

“We are not democrats”

Anatoly Dubovik

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For almost 10 years now, the biggest and bloodiest war in Europe in more than 70 years has been going on. For me personally, the reaction to what is happening on the part of anarchists outside of Ukraine has only confirmed the sad conclusions that my comrades and I came to long ago: not only is the anarchist movement in crisis, not only does it lack serious power and influence in society, but it cannot and does not even want to get out of this state. The only serious attempt I know of to analyze the current events and formulate conclusions – seemingly obvious conclusions! – was made by the Czech Federation of Anarchists. The other anarchist organizations were incapable of doing even that. (We are talking specifically about organizations, not individuals or informal groups of friends within organizations.) For many anarchists, as it was 10–20 years ago, anarchism and anarchist action remain a struggle for the rights of this or that “minority”, a philanthropic movement to help the homeless, a faction within the ecological or vegetarian movement, and so on – anything but a revolutionary movement to change society on the principles of freedom and solidarity.

I apologize for the banality: we are not democrats, and our goal is not the improvement of the state by democratic (or any other) methods, but the elimination of any state. At the same time, it is obvious that the degree of freedom – or, if you like, the starting conditions for the implementation of our program – varies from state to state. We, who started anarchist activity in the USSR (or in the Eastern European countries subordinate to the USSR), know it well from personal experience. There are states in which we anarchists have the opportunity to legally disseminate our ideas (the other question is how we use this opportunity). There are states in which anarchist beliefs themselves are punishable by prison. And there have been states in which the punishment was death.

When an authoritarian fascist state attacks a democratic state, it is necessary to defend the latter. At least for the sake of self-preservation.

When authoritarian, practically fascist modern Russia attacks relatively democratic Ukraine with the aim of destroying it and its people – and is *already* destroying it (by mass executions in the occupied territories, total bombing of frontline cities, constant rocket attacks on civilian objects in the rear) – one has to defend the relative freedom that exists here and which Russia hopes to break and replace with the fascist “Russian world”.

Ukrainian anarchists had to become temporary, situational allies of the Ukrainian state – against the common enemy.

A paradox? Yes. The same as Makhno's alliance with the Bolsheviks against White reaction. Or the alliance of the FAI-CNT¹ with the Spanish state against Franco. Or the alliance of Spanish, French, Polish, and other anarchists with different governments against Hitler.

Surprisingly, we need to explain this to many anarchists outside of Ukraine.

Surprisingly, it seems that nowhere in the world have anarchists tried to think: what should their groups and organizations do if something like the war in Ukraine starts in their country?

Something new? I now know in practice what I used to know only in theory – and what I have said above. There are situations when anarchists have to ally even with the state against a worse common enemy. This is not something that you can be happy about; it is unpleasant, but it may be unavoidable. The main thing is not to forget who we are and what we want.

For me and my comrades, the war changed nothing about our anarchist convictions. All the elements of our worldview have remained in the same place.

It is difficult for me to comment on the question of disagreements among anarchists about the ongoing war. There are no disagreements among Ukrainian anarchists. Disagreements are somewhere out there, far away. They cause us annoyance and even irritation (“Why don't these people understand such simple and obvious things?!”), but also an unexpected relief: we have no such disagreements, we are united in recognizing the need for self-defense, in recognizing the need to defend our people.

Disagreements between anarchists will, of course, remain. As a historian of the anarchist movement, I know that there have always been disagreements between anarchists. As a practical participant in the anarchist movement, I hope that these disagreements will lead to a division.

In the short term, it will be a division between those who recognize the need to protect people from imperialist fascist aggression and a touching conglomerate of pacifists, abstract anti-militarists, and just big fans of anything with the label “Made in Russia”.

In the long term, it will be the restoration of an ideological, organized, socially active class anarchism – which will get rid of the ballast of “lifestyle anarchists” and of, let me call them “anarchists of one idea” (those fighting for animal rights, feminism, legalization of marijuana or same-sex marriage, “anarcho-punks”, and so on).

¹ CNT-FAI, Federación Anarquista Ibérica – Confederación Nacional del Trabajo.

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