

Anarchist and anti-fascist prisoners in Russia

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Since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, domestic anti-war resistance has shifted from mass protest to underground direct action. As legal restrictions and surveillance have escalated, individuals across the country have taken part in sabotage operations targeting military and government infrastructure. These actions, such as arson and railway disruption, have led to long prison terms under anti-terrorism legislation.

The Shift from Protest to Sabotage

In 2022, according to OVD-Info, over 19,000 people were arrested for anti-war protest actions across Russia. With the government cracking down severely on all public dissent, these numbers plummeted in subsequent years: 270 in 2023, 41 in 2024, and only 10 until May of 2025. While protest in the streets has become nearly impossible, acts of sabotage have emerged as an important method of anti-war struggle. According to Activatica.org, in 2023, approximately 230 direct actions were recorded; in 2024, the figure was 145.

While some attacks, particularly near the Ukrainian border, are connected to operations by Ukrainian armed forces and intelligence, the majority occur deeper within Russia and appear to be carried out by unaffiliated activists acting independently. It is often possible to differentiate these types of actions by professionalism – for example, use of assassinations or high-tech explosives indicates work of Ukrainian secret services; Molotov cocktails indicate DIY anti-militarist activists. However, statistics of Activatica do not differentiate between these types of actions.

Activatica does, however, differentiate actions instigated by the Ukrainian online scamming industry. Ukraine has a sizable business of online scamming, and occasionally scammers attempt to revenge on Russians. Scammers are stealing money from online banks of often elderly people, and they demand acts of sabotage, such as Molotov cocktails, from victims in exchange for returning their savings.

Victims are pretty much always caught, and they receive prison sentences. Activatica has recorded 100 such sabotage actions in addition to the numbers of real actions. This practice is unfortunately a factor discrediting proper anti-war direct actions, as Russian propaganda is claiming that all the actions are due to scammed individuals or paid by Ukrainian secret services.

Among the groups that have publicly claimed responsibility for some sabotage actions is the Combat Organization of Anarcho-Communists (BOAK). BOAK is a network drawing from a new Russian insurrectionary anarchist tradition that appeared in the year 2008, partly inspired by the Greek December uprising that year.

BOAK has published claims of railway sabotage and other disruptions. No member of BOAK has ever been caught, but many have been forced to escape from Russia, which has led to decreased activity inside Russia. Now BOAK is attempting to spread guidelines of safety for emerging new underground cells and individuals appearing inside Russia.

Prominent Individual Cases

Ruslan Sidiki, formerly active in an anarchist farming cooperative in the Leningrad region, attempted to destroy a strategic bomber with drones in the Ryazan region. The drone was disabled by electronic defenses, but he later succeeded in destroying a freight train in the Ryazan region. Though he contacted Ukrainian intelligence to discuss tactics, he rejected material support from

them. Ruslan admitted to his actions and was sentenced to 29 years in prison in May 2025. His case reflects the high-end of sentencing now applied to politically motivated actions – a typical murder sentence in Russia is 10 years in prison.

Alexey Rozhkov threw Molotov cocktails at a military enlistment office in the suburb of Yekaterinburg, 12th of March 2022. This was only 16 days after the beginning of the full-scale invasion, making his one of the earliest direct actions, inspiring many others. At the time, many such offices stored conscription records in paper form; a successful arson would mean that young men from the area would not be mobilized for months. Rozhkov's attempt was not successful, but he inspired many others, and due to such actions, the military launched a hasty effort to digitize all enlistment records across Russia, and now such tactics are rendered less useful – however, until July of 2023, MediaZona has listed 113 anti-war arson attacks across Russia, mostly against enlistment offices. Initially released pending trial with less serious charges, Rozhkov fled to Kyrgyzstan, where he was abducted by Russian authorities. Upon his return to Russia, he was charged with terrorism and sentenced to 16 years in prison.

Roman Shvedov carried out a similar arson attack in the Rostov region. After being identified and located in custody by Solidarity Zone, he told that he is an anarchist, but he declined legal assistance from the group, stating that limited resources should go to others. He was sentenced to 16 years in December 2024. Shortly after sentencing, he died by suicide while still in prison. His blurred photograph is from mainstream media, and no known proper photographs of him exist.

The Tyumen Case involves six individuals arrested in August 2022 in three cities – Tyumen and Surgut of Siberia, and Yekaterinburg of the Urals. The first arrests occurred after two individuals were caught testing explosives in a forest. Authorities alleged that they were planning attacks on energy infrastructure. All six were subjected to torture. While they initially confessed, most later withdrew their statements. One defendant, **Roman Paklin**, continues to cooperate with authorities and has testified against the others.

Another defendant, **Nikita Oleynik**, organized an anarchist library in his home town, and is now accused of leading a terrorist group—a charge that may result in a life sentence. In Russia, no one has ever been released under such a sentence. The others face up to 25 years. The group denies the existence of an underground organization.

The Chita Case centers on two young activists from the city of Chita in Siberia. **Alexander** and **Lyubov**, 19 and 16 years old when arrested, were charged for publishing anti-war and anarchist content through a Telegram channel and for graffiti. In 2024, Alexander received a six-year sentence, and Lyubov three and a half years. This year Alexander spent more than 90 days in solitary confinement due to fabricated violations of prison rules and refusal to work in prison, and has since been transferred to a strict-regime PKT prison, typically reserved for organized crime figures and other most serious offenders.

Support Structures for Anti-War Direct Actions Prisoners

Despite ongoing repression, several organizations continue to support individuals imprisoned for anti-war direct action activities. These groups provide legal assistance, financial support, and help establish contact with detainees.

Anarchist Black Cross Moscow, active since 2003, has traditionally provided support to anarchist, anti-fascist, and anti-authoritarian prisoners. Since being declared an “undesirable organization,” all of its operations have been moved abroad. Any financial support or cooperation with the group is now punishable under Russian law, and it is not active inside Russia – donations are channeled to other initiatives. You may join ABC-Moscow’s English Telegram channel and check WWW newsfeed.

Fires of Freedom, founded in 2025, is active inside Russia. It was created to respond to the gap left by the prohibition of Anarchist Black Cross and is currently able to support detainees within Russia’s borders. Its activities include hiring legal counsel, organizing fundraisers, and distributing updates. Telegram channel of the group is in Russian language.

Solidarity Zone, founded by anti-authoritarian activists in 2022, focuses specifically on those imprisoned for direct actions against the war. The group provides legal and financial aid to 20 individuals and follows the cases of at least 20 more, offering public updates. Solidarity Zone tracks arrests through public sources, contacts detention facilities, and dispatches lawyers to establish initial communication – this is tedious work which is necessary because most of the people imprisoned for anti-war direct actions are individuals without connections to organisations or even movements. Solidarity Zone has a bilingual Telegram channel and website.

While defense arguments in court rarely influence outcomes—due to the political nature of these trials—legal representation plays a critical role. Lawyers are often the only connection prisoners have to the outside world during the investigation, and serve to monitor conditions and prevent mistreatment. In some cases, legal efforts have secured better prison conditions, access to proper food (such as vegan meals after a 40-day hunger strike of anti-war activist Ivan Kudryashov in 2023), and prevented prolonged solitary confinement (such as in the case of anarchist Viktor Filinkov, released last January after a 7-year prison sentence).

These organizations are key to preserving communication with prisoners and providing public visibility for cases that might otherwise remain unknown. They also provide a measure of solidarity and psychological support to detainees.

Acts of resistance continue in Russia despite severe repression, often driven by individuals without organizational support and at great personal cost.

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)

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