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The Army Itself

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Video footage of Russian prisoners of war, mostly “contract servicemen”, has been circulating in the networks. Some of them were taken in combat, some surrendered themselves, some are depressed, some are bracing themselves, but most of them are literally stunned that they had to shoot at civilians, not at all like the promised Nazis, and that nobody or almost nobody in Ukraine is happy to see them and greet them here not with flowers, but at best with reproaches (“Why did you come here? We were fine here without you!”) and at worst with curses.

But this is precisely why they were hired into the army. And in other places: in Chechnya or in Syria they did the same thing. They simply did not know the language or the habits and customs of the local population, and so they could easily believe that whoever they were killing – be it a bandit, a fundamentalist or anyone else – was a bad person who must be killed. In Ukraine, which is close in language and culture, this is harder to believe.

Herzen wrote in his “Bylom and Myths” that a robber is better than a soldier, because he decides for himself whom to rob, while a soldier, like an executioner, kills those whom he is ordered to. This is one of the differences between a professional soldier and

a militiaman. The latter decides for himself with whom he has to fight. Unless, of course, he is a real militiaman. It is no coincidence that in the “unrecognised republics” in Donbas, the original militia units were quickly transformed into a regular professional (i.e. mercenary) army, although they may still be called militia (but this is generally typical of the USSR and its successors, remembering that the police in the USSR were called militia (which also translates as “militia”). It is also no coincidence that the Ukrainian command in 2014 often blatantly “set up” volunteer battalions (recall the fate of the Donbas battalion)). The state needs fighters who are ready to kill anyone it, the state, orders to kill.

Replacing the army with militias and the general arming of the people in general does not guarantee the liberation of the people from the arbitrariness of the state. In Switzerland such a replacement has not eliminated the police, the officials or the class distinctions. The replacement of the army by an armed people only offers the possibility of deliverance from the power of the state and capital. The replacement of the army by a general armed people is not a sufficient but a necessary condition. It is only a step in the right direction, but a step necessary. Even the Bolsheviks, who promised that their dictatorship would eventually lead to a society without classes and dictatorships, originally planned to replace the army with universal arms. And, having already come to power, they quickly changed their mind and replaced the Red Guard (armed detachments of workers carrying guards in their free time) with the Red Army. For obvious reasons. And if the Russo-Ukrainian war has done anything good it is that it has forced the Ukrainian authorities to distribute some weapons to the people. Again, this does not guarantee anything, but it does increase the chance of liberating the people. Not only from foreign oppressors, but also from their own.