

# **Russia: Waiting for the Wheel of History to Turn**

**Reflections on the First Phase of the Russian Anti-War Movement**

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The first phase of the anti-war movement in Russia is drawing to a close, suppressed chiefly by brute force. In the following collection, we discuss the stakes of these protests, share reflections from Russian anarchists about why the demonstrations hit a wall, and present translations of four articles by Russian anarchist and feminist groups exploring why they oppose the war, what challenges they have encountered, and how they intend to move forward.

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## Why the Russian Anti-War Movement Remains Our Brightest Hope

The invasion of Ukraine would never have been possible if Putin's regime had not spent the past decade crushing every social movement in Russia—using torture to extract false confessions from arrestees and poisoning and imprisoning rival politicians. Likewise, Putin's military interventions in Belarus and Kazakhstan—not to mention Syria—have helped autocrats to maintain control of those countries; Ukraine is the only country in what Putin considers to be his sphere of influence that has escaped his control over the past decade. Some of the anarchists in Ukraine who have chosen to take up arms against the Russian invasion are expatriates from Russia and Belarus who fear they will have nowhere left to run if Putin conquers Ukraine.

We must not fall for a Western narrative that frames this as a showdown between “the free world” and Eastern autocracy. Russia's militarist imperialism concerns us because the Russian model of repression is a version of the same state strategy that we face elsewhere around the world. Everywhere on earth, governments are relying on more and more repressive and invasive policing to control restless populations. The war in Ukraine is just the latest chapter in a story that has already been playing out in Syria, Yemen, Ethiopia, Myanmar, and elsewhere. **The invasion of Ukraine represents the same strategy that countless governments have employed within their territories, expanded to the scale of geopolitics: the recourse to brute force to suppress resistance and extend control.**

War always intensifies nationalism. Just like the civil war in Syria, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has created a conducive environment for fascists and other nationalists to recruit new adherents and for proponents of militarism to legitimize their projects, from NATO down to local militias—not just in Ukraine, but throughout the entire border region from Finland to Azerbaijan. Many Ukrainian fighters have taken to calling Russian soldiers “orcs,” dehumanizing their enemies. The chief fault for this situation may rest with Putin, but it's going to be everyone's problem for years to come.

The only way this war could have been averted—and likely the only way it can be stopped now without tremendous loss of life on both sides—would be if a powerful and internationalist anti-war movement broke out in Russia, destabilizing Putin's government, hopefully followed by something similar in Ukraine and elsewhere around the world. If the war drags on indefinitely, or is concluded—one way or another—by the brute force of nationalist militarism, that will drive people on all sides of the conflict into nationalist and militarist camps for decades to come.

But if the war in Ukraine comes to an end as a result of the rebellion and solidarity of ordinary people, that could set a precedent for more rebellion, more mutiny, more solidarity, and those could spread from Russia to Ukraine, Western Europe, and the United States, and perhaps even to Turkey, China, India, Latin America—everywhere people are forced to contend against each other for the benefit of a few capitalists.

Had we known that so much depended on social movements in Russia, we might have channeled more resources to anarchists there a decade ago, when the crackdowns there began. This underscores a lesson we have learned the hard way over and over, from the movement against the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001-2003 to the tragedy on the Maidan in 2014: every battle that we lose in the global struggle for liberation, we are forced to fight again on much worse terms and for much higher stakes.

Currently, the chances of an upheaval in Russia look slim indeed. The vast majority of the population that remains in Russia appears to be patriotic, complacent, or resigned. Worse, as the war in Ukraine progresses, all parties may become so embittered that they cannot imagine anything other than killing and dying for their respective governments. But unless it ends in nuclear annihilation, the war in Ukraine will not be the last war of the 21st century. There may still be time for us to learn from our failures thus far and prepare better for next time, building solidarity across borders and other lines of difference in order to become capable of responding to war with the one force that is powerful enough to put an end to it: revolution.

## **The Limits of the Protests—and Their Future**

In Russia, the protests against the invasion of Ukraine peaked at the beginning of March. According to OVD-info, on March 6, by 8 pm Moscow time, Russian police had detained over 4419 protesters in 56 cities, including 1667+ in Moscow, 1197+ in St. Petersburg, and 271+ in Novosibirsk. It's worth remembering that the day of action on March 6 was organized through clandestine and illegal channels, as the legalistic groups had not been able to secure a permit for that weekend and confined themselves to organizing for the subsequent weekend, by which time the course of events was already determined. Over the following weeks, the protests steadily diminished. For now, the window of possibility has closed.

In the course of preparing this text, we communicated with anarchists around Russia about the limits that the anti-war movement reached in its first phase. These are the factors that they believe prevented the protests from going further:

- The extraordinarily high ratio of risk to gain in participating in the protests. “Gain” would include any changes in the situation influenced by the protests, or a significant success in the clashes with the police. Neither has occurred.
- The centralization of the protests. People had gotten used to [Alexei] Navalny [a dissident politician, now imprisoned] or his team calling for people to go to the streets. This produced a lack of creativity and independence on the part of the protesters. Now, people are waiting for a new Navalny to appear to rally people to the streets.
- Many people have seen that even the smallest attempts to protest often end in arrest, and they fear further extra-legal persecution targeting them via their employment, university

studies, family life, and the like. People are tired of being arrested and sitting at the station at risk of being tortured, receiving a fine or fifteen days in prison, in return for almost no visible gain.

- Many people are disappointed in peaceful protest tactics. Some let off steam in chats, where they can write what bothers them and then forget about it.
- Though we do not blame people for this, we must also take into account that a large number of people left Russia early in the war, either because they faced persecution or because they suspected that there would be no better time to escape. This included a high proportion of people who would otherwise be organizing. Now, due to a lack of long-term structures and confidence that, if they remained, they would have a sufficient number of comrades and opportunities to organize, they are not here.
- Simple apathy and acceptance of what is going on, inflected to varying extents by fear.
- Many protesters have been demoralized by the large number of Russian people who support the invasion and by visual dominance of pro-war propaganda in Russian society. For now, unless you really follow all the news and don't have serious financial issues, it is still possible to tell oneself "everything will be alright, it's not that bad." Russian propaganda has served its purpose: many people believe Russia is simply saving Donbas from Nazis.
- Lacking a concrete strategy. Without concrete goals, the demand to "Stop the war" is pointless. Many people feel that the government won't ever listen to them, and protests have not radicalized (yet).

Many Russian anarchists believe that the momentum for nationwide mass protests has only temporarily subsided. They expect that, as the economic situation gets worse and more reports of casualties make their way back to Russian families, larger numbers of people will eventually return to the streets, not only to protest against the war but also against the government and the prevailing social order. In the meantime, anarchists who remain in Russia seek to spread proper security practices, re-establish or reinforce support structures for dealing with the consequences of repression, and carry out clandestine outreach and skill sharing in hopes that, when the tide of popular outrage rises again, they will be ready.

The pipeline of repression continues to work, and it may seem that there is no end to it. But glimpses of the dawn of freedom are already visible. The war unleashed by the Russian fascist regime in Ukraine is clearly not going according to the plan of the Botox dictator. Resistance to the occupation regime continues in Belarus. Our imprisoned comrades will be freed if the defeats of Russian imperialism in Ukraine are supported by a popular struggle against the dictatorships of Putin and Lukashenko. Let the wheel of history pick up speed—to the misfortune of tyrants.

— Anarchist Militant, "Repression in Belarus and Russia," March 27, 2022

Below, in chronological order, we present four texts that anarchists and feminists published in Russia across the course of March 2022, describing their motivations for supporting the anti-war movement, recounting the challenges that they encountered, and strategizing for the next phase of struggle:

- For the Working Class: On the Side of Ukraine]], Antijob
- A Call from the Activists of the Eighth Initiative Group, the Eighth Initiative Group
- Getting Used to Horror and Madness, Autonomous Action
- The End of Peaceful Protest, Anarchist Militant

## **For the Working Class: On the Side of Ukraine**

*This text was published on March 1 by Antijob, an anarchist labor organizing site.*

Every section in this article will begin with “Those who in deed, not in word,” because we live in a country of total lies, much like the world described by Orwell in his novel 1984, in which truth is a lie and peace is war. Because “our” president, in his own words, had no intention of raising the retirement age, but in fact he just did. Because with his words, he claims that he pays “COVID-19” money to medical workers, but in practice, they have to wring the money out of their bosses. Because in his words, he claims that he promised to solve the problem of money not being paid to the workers who were building the Vostochny space launch site, but in reality, on the new Hotline TV program (where Putin speaks for hours answering pre-made questions from a loyal “audience”), police detained the worker who had raised this question and put him in a temporary detention center for few days so that he would not say anything. Because in his words, Putin is fighting for peace, but in practice, he has started a war, which he forbids us to call a war.

The author of this text has devoted years to fighting for the interests of the workers and against fascism—in fact, not in words only—and therefore, unlike Putin, he can be trusted.

### **Who Is the Junta Here?**

Those who in deed, and not just in words, are trying to defend the rights and interests of working people know very well that under Putin’s authoritarian regime this is nearly impossible. Why is that? Because any endeavor on the part of society, in this case wage workers, is immediately subject to repression. The state is criminally persecuting the most active elements in our society, and thus preventing us from ever becoming a force that could have an impact on the situation in the country. The state acts from two directions: on the one hand, it is engaged in outrageous persecution of labor activists, while on the other hand, it shapes the laws to fit this outrage.

How does it work? Here is an example. Back in 2008, Valentin Urusov, a worker at the diamond mine in the Yakut town of Udachny, decided to organize a trade union and fight for his rights together with other workers. But just like in the old fairy tale, the local narcotics police chief and his detectives took him out into the woods, shot a firearm right over his head, and planted drugs on him. In the end, Valentin went to prison for four years (he received a six-year sentence, but was released on parole after four years), and the union was never organized.

If we move from the lawlessness of cops to their legislation, it is worth noting one depressing thing: with the adoption of the new Labor Code, it became impossible to hold a strike in Russia legally. That is why strikes disappeared from the official statistics after the adoption of this code. This does not mean that they have disappeared, but that they have become “illegal” from the

point of view of the Putin government. By the way, when Hubert, president of the German trade union IG Metall [Industrial Union of Metalworkers], asked Putin about attempts on the lives and health of MPRA activists [MPRA, the Interregional Trade Union, is one of the boldest remaining labor unions in Russia], he told Hubert that the MPRA is “not a trade union, but an extremist organization.” That probably sums up the Russian president’s attitude to the labor movement. Although I suppose that over time, in his mind, extremists turn into terrorists.

So—we can’t legally hold rallies and strikes, because all this requires permission from officials. If people don’t have the ability to collectively defend their rights and interests, they won’t learn how to do it, and if they don’t learn how to do it, then a labor movement is out of the question. In the damned and cursed West, workers will seize factories, fight with the police, and stop neoliberal reforms, but here they will keep their mouths shut. The Ukrainian government, just like the Russian one, serves the interests of the rich, but it has one very important distinction—it does not have the means to suppress civil society that the Russian government has. There, various oligarchic groups replace one another and thus are deprived of the opportunity to establish themselves permanently and crush anything that gets in their way. And more importantly, if any of these groups burrows in and is unwilling to listen to the people, the Ukrainians tear it down, as they did in the Maidan. Unfortunately, this does not mean that society takes power into its own hands, but it does mean that it retains for itself the ability to resist.

In the end, we come to the question posed in the title of this section. Who, in fact, is the evil “junta” that does not allow ordinary people to make a move? The answer to this question is obvious to every sane person. The Ukrainian government is now handing out weapons to anyone who wants to fight the invaders. If it is a “junta” that offers only the bayonets of the nationalists and terror against its own people, why is it not afraid that the people will go over to the side of the enemy and overthrow it? Because the real junta is not to be found in Ukraine. Can you imagine Putin starting to hand out weapons to the people? He’s afraid even of a plastic cup [a reference to Putin’s infamous germaphobia]. It is in Russia that the security services have unlimited power and use it to enrich themselves and suppress dissidents. An armed people is the worst nightmare of Putin and his generals and oligarchs. The distribution of arms to the people in Ukraine has caused tremendous dismay among Russian officials and the media.

### **“Anti-Fascist” Fascism**

Those who fight against fascism in deed, not in words, know very well that anti-fascists are imprisoned in Russia, and that “our” government uses the ultra-right to suppress social protests. The story of the Khimki Forest is the most vivid illustration of this situation, when the authorities hired fascists from the Moscow hooligan group Gladiators to break up the camp of the Khimki Forest defenders. Anti-fascists responded by smashing up the Khimki municipal building. In response, without long deliberation, the authorities launched a manhunt for anti-fascists, and jailed two of them—Alexei Gaskarov and Makim Solopov—for three months. But this is still a mild crack-down. Anti-fascist Alexey Sutuga had to serve three years for a fight with the ultra-right in the Moscow café “Sbarro.”

Another good example. There was a time when the “Sorok Sorokov” movement was famous for attacking activists who opposed the building of [Russian] Orthodox temples in city parks. What consequences did they face for this? None. Russian authorities like the terror in the name of the glory of God. And here we come to another significant point. Like the fascists of the past,

the Russian authorities are forcing traditionalism and paleo-conservatism on society. Orthodox culture lessons in schools. A ban on sex education. The withdrawal of “beatings” from the criminal code, the article under which domestic abusers were most often prosecuted. This is just a small part of what this government has done. In fact, through schools, television, and every other channel available to them, the government is instilling a religious and anti-scientific way of thinking. And then they are surprised when people do not want to be vaccinated against COVID-19. You can just dive into an ice-hole and cross yourself. “We are Russians—God is with us.” And this God knows the postmodern ways—because he does not notice the stripper pole in Putin’s Gelendzhik palace. But who knows—maybe there were poles in huts in Medieval Russia too? God only knows.

But all cultural specifics aside. In short, the government in Russia professes an ideology of imperial nationalism. The central point of this ideology is that everything should be decided in the center, not locally. In the saying “Moscow is not Russia,” it is very hard to see what is a joke about it. But I would estimate that the slogan “Gazprom is Russia’s wealth” is 100% joke. In the language of this utterly deceitful regime’s PR efforts, all of “Siberia’s Power” is going overseas. Siberia is left with deforested lands, smog-black skies, cancer, and ruined nature. “Russia’s Wealth” couldn’t even bring gas to the Krasnoyarsk region. All gas pipelines go in different directions away from Krasnoyarsk, mostly to the west and a little to the east. And the Krasnoyarsk Aluminum Plant, because of which the “black sky” regime was declared there, is the fault of the “damned Americans.”

The government in Russia bans the Indigenous organizations of the peoples who populate it. Putin’s regime declared “extremist” the Bashkir organization “Bashkort,” which protected the Kushtau Shihan, a natural monument, from industrial development. But an even more egregious example can be cited. For example, after the Ingush protested against the change in the border between Ingushetia and Chechnya, several members of the Council of Teips of the Ingush People were imprisoned, and the organization itself was shut down. Instead of snapping at his Chechen protégé, Putin gave in to his desires. How that might turn out in the Caucasus in the future is not hard to guess. But who cares? After us, the deluge.

Thanks to all this, even the worst Ukrainian nationalists can say with a clear conscience: “And these people forbid us to pick our nose!”

## **Colonizers of the 21st Century—Fuck You!**

Anyone who is trying to make life in his country better, not in words but in deeds, knows that this cannot be done by means of a war with the neighbors. But “our” former “communists,” Chekists, thugs, and their children have become 21st-century colonizers. They can’t get enough of their territories to harass and experiment on the people who inhabit them. They want new territories. First, they snatched away Crimea and created fake republics in eastern Ukraine, where those who do not agree with the will of the Kremlin and its appointees or just get caught in the heat of the moment will be held as a prisoner in the basement at best. But even this was not enough for them. They wanted all of Ukraine. And as a result, “Russian warship, fuck you” became the international slogan.

It pains me to write this—because I know that in our tradition there is not only oppression of other peoples and licking of the master’s boot, but also resistance. From the Novgorod Veche [an early model for assembly-based decision-making] through Stepan Razin to the Narodniks there



derives a popular tradition of struggle against authoritarianism, which could be also described as anti-state patriotism. Thousands of heroes laid down their heads so that you and I would not remain in history as the “Gendarmes of Europe” [a longstanding expression describing Russia as a repressive force in Europe, once associated with Tsar Nicholas I] but could become an example for others.

So why do we once again choose this master’s boot and the service of psychopaths on the throne? If we want to be proud of the really good things in our history, how do we still choose to live under the oprichnina [the mass repression and execution of the boyars] of Ivan the Terrible, under Nikolai Palkin, or under Stalin? The Russian government helped dictator Lukashenko crush the resistance of the Belarusian people and keep him on the throne, and now it wants to bring our brothers and sisters in Ukraine to their knees. Do we want the people living side by side with us to perceive us as occupiers, do we want to be hated and despised?

I don’t, and that’s why I’m proud—not of Putin—but of the fact that even this international slogan “Russian warship, go fuck yourself” was uttered in Russian, which, for the record, is supposedly banned in Ukraine. So all is not yet lost for us.

How Do We Recover Our Lost Society?

Those who care about their people—in deeds, not in words—do not want them to perish in senseless wars. But the Putin regime has made sure that the only social lifeline for ordinary guys in Russia is service in the army and other law enforcement agencies. The story of one of the Russian military prisoners shows very well how these guys end up in Putin’s Wehrmacht. Nationalists brace yourselves—because the story is very international, but to nationalists’ delight, very much in the spirit of “skrepy.” [“Skrepy” is a word from one of Vladimir Putin’s speeches about the “uniqueness” of the Russian nation; the literal meaning is something like “big paper clips”—something that connects, that binds people together.]

On February 24, Rafiq Rakhmankulov, a Russian soldier, was captured by the Ukrainian military. His mother is Natalia Deineka, a resident of Saratov Oblast. He is her middle son. Besides him, she has five more children, i.e., six in total. Three of hers and three of her husband’s. Her husband works as a construction worker, he builds bridges and works on a rotational schedule. She goes with him on the rotation, but she works elsewhere—in a warehouse at a sports store. This is a complicated proletarian family that does not fit into the worldview of either the right-wing or the left-wing. Rafiq has a partner, Liliya, and in order to provide for his future family, he switched to contract military service after he was drafted and served his one year in the army. He was interested in the pay in the army and the possibility of getting a place to live. Apparently, he did not want to rotate on shifts and pay the mortgage for 20-30 years, but the alternative was selling his soul to the devil... I mean, to Putin. That’s actually the whole story.

I have no desire to justify such Rafiqs, and of course, in order to learn that “you don’t pry into other people’s monasteries” [a Russian saying about not imposing your own way of doing things on others], these guys need a good beating, but I understand that there are many such Rafiqs, Ivanovs, and other guys in Russia, and something must be done about it. Putin doesn’t care about their lives—he needs the Ivans and Rafiqs to serve him faithfully and bravely lay down their lives in his military adventures, or to employ batons to beat other Ivans and Rafiqs who are a little luckier and have realized that this is no way to live.

And this is really no way to live. The only decently paid job should not be in the law enforcement agencies. You cannot allow people to have their own homes only as debt bondage to bankers for 20-30 years. Is it worth it for Rafiq to rot in the fields of Ukraine? Is it worth it for Lilia

to create a family with a man who, for the sake of his own happiness, is willing to trample on the happiness of others? Rafik and Lilia are closer to me than Putin, Medvedev, Grefs, Rotenbergs, Timchenks, Prigozhins [the names of well-known Russian oligarchs], and other powerful Russians of all nationalities, so I wish Sashko and Tonya from Ukraine [these are common Ukrainian names, standing in as metonyms for ordinary Ukrainians as a whole] victory in the hope that together with Rafiq and Lilia, that is, with the Russian working class, we will finally start fighting not against imaginary Ukrainian Banderites (i.e., followers of Stepan Bandera, Nazi collaborator and Ukrainian national hero), but against those who have turned us into their slaves. Otherwise, no “communism” or “anti-fascism” will help us.

PS—By the way, Sashko and Tonya will also, when Russia gives up, start fighting the Akhmetovs, Kolomoiskys, Poroshenkos, and the like [the names of Ukrainian oligarchs]. We can only help them if we deal with our own. In the meantime, they can teach us a thing or two, not us them.

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## **A Call from the Activists of the Eighth Initiative Group**

*On March 10, the following text appeared on the Instagram page of the Eighth Initiative Group, a feminist group organizing resistance to the invasion of Ukraine.*

On March 5, 2022, the police and riot police broke into the houses of our activists, activists, of other feminist movements, and some strangers as well. An all-Russian anti-war march was planned for March 6, including a women’s column, which we prepared together.

We consider it by no means an accident that the searches and arrests hit feminist activists precisely on the eve of that march. They wanted to launch a preemptive strike and they succeeded—on March 6, everyone who went to the march was left without our help or coordination. We believe that these absurd trumped-up charges of “bomb hoaxes” represent an attempt to completely destroy our movement, to silence us. But we will not be destroyed and we will not be silent either.

We are a grassroots, horizontal movement. No matter how much the security forces would like to “cut off the head” of the Eighth Initiative Group, the Anti-War Feminist Resistance, and our other comrades, they will not succeed. We don’t have a head. We don’t have leaders—that’s something they’ll never understand. And now we will gather all our strength into a fist and continue to work—for us this is not a choice, but a duty.

Yes, the reality has changed, the risks are higher than ever, and the work is more difficult. Most likely, we will not directly call you to take to the streets—we do not want to get activists into new criminal cases. Perhaps the best strategy now is “guerrilla” dispersed actions: continue to put up leaflets, spread information however you can, and most importantly—unite with each other.

In the header of our [Instagram] profile, there is a link to a page with our anti-war leaflets. Green ribbons are a symbol of peace and anti-war protest. Use these. Also, the anti-war Russian movement has a flag—white-blue-white. Symbolism is very important for protest, it is one of its pillars. We continue our fight and urge you not to despair and not give up—but at the same time, be extremely careful. The main thing is that there are millions of us, and common sense,

conscience, and truth are on our side. Thank you for everything you do and for continuing to fight for peace with us.

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## **Frozen Time: Getting Used to Horror and Madness**

*This text appeared as the March 27 episode of the podcast released by Autonomous Action, the web platform established by the most prominent Russian-language anti-authoritarian network. For the sake of brevity, we have left out the section containing updates on state repression, a ubiquitous feature of Russian anarchist publishing.*

More than a month of the so-called “special military operation” in Ukraine and other insane decisions of the Russian authorities has been enough for many people to become accustomed to it.

We are getting accustomed to messages and reports from warring Ukraine—to photos and videos of destroyed cities—to news of the deaths of acquaintances, acquaintances of acquaintances, and some famous people—to the flow of refugees from that country, which has already exceeded three million. Indeed, the total number of people who have left their homes since the beginning of “denazification” is already more than six million.

We are getting accustomed to news about new social media bans and website blockings in Russia, to detentions and arrests for opposing the war, to criminal cases for spreading “fake news” about the Russian army—there are already more than sixty of these across the country. We are getting accustomed to the mass exodus from Russia of activists, journalists, famous people, and those who simply do not want to live under Putin’s regime. We are getting accustomed to all the new sanctions, rising prices, and empty shelves, to the lack of a number of essential goods.

During the “denazification” of Kharkov, 96-year-old Boris Romanchenko, who survived Auschwitz, was killed in a bombing. In the same place, anarchist Igor Volokhov, who fought against the invaders in the territorial self-defense units, died under Putin’s rocket fire. Also in the vicinity of Kharkov, according to the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense, Russian shelling damaged the memorial to the victims of the Holocaust.

Oksana Baulina, a journalist for The Insider blocked in Russia, died under shelling in Kyiv. Previously, she worked at FBK, until she was forced to leave Russia due to the risk of criminal prosecution. In Mariupol, the dead are buried in the yards of destroyed residential buildings.

On March 21, the list of “extremist organizations” was added to the international corporation Meta. Its products (Instagram, Whatsapp, and Facebook, which was previously blocked in Russia) have been and are used by millions of Russians, as well as institutions, including government agencies and state corporations. The decision should come into effect after a futile appeal; lawyers are still speculating as to what this will mean for users and marketers.

The social media platform VK also blocks pages at the request of the Prosecutor General’s Office: for instance, the fan-page of the liberal political scientist Yekaterina Schulman, the pages of Left Socialist Action, the Union of Democratic Socialists, the political party “Yabloko,” the student magazine DOXA, and finally, our VK page for avtonom.org.

A court in Moscow considered, among other things, the slogan “Fascism will not pass!” [“Фашизм не пройдет!”] to be “fake news about the Russian army!” (I wonder which of those three words?)

In Ufa, the members of the Marxist circle were declared a terrorist group and sent to a pre-trial detention center; allegedly, they intended to overthrow the government.

In Khabarovsk, unknown people announced a rally “in support of the Russian army.” They invited residents to bring Ukrainian flags, portraits of Stepan Bandera, Taras Shevchenko, and other Ukrainian figures for solemn burning in exchange for the distribution of sugar. However, the event did not take place—except for the police and journalists, only a few people came to “fight the Nazi reptile” for a package of scarce goods.

Sergei Savostyanov, the Moscow City Duma deputy of the Communist Party, believes that Russian troops should also “denazify” the Baltic states, Poland, Moldova, and Kazakhstan. This “people’s choice” was supported by “smart voting” in 2019. [A sarcastic remark about Russian dissident politician Alexei Navalny’s strategy of “smart voting,” which helped to raise Savostyanov to power.]

One of the journalists who was prosecuted for “fake news,” Alexander Nevzorov, who has been known since the time of perestroika, wanted to publicize some compromising evidence from the 1990s on representatives of the ruling clique. But he correctly concluded that after what they have done and are doing, being in power, nothing will discredit them.

## **Desertion and Support of the “Special Operation”**

Even at the very beginning of the war, an as-yet unconfirmed message was received from Ukraine about a Russian warship whose crew refused to storm Odessa. But recently, quite reliable publications began to appear in the Russian press about soldiers who left their units, about the search for conscripts, whose participation in the “special operation” of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation was not initially acknowledged, about entire detachments of security officials from different regions who do not want to take part in combat operations.

Recently, in Karachay-Cherkessia, a group of brave women blocked traffic on a bridge, demanding information about their relatives participating in a “special operation” in Ukraine and missing from communications.

As we have noted in the past, the announcement of the “denazification” and “demilitarization” of Ukraine did not cause a “patriotic upsurge” similar to the “return of Crimea” in 2014. Over the past eight years, in addition to the hostilities provoked by the Kremlin’s puppets in Donbas, we have also experienced a deepening economic crisis, a drop in the average income of Russians against a backdrop of rising prices, the “optimization” of education and medicine [i.e., austerity measures], the raising of the age of retirement, and, finally, extremely unpopular measures under the pretext of fighting COVID-19. Ratings and trust in the authorities have plummeted.

Various public opinion polls seem to show 60-70% support for the “special operation” in Ukraine. However, the sociologists who conducted them say that most of the respondents simply refuse to answer questions. As for those who express approval, on closer examination, it turns out that they approve of the picture from Russian TV, according to which Russian troops are liberating Ukrainians from Nazis. It is no coincidence that approval of the so-called “special operation” is directly tied to the age of the respondents—in the older age groups, there are proportionally more people who receive information about what is happening exclusively from television. Rus-

sians who believe television propagandists manage not to believe even their Ukrainian relatives and acquaintances who survived the bombings.

Anti-war pickets and street performances continue in Russia despite all the bans, arrests, and administrative and criminal cases, but the number of people showing up is not comparable to what it was between late February and early March. On the other hand, green ribbons and anti-war leaflets and graffiti are much more common on the streets of Russian cities than the letter Z is on cars. We assume that at least for the next several weeks or months, until the situation in Russia changes radically, protest will be expressed not so much in the form of suppressed mass street actions, but rather in the form of street “partisanism” [i.e., anonymous individual acts of direct action] and increasing sabotage by security officials and their relatives.

It is possible that someone in power has not yet completely lost touch with reality, and that this explains why martial law and general conscription have not yet been declared in Russia—there are fears that this would engender sabotage on a massive scale.

### **The Banned Demand More Bans**

Last week, the infamous “Men’s State,” previously recognized as an “extremist organization,” was finally added to the register of banned organizations. However, this decision from Russian law enforcement agencies does not prevent these neo-Nazis from supporting the Kremlin’s “special operation” or from helping the Kremlin to persecute those who disagree. Yesterday, it was our turn—the leader of the “Men’s State” Pozdnyakov called on his associates to write denunciations to Roskomnadzor demanding that they block the pages of avtonom.org on account of our anti-war position. Our public Vkontakte was already blocked on the territory of the Russian Federation at the request of the Prosecutor General’s Office as early as February 24. Now it is available only from outside Russia (or via VPN).

Anyway, Vkontakte has become useless for anything other than pictures of cats. And it is better not to look at cats, either.

Yes, the blocking of Pozdnyakov’s Telegram channel does not prevent him from starting other channels and mass open chats. The Taliban is also still banned in Russia, which in no way prevents its representatives from negotiating with the Russian authorities and being considered “normal partners.” It is possible that neo-Nazis from the “Men’s State” also dream of breaking into the highest echelons of Russian power. And in the growing madness, it is not certain that they will not succeed.

### **Frozen Time**

Despite the fact that catastrophic events continue to escalate at an insane rate, time itself seems to be frozen at a point of uncertainty right now. It is clear that the current situation is unstable and cannot continue indefinitely. But time will not move until it becomes clear when and how the current crisis in Ukraine, Russia, and around the world will be resolved.

It is important to note that against the backdrop of war, repression, and the complete uncertainty of the future, grassroots networks of solidarity are playing an increasingly important role. Networks of friends, volunteers, and human rights activists help to ensure that those who are arrested do not disappear. People help each other so that arrestees’ cats and dogs are not left alone at home. They find medicines, they acquire food despite the shortages, they track down in-

formation. Activist and volunteer networks collect aid for refugees abroad. Often, such solidarity networks function much more efficiently than state institutions and international organizations with more resources. The future belongs to self-organization and self-determination!

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## The End of Peaceful Protest

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Peaceful and “legitimate” protest in Russia has been suppressed. Moreover, it is now impossible by definition: the state adopted new legislation in a matter of days, thanks to which even chanting “No to war!” is considered illegal. Liberal human rights activists are already handing out instructions: do not shout and write “No to war!” Pro-government journalists will make Orwell turn in his grave, earnestly spreading the idea that the slogan “No to war!” came from Nazi leaflets.

To anyone who follows politics firsthand and studies the history of protest movements, it is obvious that under the conditions of fascist dictatorships (or dictatorships striving to become fascist), protest will be suppressed unless it adopts radical and offensive forms. After all, how can people win if they run from the riot police?

We know that anarchists and anti-fascists participated in these protests in many cities in the first days of the war. And they were quite successful.

However, it makes no sense now for *anarchists* to go to the centralized “protest actions,” which is to say, ritual standing in the main squares, which the “Navalny Team” [the supporters of an imprisoned politician, Alexei Navalny] and other liberal groups will go on announcing for some time: you will be loaded into a paddy wagon before you can do anything. At least, this will not make sense until the street enters a new phase—when people become ready for an active confrontation, when cries of “Shame!” are replaced by flurries of bottles at the police. Then, the time will come to join the people who are ready to act. But trying to convince people to use force, when they respond by stigmatizing you as a provocateur and shouting “we are for peace,” is both suicidal and a waste of human resources—which, alas, are already scarce.

## Direct Action

Under these conditions, there are not many tactics that can, in principle, be used. For example, if we return to the topic of rallies and similar actions, anarchists, working with other initiatives, can—instead of holding one rally, which is easy to suppress—organize many, in different parts of the city, flowing like water away from the punishers [i.e., riot police], distributing outreach materials along the way.

However, we want to talk about another tactic—direct action.

Setting fire to a recruiting office—good. But not good enough. More precisely, the symbolic arson of the military registration and enlistment office (in the spirit of throwing a Molotov cocktail into a concrete wall) is not enough to justify risking the freedom of a revolutionary.

We're few. Therefore, each of our actions must be as effective as possible. If you are ready to set fire to the recruiting office, do it with maximum efficiency (the coefficient of performance). Spend a month preparing if you must, but do it well.

The effectiveness of the action can be evaluated according to three criteria: material damage to the state, the impact of the news of the action, and the preservation of the combat capability of the partisans afterwards.

It is necessary to strive to maximize efficiency on all three scales, and to sacrifice each of them (especially the last one) only in order to gain a huge advantage in the remaining categories.

Let's start with the last criterion. It is not the one-time damage of the action that is important to us. Even if you burn a military enlistment office to the ground, it will not stop imperial aggression. What is important is the total damage that the partisan (or those inspired by the partisan's actions) will have time to inflict before being arrested. Hence the importance of security measures, which have already been mentioned more than once (we will not go into depth here, since we are not writing instructions, but discussing a general concept). Also, this implies the necessity to find a balance between the size of the group (which can increase the damage caused, and also allows for better security during the event) and the risks of information leakage.

To discuss the criteria of material damage to the state and the impact of the news of the action, as an example, we can consider the action of the Lukhovitsky arsonist. His or her goal was to destroy the archive containing the personal files of recruits, which clearly represents a significant damage to the state (moreover, a goal that is achievable even alone). To spread information about the action, he or she filmed the action on video and made an appeal.

If you want to cause material damage to the system, think carefully about how you can accomplish this, what means should be used, and what target is best to hit. We know quite a few cases in which Molotov cocktails thrown by insurgents did not set fire to anything and did not actually cause material damage. In addition, evaluate not only the showiness and hype of the action (for example, throwing Molotov cocktails), but also its effectiveness—it is often more effective not to use projectiles, but (for example) to pour fuel through a broken window.

Therefore, before planning an action, be sure to study the materials about various weapons and choose the ones available to you. [...]

In the information age, there is no effect without good information coverage of the action. Make a short but accessible statement about why you are attacking this particular object and what effect you intend. (Short is important, as verbose manifestos are difficult to understand and read, and in addition, the scale of the text should correspond to the scale of the action, lest it be unintentionally humorous.) Consider where you can safely send this message about the action.

At the moment, insurrectionalism is a topic mainly for anarchist underground groups—the others reject it as a provocation. Therefore, first of all, it is worth finding the largest anarchist channels that could support such an action, and find out how best to send them materials for distribution.

But you can also try to send it not only to anarchist platforms, but also to independent media—the situation is changing, which means that, perhaps, one of them will also mention your action, especially if it is backed up by a supporting video. Pay attention to media that now work from abroad—they have less internal self-censorship. It would be good if one of the comrades translates the communiqué into English to cover the action abroad.

A simplified scheme seems to us as follows. A Molotov cocktail to the police department, which no one learns about and which does not cause any tangible damage, is worth nothing, or

even negative, from the perspective of efficacy. But the destruction of expensive equipment or important documents, or an action that destabilizes the work of state institutions, is a positive from the perspective of efficacy, the value of which can be multiplied many times via skillful media coverage.

Let us recall once again the Lukhovitsky arsonist. The destruction of the archive is good, but the fact that thousands of people have learned about this act increases the efficacy several times.

At the same time, of course, in addition to direct action, even at such a time, revolutionaries need to do other things. First of all, agitation, involving the broad masses in the process. Indeed, in addition to weakening the state (which is the purpose of targeted attacks), there must also be an initiative in society that will take up the agenda and rebuild the world on the basis of freedom and self-determination.

However, it should be borne in mind that now, even the most innocuous outreach can be punished quite harshly. One should remember threats of a known scumbag of Anti-Extremist Center Okopnyi against a person who was spreading anti-war stickers. It is time to discard the thought "I'm not doing anything illegal, nothing threatens me." Whatever you do, pay attention to your own safety and be ready for meetings with state agents.



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