

Militarism of some anarchists and its contradictions

We present a reflection on reformist and militarist tendencies in the Czech anarchist movement

Ostrava Anarchist Federation

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After the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, some anarchists (and allied leftists) developed strange pro-war tendencies. Their defence was that they were trying to adapt anarchist ideas to the contemporary political context, while anarchism based on the original social-anarchist tradition was accused of sectarianism and dogmatism. If we look at these positions (most often promoted by the AF¹) in more detail, we find that they contain glaring contradictions and are unsustainable in the long term due to ideological inconsistencies.

The first contradiction is the alleged effort to “listen to local voices”. But this would mean that the vast majority of Ukrainian men are willing to run into the trenches for the sake of the state. The reality, however, is different. Millions of Ukrainians are avoiding mobilisation, with 650,000 fleeing abroad alone. So shouldn't pro-war anarchists listen to these voices in particular? And if the goal of these anarchists is the defeat of the Putin empire by the methods of conventional war, should not the deserters, according to this logic, be forced to join the army by force? If so, how can this be done? To denounce deserters to the state authorities? If, on the other hand, participation in the army should be voluntary, then how to supply enough men to the front? Should the AF join the government's recruitment campaign from the comfort of their keyboards?

The questions we ask are of course rhetorical and highly exaggerated; but they show that taking reformist positions entails irresolvable contradictions. Within the framework of the “effectiveness” of the struggle against Putin's invasion, then, the resignation to social revolution (this would play into Putin's hands), the silence on the crimes of the Ukrainian state (this would also play into Putin's hands) or the “temporary” cessation of criticism of the power hierarchy or the exploitation of the working class must logically follow. After all, any disunity in the “democratic” camp strengthens the position of the enemy. Reformist anarchism then, consciously or unconsciously, falls into the false dichotomy of “you are either with NATO or with Putin”. There seem to be no other ways to stop the war machine.

¹ “AF” referred to in this text is the Anarchist Federation in the Czech Republic, founded in 1995 by Czech and Slovak anarchists.

This brings us to the second contradiction, which is how to fight the war. Some anarchists believe that by sending money to build the war infrastructure, they will help the Ukrainian army to win, Russia will capitulate and the war will end. This attitude is nonsensical for several reasons. For example, the AF's campaign to deliver an all-terrain vehicle to Ukraine has spun the war spiral rather than poured sand into the war's gears. The solidarity collection managed to raise 140,000 crowns, which is somewhat suspicious in the Czech environment, where anarchists struggle to raise a few hundred crowns for membership fees of their own organisations. Considering the fact that today the average worker has trouble making ends meet due to inflation, one wonders who sponsored the campaign so generously. However, let us imagine a hypothetical situation — the movement finances a car to take some soldiers to the front line and within a few days the SUV ends up shot up in a ditch. What next? Another fundraiser? Considering that the war industry swallows hundreds of millions of crowns every day on both sides of conflicts, does such a thing even make sense given the financial possibilities of the anarchist movement? Couldn't a hundred grand be used more effectively? How about sending them to the Russian comradeship, which would burn dozens of recruitment centres or derail hundreds of trains with military material thanks to this financial support? Or to support deserters on both sides of the conflict and show how senseless it is to point a gun at people we have never seen in our lives, who have done nothing to us, just because someone put us in uniform and told us to? How about financially supporting anti-government hackers who will attack Russian or Ukrainian military servers? The question of which method of anti-war activities is more effective and meaningful, let everyone answer for themselves.

Imagine if a similar reformist current of the anarchist movement had existed in 2003. These people would undoubtedly have sent SUVs to the US army in Iraq, because Saddam Hussein is a dictator and suppresses human rights, and he has also invaded sovereign countries. George Bush would certainly be considered a controversial, but at least pro-Western and democratically elected politician. Does that sound very crazy to you? Then how is it possible that we are in an analogous situation today?

“I always thought people supported the war until I found out that some people don't have to go to war.”

— E.M. Remarque, paraphrased

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