

“In the Spirit of Sholem Schwarzbard”

Addressing Confusion about the War in Ukraine

Autonomous Action

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We recently received this anonymous contribution, and we publish it as a part of ongoing discussion on the Russian invasion against Ukraine. Text does not necessarily reflect collective views of Autonomous Action.

A text recently appeared on It's Going Down decrying support for anarchists in Ukraine who are fighting against the Russian army. Entitled "No War but the Class War," it begins with a quotation from Rosa Luxemburg and concludes with a dedication: "In the spirit of Sholem Schwarzbard." These two historical figures—a Jewish Marxist from Poland, active in Germany, and a Jewish anarchist from Ukraine, active in France—are conscripted to legitimize the authors' polemic.

This juxtaposition between Luxemburg and Schwarzbard is typical of the quality of the scholarship of the whole text. While Luxemburg indeed wrote that "the international proletariat" should "intervene in a revolutionary way" in response to the First World War, Schwarzbard—contrary to the authors' implications—took a different path. Though an anti-militarist, Schwarzbard enlisted in the French military as soon as World War I broke out and fought against Germany for a full year and a half before going to Ukraine to fight alongside other Jewish people against pogromists and alongside other anarchists against the reactionary White Army.

Let's spell out Schwarzbard's military career in detail, so there is no confusion about this. In August 1914, as soon as Germany invaded Belgium and France, Schwarzbard—already long an anarchist—volunteered for the French Foreign Legion. "Like thousands of others," he later wrote, "I believed that the land was threatened by German militarism." While explicitly opposing French colonialism and understanding that (as he put it) "the war would not establish justice in the world," Schwarzbard nonetheless believed that if Germany conquered France, it would be a catastrophe even greater than war. Moreover, Schwarzbard regarded the Russian Tsar—an ally of the French government—as one of the foremost propagators of anti-Semitism; he must have weighed this consideration as he made his choice, the same way that many anarchists in Ukraine today weigh their opposition to NATO, the Azov battalion, and the Ukrainian government while nonetheless mobilizing against Russian bombs and tanks.

In addition to these motivations, according to his biographer, Schwarzbard "revel[ed] in the potential for Jewish power in the hundreds of thousands of soldiers learning to fight in the World War."

We don't have to agree with Schwarzbard's reasoning or with his decision to enlist—or with his apparent enthusiasm for militarism. But if we want to honor his memory and grasp the complexity of the choices he faced—let alone to act "in his spirit," should we deem that advisable—we owe it to him not to misrepresent his life for our own purposes.

A month after his deployment, Schwarzbard fought in the Battle of Champagne, then, in May and June 1915, in the Second Battle of Artois. A tremendous number of his fellow soldiers were killed and wounded around him. Afterwards, his regiment in the Foreign Legion demanded the right to be discharged or transferred to a regular unit of the French Army. Schwarzbard himself did not leave the military, but accepted transfer to the regular French 363rd Infantry Regiment, with whom he continued fighting for the next seven months.

Finally, on March 1, 1916, Schwarzbard was hit by a German bullet and nearly killed. It took him a year and a half to recover, after which he went to Ukraine to participate in the Ukrainian revolution and the defense of Jewish communities from pogroms, drawing on the skills he had acquired in the French military. Some years later, he assassinated Symon Petliura, former president of Ukraine, whom he held responsible for the pogroms.

If you want to learn more about Schwarzbard's life, you could start with "Sholem Schwarzbard: Biography of a Jewish Assassin" arguably the most comprehensive text available in English.

As anti-militarists, we can't endorse Schwarzbard's decision to serve in a state military. But for the authors of "No War but the Class War" to imagine that they are speaking on Schwarzbard's behalf when they denounce anarchists fighting in Ukraine today is the height of irony.

This error shows how quickly things can go wrong when you don't bother to do a little research—when you assume, as some anglophone North Americans tend to, that you already know everything there is to know about a subject and those who disagree with you must simply be "US/NATO-aligned" or "fascist-minimizing."

The questions that the authors of "No War" raise are important for all anti-militarists. Yes, "anarchists do not fight to create or defend the sovereignty of states." We can also agree with them when they say "to oppose Russian aggression must not equate [sic] support for Ukraine"—provided that by "Ukraine" they mean "the government of Ukraine," not "human beings who live in Ukraine." They don't seem especially concerned about what is happening to Ukrainians, Belarusians, or Russians as a result of the invasion.

Anti-militarism deserves advocates who can show that it is a way of solving people's real problems, not an excuse to pass moralistic judgments according to a doctrinaire ideology. If we would prefer that anarchists like Schwarzbard not join state militaries when the armies of other states attack them, we need to propose a better alternative. It will not suffice to warn them that somebody in San Francisco is going to call them "US/NATO-aligned" or "fascist-minimizing."

Why Did Sholem Schwarzbard Join the Army?

Rosa Luxemburg was a Marxist. In the same text that the authors of "No War but the Class War" quote, she proclaims blithely that "Imperialist world domination is an historical necessity" and therefore that "imperialism ultimately works for us" [i.e., the proletariat]. Nonetheless, when the government that ruled her invaded another country, it was clear enough to her that she could not endorse this. In that regard, she was wiser than every tankie making excuses for Putin today and every liberal making excuses for NATO.

As an anarchist, Schwarzbard had no recourse to determinist frameworks like Luxemburg's. Why, then, did he conclude—in August 1914 and then again and again for the next year and a half, at tremendous risk to himself—that his best option was to fight in the French military? If we are going to summon his spirit, we had better hear out his testimony.

We can answer that question with another question. Which city would you rather live in today—Kyiv or Mariupol? Kyiv is the city that has been successfully defended against the Russian invasion; Mariupol is the one that has not been successfully defended. Take a minute to familiarize yourself with everything that has occurred in Mariupol before you answer. Pro-Putin trolls blame the victim, saying it wouldn't have been necessary to displace hundreds of thousands of people if they had welcomed the Russian tanks with open arms or that it was worth all that

suffering to kill a few hundred Azov fascists, but if you ask anarchists from Donbas and Crimea, they will tell you very clearly why so many people in Ukraine are risking their lives to fight the Russian army. We might as well have urged the residents of Kobani to reject militarism back in 2014 when the Islamic State was besieging their city. Sometimes you do not have the choice to opt out of war.

We can criticize Schwarzbard and others like him for risking their lives to defend state democracies rather than fighting to overthrow them. We can argue that they should have formed an anarchist military and immediately attacked all the other (much bigger) armies, or that they should have fled, leaving the entire battlefield (and their hapless neighbors) to other forces. But if we want the Schwarzbards of the world to reject state militarism, too, we had better make proposals that address their actual needs and concerns. Otherwise, they will rightly disregard our criticism as idle talk, no matter how many Rosa Luxemburg quotations we toss at them.

It's one thing to say that it is not *anarchist* to participate in a state military mobilization. Of course it's not! Under duress, anarchists do all sorts of things that are not anarchistic, that do nothing to advance any anarchist project—laboring to enrich capitalist bosses, for example, or paying rent to landlords. If we can understand why workers alienate their labor in return for a wage in order to survive, we can understand why they might join a state military in hopes of resisting an invasion, as well. This is not to justify what Schwarzbard did, nor to suggest that militarism solves the problems it purports to address; it is just to ground our discussion in reality.

But it's another thing altogether to allege that anarchists who participate in the territorial defense of Ukraine against an invading army—and those who provide those anarchists with a platform via which to communicate about what they are doing—are necessarily “minimizing fascism” and “colluding with neoliberal and ultranationalist war mongering.” This charge is decidedly not “in the spirit of Sholem Schwarzbard.” If anything, the anarchists in the Resistance Committee in Ukraine are attempting to improve on Schwarzbard's example by establishing their own group, drawing on anti-authoritarian models from Rojava. Their open clashes with fascists—both before the invasion and since it started—are publicly documented for those who care to look.

Seen through a Telescope, Hazily

Undeterred, the authors of “No War” sketch out a tenuous string of allegations intended to discredit the Resistance Committee, seeking to associate them vaguely with Ukrainian fascists. If the Resistance Committee had meaningful ties to fascists, you would think we would already have heard about it from other anarchists in Ukraine, Belarus, or Russia. At the worst points in their text, the authors of “No War” employ the sort of methodology via which alienated information consumers create conspiracy theories, associatively arranging random material they have encountered online. In one case, they link approvingly to an article by a writer for the Ron Paul Institute in which the author (who lives in Chile and seems to have no particular credentials regarding Ukraine other than appearances on Russian state media platforms Sputnik and RT) promotes bona fide conspiracy theories and puts “global white supremacist terror threat” in scare quotes—arguably “minimizing fascism,” if anyone is. This is an indication of what sort of echo chambers the authors have been spending time in instead of communicating with anarchists in the affected regions.

In their entire discussion of the Russian invasion and the Ukrainian response to it, the authors cite only two contemporary anti-authoritarian sources from the former Eastern Bloc, neither of which corroborate their allegations about the supposed fascist ties of the Resistance Committee.

The sole Ukrainian anti-authoritarian they cite in reference to the Russian invasion, Andrew, makes a thoughtful, if bookish, argument in favor of focusing on building solidarity structures and awaiting more promising opportunities for insurrection. He argues that “this war is unwinnable, and every minute of denying it kills more and more people” and points out that “fighting in the regular army is definitely not the way to defeat the state,” while allowing that “sometimes volunteering to fight might be a safer option than continuing to hide out.” By his own account, Andrew is practically the only anarchist publishing from Ukraine who believes there is nothing to be gained by fighting against the invasion, though this does not diminish the value of his perspective.

The only other anti-authoritarian author from the former Eastern Bloc that the “No War” authors cite in reference to the invasion is a Russian speaker named Saša Kaluža who appears to be writing at some distance from the events in Ukraine. Saša Kaluža made an earnest case at the very beginning of the war that anarchists should focus on organizing solidarity efforts while opposing both the Russian and Ukrainian governments:

“Initiatives such as the Resistance Committee are formed within the military structure of the Ukrainian state. They are not anarchist initiatives, even if most of the participants are anarchists. All territorial defense structures are controlled by the Ukrainian Armed Forces; their actions and capabilities are limited by the strategy and policies of the state and the Ministry of Defense. We can only have a dialogue or compromise with the state when we have strength and sufficient support from the people, otherwise we will end up repressed in prisons or destroyed by any of the opposing forces, whether it is the Ukrainian armed forces and the nationalist formations on their side or the Russian armed forces and the FSB. Perhaps we will see more positive examples of anarchist organizing in Ukraine, both military and civilian, in the future.”

This is a reasonable and principled position, wisely forgoing speculation and hyperbole. It occasioned a similarly even-handed response from the Russian insurrectionist project Anarchist Fighter.

It’s worth quoting the response of Anarchist Fighter at length for several reasons. First, it addresses some of the more substantive critiques in “No War but the Class War.” Second, it was written after Saša Kaluža’s text, which included some predictions that did not come true. Finally, it arguably presents the analysis that is most widely held among anarchists throughout the former Eastern Bloc—and as Anarchist Fighter were writing from a Russian perspective rather than a Ukrainian one, their perspective cannot be written off as Ukrainian nationalism. Here are the concluding paragraphs of Anarchist Fighter’s response:

“We are ready to agree with the comrade [i.e., Saša Kaluža] in many respects. This is what anarchists should prioritize—not just defending one capitalist state from another, but using the situation of instability to transfer power to the people.

“The only problem here is that in the conditions of ongoing hostilities, while the parties to the conflict [i.e., the Russian and Ukrainian governments] are strong, the

‘third’ force will be the target of an attack by both of them as soon as it goes beyond the limits of ‘neighborly mutual assistance’ and tries to present itself as a party to the conflict with its own position and decisions. And also, it will become the object of massive [negative] propaganda, on the grounds that it is interfering with the defense of the country from the invaders. [...]

“Here, we move on to the comrade’s criticism of initiatives like the Resistance Committee. Yes, formally, the comrade is right in this criticism. However, we must not forget that history is not made by keeping your hands clean. Simply put, obtaining a weapon and the ability to act without fear of catching a bullet from the Ukrainian Armed Forces represents a significant gain.

“As for the complete dependence of the territorial defense forces on the state and their subordination to the Armed Forces, we think that there is a significant exaggeration here. In conditions of war, such formations will inevitably have a certain autonomy within the framework of the tasks that, yes, the coordinating unit sets before them.

“Due to this autonomy, they can promote the ideas of self-organization, and promote them among the people of Ukraine with deeds as well as words. They can carry out all the tasks that the comrade [Saša Kaluža] writes about in the article (including assisting and organizing people), not on behalf of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, but in their own name, as anarchists. At the same time, they can develop as an organization in order to subsequently use the achievements and social influence they have earned to transform the capitalist war into a class war.

“But yes, here it is extremely important not to lose your own identity and dissolve into the general patriotic forces.

“Moving on to the conclusion of the article. Yes, there is a capitalist war. And yes, our goal is the destruction of both the Russian and Ukrainian states, and the transfer of control of society into the hands of the people.

“However, one should not fail to act practically out of a simplistic desire to keep one’s hands and ideals clean. In our opinion, at the current stage, assisting the Ukrainian people, even if that means interacting with the Ukrainian state (for the time being), will allow anarchists to more effectively accumulate the resources and influence necessary to eventually overthrow both the Ukrainian and Russian states.”

Here, Anarchist Fighter briefly explain what anarchists might hope to gain by participating in the territorial defense of Ukraine and why it does not currently seem timely to them to prioritize attacking the Ukrainian army. Nestor Makhno and his comrades made similar calculations at various points in the course of their fight against the armies of several different aspiring governments. Elsewhere, Anarchist Fighter have argued that the defeat of Russia would be the best outcome for anarchists throughout the post-Soviet regions, since Putin has played the role of backing the forces of repression in crushing labor struggles and social movements in Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and elsewhere.

Again, we need not agree with the assessment of Anarchist Fighter, any more than we must agree with Schwarzbard’s decision to join the French military. But neither should we misrepresent it as a merely pro-NATO or pro-nationalist position.

In fact, there is a broad consensus among practically all of the significant Russian anarchist projects that anarchists in Ukraine, including those in the Resistance Committee, have a right to participate in the territorial defense without being accused of being pro-state, pro-fascist, or pro-NATO. You can find this consensus among practically all of the significant Belarusian anarchist projects, as well, and it is shared by anarchists in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, Finland, Sweden, Czech Republic, Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan, and elsewhere.

There are fierce debates and conflicts between anarchists in all of these countries, and these will likely only intensify as the war drags on. But the critics from Oakland and San Francisco appear to be out on a limb by themselves in claiming that the Resistance Committee are fascist adjacent and that the only possible outcome of their experiment is the further development of fascism and the expansion of NATO's power.

If the authors of "No War but the Class War" had found any credible statement from anarchists in any of those countries accusing the anarchists of the Resistance Committee, Black Flag, Operation Solidarity, Assembly, or some other Ukrainian anarchist initiative of being pro-fascist, surely they would have directed us to it, rather than linking to *The Daily Star* (a cheap tabloid from the UK) and someone from the Ron Paul Institute. It's also worth noting that no Russian, Belarusian, or Ukrainian anarchists have republished or translated their article.

We could conclude that the discrepancy described here indicates that nearly all the anarchists across the entire former Eastern Bloc are fake anarchists, and only a handful of *real anarchists* in Oakland and San Francisco are keeping the faith. Or we could conclude that we should not depend on a couple anarchists in US metropolises for a proper analysis of events in Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus, especially not when we can hear from anarchists in the latter regions themselves.

To suggest this is not to argue for "ally politics" or to legitimize a politics of representation. It's a matter of basic common sense. If you think that Sholem Schwarzbard was a staunch anti-militarist, if you think that you can understand the decisions anarchists are making in the middle of a war on another continent without communicating with them, you are bound to make mistakes.

If you're concerned that people in the United States are paying more attention to what's happening in Ukraine than to what's happening in Yemen, Palestine, Sudan, Tigray, or Myanmar, fair enough. The best solution might be to publish interviews with anti-authoritarians in those countries and organize solidarity actions supporting them, rather than composing yet another text about Ukraine. Don't berate other English-speaking anarchists for publishing perspectives from anarchists in Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, and the neighboring regions as if it would improve matters for people to be even more ignorant about the situations there.

And What Should We Do?

Yes, anarchists must fight for the defeat of the Ukrainian government, but not by some more powerful government. If Ukraine is defeated by Russia, the same authoritarian government that has systematically tortured anarchists and crushed social movements and labor organizing in Russia will control more territory and more people's lives. Russian, Belarusian, and Ukrainian anarchists who are participating in the territorial defense have been very clear that they are not fighting for the Ukrainian government but rather against the Russian government, in hopes of staking out a foothold from which to transform Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Russian society in the

future. The consistent anarchists among them, at least, do not argue that Ukrainian democracy is worth defending, but rather that it is impossible to organize in the conditions that prevail in Russia and Belarus right now. They don't seek to stabilize the Ukrainian government, but to destabilize the Russian government, as they believe this will create the greatest possibility of upheaval in the entire region.

As anarchists and anti-militarists, we ought to be critical of every undertaking that involves any kind of compromise with the state. But our critiques will be most useful if they are well-informed. To willfully shut one's ears to the pleas of actual Russian and Belarusian anarchists who have fled from repression in those countries to Ukraine—and who cannot easily flee to Europe!—in the name of a doctrinaire “anti-militarism” is a poor excuse for solidarity. To shout over their voices, attempting to drown out their pleas with ignorant platitudes from the other side of the ocean, is still more reprehensible.

Yes, we should work towards the defeat of the Russian government, but not by some more powerful government, not by NATO—and not by nationalists of any country. If we make it clear to the millions of ordinary people in Ukraine, the Baltic countries, Georgia, Poland, and for that matter Syria, Myanmar, and everywhere else on the receiving end of the Russian government's threats that anarchists do not give a damn what happens to them—that they can all die under Russian bombs for all we care, and that if they do anything to defend themselves, we will declare that they are fascist-adjacent—then we will put NATO and the nationalists in a much stronger position. In that case, the vast majority of those who are afraid of ending up like the residents of Mariupol will opt for nationalism or call for more NATO-backed militarization, seeing that we have no real solidarity or strategy to offer them. Proponents of both Putin and NATO would love for anarchists everywhere to adopt such a self-defeating position. So would proponents of the Azov Battalion.

Yes, we should work towards the defeat of NATO, but NATO's eventual collapse will leave something equally terrible in its wake unless we organize on an international basis starting now. Supposed anti-imperialists whose response to the Russian invasion is to call for isolationism—effectively saying that everyone should just fight against his own (!) state, or against the biggest imperial force, and leave the other states alone—are giving Putin a free hand to torture every anarchist he can get his hands on. They misunderstand the global capitalist ruling class, which is an international entity bound by its own internal solidarities, even in the midst of a war like this. No proletarian has capitalists or politicians of his or her “own.” Empire is not a matter of one nation ruling other nations; it is a structure, like the state itself, that has multiple interconnected centers. Internationalism means fighting against all the politicians and capitalists of the world and standing in solidarity with all others who fight them, even if our comrades in warzones are forced by their dire circumstances to prioritize which ones they confront first. If all of us had extended proper solidarity to Russian anarchists starting in 2012, when the crackdowns there began, perhaps things would never have reached this terrible juncture.

It's not surprising when the lackeys of certain politicians and capitalists accuse anarchists of serving rival politicians and capitalists. Their agenda is obvious. But anarchists should not sling such accusations at other anarchists lightly. If all it takes to be accused of being pro-NATO and pro-fascist is to defend yourself against a government that is opposed by NATO and fascists, it will take very little to disrupt our networks. Actual pro-Putin tankies would love to have such an easy means to fracture our movements. So would the FBI and FSB.

If it's awkward to find yourself opposing the same enemy that another of your enemies is fighting, just wait until civil war arrives in the United States. Many anarchists have already experienced being called Nazis when they fight against the police and being accused of being shills for neoliberalism when they fight against the Nazis. We know better than to pay any mind to the liberals and fascists who attempt to reduce all conflict to a false binary between nightmarish alternatives. When people who call themselves anarchists attempt to do the same thing, we should not be cowed by their invective.

So what should we do, if we don't look to armies to bring an end to wars? What alternative can we propose to the Sholem Schwarzbarbs of our day, lest they join the military?

If we want to stop the Russian invasion without legitimizing militarism, nationalism, and government, the first step is to support grassroots anti-war organizing in Russia and Belarus, which is disproportionately anarchist, and to support anti-authoritarian prisoners in Russia and Belarus, of whom there are many. The next step is to target capitalists of all nationalities who continue to finance or benefit from Putin's imperial adventures—we should do this via direct action, sending the message that social movements can address militarism directly without seeking protection from any rival militarist state. If we can do those things effectively, it will position us well to exert pressure against NATO militarism, fascist recruiting, and Ukrainian state repression. If we don't do those things effectively, pro-NATO and pro-nationalist critics will be able to argue persuasively that we are doing nothing to halt the Russian assault on Ukraine, and they will consequently be able to continue to use the Russian invasion to rally support.

We will be most effective in achieving our immediate aims and in building long-term networks of international solidarity if we are communicating directly with anarchists from a variety of tendencies and vantage points in Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, and elsewhere. Likewise, we ought to do our best to maximize the likelihood that anarchists in Ukraine survive the war, including the ones who are fighting against the Russian invasion. It is a good thing that the anarchists who have chosen to fight in Ukraine have access to medical IFAKs, plate carriers, and the like. We should have raised money years ago to supply the same resources to anarchists fighting in Rojava, quite apart from the question of whether participating in military action qualifies as "anarchist." There are really not that many of us and we should treat each other's lives as precious even when we disagree. Having failed to do so in the past is no justification for failing to do it now.

We should oppose all tendencies to dehumanize people on all sides of the war, whether by calling Russian soldiers "orcs," changing the subject to Azov in discussions about the suffering inflicted on Ukrainian civilians, or centering the lives of Ukrainian refugees over the lives of refugees who do not benefit from white privilege.

Finally, we should be organizing to support refugees and migrants of all nationalities—as Ukrainian and Polish anarchists aligned with the projects attacked in "No War but the Class War" have already been doing, despite the authors' citationless claim that anti-border organizing has been "sidelined by the fetishizing of militancy in the form of state-backed militias." We need to organize with refugees from Ukraine, Afghanistan, Syria, Sudan, and everywhere else, learning from their experiences and analyses, not immediately branding them as "defen[ders] of the Western liberal-democratic project" when their perspectives differ from ours (as the "No War" authors do in their efforts to discredit Syrian refugees who fled the Putin-backed massacres in Western Syria).

Solidarity with refugees should also extend to the Ukrainian citizens that the Ukrainian government has forbidden from leaving Ukraine on account of their age and ascribed gender.

The only hope for lasting peace in Ukraine lies in not military conflict but in mutiny and rebellion—especially on the side of Russia, which initiated this war. A unilateral mutiny in the Ukrainian military alone would only guarantee that Kyiv and Lviv end up looking like Mariupol (and that there would be endless sequels to the Network case in the territories of Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan as well as Russia). We have to foment rebellion on both sides of the battle lines; as Andrew argued, it will take “a mass movement on both sides of the frontline and in the armies themselves.” Presumably, that is just what Russian and Belarusian and Ukrainian anarchists are working towards in their various efforts to cooperate, none of which received a mention in the “No War” text—either because the authors are oblivious of them or because they consider them to be “NATO-aligned.”

Mobilizing an international resistance that can prevent wars like the one in Ukraine is already challenging. It will only become more difficult if we needlessly write off massive segments of the worldwide anarchist movement as pro-NATO or pro-fascist. We should maintain dialogue with those who are trying out hypotheses other than our own, the better to learn from the results and refine our own critiques.

What proposal do the authors of “No War but the Class War” make regarding how to respond to invasions without participating in state-aligned military formations the way that Schwarzbard did? They speak abstractly about “condemn[ing] invasion and militarization” and “solidarity with anti-war protestors, defectors from the armed forces, and conscription saboteurs.” Condemnations alone are not worth the bytes they are printed on, and as for solidarity with anti-war protestors, the authors’ chief contribution to that seems to be smearing the anarchist projects that have been translating and publishing Russian anarchist perspectives.

The most concrete thing we have to go on from the authors about how they intend to express this “solidarity” is the image they use to illustrate their article: a screenshot of a video taken by an anti-war arsonist who set fire to a military registration and enlistment office in the city of Lukhovitsy. Once again, however, the witness they have summoned testifies against them: the Russian anarchist venues that have circulated news of this action, foremost of which is Anarchist Fighter, are advocates of anarchist participation in the territorial defense of Ukraine. Neither Russian nor Ukrainian anarchists accept a false dichotomy between fighters in Kyiv and arsonists in Lukhovitsy—that dichotomy is an import product from San Francisco.

In this case, as well as in their ill-fated choice to invoke the spirit of Sholem Schwarzbard, the authors appear to have made the classic insurrectionist error of assuming that those they perceive as employing the most militant tactics must therefore share their politics. Somebody burned a recruitment center, so he or she must agree that Ukrainian nationalism is as terrible a scourge as Russian militarism—never mind that the arsonist spray-painted a Ukrainian flag as a part of the action! Sholem Schwarzbard shot a former president—therefore he cannot possibly have violated Rosa Luxemburg’s instructions and enlisted in the French army to fight in the Second World War!

One of the most fundamental divides in the world is between ideologues who assume that everything is simple and those who suffer the complications of the world in their own communities, on their own bodies. It’s effortless to “refus[e] to stand on any side of a war between imperialist states” when you’re ten thousand miles away, but it is more complicated for people in Kharkiv, Minsk, and Moscow right now. Do we have more to learn from dialogue with those for whom such a question is easy because it is abstract, or from those for whom it is painfully complicated?

In Closing

Let's close with one of the tortured poems that Schwarzbard left us from his time in the military.

And like the bones of Ephraim's Tribe
That were scattered in the Valley of Jezreel,
The dead men now stirred from the trenches,
Belted, and armed with arrow and bow
Driven, flushed out by wild vengeance
Against God, against heaven, against earth and against men,
Against everything that drove them to their fate
They must now defend their bitter enemies
To fight with their own brothers...

The bottom line is that we have to ensure that the next time a war breaks out, people like those who are fighting in the Resistance Committee have a better option than organizing under a state formation. This is a gigantic responsibility. If we don't want, like Sholem Schwarzbard, to end up defending our bitter enemies and fighting with our own brothers, if we don't want to have to choose between two nationalist armies, we need to be working very hard now to establish a concrete alternative. No amount of name-calling or historical revisionism can accomplish this for us. It requires us to be humble, to listen carefully to each other, to be serious about building something together. Despite our differences, we hope to be part of this with the authors of "No War but the Class War," with the anarchists fighting in Ukraine right now, and with you.

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