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Contents

ple (Food not bombs) and so on. Anarcho-syndicalists, whose main goal is the organisation of labour in the workplace, are few and far between, and can boast of little success (though there have been several successful protest campaigns organised by them, there are still no workplace cells).

Can this situation change? Ultimately, the development of a social anarchism, which isn't isolated from society but attempts to spread its influence within it, depends on a peaceful settlement in eastern Ukraine.

While the armed conflict and tension continues, it is too early to talk about a left-wing movement in Ukraine, and potential anarchist activists will swell the ranks of the patriots or give up on activism in general. It still isn't the right time.

For westerners on the left, including anarchists, the Maidan protests of 2013–2014 turned Ukraine from an unknown quantity into the home of a mass grassroots movement—and one they had to understand. For many on the left, this meant a trip to our country: 2014 was Kyiv's year of 'revolutionary tourism'.

But the 'tourists' involved in anarchist movements at home were dazed and confused on the streets of Kyiv: why was their red and black flag flying alongside the swastika and Celtic cross? Why was there a portrait of Nestor Makhno, the anarchist revolutionary leader of a century ago, on a tent belonging to a nationalist group? And why were locals who called themselves anarchists one moment calling for the creation of a mono-ethnic state the next? Anarchism occupies a very specific place in the worldview of your average Ukrainian, and their perception of it differs from sympathetic westerners.

Soviet propaganda

The origins of this difference go back, as it often does, to the Soviet Union. Like other left wing opposition tendencies, anarchism as a political movement was annihilated by the Bolsheviks in the 1920s.

By the time Nikita Khrushchev came to power in the late 1950s, when the oldest Ukrainians still alive today developed their world views, anarchist organisations and groups were a thing of the distant past. So what they knew about anarchists was learned either from school history lessons, which described them as either naive bourgeois muddlers or evil traitors to the workers' revolutionary movement, or from Soviet film.

These people, according to the myth, may have thought of themselves as defenders of the workers' interests, but in fact were ordinary criminal elements, strangers to constructive labour and therefore against the Bolsheviks.

The social structure of the anarchist forces was always shown as strictly authoritarian: the loyal but simple-minded fighters would be in thrall to a cynical and calculating leader ('Father' Makhno or a nameless Cossack chieftain) who lived a life of luxury, often in the company of bourgeois women. And there would be merciless executioners to deal with anyone who tried to rebel. Makhnovists were sometimes portrayed as Ukrainian separatists (given that, in 1917, Ukraine was still part of the Russian Empire) and almost always as anti-Semites.

The second popular image of the anarchist was of a naive intellectual dreamer unable to cope with reality, living in a world of his own and taking his precepts from books. And while the first anarchist caricature in his striped sailor's tunic or peasant cap represented a threat, the second, in his straw hat and spectacles, was a harmless figure of fun, though he was still a 'positive character' of sorts.

After 1991

In post-Soviet Ukraine, many ideological concepts were turned upside down, without any further attempt at re-evaluation.

For instance, one thinks of the popular joke about how, after Ukraine became independent in 1991, the Faculty of Scientific Communism (the most dogmatic of institutions) at Kyiv University was quickly renamed the Faculty of Scientific Nationalism.

Something similar happened to anarchism, a new social phenomenon that had to be absorbed into people's existing perceptions of the world, and ideally in step with the nationalist aspirations of the intelligentsia working on the cultural policies of the young Ukrainian state.

As all this took place during the Civil War (a conflict which, in the new post-independence historiography, was seen as a war of

But for mainstream Ukraine, these colours have a different meaning. The combination of red and black was also used by fascist movements to symbolise the German idea of *Blut und Boden* (blood and soil). So it is no surprise that Stepan Bandera's Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists chose those same colours for their flag in the early 1940s, nor that the red and black flag became an umbrella symbol for radical nationalism in the 1990s. And at Maidan in 2013, after the swell in support for Right Sector, which had adopted the same symbolism, the red and black flag became even more associated with nationalism in people's minds. Most people have no idea of its historic links with anarchism.

This can lead to comic situations at protest actions organised by anarchists, when passers-by take them for nationalists. The anarchists try to clear up the misunderstandings by explaining that their flag is bisected diagonally, whereas the nationalist divide theirs horizontally (although in the past there have been anarchist flags with a horizontal arrangement of the colours). This doesn't always help, however, and the battle of the symbols remains high on the political agenda of Ukraine's left.

Default ideology

In western Europe, anarchism may be the default ideology for protest-minded young people and students, but in Ukraine, the big idea is nationalism. And this is both the strength and the weakness of Ukrainian anarchism: most people who go to demonstrations are more interested in having a good time than in serious politics. Later, these people drift to the right rather than towards anarchism. Anarchists, therefore, don't have to deal with the idle fun-seekers in their ranks. But on the other hand, thin ranks prevent them from becoming a serious political force.

Most 'real' anarchists in Ukraine work at grass roots level, involved in squats, punk concerts, distributing food to homeless peo-

SAU also promote the interests of business, speak out against 'homosexual propaganda', revere the libertarian ideas of Ayn Rand and work alongside right wing politicians at election times.

Another organisation that would astonish many western anarchists is the Nestor Makhno Revolutionary Confederation of Anarcho-Syndicalists (RKAS), operating out of Donetsk. This organisation, founded in 1994, has grown around its permanent leader, a martial arts lover who goes under the pseudonym 'Samurai'.

Not many of the group's adherents can stand its military discipline, cult of physical strength, subordination to its leader and devotion to conservative values for long, so the RKAS has a defined life cycle: activists rebel against the leadership and leave the group to join other organisations or start their own, whereupon Samurai recruits a new generation of young anarchists who tend the flame until the next bust up.

Among the groups to come out of this process were the Israeli 'Unity' and the International Union of Anarchists (MSA), which was active in various regions in Ukraine. Nothing has been heard of either the RKAS or the MSA since Maidan.

The red and the black

Even if one accepts the ambiguity of the Makhno brand and the very concept of anarchism in Ukraine, there remains the question of the red and black flag: why is it associated here with the far right, rather than the far left?

In western Europe, the combination of red and black symbolises anarcho-syndicalism, bringing together the red of communism and the black of anarchism. In Ukraine these colours hold the same meaning for leftist subcultures, which sometimes interpret the symbolism too literally (leading to ridiculous arguments about whether the red should be beneath the black or vice versa).

liberation in Ukraine), the situation was clear: Makhno's army represented one of the forces fighting for Ukrainian independence.

'Popular history' fixed the idea in people's heads that Makhno fought for an independent Ukraine alongside the nationalist forces of Simon Petliura's Ukrainian People's Republic. In fact, Makhno fought against them, and nationalist writers instead spread legends about Makhno's wife personally sewing him a yellow-and-blue national flag.

But how can people not see the obvious contradiction here: what kind of anarchist fights to set up a state?

The issue here is that Ukraine's patriotic mythology is based on a romanticised image of the Zaporozhian Sich, a semi-autonomous Cossack territory in central Ukraine in the 15th-18th centuries.

Writers and artists of the Romantic school were equally enthusiastic about the Cossacks, and Soviet historiography supported this tradition of viewing the Zaporizhian Sich as a progressive entity. The result was a powerful romantic national ancestor myth: Cossacks living in the wild steppe, valuing their freedom and independence higher than anything, refusing to recognise any monarch and taking up arms against every neighbouring state in the name of the Ukrainian nation.

Ukraine, unlike most of its neighbours, has no history as a state to pin its national myth to: Kievan Rus was destroyed by the Mongol Horde in the 13th century, after which the territory of today's Ukraine was governed by Lithuania, Poland, the Crimean Khanate and Russia.

Thus the Cossack military-democratic republic was adopted as a model and 'precedent' by Ukrainian historians in the 19th century. Most of these historians, as socialists, were favourably disposed to the archaic democratic system in the Sich, in contrast to the authoritarian rule of the Tsars. Over the border, in Russia, the Cossack myth paints this group as the one most loyal to the Tsar and the *Ancien Régime*.

The Makhno myth

Popular ideas about Makhno sit easily with the Cossack myth. In the public mind, Makhno, the 20th century anarcho-communist, has been reborn as the successor to the 17th century Cossack chieftains, an indefatigable defender of the right of the peasant people to their own state.

Apocryphal anecdotes about Makhno, who supposedly inscribed a machine gun with the phrase 'Beat the Reds until they're white! Beat the Whites until they're red!', have reinforced this nationalist image. So Makhno is seen as the proponent of a Ukrainian state closest to 'the people'.

In contrast to the socialist ideologues from the Central Rada, the revolutionary parliament of the short-lived Ukrainian People's Republic of 1917, Makhno is seen as a man of action with a gun in his hand, prepared to fight for seemingly incontrovertible values, for the 'people' against the 'politicians'.

Post-Soviet history also has a role to play. Over the last 25 years, mistrust of all politicians has practically become Ukraine's main guiding force. No Ukrainian president retained popularity for more than a few short months after their election. With no trust in any central government, Ukrainians dreamed of a radical, 'anti-political' force that would stand up to the 'system' of politicians and parties that were lying to the voters.

However, the ambiguous legacy of the Soviet past has prevented Ukrainians from associating such an anti-political, anti-system force with any left-wing movement. This discontent thus gave rise to increasingly popular support for militaristic nationalist and anti-communist groups. The image of Makhno, the symbol of these hopes, acquired a further layer of nationalist gloss.

A prime example of Makhno's paradoxical posthumous fame is Makhno-Fest, a music and art festival held annually since 2006 in Huliaipole, the anarchist leader's home town near Zaporizhya. The festival, whose main patron is Yuri Lutsenko, a former Minister of

Internal Affairs (i.e. police chief), is held on 24 August, Ukraine's Independence Day. According to its organisers, 'the officials may celebrate in Kyiv, but real Ukrainians come to Huliaipole.'

Given the general drift to the right among Ukrainians, it is no surprise that Ukraine and eastern European countries have seen the spread of National Anarchism, in which the rejection of the state goes hand in hand with an attraction to nationalism of various degrees of radicalism, from a tendency to wear national costume to a denial of migrants' rights.

Who are Ukraine's anarchists?

Anarchism as a political philosophy has nothing in common with either an acceptance of free market values or conservative prejudices, or with nationalism or an authoritarian hierarchical organisational structure.

But Soviet propaganda attached these labels to anarchists and now, many years later, people sharing these values, for some inexplicable reason, identify themselves as such.

Anarchism may be the default ideology for young people and students in the west, but in Ukraine, the big idea is nationalism

For instance, take Ukraine's anarcho-capitalists, or libertarians, a well-known phenomenon in the west, who insist on calling themselves anarchists (whereas anarcho-communists reject the ancap's right to this term).

Most of Ukraine's libertarians are highly paid specialists (usually working in IT) who avoid any organised political activity.

But Ukraine also has its organised anarcho-capitalists, who have nothing against the state and uphold conservative values, like the Union of Anarchists of Ukraine (SAU) – 'the first legal anarchist party in the world' – who have their headquarters in Odessa.