

# **Interview with a Donetsk anarchist**

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*The Revolutionary Confederation of Anarcho-Syndicalists — N. I. Makhno (Революционная конфедерация анархо-синдикалистов им. Н. И. Махно), established in Ukraine in 1994, was one of the most famous anarchist organizations which emerged from the former Soviet Union. Platformist in essence, the organization managed to assemble a cohort of vigorous activists who wanted to adopt a strategic and responsible approach to the question of achieving a libertarian society. The RKAS survived many troubles, it was involved in the miners' strike and had several long-term projects, but it was not without its internal squabbles and splits. Over the past year, however, the organization has been heard from less and less. To find out what had happened to the RKAS, and also hear their opinion on the current events in Ukraine, our Russia-based comrades of Autonomous Action interviewed a comrade from the RKAS, Samurai.*

## **What is the situation in Ukraine? Your assessment.**

A bourgeois national political revolution is taking place, against the background of which Civil War and the ill-concealed intervention of the neighbouring state are developing. I mean Russia. To put it simply. If I were to use more lyrical words, life is flowing in two parallel realities: people go to cafés, live their daily lives, children walk around, and in the same place nearby – deaths, violence, hatred...

The situation is very difficult and it will last for quite a long time. Perhaps a couple of years. The echoes will hardly ever subside at all. Mutual confrontation and the split in society are growing deeper every day. There is a tangle of contradictions and games of interests from the political point of view. I wrote about this in my articles a good while ago, at the time of Maidan and soon after it, and said in interviews to the ADSR (Autonomous Action Social-Revolutionary) media channel and Radio RKAS Libertaire back in winter. Since then, the situation has become even more multilayered. A lot of things have proved to be true; new players have apparently joined, some things became more obvious. Some foci have shifted. But in general everything is going according to the scenario which I predicted in the article “Baptism of Blood”. They laughed then at my expectations... Now the split of the country and the Civil War are a simple fact.

The processes taking place in Ukraine are only getting more complicated. Here one has geopolitics and nationalism, economy and the social, and mere saturnalia of passions.

## **What are you engaged in at the present moment?**

Unfortunately, I cannot be completely sincere about everything. Otherwise a lot of good people and I will have troubles of different natures. And my friends and I have many plans for the future. That's why, let's just say, we are trying to find a reasonable line of action in the newly-formed and constantly-changing circumstances.

As far as RKAS – N.I. Makhno (Revolutionary Confederation of Anarcho-Syndicalists named after Makhno) is concerned, it does not exist any more in the quality you have known it until now. Officially, but tacitly, RKAS was disbanded and its nucleus made the switch to illegal operations. Why did this happen? It happened because in the form RKAS had existed up to date, it did not meet the requirements of the time being. Though, in the same way, the whole anarchist movement – both in Russia and Ukraine – does not meet the requirements of today; and RKAS being a part of this movement hasn't managed to overcome all those vices, which make

the contemporary “anarcho-movement” be not of the moment. All these years we’ve tried to create an effective project in the medium where the project of such a kind was doomed to failure. RKAS was such a project. And time showed us the complete futility of our attempts. Why am I that straight out? There are three main reasons why the anarchist movement in the form it exists nowadays does not have any future. The first reason is the infantilism of the overwhelming majority of the people who join the movement. This is not connected only with age, though the majority of the participants of the movement recruited by us are in fact kids. Talking about infantilism I mean the state of mind, the child-like view of quite serious and fundamental things and a lack of seriousness in the perception of serious things. This is the paradigm of the consciousness of the majority of those who come to anarchism, no matter how old they are – 14, 18, 25 or older. Naïveté and some kind of childish inefficiency are inherent in them. These people form the agenda for the movement and the shape of its existence. The second reason is the “sub-culture” traits of the movement. A very good illustration of my words was demonstrated in one of the interviews about events in Ukraine on the *Avtonomnoje Deistviye* (Autonomous Action) site. Here is what one of the anarchists answered in this interview to the question: “Are there anarchist groups in Donbass?”:

“The activity of anarchists is at a low level, there are few of them. That’s why their influence on the political situation is extremely negligible. There are groups of “non-organized” anarchists in some towns of the region – Donetsk, Avdeevka, Kramatorsk, Gorlovka, Mariupol, Yasinovataya. Membership of each group is up to ten or about this number... The activity of the given groups is various: starting from conducting games of five-a-side, concerts, up to agitation (stickers, graffiti)... But the activity is not systematical. as these groups are something like companies of friends”.

I think, there is nothing to explain. The only thing what I wanted to ask about when reading this: why are there many little groups, calling themselves anarchist, but at the same time they are not united into a single organization and are engaged in obvious crap?

The question is a rhetorical one, as the answer to it is obvious: the infantilism of anarchists, everyone’s unbounded ambitions and the complete absence, at the same time, of the slightest strategic vision of the leaders of such groups, who cannot raise above well-worn and senseless subcultural “actions for the sake of actions”, raise above their ego (read infantilism) and unite into a single organization and work out a political agenda.

As one more example of infantilism and ideological manginess one can remember the anti-electoral propaganda of the breakaway organization from RKAS, the so-called *Mezhdunarodnyj Souz Anarkhistov* (MSA, International Union of Anarchists) in Donetsk. During the split the breakaways argued so much about the fact that in the allegedly authoritarian RKAS they were not given an opportunity to realize themselves, that their initiative was suppressed and so on. As a result, having freed themselves from the “dictatorship of the RKAS organizational bureau”, which made them go to mines and factories and spread “Anarchy” newspaper, and deal with trade unions and cooperatives, and build a well-disciplined “black guard”, having freed themselves from RKAS conference decisions, which put forth really constructive socio-political tasks, the “anti-authoritarian” anarchists, having established the MSA, showed their strategic and tactical abilities by sticking all around the city handwritten posters containing messages like: “Do not go to elections – eat vegetables!”.

And where are all these new, unimaginable anti-authoritarian units, the creators of which weakened RKAS systematically and broke the anarchist movement into pieces by their arrival,

thus not giving it any opportunity to organize itself into a strong, mass political organization? Are they still sticking stickers, drawing graffiti no one wants, playing football and going to concerts? Eat vegetables, do not go to elections? For the sake of this, one had to destroy all the constructive sprouts in anarchist movement, saying that that was “not quite respectable for pure anarchism”? This is the way naughty children behave, arranging holidays of disobedience and riots for the sake of their petty insults and games.

And finally, the anarchism of anarchists, due to which anarchists become the main obstacle on the way to anarchy. I resort to such a funny tautology intentionally, so as to draw your attention to the old illnesses of being anti-organizational, destructive and irresponsible, which are brought to the level of a virtue and which undermine any constructive work. Anarchists, due to such absolutely absurd mistakes, have thus failed to establish the organization. And all the attempts to establish the organization within the framework of the “RKAS” project have given rise to a real Crusade against “authoritarianism and extremism”. Both the situation in February 2013 and the current one have clearly shown all the helplessness of that amorphous form of infantile, subcultural anarchism, no matter what name it gave itself in the face of real historical events.

Coming back to the fate of RKAS, I can say that its disappearance is just a tactical step. Perhaps, RKAS will re-emerge in a new capacity, taking into account all the mistakes and being modernized according to the situation; perhaps we will create something brand new or a couple of variants. But the spirit of RKAS and the idea of that kind of anarchism which we have been trying to achieve for more than 20 years now, will live on. We are not surrendering and we are not disappearing. For now, we have dissolved in time and space. For a little while.

## **What is the social composition of the protesters in the south-east and at Maidan? Who are the leaders and the ordinary people there?**

Maidan and the Separatists of the South-East do not differ much from each other. Both the Maidan revolution and the revolution of the Separatist East involve the people of Ukraine: creative intellectuals, employees, entrepreneurs, citizens, the rural population, students, the lumpen proletariat and the former military. This fratricidal war is between the people who must have common interests, but in the course of political manipulation this nation has become a hostage and a puppet to interests of the feuding economic clans, families, in fact, to separate “strong personalities”. Instead of directing their arms against the oligarchs and their empires, the ordinary people of Maidan have led new oligarchs to power, and the common people of the South-East carry out the orders of the family of ousted president Yanukovich and his Moscow Master. All this rhetoric flavored with nationalism and chauvinism, all these tears about some interests of the East or the West are just stage scenery for the struggle for the interests of oligarchic families and State institutions, subject to their will. But these pieces of scenery are bloody. People have always paid in lives for the interests of their masters, both in the First World War and in the Second. Both in the recent local wars of contemporary history and, alas, now in Ukraine. As a result, bloody wounds and anger for decades – that is the very thing that the Ukrainian people will ultimately receive for their sacrifices. The people of Ukraine, who recognize themselves as such or do not realize, are embroiled in these cruel “games of thrones”. People on both sides of the barricades and roadblocks must understand that they have been deceived, that they are

fighting with mythology and in reality they are killing themselves, because they are one united body. The workers who have been pitted one against another like fighting dogs, on whom stakes are placed, and who will get nothing but wounds and grief. Because the enemy is on the wrong side of the fun sight. The enemy is in the Kremlin and in the Mariinsky Palace, in the Capitol and in the Bundestag.

Now let's talk about the leaders. The Maidan leaders are the national bourgeoisie and its radical elements. Who are separatists' leaders? The national bourgeoisie and its radical elements. In the East they scare the people with the *Pravyj Sektor* ("Right sector") and call on them to fight fascism – those, who have come from within the Russian fascist parties and movements or share the paradigm of imperial fascism of Russian nation. Supporters of Barkashov, Zhirinovskiy, Dugin and Limonov do call to fight fascism, don't they? This is nonsense. And the saddest aspect of this process is that by fascism the Russian fascists and nationalists, together with those in the masses fooled by them, mean all Ukrainians, the Ukrainian people as such. The Ukrainians are denied their history, language, their own name, the right to exist as such. In Donetsk, according to their logic, you have a choice, to be either a Russian or to be a fascist. If you are Ukrainian, but you have nothing to do with nationalism and, moreover, with fascism, it does not count. If you say, "I am Ukrainian," for a word in the Ukrainian language you are beaten or killed. It's simple. Such is the logic of imperial Russian "national anti-fascism". Come to Donetsk and speak Ukrainian, and you will see for yourself. And this phantom has embraced not only a handful of the pro-Russian Right, but the whole population strata. Even the so-called Left in the South-East. Manipulation wins the war. Rape the consciousness of the masses and you can work wonders of absurdity. This happened at Maidan and is now happening in the South-East.

## **What kind of organizations are *Rabochiy Front* and *Lava*? What impact do they have?**

*Lava* is just a group of miners from one of the Donetsk mines, who, on general impulse, in the early days of unrest in the city came to the Regional State Administration and wrote word *Lava* on a black flag. This is not a political organization. It's just a group of people. The flag hung on the balcony of the building for a few days, and then disappeared, as well as the group itself. These people have nothing to do with anarchism. This happens in days of popular unrest. People in a flurry of something do something, but this something has no consequences.

*Rabochiy Front* is a group that emerged as a result of a split in the Ukrainian Workers Union long before the events at Maidan. These are workers of communist, pro-Soviet views. When the unrest in Donetsk started, this group showed itself initially by protecting a monument to Lenin. Then it participated in the capture of the Donetsk Regional State Administration. In general, the participation of supporters of the Communist Party of Ukraine and all the pro-Soviet groups in the separatist movement has manifested itself massively and actively. Even the *Borot'ba* party takes an active part in events in the South-East. Many people see Russia as the successor to the Soviet Union. And, in connection with this, in all the pro-Russian-ism they see a kind of restoration of the USSR. It is so ridiculous and illogical that I do not even want to comment on it. But mass psychosis is a complex phenomenon. It has been perfectly described by many, from Le Bon to Reich and Moscovici. There was a time when I did not understand why the Nazis were able to win in Germany so easily. Now I understand. The crowd can be only manipulated, it will

swallow everything. Moreover, none of the classical schemes of the world view work in the era of Post-modernism. That's why one can see a communist and a fascist standing shoulder to shoulder, an imperialist and a supporter of workers' councils, an anarchist and a nationalist. I'm reminded of a vivid illustration of the above, when at the anti-fascist rally devoted to the anniversary of the victory over fascism, on the 9<sup>th</sup> May in Donetsk, my brother, a supporter of the separatists, was greeted with "antifascist" greeting "Heil Hitler" by his comrade-in-movement, one of those who stormed the Donetsk SBU (Security Service of Ukraine). In response to my sarcastic remark my brother, who came "to protect veterans from Banderovtsy" murmured shyly: "Hrmpf..."

## **Could you elaborate on the referendum held on 11<sup>th</sup> May?**

Another example of the society of spectacle. The referendum — which cannot either be verified, or refuted. With its fake ballots and polling stations, without observers and under the watchful eye of people in masks. I myself had the joy of witnessing a guy with a sawn-off gun who was "protecting" my polling station. The referendum, about the holding of which Mr. Barkashov personally advised one of the leaders of the Donetsk People's Republic by giving the following instructions "write 90 per cent voter turnout and let's see the reaction of the Khokhols (translator's note: pejorative or offensive, sometimes facetious name for Ukrainians)". It was a farce. To put it more accurately, it was part of the political strategies that can be embedded into the framework of an overall strategy. Its essence was to create in the first place independent People's Republics, supposedly legitimate, and then ask for admission to the Russian Federation. Everywhere, both in Donetsk and in Lugansk, the Crimea scenario had been worked out. And at first the separatists had high hopes for the option. Not by accident, a few hours after the proclamation of the DNR (the Donetsk People's Republic), did its leaders ask to come under Putin's wing. By the way, I wonder how the anti-oligarchic and socialist rhetoric of separatists combines with love for an oligarchic, authoritarian imperial state and personally for the mega-oligarch Putin, whose fortune amounts to many billions. Another fact in this absurd tragicomedy.

The Crimean scenario failed in Donbass, a quick and easy annexation failed. The circumstances were wrong and time was somehow lost. And in general, I doubt that it was a part of Putin's plans.

I will not give any statements about the Luhansk region. But there is a very large number of people in Donetsk and the Donetsk region who do not support the DNR or who are supporters of Ukrainian unity. This I can confirm. The separatists are better organized and have better administrative resources and the support of the neighboring state. That's it. And sentiments are approximately equal or I even admit that there are more opponents to the People's Republic than supporters.

## **What do you know about the fire in Odessa on 2<sup>nd</sup> May? What do you think — who committed the arson?**

This is another part of the large-scale manipulation which is difficult to speak about, because this manipulation is on blood and sufferings. Indeed, like everything that is now happening in Ukraine. We can recall the brutal murders of supporters of Ukraine in Gorlovka, the killings and

beatings at demonstrations in defence of the unity of Ukraine in Donetsk, he beatings and torture by separatists and imperial agents. The NKVD operates in Donetsk, in the building of state administration, which is the headquarters of the separatists and the seat of the DNR government. Yes, it is such an unsophisticated name for the place where pro-Russian rebels bring their opponents and simply the dissatisfied, where they are beaten and tortured, where they are kept in beastly conditions for months. One can recall dozens of cases. This is the logic of the unfolding civil conflict. Casualties on both sides are inevitable. Odessa is a part of the events. This could happen in any city and with activists from any camp. With the same success separatists could drive the pro-Ukrainian activists into the building and during the battle it could catch fire, with the same result. When people die, the common people, when they are being killed by the same ordinary people for the interests of the rich, it is the tragedy of the people as a whole. I mentioned this at the beginning of our conversation. The tragedy in Odessa is a part of large-scale manipulation, a part of the previously-opened score of civil war victims. The very war in which both sides are shooting and killing each other, and there are occasional victims on both sides. I repeat, the tragedy for me is not in who killed whom and in what quantities, but the very fact of civil strife of ordinary people clouded with myths, who are dying for the interests of those in power. Therefore, both people killed under Ukrainian flags and those killed under the Russian flag are victims of the Moloch of power in the broadest sense of the word. This is not a war of the oppressed against the oppressors, it is the war of feudal houses, in which the dead are recruits, and the lords are rubbing their hands.

This is disgusting. The real revolution begins when the plebeians join together against the patricians, but do not kill one another for their interests. And with regards to Odessa, we will never know the truth. As one of the supporters of the separatists told me: “Yes, both sides lie, but you must choose the lie you are ready to defend. For you not to be ashamed of your choice afterwards.” Here is a sample of the logic which is in the minds of the warring parties.

So, I do not want to choose between two kinds of lies, I want to be on the side of the truth. And the truth is where people are fighting against their oppressors, not against their own kind.

## **What’s your attitude towards *Avtonomnyj Opir*, *Borot’ba* and other leftists of various kinds, who are involved in the protests in the West and the East? Did you know about the creation of the Black Guard of Ukraine?**

I treat *Avtonomnyj Opir* with interest, as I believe that the anarchist movement lacks a competent study of the national question and it also lacks an attitude to patriotism in its purely folk form as it was in many old anarchist movements from Hristo Botev to Nestor Makhno. It happens that today, the view of cosmopolitanism is dominant among anarchists, cosmopolitanism that rejects any roots and marginalizes people, while internationalism — which is part of national interest as well as international and concerns the love for one’s country without any political component — has receded from its positions. The two points of view have always been present in anarchism. Internationalist anarchism corresponds more to common sense in my opinion. We must return to the roots of classical anarchism, and work at this question. Otherwise we risk making a number of old mistakes and remaining a marginal movement.



I treat the communist party *Borot'ba* cautiously as they are competitors to anarchists. And this means that they are opponents. The *Borot'ba* project works closely with the Communist Party of Ukraine and has been created for the future, a replacement for the aging, dying KPU (the Communist Party of Ukraine). It is a young, contemporary, modern version of the Communist Party. We will see MPs from *Borot'ba* holding seats in the Ukrainian parliament. They have already started to fulfill this task. In ideological terms, “Borot'ba” is the heir of the old communist movement taking responsibility for all its long history. Starting from Marx’ fight against Bakunin in the International up to the Bolshevik dictatorship of Lenin and Trotsky and the destruction of the anarchists and Makhnovshchina by them, from Stalin and the Soviet Union up to Petr Simonenko, Victor Ampilov and Gennady Zyuganov today. That’s why it is not surprising that “Borot'bists” (members of *Borot'ba*) take such a warm part in the separatist movement in the South-East of Ukraine on the side of the imperial forces, and why red flags flutter next to the imperial tricolours. There are also heroic pages in this story, but communists-statists will always remain enemies for anarchists, no matter under what mask they act: the unattractive Simonenko or the attractive Vallejo. Sooner or later we’ll find ourselves face to face with this party, and we will fight against *Borot'ba*, as Bolsheviks and supporters of Makhnovism fought against each other in their time. It’s inevitable.

I know little about the project “Black Guard of Ukraine” — and for now I am skeptical about it, in the light of my criticism of Ukrainian anarchist movement expressed in this interview. I would be glad if I’m wrong.

## **Do you think there are any Russian experts in the South-East?**

I do not think so, I can confirm so. And a lot of them — there are training bases in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions, where groups of 400–500 local people and visiting volunteers from Russia undergo training under the guidance of military instructors. There are experts, for example, in the “Vostok” (“East”) battalion, several dozen Russian military professionals. There is Girkin and his group in Slovyansk, there is Bezler in Gorlovka and many others. Of course, the majority of people who are fighting under the flags of the separatists are the locals, ordinary hard workers or veterans of the army or security agencies, Afghan War veterans, former cops and experts from the Special Forces. But a significant and authoritative core of militants, apart from volunteers from Russia, such as the Don Cossacks and the core group of various nationalist Russian organizations, are Russian saboteurs, military specialists, who organize the process. The supply of ammunition, special equipment, weapons and financing comes from Russia via the Duma’s powerful lobby. People close to Putin advise functionaries from the Donetsk People’s Republic, people such as Glazjev, for example, and such odious figures as Zhirinovskiy, Dugin and Barkashov. Moreover, the current head of the government of the so-called “People’s Republic” in Donetsk is a famous Moscow political strategist, Boroday, appointed by the Kremlin administration; he is also giving orders to separatist “Vostok” battalion whose recruiting stations openly recruit volunteers/mercenaries throughout Russia. This is intervention to a large extent which relies on the local protest movement and the local political elite. All these elements are present.

## **Is there a possibility of switching the protests in Ukraine onto the track of social revolution?**

At the moment it's an improbable scenario. I firmly believe that any social revolution is possible only in the presence of two factors. These are: massive public demand for radical change and the political organization of anarchist of the revolutionary wing, which will be able to organize and direct the process of change and consolidate its results. If the first factor is more or less present, and activity by the population has increased, the subjective factor is still absent. Political revolution is taking place. And political forces and those who are called the big bourgeoisie — or with a modern twist, the oligarchs — will take advantage of its results. But if we are talking about social revolution, then there is no serious demand for it, people, even if they see the changes, they see these changes only within the framework of purely political changes. And even those timid shoots of anti-authoritarian social revolutionism, which are not supported by a strong anti-authoritarian revolutionary organization, will be crushed by the political agenda of the bourgeois and nationalist parties. I have already talked about the absence of anarchist organization. This is the main problem of the modern anarchist movement and the cause of its collapse against the background of current developments. The things that are happening now in Ukraine and the fact that anarchists here have been unable to use the situation because they denied common sense for years and were enthralled by subcultural, anti-organizational illusions, provides much food for self-analysis.

And it confirms all the conclusions and efforts which supporters of the project called “RKAS — N.I. Makhno” attempted to carry out. The fact that it failed says a lot and answers the following question: “Is it possible for anarchists to hope now to switch the activity of the masses to the plane of the social revolution?”. The organization is a very important medium for the existence of ideas. It is an incubator, a school, a mutual aid society and a productive platform for ideas and projects; but most importantly, it is a tool of realizing those ideas, it is an instrument of influence and an instrument of struggle. It cannot be replaced with affinity groups. Read Makhno, Arshinov, Volin, Bookchin, finally. And everything becomes clear. Anarchists now, like in 1917, have missed a unique opportunity to head the process.

## **What are the prospects for the anarchists that exist at the moment?**

For now, none. And I'm afraid that in the future, too, if things remain as they are. If revolution does not happen in the minds of those who call themselves anarchists. In this interview, I talk a lot about recipes for the self-fulfillment of anarchism; that's why I don't want to repeat myself. The RKAS project was such a recipe, one which was not just refused, but a real persecution was unleashed against it. Ask those who call themselves anarchists in Ukraine, what they think about RKAS and you'll hear so much venom, bile, anger and lies. Why? Because we are the only ones who did not keep pace with supporters of subculture and chaotics (translator's note: those who believe anarchy to be a pro-chaos movement), and the only ones who spoke of the need for unity, discipline and rigidity. The only people who spoke openly to one's face about weaknesses and castigated the vices of the movement. And the only ones who had always acted against “the rules”. We have always been unlike the others, with our special “RKAS-like” and, as a matter of

a fact, Makhno's platformist anarchism. There are only two attitudes to RKAS among anarchists — respect or hatred. But there is no indifference. So we're on the right track. And our struggle for the organization is a struggle for the realization of anarchist ideas in practice. Now we have a lot to rethink. But I'm afraid that everything will remain as it is in the anarchist movement. Anarchists have a unique ability in the mass — they are not taught anything. They prefer to repeat the same mistakes, and those who are trying to correct mistakes, are branded "non-anarchists". As in the case with RKAS. Though I think that RKAS is a unique phenomenon in post-Soviet anarchism, one which existed for more than 20 years and played a brilliant role in its history. Many groups that appeared later are only clones of RKAS, whose creators are just copying parodies of the mother matrix, having lost its original essence. And each a slightly-fledged anarchist certainly wants to create his new organization, always copying RKAS but claiming this act of creating a copy to be an anti-authoritarian rebellion and a new word in anarchism. This is ridiculous. And that would just be funny, if it were not so sad. Because it is an infinite ambitious split of the movement as if from the motives of anti-authoritarianism, but in fact from idiotic vanity and self-affirmation. And I don't know, whether the coming-of-age will ever come... Makhno wrote about this almost a hundred years ago. Bookchin — almost forty. I am writing today. And it is still going on. What else can I say?

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