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Nine Months of Solidarity

A political and personal statement as well as a review of our solidarity work around the war in Ukraine so far

Anarchist Black Cross Dresden

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Solidarity Collectives as our main point of reference in Ukraine in solidarity work, despite some political differences. We believe that such complicated and critical situations as the war require political perspectives for our movement. Therefore, we see criticism as an essential part of our movement. But let's not mix criticism and reproduction of the state propaganda from Moscow. We must also not allow criticism and doubt to make us unable to act.

We would also like to call on our comrades to continue to follow closely what is happening in Eastern Europe, because the political struggles there could shape what the whole of Europe will look like in the coming decades. And don't forget to donate and encourage people around you to donate. The Ukrainian people are now in a position to resist the Russian invasion, thanks to massive solidarity from all over the world, and the anarchist movement is part of that solidarity.

Until the Kremlin burns down

Anarchist Black Cross Dresden

The more people die and the more damage the invaders do to Ukrainian society, the more we understand how politics can take a back seat to organizing as people are willing to make greater compromises to actually crush Putin and his armies.

So what is to be done now?

As the challenges grow and the political discussions continue to fail, we know how important it is to keep going. Giving up on the struggle of comrades in Ukraine and saying that it is not shiny enough for Western anarchism is not our way. We believe that support and donations must continue even in the face of criticism. We remain companions even if we argue with each other on different political issues.

At the same time, it is important for us to create structures that include this criticism in the support. We do not want to decide for the entire anarchist movement which groups and individuals exactly should be supported. Rather, after voicing all concerns, we have decided to create a differentiation of donations to ensure that you can decide for yourselves who you want to support. From now on, donations with the keyword "Ukraine" will be used to support only those companions who are not fighting in any units affiliated with Ukrainian fascists or neo-Nazis. If you want to donate to anti-fascists and anarchists in right-wing units despite all contradictions, just write it in the donation note.

Apart from that, all donations sent to us will continue to be used for the comrades who had to leave Ukraine because of the war, as we did before. We will continue to cooperate with

Since the first day of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, we have been working with friends on the ground as well as comrades from Belarus, Russia and Poland. This has been made possible by thousands of donations from people around the world who have understood the importance of international solidarity at this critical moment. And for this we would like to thank all those who responded to the calls and provided help, not only with money, but also with direct actions, logistics and media work.

We are partly from these places and partly we are just very connected personally and politically with the region, the political events, the people and their struggles. We see ourselves as anarchists.

In almost nine months of organizing, we have had many different challenges that have shaped our work with fellow anarchists in Ukraine, and we would like to share some of these challenges with you as an important critical assessment of what has been achieved by the international anarchist solidarity movement during this time. We know that this text could be used by some opponents of supporting anarchists in Ukraine to discredit the movement. But we believe that sustainable solidarity work is only possible by overcoming challenges and not by hiding facts from comrades for a convenient version of history. Despite all the criticism, we believe that the support of the anarchist movement in Ukraine is a crucial objective in order to strengthen the anti-authoritarian part of society.

Our life is full of contradictions and will remain so as long as there is exploitation, violence, oppression, imperialism, capitalism, patriarchy.... exists. That means in our political action

there are contradictions, there is no absolute truth in what we do. Nevertheless, we are active. We try to reflect our actions and to legitimize them for ourselves. We have done that many times in the last 9 months when there was time. We have been desperate, angry, sad, determined. We've been criticized for what we do. We have received positive feedback for what we are doing. We have tried to follow the political debates. And partly we were positively surprised, because the anarchist/anti-authoritarian and left movement has shown itself more open to perspectives from Ukraine. At the same time, we noticed that a lot of Russian propaganda is still shared and narratives from 2014 are still held on to. 40 years of anti-communist and anti-Soviet propaganda in the Federal Republic of Germany seem to still lead to the fact that when the German government criticizes Russia, some leftists reflexively have to defend Russia.

Because of the connections we have built up over the last few years with comrades in Ukraine, we were able to quickly build up a solidarity network. Talks in the first weeks after the invasion were mainly about getting things from the long list of necessities and pushing the solidarity work further in the hope of stopping the Russian advance. Political debates did not take place because all the activists involved in the mobilization simply did not have the time/energy.

In the last 10 years we have seen and felt what it means when this so-called Russian world takes more and more space. Repression, torture, persecution in Russia and Belarus led to new waves of emigration of activists. The cooperation of the security authorities in these countries restricted the freedom of movement even more. Most recently, the suppression of the

cists, even in the war against Putin. Many of the comrades who made this decision had other possibilities to join the struggle, but they chose the right-wing because these groups offer the best "social package" and sometimes promise a certain autonomy for the anarchists or antifascists. The more people join these units, the more resources and publicity they receive and attract more recruits, as they have better equipment and social support than other military structures. This is a dangerous spiral that is actually supporting the growth of right-wing influence within the military efforts of Ukrainian society at the moment.

Unfortunately, as the discussion about this development continued, some of the comrades went into denial mode and tried to downplay the political organization of Azov, Right Sector and other fascist military-political groups. If we deny the fact that Ukrainian fascists are organizing in this war, we create a situation where ignoring their power can lead to very serious consequences for Ukrainian anarchists and antifascists when the Russian regime is destroyed.

Not everyone agrees with us. In fact, many comrades who are in Ukraine right now believe that support should continue even if people make mistakes in their decisions within the military. This creates a complicated situation in which continued work is severely hampered by the lack of a common perspective. For us, the solidarity work around the war in Ukraine is political and primarily focused on supporting the progressive forces in this war so that there is more freedom and equality when people win. We do not support everyone without looking at the political goals behind involvement in the war.

been exaggerated by Putin supporters. We can note that the political right did not benefit from the 2014 war effort in the last Ukrainian elections.

But at the same time, the reality remains. Fascists are much better organized in the ranks of the Ukrainian army than leftists or anarchists, who traditionally avoid military service and stay away from the state war effort. Thus, when the invasion began, many comrades found themselves in a situation where it was only possible to participate in the war against Russia within the Ukrainian military to a very limited extent without having contact with neo-Nazis. This means that even if you are in local territorial self-defense, you can end up in the same unit with local fascists who join the war for different reasons.

Some comrades attempts to get a place in the military ranks brought them directly to units directly connected with Ukrainian fascist groups. And we are talking about groups like Right Sector or other political organizations. For us, this is an extremely problematic situation, because some antifascists and anarchists are now, in one way or another, becoming forces that support the development of far-right politics in Ukraine. For the fascists at the moment it is not really important to recruit only fascist sympathizers as they need bigger number to grow military power. However, such decisions create a certain imbalance in political representation within the army.

This situation has triggered one of the first warning signals for our solidarity. Do we want to support individuals or smaller groups fighting in the war within the right-wing formations? And the answer is clear: No. For us it is unacceptable to join the fas-

uprising in Belarus with the help of Russia. At the same time, Ukraine remained a place where people found refuge from repression, an intermediate space where people could meet without visas and fear of repression from East and West. Now this place is also threatened by Russian imperialism, the space of refuge is no longer a safe place, projects and contexts destroyed, cities bombed, people killed. The “Russian world” continues to spread. For us it is therefore absolutely clear that even if we as anarchists reject the war in the name of a state, we grant people a right to self-defense.

We have no pragmatic or intellectual distance to this war. We do not get bogged down in geostrategic discussions and analyze the roulette of possibilities. We have already followed our friends and comrades who have asked us for support in preparation for the expected expansion of the war. People demand to take a stand against the war, we do, but what that means in reality is very different for people. We would not demand that the people fighting in Ukraine against Russia should surrender or agree to give over the occupied territories in ceasefire agreements. That would mean in consequence that Putin achieves what he wants. Therefore, we do not understand these demands. We also do not think that Western values are being defended in Ukraine, because these supposed values are characterized by capitalism, racism, post-colonialism, exploitation and many other aspects. For us, support in this context means a struggle for liberation from Russian imperialism. It's about freedom, it's not about nationalism, about a state, it's about the Russian world not spreading to Ukraine.

We have been doing support work since February 24, 2022. There was an appeal for donations, delivery of equipment, medicines, medical equipment, humanitarian aid, cars, several convoys. People who wanted to support on site were taken there. There were many internal debates about the development, suggestions, criticism, negotiations. Everything happened extremely quickly. In the beginning, we just met every day, made phone calls, organized...

Activists in Ukraine had prepared for the war, made workshops, discussed strategies, weighed possibilities of action. It was clear that people will stay, organize. They will fight against the “Russian world”, defend their community. There are many different motivations that move people in such a moment.

Operation Solidarity was created and worked under the adrenaline of the first weeks. An <https://lib.edist.ro/library/anonymous-four-months-in-an-anti-authoritarian-platoon-in-ukraine> was formed, in which activists with different perspectives from all over the world found each other.¹ In the spring of 2022, this anti-authoritarian unit received the greatest support. This unit was organized within the framework of territorial self-defense and was responsible for defending the Kiev region against advancing Russian forces. However, when Moscow announced its withdrawal from the region, serious problems arose with the local command, as more and more people were ready to go to the front and were not given this opportunity. International fighters who joined the unit lost access to weapons and were simply “deposited” in one of the bases

¹ see: lib.edist.ro/library/anonymous-four-months-in-an-anti-authoritarian-platoon-in-ukraine

equipment is needed, let alone in situations where the person’s life is in danger. We would like to have a movement where everyone is honest and works as equals. However, this is often not the case, so it is important to build structures that are not only based on trust, but also make it difficult to abuse solidarity work for personal interests. Formalizing certain processes as well as holding all comrades accountable would definitely help in such situations.

Who fights where with whom?

Let’s start with a very simple part – for security reasons we will not name the geographical locations of the anarchist groups currently fighting in Ukraine. You can find out by following some of the fighters on the social networks, if the people/groups have published this information. like blackheadquarter.

For us, from the beginning of the war, it was important which units the comrades joined. In 2014, when the first phase of the war began, some Ukrainian antifascists and anarchists decided to join the voluntary fighting groups organized by the political organizations of fascists and neo-Nazis. At that time, the argumentation was that this was the only way to repel the Russian troops in the Donbass, since there were no leftist or anarchist volunteer battalions. So the question was whether this dynamic would be repeated in 2022.

Of course, the situation has changed since the beginning of the war. The Ukrainian army tried to limit the political organization and influence of the far-right groups within the military. It is important to point out here that this influence has traditionally

In the end, the discussion did not bring so many results. Many comrades felt that the support should go directly to the militants, often on the grounds that otherwise they would be unsafe to use. Another problem that emerged from this discussion is the power dynamics of war. Many activists* who have not joined military formations see themselves in a supportive role that in many cases resembles simple charity work that many Western NGOs are currently doing. The political side of resistance to the war often blurs with groups that abandon certain political principles, such as equality and participation, in favor of quick and pragmatic work. In addition, it has been difficult to oppose the structural organization of the war, i.e., the army, precisely because there are no independent units.

Due to the conflicts within the movement described above, it is also understandable that it was difficult to create an infrastructure stable enough to work with all the resources that were handed over to Ukraine. At the moment, after all these months of organizing, the situation is better.

Comrades who might find themselves in future conflicts that require a large amount of resources should take into account the importance of the issue of collective ownership and management of all these resources on an anti-authoritarian basis.

It is worth noting that some of the people who received solidarity from the anarchist movement had a hoarder mentality, trying to get as much equipment as possible, even in situations where it was not needed. This attitude was not clear to us, especially in the first month of the invasion. In general, a lot of support was provided on the basis of trust – it is hard for people who are not fighting themselves to understand what

of territorial self-defense, being promised, among other things, a residence permit and integration into the Ukrainian Army. These promises were broken, and all foreign fighters left the Territorial Self-Defense, while Ukrainian anarchists moved to different parts of the country to continue the resistance against the Russian invasion. This marked the end of anti-authoritarian unit and the transition to the current state of affairs – smaller groups of anarchists* and anti-fascists* are now fighting on different parts of the front lines and participating in various military groups.

Within Operation Solidarity, there were also many problems, debates, disputes over direction, problematic behavior, and claims to power. Eventually the initiative disbanded, the self-proclaimed founder stole 20,000€, and the Solidarity Collectives initiative formed from the remaining people.

The situation within the anarchist and anti-authoritarian movement in Ukraine was problematic before the war, there were conflicts like probably everywhere and different people didn't want to have anything to do with each other. With the beginning of the war, on the one hand people have reunited, but on the other hand others have explicitly not cooperated politically. Many activists had previous conflicts that were put aside for a while. But over time, these contradictions began to resurface.

It is not really imaginable under what conditions people organize in war, discuss differences, try to solve conflicts. People, in different cities, who had not worked together before, tried to do that in online meetings. Activists have participated in the initiatives so far. But many have also left them again, are burned

out, have a different focus, are tired of the political disputes that add to the difficult situation and work, and for many other reasons.

We have always been involved in these debates and tried to contribute our perspectives. For us, too, this was very exhausting, often demotivating and cost us a lot of energy, in addition to our actual tasks. We were on the verge of quitting several times. But our responsibility towards the donors is very high and we try to be as transparent as possible. In fact, none of us could even imagine a fundraising campaign on this scale. So we have to justify ourselves not only to ourselves, but to everyone who followed our call for donations. And we wanted and want so much to strengthen, support, keep alive the Ukrainian anarchist/anti-authoritarian movement.

For us it was clear that we support everyone: those who decide to leave Ukraine and those who stay, whether in Ukraine, Russia or Belarus. There are people who want to defend themselves with a gun against Russian imperialism. At the same time, there are many people in Ukraine who do not want to do this, but organize and support themselves elsewhere, because they do not want to, cannot or are not allowed to leave the country. For us it is unclear why there is a playing out of these points of view in the political debates.

Challenge in the distribution and accounting of equipment as well as in the question of “ownership”

In our anarchist vision of collective organizing, our perspective was clear – the donations and all the equipment organized from it should also be collective. The reality of war, however, painted a different picture.

In the first few weeks, some of the comrades asked us who would get support and how the equipment would be distributed. Some of the anarchist comrades were very clear in their needs and sent a list of required equipment, while others were modest and did not ask for anything except 1-2 items. In some cases, due to lack of contacts in Ukraine itself, people did not even know about the possibilities of getting support from Western comrades. This was also related to the fact that many anarchists and anti-authoritarian activists in Ukraine decided to go alone or with their small group. Some of them were already in contested areas and were difficult to reach.

In general, the situation was like this for several months until the Russian advance in many directions stopped and the comrades got some time to talk to the organizers of the infrastructure in Kiev/Lviv and other cities.

One of the first discussions that began in April was the question of various groups in the West as to who was actually responsible for the equipment sent to Ukraine. Should the tens of thousands of euros worth of equipment go to individuals and that's it, or should organized anarchist groups take care of what goes to whom in order to have a fair distribution of resources as well as an overview of the collective property bought with the anarchist community's money. This discussion became even more complicated because the equipment brought to Ukraine was often allocated to different parts of the Ukrainian army, which was problematic for us because we wanted these resources to be available to the Ukrainian anarchist movement and not to the Ukrainian state.