

In support of comrades in Ukraine

Movement of Irkutsk Anarchists

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Alongside the general decline in attention to the war in Ukraine, a so-called “internationalist” position has been visible in the anarchist milieu in Europe. Basically, it consists of two points: the first rests on the equalization of the forces of the aggressor and the invaded country, presenting this conflict as yet another capitalist war in which one cannot take sides; and the second is based on the view that NATO wages war against Russia, in which Ukraine is seen mainly as an opportunity for Western countries to fight Russia at the expense of Ukrainian lives. Ukrainian anarchists who participate in armed resistance to Russian aggression as part of the army are criticized.

As we heard from one comrade, anarchists in the West are more ready to see the struggle in Russia as “pure”, “like in the times of the First World War” (meaning romanticism around the revolution in Russia; repression after demonstrations or speaking out and supporting prisoners is closer to the Western reality). At the same time, the Ukrainian reality and experience — cooperation with the army, aiming for a long-term perspective — can be difficult to understand from the Western point of view; the practice of activity in war is far from the Western reality, which for some reason some European comrades forget.

This position is taken by some individuals, anarchist collectives and organizations from the Czech republic, Italy and other countries. In Russia, this position can be found in the syndicalists of KRAS-MAT. This position was criticized in detail in an article posted on the Pramen website. Observing the situation, we too decided to contribute our view.

The groups we have mentioned are unlikely to change their position, or at least not in the near future. This text is our humble analysis of the situation and an expression of solidarity with our comrades in Ukraine.

Geopolitics of solidarity

Criticism from some European organizations towards Ukrainian comrades seems to us to be a dead end: generally the counter-proposal brings the recommendation to oppose any war on principle and call for all soldiers to lay down their arms or turn against their commanders and governments.

But being fundamentally opposed to war and defending against Russian invasion, and seeking Russian defeat, are not contradictory to each other. Ukrainian comrades have repeatedly made it clear that it is a question of survival, including political survival. In addition, unsolicited, inconsiderate advice from Europe (often from people who have never been to Ukraine and are not currently experiencing military aggression) about what to do if one does not resist the Russian invasion in the ranks of the Ukrainian army is nonetheless unspecific, abstract, and far from reality.

The vast majority of anarchists and anarchist collectives we know from Belarus, Ukraine and Russia have first-hand knowledge of the crimes of Putin’s regime and support anarchists fighting in the AFU and participants in the resistance to the Russian invasion.

That is the position we take. For us, this war is an imperialist war. The Russian state is based on wars of conquest, great-power myths, colonization of vast territories and genocide of indigenous peoples. One need only look at even the Russian propaganda itself to realize that the Ukrainian people are fighting for their subjectivity, if not for the right to exist at all. The Russian world will bring with it poverty and destruction, xenophobia and police lawlessness, the scale of which is

not comparable to any country in Europe, including Ukraine. This is how both many Russians and residents of Russian-occupied territories live now. The real internationalism now is to support the Ukrainian people in the face of Russian aggression.

At the same time, we have no illusions about European states or the United States: they are based on exactly the same logic as Russia and are doing the same thing while having different set of patterns and strategy. We should not make false moral distinctions on the axis of East — evil, West — good. This prevents us from understanding the situation holistically and strategically in the interests of the international anarchist movement. At the same time, because of our location, history and heritage of struggle — in Siberia, inside an imperial colony-province — our perspective is centered here and we speak mainly about Russia, while in Europe and the United States local parts of the international anarchist movement are actively struggling and are most familiar with and writing about their contexts.

We can stand in solidarity with the anarchist struggle in Europe and the USA, as well as with the revolutionary struggle in other regions and countries. We know that in the event of a revolutionary situation in Russia, our comrades in other countries will support us in word and practice. Can they be criticized for such support, saying that they are helping to overthrow Putin's regime and that this plays into the hands of NATO, the U.S., China or other forces's geopolitical interests in the region? Of course not. This picture is incomplete, this criticism lacks strategy and a long-term perspective.

Therefore, we follow the same logic in case of our involvement in revolutionary events in other countries. In geopolitical terms, all states and the various political forces linked to their interests take advantage of moments of instability, war, revolution, and extract benefit for their goals from any situation. The anarchist movement in this respect cannot stand aside under the pretext of ideological inconsistencies and contradictions, and must always pursue its goals despite ethical and other challenges. Various forces will always enter the field, and they will mostly be hostile to freedom movements.

To sit and wait for a situation where the anarchist movement will have a significant advantage against fascists, states and other unfriendly forces is to condemn ourselves to inaction and defeat. No situation favorable to us will arise on its own out of vacuum. Firstly, because if we are not capable and ready to use such situations to seriously advance our cause, they are more likely to play into the hands of other political forces who will be ready for them. Second, we believe that situations favorable to the revolutionary movement will be made possible by factors such as decades of hard work and organizational activity, experience, strong ideology, training, the good standing of the movement and its organizations in society, coherent structure, methods and standards, strong camaraderie, ample resources, and connections with other revolutionary movements. If these marks have not yet been reached, then we need to continue the struggle and reach that level.

Therefore, we consider direct involvement of various types to be correct and necessary, and we support the activity and initiative of the comrades in Ukraine. From our point of view, the right step from the anarchist individuals and organizations in Europe, which have been scolding comrades in Ukraine, would be to discuss any questions and contradictions directly with Ukrainian comrades, with respect and understanding for their tragic and difficult situation. And, for example, to make arrangements and come to Ukraine to provide the necessary support, if appropriate — like many other comrades, groups and organizations did.

Approach to the media and statements

We also need to pay close attention to what and how we, as anarchists, write about the war. There are many nuances in delivering a view from Russia on the Russian war in Ukraine, as there are in commenting from Europe.

First, we believe that all anarchist organizations should adhere to the basics of comradeship and stand firmly behind the comrades in Ukraine, be in solidarity with them, and provide various kinds of support in all possible ways, regardless of how they feel about the position of the Ukrainian comrades or from what angles they analyze Russian aggression.

Secondly, one has to pay attention whether what is being written is not playing into the hands of Russian propaganda and the line it is pursuing.

Third, public statements, analysis and comments about the situation in Ukraine should be coordinated directly with collectives and people involved in the resistance in Ukraine in order to get a check with reality and to take into account the requests of comrades in Ukraine.

Fourth, we believe that the movement should work out its sharp disagreements and conflicting positions internally, without making all its disagreements and weaknesses public. By doing so, we give more information to the enemy, increase disunity and separation, fail to reach useful conclusions, and show the movement in a non-serious way, but we gain nothing. The ability to resolve serious, sensitive and strategic disagreements, disputes, conflicts and contradictions without taking these things to the public, instead working through them with well-established internal organizational mechanisms and extracting results and agreements from these processes is, in our view, a quality of a strong revolutionary movement.

Comradeship is the priority

We think that European comrades who have serious ideological objections to the activities of anarchists in Ukraine should prioritize a comradely approach and solidarity, and approach their objections or criticism with caution and make sure that a dialogue and understanding is established first. We are confident that in 10–15 years, if not sooner, this approach will be appreciated in hindsight. At the very least, it will manifest itself in the quality of relationships and connections within the movement at the international level. Moreover, looking at the political situation in Europe and the world, the ongoing militarization and the growth of military conflicts, it is hard to predict what will happen in Europe in the future years. There is a possibility that many comrades, for example in Italy or the Czech Republic, will themselves face war, death and destruction in new military conflicts, crises and natural disasters. With such an optic for the future, strong ties and exchange of experience with anarchists in Ukraine are not only politically, humanly, but also in a practical sense necessary. In other words, we see that there are issues of ideological purity, dogmatism and political contradictions, but there is also the unpalatable reality, the question of survival, relevance and success of anarchism or a libertarian future in general in Europe and elsewhere.

Let us revisit the point we made at the beginning of this text: in the criticisms we hear from some European anarchist groups, we see a dead end. We want to see a greater push for cohesion and organizational integrity in the anarchist movement, especially when it comes to events such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the defense against it. Even if there are fundamental

disagreements between us about the role of the anarchist movement in these events, the alternatives proposed should not only be realistic, but should be also based on the understanding that we will not always be able to adopt an ideal position that will not encounter any contradictions, challenges and failures along the way. Even if there are no realistic and reasonable proposals for an alternative, there is the minimum necessary, in our opinion: understand that people will do what they deem necessary in their own context, and to support our comrades in Ukraine by all available means, to stand up for them in front of other people and organizations, and never sabotage their work and efforts of those who actively provide them with practical assistance and somehow act along the lines agreed with them. And this is not just for no reason, but because we are talking about people who, like us, have chosen to fight for liberatory ideas, ideals of freedom and justice, and put them into practice.

In our opinion, these thoughts also apply to the Russian anarchist milieu. Despite the fact that the problem of the “internationalist position” which we criticize in this text is not particularly present in the Russia, we still have a big gap in the organized interaction and support of Ukrainian comrades, to which they have drawn attention and about which they have repeatedly criticized. This needs to be corrected. We are also part of this problem, and we are trying to solve it.

Inaction and neutrality are unacceptable, especially when it comes to the survival of Ukrainian society and our comrades in the face of Russian invasion. The word “comradeship” should not be disconnected from the practice, when there are personal and ideological differences in the movement. Besides, let’s look at a long-term perspective: many frictions between people fade over the years; people, circumstances and points of view change, and the participants in conflicts themselves do not always remember what the fuss was about; often old frictions begin to seem less serious over time, their sharpness fading into the past. Of course, this is not the case at all with some problems and incidents.

But comradeship and mutual support, backed up by the necessity of coming face to face with a deadly threat, will leave a significant mark and a pledge for the future of the common struggle. And these things that leave that mark are the things we need to look for between us as much as possible.

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