

Anti-war statement

Autonomous Action

29 August 2024

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We have stated from the very start that the beginning of a full-scale war in Ukraine on February 24, 2022 is an imperialist aggression of the Russian state. That is still true.

Our position on the war in Ukraine

“Autonomous Action” is not on the side of the Ukrainian state — and not on the side of any other state. However, in the current circumstances, the victory of Russia is not beneficial to the peoples of neither Ukraine, nor Russia, nor Belarus. Fighting against Russian aggression is now beneficial to everyone except the Kremlin. It is easy to see why it is beneficial to the Ukrainian authorities. But why is it also beneficial to people (and, accordingly, anarchists)?

Because:

1. The Russian state is now the dominant imperialist predator in the post-Soviet political space and beyond. The political system of modern Russia is a fascist dictatorship. It wants to spread its influence further, including direct conquering of new territories. At the same time, the current war with Ukraine is a moment of truth for this political system. If it wins (occupying Ukraine or a substantial part of it), it will greatly strengthen Putin’s dictatorship, because it will show that the Kremlin can achieve its aims by violence. If it loses (in any obvious way), it will inevitably trigger a political crisis within Russia. This political crisis does not guarantee the dismantling of the fascist political regime. But it will give us a chance. All other ways to change the state of affairs in modern Russia are not much realistic. Therefore, the defeat of the Kremlin in the war with Ukraine is beneficial to any supporters of progress and freedom, including anarchists. Ukraine (both its people and its state) is now forced to act as an icebreaker, which is at least potentially capable of creating cracks in the ice of Putin’s regime. For us, regime change is obviously desirable, because in the current situation anarchists cannot be meaningfully present in the public political life of Russia (nor other sane points of view).
2. Russian occupation means russification of the occupied territories and their population, bringing them to the imposed standards of the Kremlin. Any empire homogenizes the occupied territories and reduces the space of freedom. Putin’s empire is doing the same, and its spreading deprives independent regions of their independence. In this sense, Ukraine’s resistance is anti-colonial struggle which anarchists should support.

In the current circumstances, we consider meaningless the stance like “both are equally repulsive”, “no difference between Zelensky and Putin” and so on. It made sense to cry “against all!” during the First World War, when equally authoritarian imperialist predators fought each other directly. Now, in the conditions of radical inequality of forces and objectively freer political system of Ukraine, such a position only helps the Kremlin to win. And this victory will make it worse for everyone.

For the same reasons, it does not make sense to call “everyone to lay down their weapons.” As has been said many times, if the Russian army lays down its weapons, the war will end. If the Ukrainian army lays down its weapons, Ukraine will be devoured by Putin’s empire and the war will continue. The war is beneficial to the Kremlin (because it allows to preserve power),

and successful annexations only fuel its appetites, as shown by the previous 20–30 years. Putin’s popularity is based on the fact that the Russians have never before lived with such a level of well-being. And the war has not yet undermined that. On the contrary, right now high salaries of the mercenaries and increased spending on military production rather brought money to the poorest layers of Russian population.

It is important to say that other states (including the so-called “democratic” ones) have also waged wars in recent decades. But the vast majority of these wars were not aimed at territorial conquests. This does not justify them, but it distinguishes them from the wars of Putin’s Russia.

We respect and support the anti-authoritarians who decided to take up arms and fight against Russian imperialism, even if they joined the state army of Ukraine (AFU). This is why:

1. The dominant point of view among Ukrainians now is the need to resist, and this resistance is now primarily associated with the AFU. Therefore, the presence of anarchists in the ranks of the AFU is useful in terms of acquiring respect of the people, not to mention practical combat experience. Anarchists joined the AFU, because there was no other opportunity of armed resistance against Putin’s army in Ukraine.
2. In the same condition of radical power inequality, AFU is naturally forced to be more open to non-standard and creative solutions and the manner of combat (an obvious example is its use of drones). This opens up some opportunities for anarchists in the AFU to influence the general structure of the state army (which we do not idealize, and to which we have a much more skeptical attitude). We are not exaggerating the extent of this influence, but it is still a chance. In addition, a significant part of the supply of the AFU is now carried out through non-state channels, like volunteers, etc.

Authoritarian and repressive trends in Ukraine

The fact that we support the struggle of Ukrainians against the Kremlin aggression does not mean that we unconditionally support everything that the Ukrainian state or the Ukrainian president do. Of course, Ukrainians (as well as all other peoples) should decide for themselves what and how will be arranged in their country. But we can express our attitude to some important cases.

We do not support the coercive conscription (draft) and the ban on leaving the country for men. We stand for voluntary army or at least for a movement in this direction. The reasons for the introduction of these measures in the Ukraine are understandable, but anarchists cannot support sending people to the front lines against their will. Until 2022, Ukraine was a regular nation state, with strongly corrupted bureaucrats, social stratification, low income level, etc. It also has a rather unpleasant policy towards Russian language, which is the first language for a significant part of the Ukrainian population. All this cannot for a second justify Putin’s invasion, but the Ukrainian state also does not have the slightest right to force anyone to serve in the army.

The interests of any state are not worth a single human life. Self-identification with states is a propaganda wiring that kills people on both sides of the front in Gaza, Ukraine and other conflict

areas of our planet. Anarchism becomes even more relevant now, when self-identification with states can cost you life in a meaningless war for murky interests.

But we repeat once again that we are not going to tell the Ukrainian comrades what to do and how to react to certain actions of the Ukrainian state. Authoritarian, conservative and straight fascist tendencies in Russia are in any case more powerful, and Russian political regime poses an immediate threat to all surrounding societies (and because of nuclear weapons — to the whole world). One can fight against Russian aggression without self-identification with the Ukrainian state.

What to do?

We urge the Russians to continue to protest and counter the criminal war in all ways possible, and to use all means to avoid being drafted. If you were drafted, leave the army as soon as you can. Consultation can be obtained, for example, in the volunteer “Go with a forest” project.

We publish anti-war leaflets and stickers to print and distribute. Download and use it.

Do not forget that in the current conditions, the distribution of such stickers and leaflets in Russian cities can lead to criminal prosecution. Do this in such a way so as not be recorded by video surveillance. Use printing services which will not snitch to the cops.

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