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Antifa in the Wild East

Internet warrior sets the the record straight

Anonymous

January 21, 2009

Anti-fascism in Russia is not a political but a social movement. It is not some irrelevant lefties who imagined that “fascism is an immanent threat” and started to “fight” it. And that is how it should be – fascism is not a threat in Russia – they do not have a slightest chance to take over. At least 95% of the population hates them. State and capital are the real problem.

As there is no real parliamentarism in Russia, threat of right-wing electoral populism is also much smaller than in most of the European countries. Usually authorities intervene quickly to dismiss nationalists from the elections with dubious legal grounds. Thus only dangerous fascists are the most marginal, and hated by even most of the other nationalists – those who kill migrants and other marginalized groups in the streets.

I do not even quote the statistics of how many people got murdered by Nazis in Russia this or last or any year, as those statistics only involve cases which make it to the news. But no matter how many it is, society does not care a fuck – or if cares, in form of demanding more powers to cops. Obviously none of those not directly touched by the problem is interested to fight it on their own.

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Society is almost perfectly atomized, people mind their own business. This is obviously due to bandit capitalism finishing off with the horizontal structures already in agony due to the authoritarian Soviet rule, but it is the shape of things to come in the West as well. Russia is not underdeveloped in terms of the “civil society” – it is overdeveloped, 20 years ahead of the West. Whatever “leftist” there currently exists in the Western Europe, it is becoming more and more irrelevant and in 20 years nothing will remain of it. Then moral politics will be dead, and only interest and lifestyle politics will remain.

Of course there is some imagined “civil society” in Russia. It is created by market law of supply and demand – as xenophobia in Russia is considered a problem in the West, there is a supply of grants thus a demand will arise as well. Whatever these NGO’s “monitor”, nobody cares. But of course their voice is heard anytime you need a “specialist” to demand more money or powers to cops. More these people have such links to grassroots antifascists which Nazis may scandalously expose, worse for grassroots antifascism. To avoid confusion, when I refer to “Antifa” in this article I do not mean these people – nor do I mean liberal political parties, all of which even have elements happy to cooperate with more moderate fascist organisations.

I have a gut feeling that most of the killed Nazis are due to “migrant Antifa”. Only other group fighting back against Nazis, youth subculture, is way behind them. There are for sure plenty of migrants and minority nationals in youth subcultures as well, but these usually come from mixed or otherwise integrated families, and are in a sense outside of the diasporas – actually such people are also plenty among the Nazis, maybe even more than among Antifa. Thus these two “Antifas” do not really mix. And I am fine with that – I do not cry if some Ingushetian kills some Nazi, but I believe it should be mainly Russians finishing off with the Russian fascism, and Ingushetians finishing off with the Ingushetian fascism. I do not want a race war – Nazis already make shitloads

of noise after cases when migrants have killed their activists, thus I do not spread these stories.

Mostly “migrant Antifa” also works outside the concept of Antifa. There are some notable exceptions – such as when football fans in Mahachkala of Dagestan yelled “Antifa!” in terrace as a reply of Stavropol fans shouting “Russia for Russians!”, but mainly migrants understand their conflict differently. Their code of honor does not allow a revenge against fascists as an entity, but they try to search individual Nazis who violated them and pay an eye for an eye. This of course usually only goes for mountaineers, Central Asians and Chinese are usually too atomized to have any kind of organised blood feud. Also traditionalist diasporas are organised according to traditional hierarchies, on top of which is their own bourgeoisie, which occasionally likes to make loud statements for example about their “2000 fighters ready to fight skinheads”, but in practice wants to avoid conflict with Russian authorities at any price, and is mainly interested to silence any protests against Nazi rampage inside their community. It would be a rather stupid idea to attempt to build any coalition against fascism with minority nation elites.

Thus most of the credit for fighting Nazis goes to subcultural youth. But this is also social, not political – wearing a Mohawk is not a political statement. Thus of course this “Antifa” comes with any ills the society has in general – some are sexist, some are homophobic, some are alcoholics and junkies, some may be just plain loonies or lumpen criminals (and not that gentleman “Arsene Lupin” flavor).

In the West, I am always puzzled with people who first of all identify themselves as “squatters” or “Antifa”. What the fuck is the alternative these people are proposing, a Tobin Tax? Fortunately in Russia almost all the horizontal grassroots activists consider themselves anarchists or in few cases (non-authoritarian) communists. Actually in most of the cities Antifa is organised by a mixed scene of anarchists, punks and skinheads – Moscow is perhaps only city

where anarchists are a clear (but significant) minority in Antifa. I am obviously concerned if someone considering himself anarchist is clearly homophobic and sexist, but if someone is just “Antifa” I do not really care. I do not say that these ills should be ignored, but one should be realist – no matter how many columns I write to some zine on how antifascism should be against homophobia and sexism, these will only influence a minority. Subculture always reflects values of the society – and as long as consumerism is order of the day, punks will always be way more interested about tattoos and collecting records than going to demonstrations. And in Moscow in particular most of the anti-fascists are themselves former Nazis – one should be happy just for the fact that they are now beating up their former comrades and not migrants.

There is a discussion though about sexism in the Russian Antifa movement. This because in Russian Nazi movement there are many women in prominent, even leadership positions – actually in terms of gender balance they are not doing worse than Antifa. For example cameraman and oldest member of the Ryno group, which is currently facing a court in Moscow for murdering 20 people, was a woman. Thus there is a discussion if female Nazis should be beaten up as well. In general Antifa has taken an anti-sexist position, and Nazi women are beaten up as well. But due to prevailing sexism in the society, this often backlashes against the Antifa. For example, when female Nazi Polina Sidorova got wounded during Antifa attack against Nazi concert in club “Niagara” in Moscow in autumn of 2006, Nazi video collective “Format 18” made an effective propaganda video to raise funds for brain surgery she needed. Thus some of the Antifa argue that Nazi women should not be beaten up, at least not by men. Of course Nazis themselves are not the gentlemen they claim to be – for example when Aleksey Krylov was murdered in Moscow last March, Nazis attempted to also kill a girl going to concert in the same company with him.

Following news about anti-fascism in Russia one may easily get the picture an evil and unstoppable horde of Nazis which keeps

for Russian anti-fascists would be to make an action against your local Nazis, and then put it into international context in a claim.

See you in the streets in the internet!

Anonymous anarchist from Moscow

slaying hapless anti-fascists. Another victimization issue, another reason for Western activists to feel guiltiness. Guiltiness, which I have at times indirectly exploited myself, as money for lawyer, medical and funeral bills is indeed often very much in need. This is why it is always the first priority to translate these horror stories. And stories of victories seldom get translated at all, as nobody wants to be visited by officials from UBOP (Department for Fight against Organised Crime) or FSB (ex-KGB). In former Soviet Union, activists already years ago established closed communication networks which cross borders, but in the West these are still mostly non-existing. These are not stories everyone should read – thus you do not hear that violence porn except maybe many years late.

Talking about violence, you do not often come across pacifists in the Russian movement, thus if I see some criticism of Russian antifascism written from pacifist point of view, it is quite likely written by someone not from around here. If you are subcultural in Russia and living in a smaller place, you most likely have to fight at least once in a week. This is why even most of the hippies around know how to kick some ass.

Violence is for sure romantic, our society is totally fascinated with it, to most of the movies people go to see some violence. And stories from real life often beat movies, thus I often eagerly share them although I never participated myself. And it is not there just for the beauty of it – after all, there is not a single historical example of fascism being crushed by non-violent means (state capitalism of the late 80's was hardly comparable to fascism). Nazi by definition is someone, who is out there to kill you (unless you are a Nazi yourself, or ready to pretend to be one). Unless he is crushed, he will get you sooner or later. If this is not the case, he is not a Nazi but just someone who thinks too much of himself. Obviously most Nazis are just pretenders, even in Russia – they do not deserve to carry the NSDAP flag. But some Nazis are worth of the name, and thus any action against them is a mere self-defence, even if it happened a year or 20 years before they were to come after you.

Nazis in Russia are perhaps far from seizing power, but for me and my comrades it is either us or them. It is easy to make hollow statements such as “using violence makes you a fascist as well”, but I have no use for moral superiority if I am dead. Anarchists have been beating and killing fascists ever since they came around, and I will never piss on the grave of the comrades who made all those attempts on life of Mussolini, Hitler and Franco. There are plenty of reasons why anti-fascists violence in Russia of today should be non-lethal, but all of them are of only pragmatical, not of moral nature.

But whereas beating up Nazis is not a moral problem (perhaps it is even a moral imperative), pragmatic record of Antifa in Russia is more in doubt. It is not clear if Nazi movement is going down due to general tendency towards welfare, stability and control in Russia, due to state repression or due to Antifa. Probably all of these factors play some role, Antifa being the least significant. But Antifa has certainly put some individual Nazis and crews out from the game, and shown that Nazis may be beaten by whoever, at times even more effectively than with sophisticated state machinery of control and violence.

But I am doing fine with pacifists as long as they are comradely. Good part of other activities of Russian anarchists except anti-fascism are completely in the realm of the non-violence, often these means simply work even if you do not treat them as a dogma – thus there is a field for cooperation. I have a huge respect of those pacifists who are consistently anti-state and do not call cops to do dirty work for them, and for whom pacifism is not just a mask which hides cowardice. Most of the “warriors” who have a beef with pacifists have seldom been there done that violence themselves.

At least in Moscow, in 90% of the cases it is the Nazis who get the beating. If you never heard any of them getting killed, it is because Antifa did things with some skill and they also had good luck – but for sure all of them who had an encounter with Antifa

they could curb “skinheads”. Russian state is not protecting Nazis – sometimes they try to play down or even deny the problem due to protect their image, but Nazis are facing heavy repression which is probably the main reason why their movement is going down. But no matter how much cops torture random boneheads, it is no way they may stop the menace altogether – Nazis will be active just as long as they feel indifference of the society. And tactics of “decentralized resistance”, inspired by famous fantasy book Turner Diaries, have proved itself to be successful in Russia – no matter how much Nazis are repressed by the state, some cells will always survive. And in practice bureaucracy, competition and even hatred between different government repressive structures and very narrow focus on short-term gains mean that Nazis are surviving even the vilest government repression, thus you may never count on government on finishing of with the Nazism.

Sometimes some individual officials may have hopes of using Nazis for their own purposes, but in general Russian police does not protect Nazis. There are cases of one police structure protecting their Nazi informers against charges pressed by other structures, or individual polices covering up their Nazi relatives – but in general these are exceptions. some individual cops or even districts may be Nazis (for example the notorious St. Petersburg district number 76) , but with others it is the contrary – there are number of cases when cops arrested anti-fascists after an action, but as their chief was a Chechen or Armenian they let them go without charges. But most of the time cops just solidarise with whoever pays them more money. When Antifa attacked concert of Nazi metal band “Korroziya Metalla” last June and some got arrested, cops let them go without charges as they hated boneheads, but anyway cops sold home addresses of the arrested to Nazis as Antifa was stupid enough not to make a better tender in prior. Actions in consulates could make sense if it is the state directly attacking anti-fascists – but in any other cases the best kind of solidarity

where anti-fascism is different, where there were ideas and alternative models of the world. But maybe I am wrong – this far public discussion in Russia about antifascism has done nothing good for the movement, except gained the movement few more comrades who maybe would have found us anyway. After all those TV documentaries and endless internet debates, nothing has changed – people are still murdered, still nobody fucking cares except those people who are being murdered. As far the general tendencies in the society remain the same, any attempts to create “movement infrastructure” in form of publications, policies, organisations, meetings or discussions is the straightest way to torture chambers and jail. Thus most likely I will do other things, and do not interfere with activities of those who like to beat up Nazis for whatever reasons they may have.

I will be there though when another lawyer, hospital or funeral bill is necessary, but I hope the time of the appeals will also soon be over. This because after all the amounts are not that big – usually around 1000 Euros for one fundraiser. In terms of financial flows of international activism, these are not such a big amounts. If we had a number of constant, reliable long-time sponsors we would quit writing fundraisers altogether and it would save much time and effort.

As we have managed to put issue of “anti-fascism in Russia” to agenda of international activist movement, I am often asked what could be done to help us. It feels kind of stupid only to ask for money, as this is reducing solidarity to something measured by monetary value. But it is often hard to imagine what else would be necessary – as I already said, fascists in Russia are not taking over and in the end only Russians may deal with the Russian fascism. Obviously most stupid thing to do when Nazis attack someone would be to set up a demonstration at your local Russian consulate – issue of street fascism has nothing to do with the state. This would only repeat the message everyone from liberals to even less extreme nationalists are repeating – more powers to cops so that

will remember it for rest of their lives. Actually probably one of the reasons why Moscow Nazis are so brutal is that they got beaten up so much. In 2001–2002, when Moscow Antifa got really launched, it was 1 antifascists to every 50 Nazis, so it was way more easy to find Nazis than Antifa – and in the streets it is almost always those who have the initiative who do the beating. And even still, as Nazis are much worse to conspire and they simply do not care about their rank and file, they take much more damage. Actually after all these years, Moscow Nazis have still not managed to kill a single fighter of Moscow Antifa (despite some serious attempts) – Sasha Ryukhin was in the very periphery of the movement, and Krylov had no connection to movement at all.

Moscow anarchists were occasionally beating Nazis and National-Bolsheviks since the early nineties, just as the first RASH-skinheads who came around 1998–1999. But only in 2001–2002 some people decided to give that a priority, and since then some ass was kicked about every week. First 2–3 years of Moscow Antifa are documented in the book “Dat’ Pizdy”. In the beginning National-Bolsheviks were few times picked up as a target practice, but although they have some boneheads they are not really involved in anti-migrant violence, and as individuals they are pitiful losers, so they are not anymore beaten up by anarchists or Antifa.

One must understand that what comes to anarchists, this is a war which we started. Russian Nazis were killing migrants ever since they began to organise, and occasionally boneheads had fun terrorizing some hapless gutter punks. But they did not care a fuck about the anarchists before they started to get beaten up – not that Moscow Antifa was organised by anarchists only, but anarchists were always public about their support for the direct action. Perhaps harsh reaction of the Nazis, who decided to revenge not only against Antifa but anarchist, activist and hardcore punk scene as a whole, was a surprise to someone – to me it was not. After all, they are Nazis – they are bad on public relations but good

on terror. Differently from Antifa, for Nazis it is beneficial to escalate the conflict – back in the fistfight days they lost much more of their cadres to Antifa, but fewer people switch sides now when it is about life and death.

To me, it was clear from the day one that Antifa activity will result some burials, and at times I wonder if it is really worth of it. In another hand, in counter-revolutionary times there are few fields you may work in from the beginning, and at least Antifa is on public demand for certain constituencies. Washing your hands from it would mean relying to your race privilege – it could be possible only as long as there are no significant anarchist presence in migrant communities.

Not that Antifa in Moscow or elsewhere in Russia cares a lot about strategy. Mostly it is just people who like to beat up Nazis – doing something useful and having fun in the same time. That is not where I get my kicks, but I do not judge. Whoever claims to hate violence is most likely a hypocrite – he just wants to have it in a sterile, safe form such as TV serials, movies or computer games. To me a Nazi has less rights than some digital zombie in my computer screen, as computer monsters do not murder real people just because of their skin color.

For sure there is also the point that violence corrupts, continuous fear makes people embittered and brutal. For example case in last August, where 4 rather irrelevant Moscow Nazis got stabbed before they even pulled their knives was also for me too much. But again, this is a flipside of having a social, not a political movement – you do not need a membership ticket to get into Antifa. Whoever confuses excesses with general strategy, does not understand what fascism is real about and what are we fighting against. Violence alone has nothing to do with fascism – fascist violence is based on hatred of everything non-conformist and different, and conditioning of that hatred by a bureaucratic machinery to an extent that you do not see a difference between your own will and will of the system. No excess of an individual may ever be fascist, as fascism

is never a free moral choice of an individual but something you do for your “Reich”.

First generation of Moscow Antifa never did any claims or statements. They were not interested about leaflets, stickers or publishing journals. It was just a group of people – some from anarchist scene, some from punk scene, some from football hooligan circles, some former Nazis – who got together for just a one goal: to beat up Nazis. And they did their job well – they lost fights very seldom and never took any serious casualties. It is not correct to claim that this way nobody ever learned about the Antifa – Nazis learned to know them very soon, and they were terrorized. First generation understood the laws of the atomization of the society – that nobody fucking cares about murdered migrants or homeless. Thus they did not even tried to get public sympathy. Even cops do not really care, as long as there is no moral panic and their bosses do not demand from them to act. There has been a moral panic against Nazis since the nineties, and thus Nazis have suffered – cops randomly arrest them without charges, take fingerprints and photos, occasionally torture for 1, 2 or 3 days by suffocating and beatings and then let go. By avoiding publicity, Antifa for a while managed to avoid most of this.

But as usual people change, there is a big turnover and at some point some people got the idea to give some interviews to journalists and to show up in TV. After this, for sure a moral panic – how may someone pretend to do job of the cops better than the cops!?! There was a discussion in state Duma, in beginning of the year 2007 ultra-right wing deputy Viktor Alksnis made a public enquiry where pen-names of 10 “leading Moscow anti-fascist terrorists” were published (“Bonecrusher”, “Dill”, “Foot”, “Journalist”, “Pit”, “Radist”, “Satan”, “Shkobar”, “Tigran”, “Zog”), some with supposed real names and home addresses. Heat was on, and number of people were forced to leave Russia for other countries.

In a way I am involved in an effort to turn a social movement into a political one – I may point to days or even contemporary places