

“[Insert topic of the day] has divided anarchists”

Zosia Brom

2023

“Anarchists do not stand aside from popular struggle, nor do they attempt to dominate it.

They seek to contribute practically whatever they can, and to assist within it the highest possible levels of both individual and group solidarity.”

Stuart Christie

Divisions within the anarchist movement are nothing new and in fact, “[insert topic of the day] has divided anarchists” would serve as a good sentence to begin a text about pretty much any moment of contemporary anarchist history. I don’t consider this attitude a problem of anarchism: after all, it is a movement without leaders, a movement of many diverse flavors, one where any position of authority can be questioned. A movement lacking dogmatism, on paper at least.

Thus it was predictable that there would be many approaches to the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine. This would not be a problem by itself, and the discussion could have been carried on with respect to various diverse interpretations of what is anarchism, as well as the diversity of the lived experiences of anarchists from different parts of the world, the general history of anarchists in armed conflict, as well as the respect for the actual reality we all live in and the ambition to come up with politics matching it. This, however, is not how it went, and instead we saw a rather ugly show of Western supremacy coming from some parts of Western anarchism, combined with a narrow, religious even, interpretation of what anarchism is, delivered with no regard for the diversity of the anarchist movement and the complexity of the world. To achieve this goal, the anarchist Western supremacists came up with a whole set of tactics. One of them was wilfully ignoring what the vast majority of their East and Central European comrades were trying to explain to them. Another one was gatekeeping the very term of *anarchism* and assuming the position of the decisive, unquestionable authority on all things relating to it and as such only enforcing the impression of them coming from a supremacy position. Another one was displaying extreme levels of hostility towards Eastern European anarchists attempting to engage in this discourse, and often dismissing them in a borderline conspiracy theorist way, by, for example, implying that they are CIA agents, undercover fascists, and so on.

It is, however, unfair to say that all, or indeed a majority, of Western anarchist groups reacted in the above way. While this attitude was displayed by a small yet vocal minority of the movement

was very disturbing to witness and experience, many others instead offered unquestionable solidarity and material assistance to their Ukrainian, Russian, and wider Eastern European comrades. This ongoing assistance is one of the more impressive projects I've seen anarchists undertaking in recent years, and it is made even more commendable by the fact that I am aware that in many cases, it comes despite the discomfort of sacrificing some aspects of one's beliefs and politics in the face of a humanitarian crisis and war crimes committed by the Russian army, together with the drive to show solidarity to their Eastern European comrades.

This attitude of anarchist groups makes them distinguishably different from most other parts of the Western radical left, and it is the aspect of anarchism I consider the most hopeful for the future, with all its complex problems that call for non-dogmatic, out-of-the-box solutions. I think it is difficult to say what will change from the anarchist point of view in the context of the Russo-Ukrainian war, for the simple fact that there are many anarchist points of view. But what will make a lasting impact is a core of true anarchist politics: judging things for what they are, listening to the people directly affected, doing what we can to help others with their struggle with an oppressive power, and contributing practically by whatever we can. If we can get it right, we will have a chance at becoming a significant power. If we can't, we will become – or in some cases remain – a social club for people who like reading old books.

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Retrieved on 23rd January 2024 from kontradikce.flu.cas.cz

Zosia Brom, originally from Poland, is an economic migrant and anarchist. She is currently developing a workshop around issues of class and migration for the Class Work Project. In the anarchist movement, Zosia is mainly known as a former editor at Freedom Press, an occasionally controversial writer (the author of the article “Fuck Leftist Westplaining” in February 2022), and an organiser of the Anarchist Bookfair in London.

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