

Bolshevik repression against anarchists in Vologda

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“In April 1918, a telegram came from Moscow about the speeches of anarchists. At this time, the Vologda anarchists became insolent. They seized the building of the hotel “Europa”, furnished it with machine guns ...turned it into an almost impregnable fortress. A lot of them turned out to be from Petrograd. The Red Guard received an order from the gubernia executive committee, to at all costs disarm the anarchists. This task was carried out overnight.

The Red Guards had to contend with the so-called “violent” echelons of anarchists who were returning from the front from the old army. One of these echelons coming from Yaroslavl to Vologda, was well armed, had even a few large guns. Anarchists seized everything that came to hand.

To prevent them from organising riots in Vologda, the Red Guard and the Latvian regiment skilfully manoeuvred the anarchist detachment.”

K. P. Yushkov From the revolutionary past in Vologda. For the power of the Soviets: Memoirs of the Vologda Bolsheviks. Vologda, 1957. p.26.

There is a reasonable amount of information available in the English language about repression in April 1918 against the anarchists in Moscow and to a lesser extent Petrograd. Less is extant in English about Bolshevik repression against anarchists in other urban centres at the same time, like Tsaritsyn and Vologda. This article aims to throw some light on the repression in Vologda.

Anarchists in the Vologda region (Vologda, North-Dvina, Cherepovets gubernias) began their activities in 1917. The first groups of anarchists were created at the Sukhona artillery plant in Vologda where the anarchist Alexander Dmitrievich Fedorov was a worker (known as Alexei or Worker Alexei within the anarchist movement). Fedorov, born in 1883, often spoke at rallies and was a leading light in creating an anarchist movement in Vologda. Mikhail Vetoshkin described Fedorov in his memoirs as a “very noisy and active worker”.

The Northern Federation of Anarchists was created in 1918 and the Federation occupied the Passage Hotel at 57 Obhukovskaya Street. It had 350 active supporters. Its banners were emblazoned with the following slogans: “Neither god nor master! The spirit of destruction is the spirit of creation. May the future abound! The Federation decided to issue a newspaper called *Gryadushcheye (The Future)*, with Fedorov as editor.

The first issue appeared on April 10th. It was planned to appear twice a week but under the circumstances which will be described only a few issues appeared.

The hotel occupied by the anarchists was heavily fortified and a number of guns and machine guns arranged around the building. The anarchists gathered a large collection of literature at the building. The anarchists formed an armed unit called the Anarcho-Proletarian Regiment of Comrade Bakunin.

Vologda was a major railway junction so that soon the local anarchists were reinforced by others from Petrograd, Yaroslavl and Galich, swelling the number of anarchists in the town to 900. On March 20th, a detachment of anarchist communists arrived in Vologda and took over the Europa hotel. Three weeks later The Vologda papers reported: “*A few days ago, a detachment of Kronstadt anarchists arrived in our city to the number of 20 people. They were followed by two more detachments of 52 and 200 people*” ... But already an ominous event had taken place in February of that year with the arrest of six anarchists led by V. I. Chernov. They were arrested and imprisoned

for two days after which they were released after signing a pledge that they would not take armed action against Soviet power.

Following the attack on the Moscow anarchists on the night of 11–12th April, an order was issued to on April 15th to attack the anarchists in Vologda. The operation was led by the head of the local Cheka, P. N. Aleksandrov. The 8th Latvian regiment, part of the Vologda garrison, surrounded the Europa hotel at 5 a.m. After several machine gun bursts the attack began. The anarchists were taken by surprise and preferred to surrender. 40 rifles, 200 cartridges, 10 hand grenades several machine guns and 6 pyroxylin grenades were seized. Around 100 anarchists were arrested including Fedorov. At the Passage hotel the anarchist M. Sobelev was captured and several hand grenades and a revolver were confiscated from him.

The secretary of the French embassy, Count Louis de Robien, who was in Vologda at the time wrote approvingly in his diary: “*The battle was on in the streets and even at the station, and the Soviets arrested an anarchist group that was hiding in some houses and railroad cars ... The operation against the anarchists we witnessed here, also took place in other Russian cities, especially in Moscow ... It was time to do something, because the anarchists terrorized the population, seizing the houses and driving out the tenants and appropriating everything they wanted ... It was necessary to apply force*”.

The anarchists arrested at the Europa were told to leave Vologda within 24 hours.

The Northern Federation of Anarchists demanded of the Executive Committee of the Vologda Soviet why this action had taken place. The chair of the executive committee Sh. Z. Eliava and PN Aleksandrov explained that information had been received that the anarchists were going to blow up the Soviet, in addition, they had received reports from Petrograd that among the anarchists there were criminal elements. As these charges were found to be totally false all those arrested were released.

At the meeting that followed, the anarchists accused the Bolsheviks of usurping power, and treason against the cause of the revolution, and recalled their representatives from all Soviet institutions. In the second issue of *The Future* Fedorov fulminated against the action writing that “*After reviewing the current situation the anarchists of the Northern Federation came to the conviction that the real Soviet power is not the power of workers and peasants,*” and that “*the dictatorship of the Bolshevik Party had declared an uncontrollable terror and that had very much paralysed the entire political and economic life of the country. ...the authorities have compromised themselves so much that no anarchist is able to have anything in common with the former friends who are now traitors.*”

Two more issues of *The Future* appeared after this until it was prohibited by the Soviet authorities and in June 1918 one issue of the newspaper *Dawn of Anarchy*. In July 1918 Fedorov spoke at a meeting of the Main Railway Workshops where he had sharp criticisms of the Soviet government, demanded the ending of the Civil War and the restoration of freedoms.

In response the chairman of the Provincial Executive Committee, Mikhail Vetoshkin, sent a letter to the Cheka demanding that Fedorov be arrested. When arrested, Fedorov gave a false name and fled the city. The search for him ended in February 1919 with the amnesty declared on the anniversary of the Revolution.

In the meantime Fedorov was the Vologda delegate to the congress of the Northern Federation of Anarchist groups held at Briansk on August 6th-11th, 1918. He reported that the anarchists had a “great influence in the railway workshops, that anarchist ideas were popular among workers and peasants, but that lack of theoretical forces impeded the progress of anarchism in Vologda

He said that at first people in Vologda were apprehensive about the anarchists but then began to treat them sympathetically. To establish relations with the anarchists in the cities of Vyatka, Galich, Cherepovets, etc. an armed anarchist partisan detachment arrived in Vologda, which joined the local organization and was asked to refrain from seizures and requisitions. He also commented on the Bolshevik attack on the Europa hotel, saying that the library and clubroom there were severely damaged as a result of the attack. The arrival of the lecturer “v. V” (Wolf Gordin?) in Vologda had contributed to the growth of anarchism there. After he left, workers often asked when he was returning. Now due to repression it was impossible to hold meetings and lectures and The Future had been closed down by the authorities. Organisational work was in decline, hence the need to send anarchist lecturers to Vologda. Fedorov also commented on the increasing popularity of anarchism among peasants. He referred to a peasant uprising in the area of seven townships in Cherepovets region against military mobilisation and the seizure of young horses. Two echelons of Red Army soldiers were sent to put down the uprising, entire villages were burnt down, and peasants were shelled and shot. There had been the setting up of an agricultural commune which supplied food to the railway workers, but this had failed.

In January 1919 another anarchist agricultural commune set up near Vologda was immediately suppressed by the Soviet authorities.

In summer 1919, according to local Chekist Nikolai Sinitsyn, a train full of anarchist sailors arrived at Vologda station. Surrounded by the Bolsheviks the sailors refused to negotiate and pulled out machine guns from the train wagons, saying that they would fire on the station. They were allowed to continue along the railway line. Sinitsyn reported that: “*I remember that on most cars anarchistic slogans were written and on one of the carriages the black banner of anarchists with a skull and crossbones was attached to the doors.*” He also noted that separate groups of anarchists were also disarmed in Veliky Ustyug, Cherepovets and among the students in Totma.

Fedorov returned to Vologda in 1920. He lived at 3 Kabylynskaya street (now Clara Zetkin street). An anarchist club and library were located there. An underground print shop was set up and Fedorov with N. A. Solntsev¹ and M.P. Suchkov began to publish *Borba (The Struggle)* and tried to create the groups Union of the Peasants of the North and the Union of Grain Growers intended to spread anarchist ideas among the peasants. On March 23rd Fedorov, Solntsev and Suchkov were arrested by the Cheka, who confiscated large amounts of printing font, a typewriter, leaflets and copies of *The Struggle*. He was sentenced on May 1st 1920 to imprisonment in a concentration camp until the end of the Civil War.

In a monthly review the OGPU (new name for the Cheka) reported in 1922 that: “In the Arkhangelsk and North Dvinskaya Gubernias. There was clandestine activity of administrative-exiled anarchists in the villages, where agitation against the introduction of a tax in kind (Vologda, Irkutsk and Primorskaya Gubernia) is being conducted. In the Vologda gubernia. Proclamations spread among the peasants and it is planned to create a peasant labour union.”

Fedorov was again arrested on November 21st 1921 and sentenced to two years in a political isolator. He was again arrested in 1925, and in July sentenced to 3 years. In December 1927 he applied to the Vologda branch of the Communist Party in an open letter, in which he renounced his previous political struggles and publicly condemned anarchism. As a result he was released

¹ Nikolai Alexandrovich Solntsev. Born in Vologda in 1893. Council worker. Anarchist communist. Sentenced to 3 years in Siberia in 1922. In 1926 he was living in Tula where he was again arrested and sentenced to 3 years. In 1941 he was arrested in Kasiimov city, Kasimosky district in the Riazan region and sentenced on February 6th to 10 years in the camps where he probably perished.

early. Whether this was as a result of having his spirit broken or as a ploy remains up for grabs. But nine years later he was arrested again and disappeared into the camps, with no further trace, most likely dying in the mass shootings of anarchists in the late 1930s.

Note: Another Vologda anarchist was Alexander Ivanovich Lodygin, born in Vologda on November 1st 1885. He became an anarchist in 1917 and took an active part in the Vologda movement. Arrested in 1938, he died sometime after 1940.

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