

Anarchists Against Counter-Revolution

Friends of Russell Maroon Shoatz



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There has been a disturbing trend within anarchism in the last few years. It could be called the right wing of anarchism, liberal anarchism, anarchism in name only, or reformism. Whatever it is called, people who believe that they are anarchists have taken positions that side with colonizers, nation-states, and western hegemony.

The most glaring of these positions are: 1) the Resistance in Palestine should not be supported or should only be partially supported because Hamas is not sufficiently 'anarchist.' 2) Money and solidarity should be sent to 'anarchist' battalions in Ukraine which fight alongside fascist battalions and under the direction of the Ukrainian State and the United States. 3) Armed struggle against the US is a foolhardy endeavor.

Let's look at each of the three examples in more detail to explore their specific contradictions.

The Resistance in Palestine:

While once the leftist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) was one of the strongest Resistance factions in Palestine, Hamas has become the most prominent. This marks a shift from leftists at the forefront of the Resistance to a group that is known for its focus on Islam. Islamic Jihad (PIJ), "a national Palestinian Resistance movement which is rooted in our people's faith, culture and belief, namely Islam,"¹ bridges the gap between leftism and Islam. Dr. Mohammed Al-Hindi of PIJ² has explained that this transition was not imposed, but rather rose out of a desire from the people. During this transition period, Palestinians were looking for Islamic groups to play an active role in the Resistance and when they did not initially find recourse through the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamic groups. Groups like Islamic Jihad and Hamas arose to fulfill the need. Despite the differences in ideology, all of the Resistance factions (from the PFLP to Islamic Jihad to Hamas and others) have committed to working together in Al Aqsa Flood.

The Palestinian struggle is a massively significant struggle against one of the most egregious colonizers in the region, an agent and ally of the US and the west. The entire takeover of the region and creation of the Zionist entity was facilitated by the original colonization of the area by England. Armed settlers of the area come predominantly from the US and Europe and are highly visible Western agents of its hegemony. People in struggle are literally fighting the right-wing neighbors of those of us who live in the west.

When people in the west (purportedly as part of a liberatory movement) evaluate Hamas based on their own narrow definitions of what is the right and wrong way to build a movement, they are ironically bringing a western measuring stick to a struggle against the west. They form the second tier of colonization: measuring and categorizing a people's struggle to judge and decide if it is worthy of their solidarity. This process reinforces differences between us. It is the same process of 'othering' that creates acceptance for colonization within civil society to occur in the first place. The colonized people are designated as the 'other,' a concept that allows for a process of dehumanization: to use the differences of culture as a wedge that forces them out of our shared humanity and into a new category that allows for exploitation. If people are different from us, should they be colonized? Any anarchist would adamantly say, no! The people of Palestine

¹ <https://www.dropsitenews.com/p/oslo-is-over>

² *ibid*

want to fight back against torture and attempted genocide and out of this desire groups like PIJ and Hamas were born.

As anarchists it is our duty to understand why our politics are not the unique driving force behind oppressed people as it once was. In Palestine, while having some adherents to traditional revolutionary left politics, in PFLP and DFLP, the left has generally faded as the main oppositional ideology. If we want to become relevant again, our role, as anarchists, is to understand how Hamas has become so relevant to people there and what role Islam plays in the Resistance.

Furthermore, withholding support while the Resistance factions are being bombed and shot at does not put your movement in a strong position to make suggestions after the war. The strongest bonds are forged through struggle and the connections between those who fight side by side will continue after the fighting is over. There is a reason Aaron Bushnell's³ likeness is spread throughout the Resistance areas. His action speaks loudly over the din of naysayers critiquing the Resistance and with his action he has brought anarchism to the forefront of the struggle by showing unequivocal solidarity. May he rest in peace.

Russia-Ukraine War:

Contradictorily, while now questioning the legitimacy of Hamas, liberal anarchists had been rallying support for the Resistance Committees of Ukraine, which were nominally anarchist battalions that fought with the Ukrainian military and even within fascist battalions.

What was clear from the start of the Russia-Ukraine conflict was that the pressures and overtures of the west had pushed the Russian state to its breaking point. Since the end of Cold War, the United States promised Russia that NATO, an aggressive military alliance, wouldn't move past Germany. Since then, there have been several expansions of NATO, under Clinton and then Bush. The red line for Russia was always the inclusion of Georgia and Ukraine in NATO. In 2008 at the Bucharest Summit, the US announced that Georgia and Ukraine would join NATO - a direct provocation. In 2014 the Maidan uprising occurred in Ukraine, with protagonists being funded on one side by the United States and on the other by Russia. Simultaneously a conflict was brewing in the Donbas region, between Russian separatists and the Ukrainian State. Some Ukrainian anarchists joined the state in fighting against the separatists⁴. Anti-fascists from Europe arrived to fight on the side of the Russians. This area became the center point of the conflict, as Russia sought to bring it back within its fold and Ukraine, with the support and at the bidding of the West, fought to keep the region.

When Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, anarchists from Ukraine took a nationalist position that they needed to fight Russia in tandem with the Ukrainian state. This put them under the direct control of the Ukrainian military, and thus the United States. The Ukrainian military has received training and billions of dollars from the US since 2014⁵. This year a direct arms ban

³ Aaron Bushnell was an anarchist and servicemen in the US Air Force who set himself on fire outside the 'Israeli' Embassy in Washington DC to protest the attack on and ongoing colonization of Gaza. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-immolation_of_Aaron_Bushnell

⁴ Ukraine's Anarchist Militants Fighting neo-Nazis. 5:48: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m5ZLpFIsMH8&rco=1>

⁵ [https://www.dvidshub.net/search/?filter\[type\]=news&filter\[tags\]\[\]=jmtgu&filter\[date\]=19691231-20240818&sort=date](https://www.dvidshub.net/search/?filter[type]=news&filter[tags][]=jmtgu&filter[date]=19691231-20240818&sort=date) <https://theconversation.com/in-2014-the-decrepit-ukrainian-army-hit-the-refresh-button-eight-years-later-its-paying-off-177881>

against the fascist Azov Battalion was lifted by the US Congress⁶. Azov is among many fascist battalions that had heeded the call to combat and had already been fighting in the Donbas region. Even beyond it's association with the US and the many far-right battalions, the entire Ukrainian military has a fascist bent, with soldiers wearing patches of and commanders sitting beneath the portrait of Stepan Bandera, the former fascist leader of the radical militant wing of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists. Ukrainian anarchists have been fighting shoulder to shoulder with fascists and many eventually directly joined Azov battalion⁷.

The result was the absurd situation of having so-called anti-fascists on both sides of the conflict, fighting each other alongside fascists and at the bidding of and for the ends of State actors. Despite this contradiction, anarchist groups all over Europe and the US beat the war drum for the fighters, encouraging solidarity and cash donations. One anarchist group raised over 100,000 Euros for fighters on the side of the US⁸. The justification for this bizarre alliance was that the anarchist community should put its concerns aside and follow the lead of local anarchists and that they were fighting 'imperialism.' Yet what good is listening if one cannot see the broader context? And is there one type of imperialism that is better than another?

This point is not to argue in any way that Russia is a good choice of the two and that the military regime of Russia will be any more liberatory than NATO. There is no good choice in this conflict. In an ideal situation anarchists would be able to create a third front and take advantage of the melee to take their own territory. Unfortunately the capacity for this does not exist. And, unfortunately, it never will if the movement doesn't strengthen anarchist projects that are committed to anarchist principles. The result is a half-hearted bumbling down a path towards liberalism. In the end liberalism always strengthens fascism.⁹

Whereas the Palestinian Resistance is clearly fighting western colonialism, Ukraine is fighting on the side of the US and the west. It must be asked: why can western so-called anarchists overcome the contradiction of anarchists fighting alongside the US military and with fascists, but cannot accept that Hamas is a legitimate fighting force for the Palestinians? The answer is probably more complex than they themselves can answer, but it does appear suspiciously pro-west, leading this author to wonder if they are subconsciously harboring nationalistic sentiments. Furthermore, the overtones of racism cannot be ignored.

The Critique of Taking Up Arms Against the US State:

At the same time that these reformists in the west have been beating the war drum for NATO and denying solidarity with the Palestinian Resistance, they have been taking a stance against armed struggle against the US state.

This hypocrisy was explained and well-documented by the authors of the text 'No War But Class War: Against State Nationalism and Inter-Imperialist War in Ukraine: "A concerning and not-unrelated double standard has also developed among some US/NATO-aligned anarchists,

⁶ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/us-lifts-ban-azov-brigade-ukraine-american-weapons-russia-rcna156487>

⁷ <https://www.anarchistnews.org/content/no-one-will-be-forgotten-new-losses-anarchist-movement>

⁸ <https://abcd.org/en/2022/03/23/update-donation-for-solidarity-with-anarchist-and-anti-authoritarian-activist-from-ukraine/>

⁹ The evidence of this can be seen both in the election of Donald Trump in the US and at the end of the Spanish Civil War

with regard to anarchist and anti-racist/anti-fascist struggle in the US. In August 2020, on the heels of the George Floyd Uprising, anti-fascist Michael Reinoehl shot and killed fascist Aaron Danielson, a supporter of the far right group Patriot Prayer in Portland, OR. Before anyone knew the details of what had happened, CrimethInc. and their allies at Ill Will Editions and the Vitalist International (two projects that include 'Tiqqunists' who have flirted heavily with the far right) denounced what they assumed had happened by calling on comrades 'not to be drawn into grudge matches...[or] seek revenge in symmetrical warfare.' They lamented, 'The escalation to lethal force is tragic for all.'"¹⁰

Sadly and misguidedly, these groups were not referring to the actions of the State, which gunned Michael Reinoehl down in the street. They were referring to the actions of the comrade himself. This was a clear denunciation of using arms to stand up against homegrown fascism in the United States.

This sentiment was further solidified in this group's text, 'Against the Logic of the Guillotine.'¹¹ They couch it softly by first admitting that, "self-defense is necessary" but modify this statement with, "but wherever we can, we should take the risk of leaving our adversaries alive." Yet later in the text they pull back the cover entirely to show their true feelings and state point blank, "We don't want to exterminate our enemies." The absurdity of this statement is apparent in the modern day chain gangs in Alabama, migrant detention camps, the poisoned waters of Flint, Michigan, systemic raping by prison correction officers, and the list goes on. But the author separates themselves from these realities to show their class and privilege when they explain how they had come to this conclusion: "As for our immediate adversaries...[h]owever selfish and rapacious they appear, at least some of their values are similar to ours..." And because they seem to identify so closely with fascists and agents of the US state, they giddily assert that the struggle of their revolutionary project should be for their benefit: "When we are compelled to use coercive force, the only possible justification is that it is a necessary step towards creating a better world *for everyone*—including our enemies..."

This same group of so-called anarchist-journalists were the first recipients of Aaron Bushnell's footage of and statement about his self-immolation for Gaza. He entrusted them with this content, believing that they were conscientious actors who would treat his final moments with the gravity and respect they deserved. According to CrimethInc., Bushnell emailed the group: "Today, I am planning to engage in an extreme act of protest against the genocide of the Palestinian people. The below links should take you to a livestream and recorded footage of the event, which will be highly disturbing. I ask that you make sure that the footage is preserved and reported on."

While not a direct armed confrontation with the US, this is a powerful action by a sober and politically driven comrade who intended to make the ultimate sacrifice to bring attention to the martyrs and civilians of Gaza who were being bombed and gunned down relentlessly. Instead of honoring his sacrifice, CrimethInc. wrote a text passing many judgements on the deceased.

They wrote: "Many things that are worth doing entail risks, but choosing to intentionally end your life means foreclosing years or decades of possibility..." And with even more scorn towards his actions, they proselytize, "It is not willingness to die that will sway our rulers." They even go so far as to say he should not be considered a martyr.¹²

¹⁰ <https://abolitionmedia.noblogs.org/post/2022/04/12/no-war-but-class-war-against-state-nationalism-and-inter-imperialist-war-in-ukraine/>

¹¹ <https://crimethinc.com/zines/against-the-logic-of-the-guillotine>

¹² <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/crimethinc-this-is-what-our-ruling-class-has-decided-will-be-normal>

It is difficult to comprehend and bear the weight of a young comrade taking such a final and meaningful action only to be judged harshly by the very group he entrusted with publicizing it. Instead of focusing their piece on the actions and thoughts of Aaron Bushnell, CrimethInc. chose this moment to reflect on their role as journalists, and the effect and power they might have by publishing this action. They were worried they would inspire others to follow suit. It is strange to see such a phenomenon displayed so brazenly: that the reflection of themselves outweighs their responsibility to a comrade, his sacrifice and his desire to draw attention to Gaza.

This may be the key to understanding why this reformist tendency has taken root in the United States in particular, and why this group would be so horrified by a revolutionary sacrificing their life. These reformists are so focused on their own overblown role in the movement, they cannot see the bigger picture: the colonial role of the United States, the war on black and brown people in the US itself, and certainly not the humanity and self-determination of people from the global south. They are deeply ensconced in the conception that their thoughts and considerations far outweigh those of other people – yet another hallmark of western superiority.

The final point of this heartbreaking episode is that it is clear that while reformists anarchists write eulogies of people who fought with the Ukrainian State, and promote articles about the Resistance Committees¹³ - including the armed branch - of Ukraine, they are critical and skeptical of an action for Gaza on US soil.

In this last section I have referred to the journalist-'anarchists' CrimethInc. exclusively but they are merely a public representation of a broader tendency and set of beliefs. It is clear from their popularity that in espousing these positions, there are many who are anarchists in name only, unwilling to jeopardize their comfortable position within the US and therefore not fully dedicated to the end of colonization and the destruction of nation-states (especially when it is their own).

They have essentially become a mouthpiece for US state propaganda: trafficking in Islamophobia, pushing the west's agenda in Ukraine, and fear mongering against living up to an anarchist's greatest responsibility: to fight the nation-state where they reside.

These three positions are miles away from the original intentions of the anarchist movement. Anarchism has always been based on 1) building a society of federated communes 2) fighting against the nation-state where you reside 3) fighting colonial powers 4) creating counter-narratives to State propaganda 5) fighting fascists and against fascism 6) operating with an international purview in a borderless struggle 7) standing and fighting on the side of the oppressed.

When you consider the clear tenets of anarchism as a political and social movement, it is hard to imagine how any of the deviations I have detailed here could occur. Yet there is another facet to consider. The fact is that anarchists do not have as strong a pole in the world as we once did. In the heydays of the Spanish Civil War, Emiliano Zapata, Nestor Mahkno, and the Shinmin Prefecture, there was a widely understood definition of the anarchist position, regions functioning based on anarchist principles and militant battalions defending these regions and launching attacks against imperial and colonial forces.

Despite the movement being at such a low point, it is not time to give up and settle into the values of a colonial society. Instead it is up to those of us who call ourselves anarchists to rebuild the movement to not just its former status, but, having the ability to reflect on the successes and failures of former initiatives, to use our hindsight to destroy the States that have wreaked colonial

¹³ <https://crimethinc.com/2022/02/24/russia-and-ukraine-grassroots-resistance-to-putins-invasion>

havoc on the world for so long, create long lasting liberated territories and form a foundation from which to truly support the liberation of all people.

To have success, we must have a look at the situation and take into account important considerations. The first is to look very deeply and concertedly at what anarchism is as a revolutionary movement: to study former examples of anarchist movements and societies. The second is to bring a stronger understanding of the current situation in global politics to bear. For example, to understand the bloody and fascistic role of the United States in Central and South America, to understand the history of colonization in West Asia, to study and understand the fights of the Polisario Front and West Papua. That is to say, anarchists must have an anti-colonial and anti-imperialist understanding of the world. To support this perspective, we must learn to decipher the propaganda of the State and differentiate between that what we stand for.

Next, anarchists – particularly those in the west - must learn how to listen to people who have been colonized or oppressed. When a group of Marxists traveled to Chiapas to put their textbook left movement into practice, they were met with questions and the different perspectives of people in the region. After discussions and a melding of ideas, the current Zapatista movement emerged: a mix of leftism and indigenous concepts and traditions. It is in this melding of ideas that our movement will become relevant and much stronger. Anarchism's strength does not come from maintaining a rigid measuring stick to judge would be comrades, but from allowing a multitude of perspectives to co-exist simultaneously. However to be clear, there is no room or time to entertain right wing or fascist perspectives. These must be rooted out and crushed.

Finally, anarchists, particularly in the west, must establish militancy in their home terrains – not in the service of colonizers, but in the service of oppressed people. It is time for anarchists to turn the guns from fighting in the service of western interests, and point them at the perpetrators of so much grief and devastation worldwide. The armed struggle must fight fascism and weaken the State where they live. They must use their force to fight for the colonized, to challenge western hegemony, and to defend the type of society that anarchism stands for. The west is currently in a decline in terms of its global position, and anarchists have a political opportunity to stand on the right side of history, as well as the strategic potential of this moment. Many other armed groups are taking advantage of the changing global order and it is time for anarchists to step up.

It is only in this way that anarchists can avoid being a proxy of the very forces we are supposed to fight, to live up to the sacrifices of our predecessors, to hold up the torch of anarchism for the martyrs of the movement and its history, to stand on the side of those who have been thoroughly wronged by this global system and finally to become relevant again to everyone who struggles around the world.

-Friends of Russell Maroon Shoatz

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