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This interview with Mikhail Tsovma was conducted in 2010 for the German book "Von Jakarta bis Johannesburg: Anarchismus weltweit". Here is the English version, which was first published on Alpine Anarchist.

Gabriel Kuhn: Many of the best-known anarchist theorists came from Russia but then lived and agitated abroad. Mikhail Bakunin, Peter Kropotkin, Emma Goldman, and Alexander Berkman are just some examples. Can you tell us more about the history of anarchism in Russia?

Mikhail Tsovma: Yes, that is true–Russia gave us at least two theorists who are considered the founding fathers of classical XIX-century anarchism, Bakunin and Kropotkin. Both of them were significant figures in the European and international anarchist movement, as well as the Russian "liberationist", Populist and anarchist movements. Having emigrated to Western Europe and practically not being able to return to Russia (Bakunin was returned to Russia as a prisoner for over ten years and then escaped to Europe;

Kropotkin ran away from prison, left Russia, and returned to Russia many years later, following the revolution of 1917, when he was already an old man, and died there in 1921), they managed to make a valuable contribution to anarchism and socialism, synthesizing various ideas which were earlier elaborated by European socialists and also making their own original contributions. But they exerted a very strong influence on the Russian radical movement in the XIX century (Kropotkin also in the early XX century). It was their experience of living under Russian tyranny that helped shape their anarchist views.

When speaking of the anarchist tendencies in Russia in the second half of XIX century, we should not forget that a considerable number of Russian socialists were inspired by a stateless and federalist socialist ideal, very much like that advocated by Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin, as opposed to the authoritarian socialist doctrine of the Marxists or Blanquists. Both Bakunin and Kropotkin exerted a strong influence on the Russian Populist movement, which was to a large extent a socialist federalist and libertarian movement before the 1880s.

It's a completely different story with Goldman and Berkman, though. They both were born in the Russian Empire and spent their childhood and adolescent years there, absorbing the Russian culture–and Russian radical or Nihilist culture as well–but their main arena of activities was America and Europe. Although they spent several years in Russia in 1919 through 1921, following their expulsion from the United States, this was but a brief, although significant, period in their lives. And it is really sad that until now their names and lives remain quite foreign in Russia. Some of Goldman's articles were published as a book in Russia only once, in 1920, as well as Berkman's prison memoirs. But because Goldman and Berkman were consistent anti-Bolsheviks ever since they left Russia, they were censored in the USSR for the next seventy years. It is only now that some of Emma's articles, her brilliant memoirs and

her critique of Bolshevism are being translated into Russian, while the facts of her biography become known to the Russian audience.

A specifically anarchist movement emerged in Russia in the early XX century and it was given impetus by the Russian revolutions of 1905 through 1907 and then 1917 through 1921. Predominant trends were anarcho-communism (in both Kropotkin and more violent "propaganda by the deed" style), anarcho-syndicalism (by the way, the term seems also to be first coined in Russia in the early XX century in discussions over the practice of European revolutionary syndicalism), anarcho-individualism, Tolstoyanism and even anarcho-mysticism. Of course, as elsewhere, there were a lot of other anarcho-isms, but here I mention the most notable ones.

And one should also take into account that there was a larger, not strictly "political" influence of anarchist ideas in Russia–some of Russia's well-known writers, poets, artists, and philosophers were at some point or to some extent influenced by libertarian ideas. Alexander Herzen and Leo Tolstoy were just two of them, but we can also mention Alexander Blok, Maximilian Voloshin, Mikhail Osorgin and Mark Aldanov among the writers and poets, or Nikolay Ghe and Kazimir Malevitch among the artists. Even some Russian religious philosophers, like Nikolay Berdyayev, were to some extent influenced by anarchism. The same Berdyayev, for example, wrote quite correctly, that "Russia is the most stateless, most anarchist country in the world… All our truly Russian national writers, thinkers, publicists–all are anti-statist, sort of anarchists. Anarchism is a phenomenon of the Russian spirit". This statement, of course, needs some critical examination as, without doubt, authoritarian, conservative trends in Russian culture are at least as strong. But in a certain sense Berdyayev was referring to an interesting–and real–phenomenon.

For an introduction into the history of Russian anarchism Paul Avrich's "The Russian Anarchists" (first published in 1967) remains a brilliant book, although, of course, it was written at a time when Soviet archives were closed to researchers like Avrich and only very

”ideologically correct” Soviet scholars were allowed to see them in order to further refute ”petit-bourgeois anarchism”. But of course Avrich’s work left a lot untold and there remains a lot more to be said about the Russian anarchist tradition both before and after 1917–for example, about Russian anarchism after Kropotkin (which in its best, that is, critical part was post- if not anti-Kropotkin).

Gabriel Kuhn: Do the mentioned figures remain influential?

Mikhail Tsovma: Definitely, Bakunin and Kropotkin remain influential, sometimes more influential than is really necessary, as there is a tendency among anarchists–not only in Russia–to overestimate the relevance of ”our” theorists (or practitioners like Makhno). But this can also be used as a starting point for anarchist self-criticism and further development.

The books of Bakunin and Kropotkin were re-published recently, and these men are still in the process of returning into Russian intellectual history, if only slowly and to a limited extent. The only consistent efforts to publish Bakunin’s collection of works were made in Russia in the 1920s/early 1930s, and these remain unfinished. While these old books are basically unavailable now, except for in the large libraries, recent reprints of Bakunin or Kropotkin were rather fragmented. These two grand Russian anarchist thinkers were basically absent from the Russian intellectual culture except for a brief period in the early XX century and then for several years after the revolution. Under Stalin and later in the USSR these names were practically taboo. Or else, they were scolded by official Soviet propaganda as ”petit-bourgeois ideologues”, ”virulent opponents of Marxism” or ”utopian dreamers”. Until now there are more studies–and better studies–in almost any European language about Bakunin and Kropotkin than in Russian. And that’s a real shame. On the other hand, it also often happens that materials on the history of Russian anarchism, discovered recently by the Russian researchers, are practically unknown outside of Russia. We need to find a way to bridge this gap.

use it wisely, you know, so that at the end we get rich soil, not just dried pieces of shit everywhere.

I hope that libertarian culture in Russia is here to stay, but it needs to be studied, developed and practiced. I’m quite curious about the things happening in other countries, but my constant concern is about what’s happening in my country, although I have spent the last several years outside of it (but I do keep in touch and work for the benefit of the anarchist movement in my country, hoping to return there quite soon). I hope as time goes by we will cease to be the weak link in the international anarchist movement.

As for the rest of the world, as far as I can judge, anarchist movement, culture and practices have developed a lot. I have read the international anarchist press back in the late 1980s and 1990s, I remember how many and what kind of books were published back then, the size of the anarchist movement and its impact on social movements… We can always find a lot to be criticized about our movement, but there has been some significant progress over the years. Anarchists stopped being just a small insignificant group on the margins of the Left (and where’s the Left, by the way? how has it been doing recently?) or a club of dreamers always going back to Russia in 1917 or to Barcelona in 1937 in their dreams. Our movement has considerably grown in numbers, influence and practices. We could have done better, no doubt. Especially in Russia, we could have and should have done much, much better… We still should.

Mikhail Tsovma has been an activist in the Russian anarchist movement since 1988. Among other projects, he has been involved with the Confederation of Anarcho-Syndicalists (KAS) and the anarchist website Bakunista!.

tired or disillusioned, you know. On top of that, of course, there is always a danger of doing the anarchist routine as usual, instead of setting ”ambitious” goals for ourselves and doing things the best possible way, whether we talk about producing magazines, doing anarchist analysis or participating in a manifestation or community organizing.

I hope that the anarchist movement in Russia will remain and continue to develop for a considerable period of time, not be exterminated as it happened before. I don’t think the latter is now possible, although in Russia you never know. Of course, new forms of control are in place, but the total control and uniformity of the Stalin era is no longer possible or even desirable for the rulers (although if you read some descriptions of the ways the bureaucratic machine in Russia worked in the 1850s, or the 1930s, or the 1970s or now–you will always find some striking similarities). At least access to ideas and information can be no longer controlled thanks to the Internet; although, of course, it can be made difficult, plus in order to look for something you have to have some idea of what to look for. One of the Russian writers once said that ”there are two main disasters in Russia–the power of evil at the bottom and the evil of power at the top”. Back in 1886 he was referring to the mutually reinforcing duality of authoritarian state administration and the lack of enlightenment and civil consciousness of the people. But this pretty universal statement could have really been made in 1686, 1916, 1936 or 2006–we still have this problem, very much so, it seemed to have disappeared at times, but it keeps coming back. And we have no choice but to fight this state of things.

I hope the layer of anti-authoritarian culture will grow thicker and richer in the anarchist movement in Russia and will eventually spread further, but in order for this to happen, we need to learn, think, write, do things, create… And we have to recycle a lot of energy and ”waste”, the same way the compost is made, if you excuse my agricultural metaphor. At the moment we do have quite a lot of shit happening in the movement, too, but we have to be able to

Emma Goldman also seems to be making her final triumphal return to the Russian scene–if only among the anarchists and feminists now–as her articles and books are being translated.

Gabriel Kuhn: Did Leo Tolstoy leave a strong political legacy?

Mikhail Tsovma: Leo Tolstoy is considered by some the third grand Russian contributor to the anarchist tradition, who propagated a Christian version of anarchism, different from both the classical anarchist tradition and the authoritarian doctrine of the Russian Orthodox church. He stayed in Russia for all of his life and towards the end of it he had inspired a rather strong following among the peasants, workers and intelligentsia, which was based on nonviolence, pacifism, equality, non-cooperation with the state, opposition to the organized church, vegetarianism, etc. There were Tolstoyan rural communities and urban clubs and vegetarian canteens in Russia in the early XX century and after the revolution. But they also were crushed completely by Stalin in the 1920s and 1930s.

Tolstoy was a great moral authority in Russia in late XIX/early XX century because of his critical stand against the state and the church and his consistent Christian beliefs. His funeral was attended by thousands of people and since then he continued to be seen as a sort of prophet. At the same time he was ridiculed by some for his controversies and sometimes puritan attitudes. The Soviet regime stressed his opposition to Tsarism and the church, but only gave a rather limited overview of his social ideas and criticized him bitterly (as he obviously did not understand and value Marxism).

But Tolstoy was the only anarchist of some sort whose collected works were published almost completely in the USSR. This was due to the fact that he is one of the greatest Russian writers. Although this voluminous work was held primarily in libraries, at least it was available to readers (unlike most books by Bakunin, Kropotkin or other anarchists–we really did live in an Orwellian state for a very long period of time). And this did inspire some following in the 1970s/80s, for example, within the Russian hippie culture.

Actually, if we think of it, there are some parts of Tolstoy's legacy that may be still relevant and can have some audience in modern-day Russia–definitely his ideas on non-violence, vegetarianism or simplicity can and do find some followers. But probably most significant are his criticisms of state authority and the official church. At the same time, we should understand that some of his ideas were rather self-contradictory (one cannot help but notice that he was a self-made philosopher) and some were quite conservative (for example, his ideas on family and sexuality or his religious vision as such, which by far most anarchists can't share). I think a critical re-assessment of his legacy–and for that reason also a re-reading of Tolstoy–is necessary, especially since 2010 marks one hundred years since his death.

Gabriel Kuhn: What role did anarchists play in the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917?

Mikhail Tsovma: If we look at anarchist thought as it developed in Russia from 1900 to the 1930s, we will see pretty much the same tendencies as elsewhere in Europe–the dominant currents were anarcho-communism and anarcho-syndicalism, to a lesser extent anarcho-individualism and various other anarcho-isms. An organized anarchist movement as such appeared in Russia shortly before and during the first Russian revolution of 1905 through 1907. One should also bear in mind that for the most part of the first three decades of the XX century in Russia, when the movement emerged and developed, it lead a clandestine or semi-clandestine existence, except for very brief periods of time, so as a result of that it didn't have very strong roots, although obviously there were some anarchist tendencies in Russia even before this period.

Anarchists were basically a minority radical faction within the broader revolutionary movement both in 1905 through 1907 and 1917 through 1921. Anarchists were allied with other left-wing socialists in the overthrow of the Tsarist and then "bourgeois" provisional government in 1917. However, shortly after that the Bolsheviks de facto took all power in their hands and a process of de-

anarchist/DIY/punk/squatter scene–it's largely somebody else's experience that we hear about, but it is very much different from what we have in Russia right now. The world has changed a lot, our particular current situation is very much different. And in any event, the most important social experience is often not the one that you have read about in a book, however inspiring it may be, but the one you have had yourself and were able to think over. Even some of the rather positive experiences of the anarchist movement in the 1980s and 1990s are completely unknown to the present-day activists–they were small kids or probably not even born yet and very little effort has been made to inform them about these experiences. So there is a lot of re-inventing of the wheel going on in the Russian anarchist movement.

There is a belief among anarchists–who are predominantly young people in Russia–that the change we dream about will happen somehow fast and almost by itself. "Creative spirit of the masses…" "Wenn Arbeiter und Bauern…" I held the same optimistic beliefs back in 1989, when I was just seventeen (and for some time after that), although there was some ground for it back then, as society seemed to have been moving fast and the direction was generally "progressive".

But we need to realize that in fact social changes–especially progressive social changes–are very complicated and slow, they take not just time, but an enormous effort on the part of many people. Changes can be moving fast at times, but for them to be deep and not just superficial or illusory, they need time. And it becomes twice as hard if the general direction of social change becomes regressive.

Even if we talk about the growth of anti-authoritarian culture within the Russian anarchist movement, it takes time and it doesn't happen by itself. Introducing our values and ways of self-organization into the broader social groups is even more complex. This needs to be done, of course, but that's a hell of a job and not many people look at it seriously enough–as a thing they want to spend their life in a voluntary, but conscious way. And people get

ing class or local communities or whatever kind of social base you can think of for progressive social change? People in the former USSR en masse don't believe that they can change anything and they don't know how to do this. There is enormous disbelief in the government, but this kind of disbelief still leaves people paralyzed, as the ideas and tools for change are lacking. But there is also some interest in anarchism and we should develop this in some practical terms, as well as trying to spread libertarian values.

Sure, there is a wide range of everyday social practices that people in Russia and other post-Soviet countries have in order to survive in spite of the state, when the existing Soviet "social state" has disappeared. This should be studied, in fact, by the anarchists, and we should try to radicalize these practices and make them self-conscious. But almost none of this is done.

Anarchists in my country just start to practice some of the alternatives to the state and hierarchy–in the form of independent organizing for various social campaigns (and building coalitions), the autonomous DIY/punk scene, Food Not Bombs, etc. But very often it is too little, even if it is not too late. There is a very long way to go, if we are to learn in practice how to do things differently. Some experiences are almost absent (squatting in big cities is in most cases impossible, at least for a considerable period of time, due to heavy repression), while other practices are not even discovered (autonomous rural communities, for example).

Anarchists somehow believe that they are in a unique position–that they have a universal wonderful theory of how to do things a different way. In a sense this is true–we do have a model of how to do things differently, but it's just a sketch on a sheet of paper (well, I'm talking about how things are in my country). It has to be implemented in practice and when we start doing this, we will, without doubt, find out that there are improvements to be made to the sketch. Life is always more complicated than what we think it to be. And we can't constantly refer to the Spanish revolution, the Makhnovschina, the Argentinian FORA or even the international

struction of non-Bolshevik political movements started, including anarchists and left socialists.

Bolshevik ascent to power also initiated a process of internal disintegration of the anarchist movement. Should anarchists be opposed to the new Communist "workers' state" or should they work with the Bolsheviks hoping to be able to influence the course of the revolution into a more popular, self-organized, non-state, directly democratic direction? These were not always easy questions. Anarchists have criticized the new dictatorship from the very beginning. But there existed a considerable number of "Soviet anarchists" who chose to work with the Bolsheviks "for the sake of the Revolution" (some of them later also joined the Communist party). Even Makhnovists were to make tactical unions with the Bolsheviks against the Whites or the Ukrainian nationalists.

But already by 1919 through 1920 more anarchists were talking about "The Third Revolution", while this was also in the air in 1921 with the Kronstadt uprising and various popular anti-Bolshevik movements of peasants and workers throughout Russia (and that was, in a sense, "The Third Revolution", or, better said, the continuation of the revolution started in 1917, but the one that failed). This was also a period when Bolsheviks continued repressive policies against their opponents, including anarchists. However, for some people becoming a "Soviet anarchist" was an attractive option, though the degree of cooperation also varied. Almost none of these renegades survived the Stalinist purges of the late 1930s. So, there existed a number of more conformist and careerist elements within the anarchist movement (including some of its intellectuals), but there also existed many consistent and principled anarchists who paid with their lives for their libertarian ideals. The history of the Russian anarchist movement after the revolution gives us both examples of unprincipled or short-sighted collaboration with the Bolshevik party and other, more inspiring examples of consistent libertarian critique and practical heroism in the face of the new

dictatorship, ranging from ordinary peasants/Makhnovists to anarchist organizers, poets and philosophers.

Besides the famous Makhnovist peasant movement in the Ukraine, which was strongly influenced by anarchists, and the Kronstadt uprising, which the anarchists wholeheartedly supported, there were other popular movements in 1917 through 1921, which constituted the popular, radical and directly democratic side of the Russian revolution. They were not directly influenced by anarchist ideas, but they do constitute a potentially interesting development within the Russian revolution, which, if not suppressed, could have lead to a more positive social experiment in Russia.

In the 1920s anarchists were either killed, imprisoned, driven into clandestinity or forced to leave Russia. A rather considerable number of anarchists emigrated from Russia after 1921 and for several years there existed a possibility to exchange information with those who were left in the USSR. Because of that some information about the situation of anarchists and repression against them in Soviet Russia was published. Those who escaped or were thrown out of Russia were also able to summarize the experience of anarchist participation in the Russian revolution in the books that were published abroad and which became known to those living in the USSR only sixty or so years after. (Here I mean Voline's "Unknown Revolution", which was published in Russian only recently, or Arshinov's and Makhno's books about the Makhnovist movement in the Ukraine, which were widely published in the 1990s. However, Maximoff's book "Guillotine at work" or some other, lesser known books by anarchist emigrants still remain unknown to the Russian readers, while some critiques of Bolsheviks written by anarchists in Russia in the 1920s are also lost or completely forgotten). On the other hand, throughout the 1920s and 1930s there still existed an anarchist movement in the USSR, which was eventually crushed and exterminated by the Bolsheviks, and we only start to re-discover its legacy now, while it is almost completely unknown outside of Russia.

Mikhail Tsovma: Well, I honestly don't know, nor can anyone know, what the chances are for anarchism in Russia. Right now we have an ever more audacious authoritarian regime, growing atomization within society, disintegration of the social fabric, and a lack of will and experience on the part of the people to fight back against injustices. Dictatorships are not just things that fall on us from above, they are fed and reproduced by the people, who were conditioned in authoritarian ways–they are scared, tired, looking forward to comfort or prefer the "easier" way of living this life without thinking about the consequences. But most recently we also seem to have the signs that some people are fed up and want to change the way things are or at least stop the most outrageous practices of the state and capitalism. I hope this is also a growing phenomenon in Russia, not just an optical illusion.

There was a rather brief period in Russia recently, when the general situation was more free–of course, we had the emerging private capitalism, government and corporate mass media. But the government was weaker for some time throughout the 1990s and this gave people some more breathing space. The mass media were not as controlled as they are now and some information about what is going on was circulating through the media (and so people were aware to some extent of what was happening). Things were gradually changing and by now we have a very different situation. Some anarchists in my country argue–and in a very stupid manner, I would say–that the worse, the better. We do not need relatively free mass media, we do not need courts that at least observe the state laws which exist, we do not need trade unions, we just need an anarchist revolution based on direct action and non-hierarchical organization. That's well and fine, but I have some questions. Do these people themselves practice what they preach? And how do we fight for justice in the here and now if we consider human rights and basic democratic freedoms to be some liberal bullshit? How do we start from scratch, when even anarchists don't have a hell of a lot of experience of a different way of doing things, let alone the work-

and were at the forefront of the anti-war movement (which, however, was not very strong in general). Already then it was stressed that nationalism and statehood can not resolve the problem. As the Chechen separatists resorted more and more to terrorist tactics, and this obviously was also used by the Russian government for its own purposes of strengthening the authoritarian regime in Russia, the predominant line in anarchist propaganda started to sound like "Putin and Maskhadov/Basayev is the same band". I would say that unfortunately not enough serious thought was given to the problem and in many cases the anarchist position was not more than a sort of simplistic leaflet. As time went by, more and more stress, of course, was made on criticism of the Russian army's war crimes in Chechnya, the violation of basic freedoms and human rights, and the criticism of both the Russian central government and the regime it installed in Chechnya. And some anarchists also participated in various forms of humanitarian aid to people in Chechnya, together with the human rights activists.

As for the problem of growing nationalism in Russia, anarchists and anti-authoritarians constitute the core of the antifascist movement, being among the most consistent internationalists.

Recently there were some attempts to play in the field of Russian identity (there was a rally "Russians against fascism", for example, organized by some antifascists), but this was subject to severe criticism within the movement. Most anarchists stress internationalism, opposition to xenophobia and racism, and not national identity (as Russia is a multi-ethnic country). I would not say that we don't have a problem with some xenophobic attitudes within the movement, which are not always properly analyzed. But in general the slogan "Our fatherland is the whole of humanity" remains one of the main slogans at anarchist demonstrations. And anarcho-nationalism, although it exists marginally, is but a weird thing at the edge of the movement.

Gabriel Kuhn: Which chances do you see for anarchism in the future–both in Russia and in general?

The organized anarchist movement in the USSR was destroyed by the Bolshevik state by about the mid-1920s, when all public activities of anarchists were banned and the activists of the movement were continually arrested and imprisoned. Some clandestine activities of anarchists continued in the late 1920s and early 1930s, but primarily in small groups. No anarchist press or book publishing was allowed after 1925 to 1926, although some books by Bakunin and Kropotkin were still published in the 1930s by Soviet state publishers.

Gabriel Kuhn: The Kronstadt uprising is considered a key moment for the Bolshevik oppression of anarchist activism. Can you tell us more about the relationship between Bolsheviks and anarchists, and about the situation for anarchists in the Soviet Union?

Mikhail Tsovma: No doubt Kronstadt represents a key moment of the Russian revolution, as it was one of the strongest, but also one of the last attempts to fight back against the dictatorship of authoritarian communists. Same as the other popular anti-Bolshevik movements, it was brutally crushed. But immediately after that Bolsheviks announced a change of their policy–"war communism" with its bread requisitions from the peasants was replaced by the "new economic policy" (NEP), which allowed some liberalization. This, however, was only an economic liberalization, not a political one.

As for the political repression against anarchists and socialists, it was intensified during and immediately after the Kronstadt uprising. But one needs to understand that repression didn't start with Kronstadt. Ironically, one of the first two documentary film chronicles of the Soviet period is a report about the raids on anarchist clubs in April 1918 (I haven't seen it, but it should be found in the Russian cinema archives). Already back in 1918, right after the "October Revolution", anarchists were systematically repressed, arrested and even shot. This intensified in 1919 through 1921. But after Kronstadt very little public anarchist activity was allowed. After 1926 the Kropotkin Museum in Moscow was the only place for anarchist propaganda and it also was "supervised" by the secret police

and was eventually closed down. In the 1920s we can talk about an anarchist underground, but it was a small underground.

One has to realize that the situation of the anarchist movement in Russia and the ex-USSR is very different from any European country (we can probably compare it to China since Mao, though). The remnants of the movement in the USSR were physically destroyed in the 1930s. For the following fifty or sixty years any anarchist voices in the USSR were violently shut. The situation was somewhat similar in other countries of Eastern Europe, where for about 30 to 40 years there was no anarchist movement. But even in countries like Bulgaria anarchists who have emigrated after World War II were able to see the resurrection of the anarchist movement in the late 1980s. In Russia practically no anarchists survived that long. I can think of probably just four anarchists in the late USSR–they were very young people in the 1920s, when the last anarchist groups were crushed, and they were already very old and in weak health in the late 1980s/early 1990s when the movement re-emerged. So, basically, there was no living tradition of anarchism when we started from scratch 20 to 25 years ago, in the mid and late-1980s.

Gabriel Kuhn: The Makhnovists in the Ukraine are often seen as an anarchist movement that was at least temporarily successful in influencing wide parts of the population. What is your assessment of this history, and does any influence of the Makhnovists remain in former Soviet republics?

Mikhail Tsovma: The Makhnovist movement, or Makhnovschina, in south-eastern Ukraine in 1917 through 1921 was indeed the most massive social experiment during the Russian revolution influenced and inspired by anarchist ideas. It was built on the basis of freely elected Soviets, which were not local parliamentary bodies for representation of political parties, but instead local self-management structures subject to direct democratic control (to the extent that was possible), which coordinated their activities at a regional level through congresses of Soviets. Basically, the system was built from the bottom up and this was anathema to the Bolshevik or any other

tations in this way, sometimes blocking the traffic on central streets. There is also a growing practice of confrontation with the police if it prevents or restricts legal assemblies. So, in this respect, although not without problems, anarchist street politics are developing and anarchists are able to slowly build up a protest culture of their own.

Gabriel Kuhn: What are anarchist positions on questions that concern nationalism and statehood on both sides, for example in Chechnya?

Mikhail Tsovma: From the very beginning, that is since the 1980s, the predominant position of anarchists in Russia was an internationalist one–anarchists supported the move of former Soviet republics towards independence in the sense that no people should be forced to stay within the Soviet Union, but at the same time stressed the importance of internationalism, criticized the idea of nation states and nationalism. In the 1990s, as the nationalist movements in the former USSR grew larger and nation states consolidated, so grew the tensions between the anarchists and nationalists in various countries of the ex-USSR.

There are some exceptions, of course, like the situation in Belarus, where the authoritarian regime in fact suppresses national language and culture, and national liberationists are a strong part of the opposition. In this country even speaking Belorussian is a political statement. And some anarchists in Belarus are very sensitive about it. But at the same time strong criticism is also aimed at the nationalistic opposition.

As for the Chechen war and ”national liberation” movement there, anarchists from the very beginning were saying that it is the decision to be made by the people in Chechnya whether they want to stay inside Russia or not. But at the same time nationalism and the idea of a nation state as a supposed solution to the problem were criticized. There was a small faction in the anarchist movement which expressed support for Chechen separatists as such, but this was never a strong position. Anarchists were wholeheartedly opposed to the war in Chechnya since the first Chechen war in 1994

social activism in Russia remains very repressive (and has become even more repressive recently). Where anarchists can collaborate with other political and social groups, they do so (not to say that we don't have the continuous "How can we collaborate with Trotskyists after Kronstadt?" saga). At the same time very often anarchists not only form one of the most active parts of social movements, but they also practice their own independent actions, for example, in the form of direct action and illegal demonstrations against police brutality and Nazi terror, which sometimes attract several hundred people, not bad by Russian standards.

There is a widespread practice by the local Russian authorities to ban or make practically impossible any legal manifestations or sometimes even small picket lines. In Russia you have to warn authorities ten days in advance if you want to have a rally or manifestation (if I'm not mistaken similar regulations existed in Chile under Pinochet), and they may or may not give you a permission, etc. Sometimes even if you have a permission, that still doesn't mean that your rally will not be illegally and brutally stopped by the police. And they may stop you from unfurling banners or distributing leaflets or something like that. That makes any open street protest and activism very difficult, confined to a small square behind police barriers, and at times it makes it impossible. And imagine your comrade was killed by Nazis or brutalized by the police just today? Do you wait for ten days to express your protest?

But the anarchists with their practice of illegal demonstrations in recent years are sometimes better off than the rest of the opposition, because they basically don't ask for permissions and have the opportunity to plan and hold their actions in spite of the police. There still can be a very restricted field for action–you can only make a fast-going manifestation, as you may be sure that the overwhelming and brutal police forces will arrive pretty soon after they learn about the protest. But at least you can express your protest in a rather visible and more efficient way. On numerous occasions, anarchists in Moscow and St. Petersburg were able to have manifes-

centralized government. At the same time it proved itself pretty effective in the chaos of the civil war. Although Makhnovists chose or were forced to make some tactical unions with the Bolsheviks (and were constantly betrayed, manipulated and exterminated by the latter), they were a strong popular force within a considerably large region. In the end they were crushed by the Bolshevik's power, which effectively consolidated itself in 1921 through 1922.

Was it an anarchist movement? In a sense, it definitely was, as it was practicing some directly democratic principles. The political groups most influential in the Makhnovist movement were anarchists and to a lesser extent left socialists (and unlike the Bolshevik regime, the Makhnovist region was famous for freedom of agitation for all left parties and groups, including the Bolsheviks). But at the same time it was a limited experience of an anarchist-inspired social movement, both in time and because it operated within the harsh limits of a brutal civil war and successive occupations of its territory by various forces (German army, Ukrainian nationalists, the Whites, Bolsheviks). Because of that the movement was forced to adapt to the situation and was often functioning as a war-time (and thus limited) democracy or a mere insurrectionary movement (not unlike the anarchist social experiment in Spain in the late 1930s, which was also a case of a libertarian experiment during wartime, although it was a much greater and significant phenomenon). But compared to Bolshevik, nationalist or pro-monarchist dictatorships that surrounded and at times occupied the Makhnovist territory, it was a functioning free worker/peasant democracy, where there was no place for anti-Semitic pogroms, for example, which were very common under the Whites, Ukrainian nationalists and Bolsheviks. The Makhnovist movement was physically destroyed by the Bolsheviks. Given that the country was tired of civil war and was finally granted by the Bolsheviks some freedom from the policies of war communism (primarily the abolition of bread requisitions from peasants), the Makhnovschina did not later recover from the military defeat.

But it is noteworthy that until the end of the 1920s and early 1930s the government was on the lookout for a resurgence of the Makhnovschina, especially as Stalin returned to repressive politics in the villages, this time in the form of "collectivization". Makhno, a sort of peasant anarchist Robin Hood (or, actually we better say Wat Tyler), remained in the minds of local (and not only local) peasants and workers a symbol of popular opposition to repressive government. He became a figure of popular culture in spite–but also partly due–to the Soviet propaganda, which continued to show him as a drunk bandit shooting anyone at will and playing accordion (in general the official Soviet propaganda and films only showed anarchists as drunk bandits who made alliances with the "counter-revolution" or, sometimes, as pointless utopian dreamers–that's a negative media type which we still have to fight against to this day).

Recently Makhno made a strong comeback. He always enjoyed some sort of evil popularity in folklore, but after some more sympathetic books started to appear about him in Russia in the 1990s, and especially after his and Arshinov's memoirs were reprinted, he was finally "rehabilitated", at least partially. Over the last years several documentaries, although rather poor ones, were made about him in Russia, and what's more, a whole TV series, showing both him and the popular movement he led, was made by Russian TV. Of course, there is a lot to be criticized about the TV series, but at least it shows him sympathetically for what he was–a leader of a mass popular movement inspired by the principles of freedom and equality. But all the myths created by the Soviet propaganda also seem to survive forever around this man.

In the anarchist literature there is a strong tradition to idealize Makhno and the Makhnovists and take them rather uncritically. This is due to the fact that the main books by anarchists about the Makhnovschina were written in the 1920s, when the debate with the Bolsheviks was still raging and there was an obvious need to counter the lies. Now there is time for a more critical and unbiased re-examination of this movement. I would like to point to very thor-

Gabriel Kuhn: Is there much collaboration between anarchists and others on the radical left? Or do anarchists mainly work, organize, and fight by themselves?

Mikhail Tsovma: Of course, there is. But the peculiarity of the Russian situation is that there is no strong left in Russia at all, not to mention a strong radical left. Obviously the Communist parties cannot be considered "left" in any meaningful way, because basically they are Stalinist, nationalistic, authoritarian and xenophobic (and the Communist party of the Russian Federation used to vote for government policies when it was necessary for Putin). There are some anti-Stalinist left groups like the "Democratic Left", Trotskyists, etc., but they are smaller in size then the anarchists.

If there are some social struggles going on–like strikes, local struggles against housing speculators in big cities (who obtain construction permits with violations of existing norms due to corruption, and who build houses, garages or shopping malls too close to existing houses), movements against the destruction of historical buildings, human rights and antifascist struggles–various political groups, usually liberals, anarchists, the left, sometimes Stalinists, come together to support them. The only strict exception anarchists make is not to do anything with Nationalists (Nazis, National-Bolshevik party, etc.).

Unfortunately the number of politically or socially active people in Russia remains very limited. The only notable exception to this rule was the perestroika period and to some extent the mid-1990s. In general, people in Russia have a strong disbelief in their ability to achieve anything in the public sphere through collective struggles, which is basically the legacy of the authoritarian and repressive character of the Russian state during the past decades or even centuries.

There have been some changes recently, as the policies of the government, impudence of bureaucrats and capitalist practices, ecological violations, police brutality and Nazi violence become really unbearable. But at the same time the very atmosphere around any

was not only a young journalist with a leading oppositional paper, but she was also an activist of the anarchist movement. Over the last three years several leading members of the Moscow anti-Nazi skinhead scene were also killed–Fyodor Filatov, Ilya Dzhaparidze, Ivan Khutorskoy. These were anarchists or our close comrades who worked to change the skinhead scene from its current Nazi state back to its antiracist and antifascist origins… And not only that–they were the core of street antifascism in Moscow.

Until now the antifascist movement has a policy of not killing Nazis in revenge. That's a very strong moral statement and a noble stand. But honestly, I don't know how long this can be sustained. The post-Soviet political scene is very brutal and there were cases recently–in Russia and the Ukraine–when Nazis were injured or killed because antifascists had to defend their lives.

The antifascist movement in Russia is predominantly young, 16 to 25, and so are the victims of Nazi terror against the antifascist movement. It has to mature and think things over in order to survive and make its struggles more efficient. But it is on its way and the anarchists form the core of this movement.

And yes, same as in Europe we also have the eternal debate of whether we should fight against fascism or against capitalism. There are those who argue quite convincingly–usually before the computer keybord and screen, though–that we should first of all fight against capitalism, because it forms the core of all the problems. Quite so. One should not forget about fighting capitalism and the state in the midst of antifascist struggles. But as in Italy in the 1920s, or Spain and Germany in the 1930s, we have quite limited choices as fascism is on the rise. We should try to keep our hearts burning, our heads cool and our hands clean, as the head of the Bolshevik secret police Felix Dzerzhinsky once advised, but we do not have much choice regarding whether to fight or not to fight fascism here and now and regarding what exactly should be the order on our list of priorities.

ough books on the Makhnovschina by the Russian historian (and ex-anarchist, one of the founders of the first anarchist group in Moscow, Obschina) Alexander Shubin. His books definitely deserve being translated and published as they aim to start this critical–but nonetheless sympathetic–re-examination of the Makhnovschina.

Gabriel Kuhn: How has anarchism developed in Russia since the end of the Soviet Union?

Mikhail Tsovma: The anarchist movement–as well as other political oppositional movements–emerged from its clandestine existence in the USSR around 1987to 1988. From the 1950s to the 1980s, at the time of Khruschev's period of "thaw" (ottepel) and later, under Brezhnev, some small clandestine anarchist groups appeared, which were inspired by Bakunin's critique of state socialism and other literature from the 1910s/20s that was occasionally found in antique bookstores (but of course the main inspiration were the injustices and lack of freedom under the Soviet regime). But, of course, these groups were crushed by the KGB as soon as they were discovered. In the early 1970s there were also cases of youth groups inspired by the European and American new left radicalism of the late 1960s. Some anarchist-influenced ideas also found their way into hippie and later punk counterculture of the 1970s/80s, but these movements in general remained mostly apolitical.

So, until the 1980s there was no continued anarchist activity that lasted long–for the simple reason that any such dissent was sure to have lead people who held such radical views into prison or psychiatric hospital. But already since the early and mid-1980s there existed some small clandestine groups, which later became the core of the re-emerging anarchist movement. In many cases these groups were first inspired by Marxism-Leninism "unspoiled by Stalin", non-Leninist Marxism, various currents of socialism and anarchism, but later formulated a specifically anarchist program. The other source of the re-emerging anarchist movement was the spread of books like Kropotkin's "Memoirs of a Revolutionary" (almost the sole book by Kropotkin allowed by Soviet authorities) or the wonder-

ful books by Natalia Pirumova, a Soviet historian and a sort of soft dissident, who tried to write positively about the grand figures of Russian anarchism and socialism–Herzen, Bakunin, Kropotkin–to the extent that was permitted by the official Soviet propaganda. Her books were rather influential and it is no surprise that during the perestroika she was unofficially proclaimed by us as "the grandmother of Russian anarchism".

One of the groups which emerged in the mid-1980s, and probably the most influential one, was the Moscow-based group Obschina (Community), which was formed at the history faculty of the Moscow Pedagogical Institute. Same as elsewhere in Russia, members of the group benefited from access to the historical archives, which were closed to the public. Previously a clandestine Marxist group (one should remember that in an Orwellian state, which the USSR was, the influence of the official ideology was enormous, while other opinions and ideas were severely censored), it became an "independent socialist" group by 1987, when it was officially constituted. The change of the group's ideology was mainly due to their acquaintance with Bakunin's critique of state socialism, as well as with other trends of socialism and anarchism. Obschina was part of the growing "informal" movement (neformaly), which was the common name for all non-party-controlled activities–from groups which defended historical monuments from destruction to environmental groups to emerging political organizations. With the beginning of glasnost and perestroika ideological control was loosened a little and there opened a space for some open public activity. Obschina was part of a network of socialist clubs, which emerged throughout the country and which were partly Marxist, partly non-Marxist. Those of the groups who advocated the principles of self-management in 1988 formed first the Union of Independent Socialists, which in January 1989 re-constituted itself as the Confederation of Anarcho-Syndicalists (KAS; the founding congress was held in May 1989). The Obschina group largely formulated the program of the new organization and also published a regular samizdat (self-

There seem to be just small anarchist groups and individuals in Kazakhstan, Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan.

There are some anarchist historians, philosophers, and sociologists now, who have produced some fine works, but the modern Russian intellectual tradition is far from being developed. Interesting anarchist books by Russian authors are still a rarity.

Gabriel Kuhn: You have already mentioned the authoritarianism of the current Russian regime, and many dissidents have paid with their lives for their activities. How does this effect the anarchist movement? What are ways of resistance?

Mikhail Tsovma: Yes, that's true, in recent years there has been a strong process of both criminalization of any protest and of attacks and murders against social activists. Anarchists are also part of the public campaign, however small, against criminalization of activism. With the rise of the Nazi movement in Russia in recent years and because anarchists are the core of the antifascist movement in Russia, there is also a growing number of deaths among comrades. People are being attacked and killed on the way home or to a concert, after a Food Not Bombs action, during a Nazi pogrom of an ecological protest camp… This started around 2004 to 2005 and seems to have no end. And of course, there is a bigger picture–several hundred racist attacks in Russia each year leaving several dozen people dead.

In January 2009 the lawyer Stanislav Markelov and the journalist of "Novaya Gazeta" Anastasia Baburova were shot in the head in the center of Moscow. This made big news and provoked an international protest campaign in Russia and abroad. Well, Stanislav was not only a lawyer–although he was an exceptional lawyer in modern Russia–he was also our comrade. Markelov took the cases of defending antifascists in court, or the cases of social activists brutalized by the police, the authorities and the mafia, of victims of war crimes in Chechnya… But he was also a socialist, who cooperated closely with the anarchists, frequented protests actions and our summer camps in Pryamukhino, Bakunin's home village. Anastasia

ity trade union in some cities in Siberia. The Association of Anarchist Movements (ADA) also dates back to the early 1990s, but at the moment leads a nominal existence. Rainbow Keepers, who were the organizers of eco-protests in the 1990s and early 2000s, disintegrated, but anarchists are still active in various local eco-struggles, as well as an anti-nuclear campaign. There is a large number of anarchists who are also part of the punk/hardcore DIY scene, many of them are also involved in antifascist struggles and animal liberation. Quite a large number of anarchists in Russia do not belong to any "nationwide" organization, but instead are active in local collectives and scenes.

Anarchists are still producing some samizdat newspapers and magazines, although the quality and the content is not always the best. But maybe I'm just being a grumpy old anarchist man over 35.

All in all, we are still talking of a couple of thousand activists nationwide, which is not big. But anarchists are often a vocal and active independent voice within the Russian social struggles and they also have a tendency to organize independently. Compared to the 1990s there was some quantitative and qualitative growth of the anarchist movement and some very lively anarchist scenes can now be found not only in Moscow, St. Petersburg and a few other major cities, but also in larger numbers in regional centers.

Some progress has been made in recent years in anarchist book publishing, but it still has a long way to go, it seems, before we will have a lively anarchist book culture. But in this age of modern technologies–and growing authoritarianism in Russia–a large part of the dissemination of anarchist propaganda is done through the Internet.

There are some strong contacts between anarchists in Russia and the Ukraine and Belarus, where anarchist groups are rather numerous and sizeable. Recently there is also growing cooperation with anarchists in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia (and a regional newspaper for the anarchists of the Baltic region was launched last year).

published) magazine of the same name. The magazine started off with just several dozen typewritten copies in 1987 and grew into a popular samizdat magazine by 1989 with a print-run of several thousand (sometimes up to 30,000) copies. For some time KAS served as a common organization of various anarchist groups, not necessarily anarcho-syndicalist. That lasted until about 1990 to 1991, when other networks and federations were also formed. Other regional groups of KAS also had their publications and at some point in 1989 to 1990 the combined print-run of the anarchist press in Russia was several dozens of thousands of copies. These were the times of the late perestroika period when a considerable portion of the population in Russia was rather politically active, looking for new ideas, attending massive oppositional manifestations and struggling against the local bureaucrats. This period lasted for just about 4 years–from 1988 to 1991–but was a very significant period of modern Russian history. Following an unsuccessful coup d'etat by the hardline Communist bureaucrats in August 1991, the Soviet government ceased to exist and new states emerged on the remnants of the Soviet Union (although at a referendum held earlier that year most of the voters voted to keep a united country). Briefly after that liberal reforms–privatization and liberalization of prices, which were also characterized by hyper-inflation–lead to "dissatisfaction with politics" on the part of the majority of the population. Life in the new Russia turned into a game of survival under "wild capitalism". This has effectively killed any mass democratic movement.

Throughout the 1990s anarchists lived through several crises. Once a bubbling movement of radical opponents of both Soviet Communism and capitalism, the movement declined greatly by 1993 to 1994, following the general trend of disassociation of larger parts of the population from "politics". (One should also take into account that anarchist principles were not a real conviction for all the newcomers to the anarchist movement, many of whom didn't stay long in the anarchist ranks.) In the mid and late 1990s anarchists

remained a rather small network of groups, mainly active in environmental, anti-war and some other campaigns. One of the brighter stars were the eco-protesters, Rainbow Keepers (Khraniteli Radugi), who held at least one ecological protest camp each summer, trying to catalyze local communities' struggles, and who did other eco-protests in between. By the late 1990s the movement slightly grew in numbers, primarily due to an influx of young people from the emerging punk/hardcore DIY (do-it-yourself) scene. But the problem remains that very few young people stay in the movement long enough for the movement to benefit from them growing older, wiser and more experienced.

With the establishment of the increasingly authoritarian government of president Putin in 1999 through 2000 and the emergence of new problems (authoritarian police regime, the war in Chechnya and terrorism, continuous decline of even formal democracy and freedom in Russia, the development of capitalism and consumerist culture, growth of xenophobia and the continuing rise of the Nazi movement) the anarchist movement was also growing stronger, as a reaction to these negative developments.

However, by the end of the first decade of Putin, Russia comes with the absence of even the formality of democratic institutions or political opposition, while the practices of the state become ever more repressive (the main problems being arbitrary "anti-extremist" laws and practices, enormous police brutality and lack of any democratic control over the law enforcement agencies, de facto ban on oppositional activities, and a limited number of possibilities for unrestricted spread of propaganda with the sole exception of Internet).

Slowly but steadily, however, social activism is re-emerging in Russia–both in the form of social movements and oppositional political activities–in the face of the growing repressive state, overwhelming corruption and capitalist practices, which become ever wilder. But the main problem remains the same: most people in Russia traditionally don't believe in "political", that is collective, action, social movements are very weak or almost non-existent, and there

are no well-established forms and organizations which can be vehicles of civil action (be it trade unions or local initiatives). Russian society suffers from enormous fragmentation.

Another problem is the growth of the Nazi movement in Russia, which for some time was in fact nurtured by the government, which believed it can establish and use some sort of "manageable nationalism". Nazi violence–mainly against immigrants, people of color, but also against antifascists, anarchists and progressive social activists–is on the rise. Recently we have also witnessed the emergence of a Nazi underground, which is an increasingly terrorist force.

Gabriel Kuhn: What are the main currents of the contemporary anarchist movement?

Mikhail Tsovma: In the 2000s we have in the Russian anarchist movement basically all the same currents which you can find in any other anarchist scene–from anarcho-syndicalists through anarcho-communists to anarcho-individualists, feminists, primitivists, eco-protesters, antifascists. But unlike the movement in Italy, France or Spain–where you would have several generations of the same family in the anarchist movement–the anarchist scene in Russia is predominantly young. There are few people older than 30 through 35 (and very few people over 40). Out of the people who started the movement in the 1980s there are just several persons left. High turnover remains a problem.

If we talk about organizations, the largest is Autonomous Action, which positions itself as a libertarian communist organization and consists of primarily young people involved in local social, antifascist, ecological struggles. Autonomous Action produces a magazine, "Avtonom", which is published in several thousand copies and is the biggest in Russia, although there are also some criticisms to be made regarding its content. There are now at least two anarcho-syndicalist organizations in Russia, which are small in size, but they also produce newspapers. In Siberia anarchists are the core of the Siberian Confederation of Labor (SKT), a revolutionary syndicalist organization which dates back to the 1990s and is an active minor-