

Rebooting anarchist currents and practices

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The idea of writing this material has been a long time coming. It was the Belarusian anarchist and politician Akihiro Hanada-Gaevsky who encouraged me to do so. I have incorporated some of his thoughts into my article.

Anarchist activism needs a restart, and no one yet understands how to do it. The lion's share of comrades have left, are in decline or in prison. Repression has become harsher and we are forced to adapt to the new realities. It is difficult to do so because everything is changing at a frantic pace.

No one knows what will happen in a month's time, under conditions of war, or whether any of the things the author has outlined will be possible. It's also hard to time each particular region or country for obvious reasons.

One does not want to fall into "impostor mode", where one thinks one is out of place. Right now I guess I am, to you I am a no-name, but since there is no suggestion of a way forward, let it be mine. Good or bad, time will tell. At any rate, it's better than nothing.

Publicly positioning yourself necessarily as an anarchist

At this point you'll probably want to close the article, write about the comrades of the past and spit on the author. But take your time.

What I am saying is that there is no point in fighting against propaganda that only stigmatises anarchists as disorderly scumbags. It has more resources and the public has longstanding stereotypes.

Plenty of decent and literate people believe that anarchy=chaos. We don't have the resources to remedy this situation. Individual cases sometimes work, but it's a grain of sand in the sea. Mostly anarchists are on the radar for high-profile arrests or repression, but nobody discusses their views.

We can campaign for anarchist principles without a specific generalisation. Direct democracy, the development of self-government and the struggle for one's rights. This is entirely possible in a dictatorship or liberalism.

As has already been pointed out, what matters is not what we call ourselves, but what ideas we profess. Take any poll on the street or among neutral acquaintances/relatives. Does anyone even know what anarcho-communism is? Communism = Stalinism, Bolshevism. Anarchy or anarchism = chaos, lawlessness. Years of propaganda have gone nowhere again.

It's hard to get used to, but almost nowhere have anarchists gained popularity. How many people have come to our views from, say, the liberal camp or the extreme right? There are a lot of ideologues. And back they come over quite readily.

For those who haven't understood, let me make it clear: I am only talking about the public, please don't get confused. In your circles, closed or not, you can call yourself whatever you want.

Cut out the irrelevant

Probably the most important thing is to cut out the endless debates with the right, left and other political currents of all stripes. I can't even count how much effort has been wasted on this. Anarchists are unbearably bogged down in this kind of bickering and discussion.

We struggle endlessly to be canonical. Heaven forbid those should think ill of us, those should criticize us. So what's the return on that? Apart from endless divisiveness and searching for who is to blame for the situation? Who has a "blacker and redder" flag than the rest of us? The lion's share of the criticism is totally unconstructive.

What has museum anarchism, as Peter Ryabov would say, led us to? It has turned out to be no less dogmatic than the postulates of right-wing theorists. One step to the right, one step to the left, and then "not according to anarchy". One has to constantly make excuses for something.

It's like the thought police around you, watching out for your steps to conform to established routines. And the conventional "leftists" are endlessly watching to see which of them is more progressive.

And more often than not, the agenda is set by activists in other countries. Without asking our opinion. Putting us in front of the fact of new trends.

Answering the question up front: But how do we prove the validity of our views to anyone, without debate?

They are reasonable when the movement stands firmly on its feet. Known in various circles. Our views are simple and understandable to people. And its name does not evoke contradictory associations. Only then can it be. Let historians, theorists, etc. handle everything else.

And how do we know exactly how it will be? We try to go into every tiny aspect of society which none of us has seen. This is mostly guesswork, nothing more.

Interaction in the state. The market, etc.

It has always been incomprehensible to me to reject capitalism and the market in the context of living in it. How does that even work? Just because you don't pay taxes somewhere, avoid unnecessary spending, doesn't make you an active destroyer of capital. Most of this effort is completely illogical and does nothing to help the overall cause.

It is impossible to put forward an effective and realistic alternative at this stage. The centralised bureaucracy of the USSR was unable to cope with planning in the face of growing information and trends and new initiatives. The anarchists' proposed decentralisation and the use of modern technologies for data processing cannot overcome the asymmetry of information (that is when data is not distributed evenly fairly due to different market circumstances).

Some futuristic schemes of possible alternatives can be proposed, but since the task of building an alternative here and now is not yet in sight, I think we should explore how democratic practices can be promoted in the current realities. And the market, in turn, does not exclude such tools: blockchain representing peer-to-peer communication and decentralisation, crowdfunding (Kickstart, Ulej), crowdsourcing (joint discussion and evaluation of strategies and projects), open-source, cooperatives, etc.

With proper infrastructure (software, services), ordinary citizens can directly participate in the economy without any experts (crowdfunding).

Roughly speaking, if you don't want another situation where there is a group of anarchists who never have money, then try to look for it where you were alienated to do so before. As an option: engage with businesses, advertisers, grants, donations etc. While your comrades turn their noses up at "capitalism", thinking that this money is "bourgeois", you quietly do your projects.

The bottom line is this: the basic values for us are, of course, unchanged. Globally it is solidarity, freedom and justice, interpersonally the humanistic “not to betray”, “not to exploit” and so on. But the personal self-restraints of anarchism, such as not joining the army, not cooperating with the state, not owning one’s own business, seem stifling and superfluous. All of these may be approached wisely.

Interacting with people

We must be able to interact with people at all levels. Why is a factory worker a priori a good thing and a manager or an accountant a bad thing? We are living under the conditions of capitalism. And there can be no special status for a producer at this level. Especially in an age when AI and robots are taking people’s jobs. And what’s more, it has already started taking jobs away from writers, programmers, etc. If we’re drowning in fairness among humans, then we’re removing parochial stereotypes from the last century.

We work wherever possible, except in outright repressive bodies. This does not mean that the civil service is evil, a misconception that has long been flickering in our ranks. These people also need to be dealt with. The Ministry of Emergency Situations and Social Security is a good example. Service in the army can help in the fight against the regime and external aggression, as Ukraine shows. Mobilisation, as a danger, fortunately happens very rarely.

Most coups, uprisings and protests, have always involved the above groups. These are millions of people, where would they go in the event of any change? Without paramilitary support, any large-scale protest is doomed to suppression.

Campaigning

Partial street-cleaning is essential. Putting up flyers, putting up banners has always been considered something sacred. “Genuine activism” for which there is no question. Almost all of it, unfortunately, only ends up on the internet and does no good. Motorists don’t see the banner on the bridge, passers-by don’t read the leaflets on gutters and poles.

Few people come, so does the subculture with its music, the romance of the black blocks, etc. But there are no vibrant public figures to tell a person about. Not necessarily in your country, but at least somewhere.

Are you ready for more shit years of nothing changing? The anarchists and theorists of the past were incredibly progressive people ahead of many in their views. Do you really think they would blindly follow the same symbols, slogans and theoretical knowledge? But whoever you ask, everyone speaks for people who have long since passed away, without even trying to analyse the current situation.

The most sensible thing would be to push through with a neutral or near-anarchist agenda in the information field.

The most striking example is the website antijob.net, which has existed for many years. Of course, there are analogues, but everyone knows that the resource is ideological and reliable.

It seems to the author that blogging, social networks, trendy agendas and trends are best suited. You do not have to plant a flag there, write “the state is the main enemy” and so on. You need to make interesting and vivid content, and at the same time make a point of view on the

issue. You can do this even in a repressive state. Especially by gaining credibility and a lot of subscribers.

You can do travel, science-pop, book reviews, some kind of self-promotion, movies, music, and promote the right thoughts there.

The author had thoughts about campaigning in some circles, sections. In mountaineering, martial arts, or wherever. But it requires oratorical skills, and there's a risk of being denounced. So be careful if you do decide to do it.

You may ask: What about radicalism? Protests?

The most popular trend in the world is “social protests”, critical civil society. The agenda of most of them coincides with the radical views of anarchists. Like the anti-government riots in Iran, or the “yellow vests” in France, or the “Occupy” movement.

They value broad participation in politics, organise themselves horizontally and respond sharply to restrictions on rights and freedoms, although they rarely take part in elections. Grassroots initiatives, courtyard/district chats are welcomed. As it was in Belarus.

But it is important to make the caveat here that coinciding agendas does not = anarchist. Most of the participants are ordinary people who want local change, a change of power, perhaps some kind of justice. They don't all want to be under our banners, as our comrades mistakenly think. It's just as important to take part in these protests, it depends on where you are, your level of radicalism and your readiness.

The struggle for the rights of industrial workers, who have proved (quite predictably) passive and conservative, does not seem worthy of much effort either. In the absence of a trade union movement, dependence on the workplace and credit, it is not far-fetched to bet on workers.

It makes more sense to help restore justice in conflicts that have already erupted. As was the case at the environmental protests in Shiesse. Or the Anti-Platon truckers' actions, the Yandex/Delivery Club courier strikes, taxi drivers etc.

The author has no consensus on whether or not banners are needed and whether or not others can be used when taking part in this type of action.

Security

If you are not convinced by the previous arguments, here are arguments on why it is relevant from a security point of view.

Identification, and clear identification, is very much loved by the security forces. In today's world, there is more and more control every year. AI is watching people on video cameras. Our faces are being scanned on the underground. Chats and texts are being read. Locations are being tracked. Information is structured and stored. Entire departments are set up to catch suspicious individuals, and criminal cases are being stamped out at an incredible rate.

Wouldn't the best solution be to stop feeding the security forces and provide yourself with legal cover? If your group does not identify itself, it is much harder to find out who you are. Especially if you don't talk too much and are ethical online.

Any arrests try to get a group of people together. They're looking for something they have in common. Ideology is the most convenient way. Especially flags, badges, literature.

While in Russia, anarchism has not yet been equated with outright extremism, in neighbouring Belarus, symbols and other attributes are drawn to the theme of the Third Reich. As long as it's legal, and then?

If you are not united by something obvious, it becomes more difficult to prove your affiliation without fabricating a case, planting evidence and other factors. But no one is immune here.

Just as depressing is the fact that many comrades (admittedly, I happen to be one too) compare the current risks of anarchist activity with the past. This is categorically wrong. Years ago there were no such gigantic sentences for frankly mediocre activities. Engaging in anarchist activity is now critically dangerous.

The maximum that awaited an activist before was a sentence for fighting, hooliganism. Mostly there were fines for extremism, websites, rallies, pickets.

Most of them have left behind a time when there were almost legal conventions, gatherings, concerts, rallies and marches. Outside paraphernalia, lectures, debates, open spaces. Compare that to what's happening now.

Sentences for murder are comparable to extremism, setting up or participating in an organisation, participating in a resource or website. Five years for outright stupidity doesn't surprise anyone.

Let me try to summarize

The anarchist movement has existed for a very long time. To say that it has always been a homogeneous mass is certainly wrong. That it has stood still, or that it has only been an "illegal rebellion" is a delusion.

Years of studying theory and practice have led me to the conclusion that all the uncompromising, maximalist, eternal rebellion... all these iconic things for anarchism are far from being so. A lot of it is attributed quite undeservedly.

By the way, it's the same thing now, when girls and guys can't really explain what ideas they stand for. But they consider themselves anarchists. No one is embarrassed by this.

Being a teacher or a university lecturer is just as taxing to the system as working in a bank.

A factory worker can manufacture drones or weapons for a long time, but as long as there is no war, nobody seems to care.

Unions based on subculture, food and ethical habits have long come to the fore. Introducing a considerable amount of divisiveness into an already small community.

Why asking liberals or conservatives for help is not shameful, even though these are our opponents. Or turning to the same media in the case of news spreading.

Anarchist or left-wing communes, formations in the territories are and have been quite tolerably friendly with the system. The commune, by the way, is still considered a struggle against the system.

The anarchist "squad leaders" collaborated with opponents in their views and political systems. The units themselves were filled by people with different sympathies. Not all of them understood what "anarchism" was.

Many books describe how anarchists were involved in creative, intellectual activities. They organised schools, clubs, free spaces, trade unions. They paid wages, co-operated with the authorities, deplored drunkenness and hooliganism in the streets. They asked permission to occupy premises or negotiated with the owners. They punished looting and inappropriate behaviour.

Individuals, groups and squads carried out terrorist attacks and shootings and took part in mass protests. But it would be wrong to say that assassinating the American president, or setting fire to a government building, was the pinnacle of anarchist activity. It would be as if there was no creation, mutual aid, women's rights struggles, strikes and pickets.

What the author has written is simply a reflection on how to proceed. When the old tactics don't work and the conditions of existence have become unbearable.

It is useless to change the minds of the already hardened theorists and practitioners who make no compromises whatsoever. I sincerely respect that position, but I cannot go on with it. I do not see results. I don't see prospects. I don't want to live in perpetual waves of activism-repression-prison. Many people understood this long ago, they were just afraid to admit it and get condemned.

And, of course, I am prepared to be called a liberal, a splitter, a divisive anarchist. And the article is likely to provoke some discussion.

Good day to you all, I'm with you!

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