscow in early October 1993 was the scene of a bloody showdown between the authoritarian pro-Western President Boris Yeltsin and his opponents in the Russian parliament, a large section of whom were national-Bolsheviks. In September 1993 President Yeltsin had issued a special decree on presidential rule and the use of a referendum to gain approval for his policies. This was publicly opposed by Vice-President Alexander Rutskoi. When Rutskoi refused to submit his resignation at Yeltsin's request, Yeltsin stripped him of all of his vice-presidential powers. Protests by the Russian parliament and the Chair of the Constitutional Court failed to reinstate Rutskoi's powers although he retained the title of Vice-President. Yeltsin removed Rutskoi as Vice-President on charges of corruption, an action opposed by the parliament. Yeltsin then issued a decree dissolving parliament, which responded by declaring Rutskoi President. Many deputies obeyed Yeltsin's order to disband, but about 100 deputies and several hundred armed supporters led by Rutskoi and speaker Ruslan Khasbulatov occupied the parliament building, also known as the White House. A tense stalemate ensued between government and rebel forces and lasted for several days. It was broken when rebel supporters staged an attack on the mayor's building and Moscow's main television complex. The government responded by shelling the White House and putting down suppressing the rebels. It is estimated that over a hundred people were killed.

A meeting of anarchists and non-Stalinist leftists in Moscow on 1st October 1993 agreed to set up a volunteer medical brigade. During the next four days members of the Volunteer Medical Brigade went about their work, often under fire, in places where the rebels and government troops clashed. This provides a perfect example of constructive self-organization, which is all the more impressive because it emerged in a situation which, from an anarchist point of view, was far from being positive and empowering. It puts a human face to a historical event which is otherwise too easily obscured by the big names and parties.

Will Firth, translator.

Translated with financial assistance from the Institute for Anarchist Studies

Yaroslav Leontyev: On 28th September 1993 I went along to a meeting of critically-minded scientists, artists and intellectuals which had been called by deputies of the Moscow City Council and the economics professor A.V. Buzgalin. The speakers expressed their apprehension at the

danger of civil war, and in particular the words of Nikolai Gubenko stuck in my mind. The speakers were very mixed, but the general mood could have been summed up in the words of Tolstoy and Korolenko¹ — “I cannot be silent!” At the meeting I also met the anarchist Damier, members of the Party of Labour, and other people I knew. We arranged to meet again in three days time...

The meeting was held on 1st October in the Dzerzhinski district council building. The opinion which prevailed at the meeting was that the interests of the President and the parliament were alien to socialists and anarchists, but in view of the impending confrontation we were prepared to take a clear non-military stance, the essence of which was to emphasize peace-making. When people later asked us in the Medical Brigade: “Who are you for, the ‘Whites’ or the ‘Reds’?”, we answered that we were for the wounded. At the meeting on 1st October none of us could have imagined what carnage was to come...

At the meeting we decided to set up a volunteer medical brigade. As soon as the meeting finished I set off to “Memorial”². As it turned out, I arrived there just in time for a meeting of the Legal Rights’ Center. I told the members there about our newly founded Volunteer Medical Brigade and the idea met with approval from most of those present.

The next day, Saturday 2nd October, I met up with three other members of the new Medical Brigade near the metro station “Barrikadnaya”. The others were Dima Lozovan, Sasha Rzhavskov and Sasha Maysuryan, a member of the alternative Democratic Union. We headed off to the Krasnaya Presnya district council building. There we found out about clashes that had occurred between the OMON riot police and demonstrators at Smolensk Square. We then went to the Garden Ring road³ — barricades had been erected, and we started setting up our first aid post there. At the moment we were joined by our comrades Peter Ryabov and Olga T., a librarian from the Institute of History.

Peter Ryabov: At three in the afternoon on 2nd October I came out of the metro station “Smolenskaya” and saw several hundred people busily building five barricades on a narrow section of the Garden Ring road — between two cordons of riot police with shields and helmets who were partitioning the road. People who had been there since the morning explained how around noon two mass-meetings of supporters of the Supreme Soviet had been brutally dispersed by the OMON, during which one person had been killed. In response, a hail of stones had descended on the OMON and the barricades had been erected on the road. A significant part of the barricades was made of wooden crates which the rebel supporters had set on fire. Thick clouds of black smoke and tongues of fire rose into the sky and certainly were visible from afar. The weather was splendid, and there was an unusual absence of cars. Silently and sternly the demonstrators dragged more and more objects up to the burning barricades.

“Throw more crates and shelves onto the fire!” one of the rebel supporters said, and added with almost superstitious respect: “Our deputies in the besieged Supreme Soviet will see the fire”.

¹ Vladimir Galaktionovich Korolenko (1852–1921) — a Russian writer who condemned injustices and advocated social reforms.

² “Memorial” — an organization set up in the late 1980’s to document and commemorate the suffering of political prisoners in the USSR and rehabilitate those of the victims still alive. It also serves as an umbrella for various grass-roots organizations promoting civil society.

³ The “Garden Ring” (Sadovoye koltso) was historically the outer defensive wall of the city; as the city expanded it became a circle of parks and gardens encompassing inner Moscow; today it is the main inner-city ring-road (circumference 15km).

There was no pogrom, rampage, or smashed shop windows — it seems the rebels had only smashed up one American boutique at the entrance to Arbat Street where a rally of over 2,000 people was now taking place. Familiar faces came up to speak at the microphone — Anpilov⁴ and Konstantinov. Later, towards evening, there was loud singing of Talkov⁵ songs. But on the whole things were fairly quiet — the atmosphere of hysterical schizophrenia which usually prevailed at rallies of the nationalist movements “Democratic Russia” and “Workers’ Russia” was absent. Hundreds of people were doing their best to drag iron lattice work, metal pipes and wooden boards out onto the road. They worked briskly but calmly; hardly anyone was drunk. The rebels worked in a well-coordinated and orderly way although no groups of armed national-Bolshevik fighters were to be seen, nor any obvious leaders. The rebels were laconic, as if they were prepared to fight to the bitter end — probably a result of the week of hard clashes with the police and OMON. Although I didn’t feel any great attachment to these people at the barricades, I did feel a certain respect for them — in all the years since perestroika I don’t think I’d come across any other political event where there was such an air of genuine, serious intent.

Around half past four my comrades from the Medical Brigade arrived, and all together we started organizing our first aid post there. We basically had to start from scratch. None of us had even basic medical training (except for Olga who had studied medicine at the Pedagogical Institute) — there were no doctors among us, no medicines... But very soon the situation improved unexpectedly. Several new comrades came along to join the Medical Brigade that evening, including someone who had at least rudimentary knowledge of medicine, albeit from the forensic side: the lawyer Stas Markelov. People who lived or worked nearby started donating medicine and money for our improvised first aid post. Then we arranged to get water. Dmitri Lozovan was sent off to all the chemists’ in the area and came back with dressings and pure alcohol. We raised a white flag with a red cross at our improvised stand, we also put on self-made armbands to show we were from the Medical Brigade. Then we set about carrying water and fuel for a fire and arranging benches for people to sit on. We agreed that Yaroslav Leontyev be the nominal head of the Medical Brigade. We got our fire going and worked out how to withdraw if we found ourselves in the middle of a hot spot.

Alexander Maysuryan got through the police cordon and went up to the ambulances which were parked behind it. He wanted to talk with the medics about cooperation in case things escalated; but strangely the people in the ambulances had police uniforms on beneath their doctor’s smocks... “Are you just going to help injured OMON members, or also civilians?” Alexander asked them. They assured him that, if worst came to worst, they would offer medical assistance to both sides. Fortunately, that evening we didn’t have to see in practice whether this was truly the case.

The Medical Brigade finally took shape on the Saturday evening when it was joined by the left-wing social-democrat Stas Markelov, the anarchists Nick and Head, Dima T., a student from technical college, and Grisha Vorobyov, a member of the Democratic Union. The next morning the Medical Brigade was given its name: the Maximilian Voloshin Medical Brigade. Maximilian Voloshin was a hermit from the Crimean village of Koktebel who during the Russian Civil War

⁴ A leading national-Bolshevik politician.

⁵ Igor Talkov, a Russian singer / songwriter of nationalist persuasion.

(1918–1921) helped the Whites and the Reds in turn. There were people of different persuasions in our Medical Brigade – anarchists, members of the Democratic Union, social democrats, supporters of self-management, “Memorial” members, proponents of extra-parliamentary opposition. All of us refused to support either of the two sides currently struggling for power but didn’t want to stand aside passively in view of the intestine strife which was brewing. On the Sunday morning the Medical Brigade was joined by Volodya Savelyev, a member of the Party of Labour, and the anarchist Vadim Damier. Several hours later a range of other people joined, among them Ira F. from the Communist youth organization, the non-party medical assistant Zhenya K. who lived outside of Moscow, the paramedics Aleksey Tavrizov and Sasha Sokolov from the “Memorial” Legal Rights’ Center, two paramedics who weren’t politically motivated at all, Sergey G. Andrey E.. One of the people who sporadically joined in the work of the Medical Brigade was a pro-Yeltsin doctor who was disgusted at her hero’s methods and had now become a staunch Rutskoi supporter. The Medical Brigade was also very mixed in terms of its ethnic composition – Russians, Armenians, Jews and others – and a wide range of ages was represented, from sixteen upwards. Another interesting detail is that about half the members of the Medical Brigade had defended the White House in Moscow in August 1991 – Sasha Sokolov had been in charge of a team of paramedics, Yaroslav Leontyev had been on telephone duty in the White House itself, and Peter Ryabov, Nick Shironin, Markelov and Lozovan had protected on the barricades.

This time most of the members of the Medical Brigade were in good spirits. They expected a fight with the OMON, a baton charge or two, some water-cannon, and perhaps a whiff of ‘cheremukha’ tear gas, but no-one in their worst dreams could have imagined how much blood was to be shed in Moscow. No-one expected the use of automatic weapons and tanks... A mass-meeting with the humble title “Council of the Peoples of the Soviet Union” was scheduled for the Sunday afternoon.

Peter Ryabov: As I was going up the escalator out of the metro station “Tverskaya” on Sunday 3rd October and holding the rolled-up flag of the Medical Brigade a man came up to me and said encouragingly: “Good on you! You’ve got to fight for the future!” I realized there had been a misunderstanding. I replied that I wasn’t a rebel supporter at all, but rather a member of a medical brigade which offers assistance to victims of the conflict. This didn’t put the fellow off. With a weightily ring to his voice he continued: “There are different ways to contribute to the struggle, but we all have the same goal – ...”. He paused for a second and then added: “... to crush the Jews!”

“Crushing the Jews” certainly wasn’t what I was on about and, scorning his appeal, I made my way to the Medical Brigade’s meeting point at the City Council building. There were about a dozen of us and we moved off to October Square. There we saw endless rows of police in bullet-proof vests equipped with helmets, shields and batons. Soon we heard the yells of demonstrators. A large demonstration came up against the solid police cordon. It slowed down for an instant, hesitated, and then it changed direction and gradually started moving off towards the Crimean Bridge. Possibly the authorities had expected and encouraged this course of events – there was only a thin police cordon lining this route. In the huge demonstration there were somewhere between 20,000 and 40,000 people. No rebel fighters were to be seen and there was very little in the way of weapons or projectiles. The demonstrators were in good spirits, singing songs, holding placards and flags, mainly red. We didn’t particularly want to mix with the demonstrators, so the Medical Brigade followed the demonstration along parallel side streets leading to the Exhibition Hall on Krymsky Val. From there we saw a short battle that ensued on the bridge. A disordered

group of frightened police clustered around the ladder at the side of the bridge and hurriedly slid away down it to the massed jeers of the demonstrators. Dozens of huge riot-police shields were thrown from the bridge into the water which was covered with floating autumn leaves. There was a loud bang, probably a round of 'cheremukha' tear gas being fired, but it was quickly dispersed by the breeze. The demonstration moved off again, and we, struck by what we had just seen, ran up to the stunned demonstrators and no less stunned police gathered around the bridge. Stas quickly went up to a police major who had lost consciousness and revived him. Olga bandaged an old woman who had a bad cut on her hand.

Since we had gone up to the bridge we fell quite a way behind the main body of the demonstration and didn't see the ensuing clashes on the Garden Ring road. When we set off following it again we just saw the trail it had left along its way to the White House. At one spot there was a smashed-up bus with broken windows and oil dripping from the engine; at another spot demonstrators were unloading riot-police shields from a badly-dented police car; and then a man came up to us choking from 'cheremukha' tear gas (the police had fired it into the demonstration twice more — again with very little effect). We came across a thick layer of foam on the road where a fire-engine had been smashed up. At one point Yaroslav Leontyev helped prevent the lynching of several police officers. At one spot we found a man dead, he had a hole in his head. What was going in? Was this an uprising? A revolution? A pogrom? An act of provocation by the authorities so as to justify a clamp-down? Neither we, nor the rebel supporters, nor the police really understood what was going on. Stunned by what we had seen, we ran to catch up with the main body of the demonstration which was proceeding to seize the White House.

When we reached the vicinity of the mayor's building the ring of the blockade had already been broken and there was no more shooting, but there were already victims of the fighting, and the ambulances which were there were evidently in no hurry to help the wounded rebel supporters. We quickly set up our first aid post at the trolley-bus stop opposite the mayor's building — we dragged up benches and laid out dressings. Yaroslav and I set off to get water which we needed for drinking, for washing our hands, and for bandaging. We went to the entrances of a residential building and rang one doorbell after another. "We're from a volunteer medical brigade. Will you let us in to get some water for our first aid post?" But the residents didn't want to help, evidently they were paralyzed by fear at what they heard and hid behind the safety of their doors. In the back part of the building we finally found an old man washing his car. He quickly grasped the situation, filled us up a canister and some bottles with the help of his neighbour, and soon we were laden with water and on our way back to the first aid post. And then the unexpected happened: shots rang out. First it was individual shots, then increasingly heavy salvos of gunfire. It came so abruptly and was quite terrifying. This was no baton-charge by the OMON — now the air was full of bullets and we couldn't tell where they were coming from. We dashed up to our comrades, going in stages, and then together with them, bending over low and squatting, we slid down into the gully below the building and set up the first aid post again there. The shooting would die down for a moment and then start up again. We saw a whole mass of OMON troops and policemen smash through the metal blinds and out of the ground-floor windows of the mayor's building and run away towards Kalininsky Prospekt.

We helped the wounded. Olga, Stas, and the medical assistant-cum-student Zhenya, who had joined us along the way to the mayor's building, gave them first aid. One of the wounded had a broken arm, another had been hit in the leg. From the window of a nearby apartment people yelled to us that someone had been brought to them with a head wound — either from a splinter

or a lump of falling plaster. All this was unreal, frightening, staggering — this wasn't the cinema, not a book, not a dream, but the streets of Moscow, today, 3rd October, a sunny autumn Sunday. Shooting, casualties, blood!

Yaroslav Leontyev: Before the first wounded started coming or being brought to us we busied ourselves with setting up the first-aid station. When the shooting began members of the of the medical brigade dragged together benches in the small gully near the corner of a building on the street Novy Arbat. As chance would have it, this was directly opposite the steps leading up to mayor's building — the very same place where in August 1991 three members of the Medical Brigade had guarded the barricades under a red-and-black flag. Now we were standing close by, this time under a white flag with a red cross. Some of my comrades sorted the medicines while others fetched water. The first-aid station was in the courtyard and in the front part of the building was a chemist's. We thought that if worst came to worst we could break in. Straight after the mayor's building was seized by the rebels I dashed off there to get water from the garage complex. Before I got the water there I asked for an announcement to be made over the White House loudspeaker. I asked any doctors who may have been there to get in touch. Several turned up straight away and were willing to help, so I told them the way to the first-aid station. There was rejoicing all around. As I stood there a column of soldiers was led past me. They had been taken prisoner or had switched over to be on the parliament's side — there were different versions. People carrying machine guns got into cars and headed off to the television complex Ostankino. In the throng we occasionally caught a glimpse of Sasha Sokolov, Nick and Head, who were working separately. They drove off with the rebels. With several medical orderlies and the medical assistant Zhenya I then went to the mayor's building. Here a general and black-uniformed "Barkashy"⁶ were giving orders. One of them asked us for help and we bandaged up his injured shin. In one of the corridors of the building we saw a young Trotskyist — he was disappointed that the fighting was over and there seemed nothing more to do.

When we returned to the first-aid station we continued the work of setting it up and improving it. We hung up a poster which read "Donate to the Medical Brigade and Help to Help the Wounded", and another saying "Doctors! Your skills are needed here!" Lozovan found a tin of red paint somewhere and I painted a number of red crosses at the corner of the building. Several of the members of the Medical Brigade and the medics who had come and joined us expressed an interest in going to Ostankino. Several people, including myself and the medical assistant, stayed behind to staff the first-aid station. The chemist's was right nearby, so it made sense for the others to take the bulk of the medicines with them to Ostankino. The situation was confusing — things changed quickly and there was no information about what was happening in the city. Night began to fall and we decided to light a fire. I went by White House Entrance No. 20 where a first-aid station had also been set up. I pushed my way through the throng around the building and was able to get a bit of food for the Medical Brigade — some black bread and crackers. It was my first bite of food that day. Then someone brought news that a group of rebels had set off to the "Pentagon" building near the metro station "Arbatskaya". We decided to head there too. On the way on Kalininsky Prospekt we picked a guy who was all beaten and bloodied. He told us that he had been set upon by looters. We took him to the station "Arbatskaya" and went up to the stationary first-aid post there. Then we went up to the "Pentagon". There we did indeed find

⁶ "Barkashy" (plural) — members of the Russian fascist party RNE (Russian National Unity) led by Alexander Barkashov.

a group of 100–150 people with monarchist and red-and-blue flags similar to those of the RSFSR. But everything was calm. We stood there with them and had a smoke before heading back to our first-aid station. Our comrades who had set off to Ostankino had not come back yet.

At around six o'clock in the evening seven members of the Medical Brigade — the medics Sergey G. and Andrey Ye., together with Stas and a few others — took the little white flag with the red cross and a rucksack of bandages and medicines and set off for Ostankino with the third column of rebels. When they arrived there they saw euphoric scenes — the rebel forces seemed close to grasping victory. Several detachments of rebel fighters had taken up position there — there were dozens or even hundreds of them. They had individual first-aid officers with them, but since the Medical Brigade was the only organized paramedical group there at that time it was joined by several doctors who were also at the scene; and when the fighting broke out there they worked in groups of three: one doctor cum first-aid officer together with two medical orderlies.

Most of the comrades at Ostankino called in briefly at Stas Markelov's flat which was not far from the television complex and was turned into a base for Medical Brigade. When they returned to the television complex a battle was raging. Andrey and Olga, who had stayed there and not gone off to Stas', saw how the rebels had fired a grenade-launcher through a window, and then instantly — as if just waiting for this as a signal to open fire — a storm of automatic fire had begun cutting a swathe through the people assembled around the building. Equally heavy fire was returned. Members of the Medical Brigade stole from cover to cover through the surrounding park, trying to hide from the hail of bullets. From the cover of a number of buses about 150 of the soldiers who had switched over to the rebels' side now launched an attack on the television centre, and the defenders who remained true to Yeltsin returned fire from the windows. The exchange of fire periodically died down and then resumed with increased intensity every five to seven minutes.

Several armoured personnel carriers stood by the pond in the park and remained neutral for a long time. But then all of a sudden they unleashed a barrage of fire at the rebels from behind. First they fired above people's heads towards the television centre, then they began firing straight into the rebels and gunned down a large number of people. When the members of the Medical Brigade saw this they realized the rebels didn't have a chance here. Night had fallen by now and the armoured personnel carriers searched the park with their spotlights; when they found someone they pumped machinegun fire into him. Stas Markelov recalled: "We tried not to end up right where the shooting was. When people found wounded they yelled: 'Doctor help! Doctor help!', and we had to run to where they were. How many people received help? None of us were in a position to count. There were dozens of wounded. But that, of course, was not the full figure, there were more. Those who we helped were largely civilians. The few fighters who were wounded were taken away in buses to the White House — that's where their first-aid station was. Most of the injuries were gunshot wounds. The wounded civilians were taken away in ambulances and private cars to the Sklifovsky Clinic and to Hospital No. 20. Party of Labour member Volodya Savelyev together with a private medical practitioner drove five wounded to the Sklifovsky Clinic. The sixth died before they arrived... After spending an hour or two under fire, most of the members of the Medical Brigade returned to base at around ten o'clock in the evening."

Only Olga and Andrey remained near the television centre. Andrey kept running to help the wounded and bandaged up a lot of them by himself. Olga later said: “Not being professional army medics we were unable to assess the situation quickly and judge the best place to locate a first-aid station, or how to correctly allocate tasks in the Medical Brigade. Even the idea of sending two or three members forward to the line of fire only arose when the battle was already raging. We had not made any provision for communications nor any plan for what to do in the case of an emergency situation arising. But we shouldn’t be too hard on ourselves! The developments as they occurred overtook even the civil defense personnel, army medics and emergency services whose job it is to help the wounded. But there were ambulance crews at Ostankino helping people. They deserve praise and recognition, they really do, doing their professional duty under fire. But there were so few of them there when they were needed!”

Yaroslav Leontyev: The Medical Brigade members who had left for Ostankino still hadn’t come back. We waited at the first-aid station until ten o’clock, as agreed, and not having seen any tanks or members of the Medical Brigade, we decided to leave and go to the “Memorial” office on Karetny Street. After all, there was little point in staying at the unlit first-aid station without doctors. On the way we went up to the Supreme Soviet building. Here someone called out to us – it turned out to be Maysuryan. He joined us and we continued on to Karetny Street. When we walked past the Headquarters of the Ministry of the Interior on Petrovka Street we didn’t notice any particular goings-on there. From the “Memorial” office we rang Stas’ flat at Ostankino and found out what had been happening. All of our comrades were in one piece, thank God.

I slept fitfully that night. From time to time I got up and turned on the radio to hear “Echo of Moscow”.

The next morning eight of us met up. Andrey was there, Olga, Stas, Lyosha Tavrizov from “Memorial” and others. I had had to travel into the inner city changing vehicles numerous times because transport on the Fili line of the metro was interrupted. The stations “1905” and “Barrikadnaya” were closed off and armed guards were patrolling the platforms. Anyway, finally I somehow made it to the station “Pushkinskaya”. The inner city was alive with its everyday crowds, only Tverskaya Street had been barricaded off by supporters of the President, and I could hear the rumble of gunfire coming from the Garden Ring road. Some time between 11 and 12 o’clock we left “Memorial”, split up into pairs, and quickly headed off towards Novy Arbat. We went down side streets until we came to the intersection of Chaikovsky St. and Kalinin St. Armoured vehicles were positioned everywhere, helmeted sharpshooters in bulletproof vests were dashing about and shooting at fighters who had taken up position in attics and on roofs. Here and there we heard an exchange of gunfire. A police cordon prevented us from crossing the Garden Ring road. Suddenly there was an exchange of gunfire and we had to seek cover in the nearby entrances of buildings. When I saw my acquaintance Lena who lived nearby I decided to go in with her for a cup of tea. This was also a good opportunity to make some sandwiches for the members of the Medical Brigade. As I was going through the ground floor entrance of her building I found out that there was a rebel sniper up in the attic – he had taken up position in the top floor directly opposite Lena’s window. Her husband dashed downstairs straight away to get the OMON, and we had to spend several rather unpleasant minutes in a state of uncertainty with the door to the attic open. A quarter of an hour later the OMON got to work “smoking out” the sniper. There

was no way of leaving the building now – a furious exchange of gunfire made it impossible to get through the inner courtyard. I had to stay in the kitchen at Lena’s and whittle away the time. She told me that not long before a neighbour who had been standing by the window had been hit in the belly and her husband had driven her to hospital in his car. Lena suggested that we might want to use her flat as a headquarters for the Medical Brigade, but as it turned out this was no longer necessary.

Back in August 1991 the situation was basically predictable – things would go either this way or that way. In October 1993 it was impossible to get a clear picture of what was going on, however much one tried. One thing was clear – it was six of one and half a dozen of the other, whoever won. If that was the situation why did the anarchists and socialists who made up the core of the Medical Brigade not stay clear of the events? As we see it, in any war it’s mainly ordinary people who cop it, regardless of whether they’re in civilian clothes or wearing a soldier’s greatcoat. It’s these ordinary people who are turned into cannon fodder by a gang of power-hungry villains. “When the big boys clash, it’s the little guys who get hurt,” as a Russian saying goes. Besides, there are the teachings of Jesus Christ, Lev Tolstoy and Mahatma Ghandi. And also of Maximilian Voloshin, who wrote in the sanguinary year 1920:

Amid the troops on both sides
They cry the same slogan:
“You’re with or you’re against us!
There’s no middle ground!
Justice is on our side!”
And here I stand between them, alone
In the thunder of battle, amidst flame and smoke
And with all my might
I pray for those on both sides.

On the morning of 5th October the Medical Brigade member Olga, who wasn’t attached to any party or organization, went to the Krasnaya Presnya Embankment. Two corpses were there which hadn’t been picked up yet, and a third was soon brought. The young people who had been there since the evening told her that voluntary doctors and medics had brought around 70 wounded and 33 dead out of the ground floor of the parliament building. The dead were laid out on the embankment near the car parts shop. By the time Olga arrived they had been removed. Candles now stood at the place where they had been laid. She placed a miniature calendar there with an image of the 12th century Madonna from Vladimir, the same one as in the famous icon in the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow.

Exactly one week after the October events flared up the members of the Medical Brigade met again at “Memorial” to exchange ideas and opinions. They discussed what to do with the Medical Brigade. They arrived at the conclusion that, unfortunately, given the situation in Russia, it was too early to disband...

Yaroslav Leontyev⁷ & Peter Ryabov⁸

⁷ Yaroslav Leontyev is a historian from Moscow and activist in the socialist movement. In the late 1980's and early 1990's he was one of the leading organizers of the Society of Socialists / Narodniks. He is a leading specialist on the history of the Left Social Revolutionaries.

⁸ Peter Ryabov is a veteran anarchist and member of the editorial board of the magazine "Naperekor" published Moscow.

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Retrieved on 2nd August 2020 from http://struggle.ws/eastern/yeltsin_93.html
Translated from Russian by Will Firth (with financial assistance from the Institute for Anarchist Studies). Thanks to Vadim Damier and Laura Akai for assistance with some difficult expressions.

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