

Interview with a Member of KRAS *(Confederation of Revolutionary Anarcho-syndicalists)*

About the History and Problems of Forming Anarcho-Syndicalist and Anarcho-Communist Organizations in Former Soviets

With the help of one of our correspondents we received the following fragment of an interview with Vadim Damier of KRAS, the Russian section of the IWA. The interview was made not so long ago for CNT-publication.

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What inspired you to start anarcho-syndicalist activity?

Of course, before the so-called "perestroika", no open anarcho-syndicalist activity was possible. The Communist Party repressed even the smallest signs of any oppositional moods. The people in my family were critical, so I always knew that the regime was unjust and had nothing to do with real socialism. I didn't know a lot about anarchism then but I was convinced that real socialism was not possible without self-management and that communism came from the word "commune" and was not possible without federalism. I listened to western radio stations and new a little about "dissidents" but I didn't really want to have contact with them because I didn't want to change the dictatorship of the Communist Party so that state capitalism could become private capitalism. But there was nobody around me with revolutionary leftist ideas and therefore I didn't have any chance to work in any underground group.

Before perestroika, I wrote some academic work about the ecological movement in Germany. It seemed to me that that this movement had a lot in common with self-managed socialism and federalism. Then perestroika started and after Chernobyl the ecological movement appeared here and I decided that my knowledge of the ecological movement abroad could be of help here. In 1988 I joined the ecological movement and I actively participated in the Moscow Federation of Ecological Groups. It was a very interesting movement which supported local self-governing councils in different areas of the city. At the same time I was promoting the ideas of self-managed socialism and even tried to publish a little journal. I wanted this socialism to become the main ideology of the ecological movement but unfortunately other ideas won out.

Sometime then I read a book on anarchism which was even legally published. Kropotkin's "Conquest of Bread" made an especially strong impression on me. I understood that this is what I had been looking for all my life and these ideas fit my concept of a future soci-

ety. In this book I also found answers to my doubts and started to consider myself a "kropotkinist" anarchist. In 1990 I joined the first organization which called itself anarchist.

Tell us a little about the modern history of anarcho-syndicalism in Russia

As you know, in Russia there was a rich anarchist tradition which was interrupted by the Bolshevik dictatorship. There are accounts that the anarchist underground existed even up until after the Second World War but by the 1980s, of course there were no libertarian movements left in the country. The groups that openly called themselves anarchists started to appear around 1988-1989. In 1989-1990, they joined to form the *Confederation of Anarcho-syndicalists (KAS)*. Actually, it wasn't an anarcho-syndicalist organization but something like a synthesis anarchist federation. There were anarcho-syndicalists there but also anarcho-communists, individualists and even anarcho-capitalists. Of course such an organization quickly fell apart. Now only a few groups in Siberia still operate under this name.

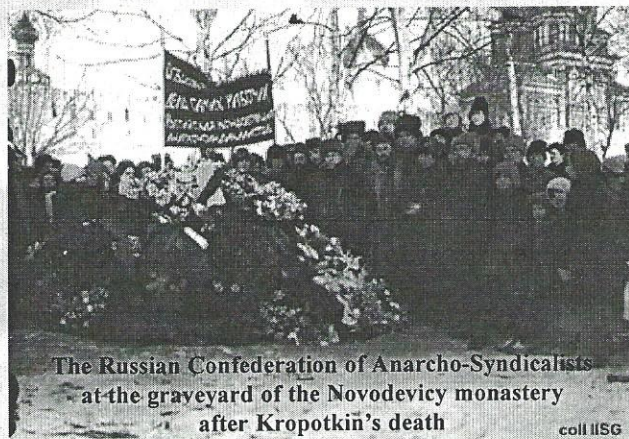
Why did this organization call itself anarcho-syndicalist? I already said that in Russia, very few people had read theoretical texts. Bolshevik propaganda called anarcho-syndicalism the idea that firms should belong to working collectives. The founders of KAS liked this. They were supporters of "market socialism" (something between Proudhon, anarcho-collectivism and Yugoslave socialism). Precisely the idea of "stateless market socialism" dominated in KAS. The leaders of KAS decided to contact Swedish SAC and received help from them.

Of course I as a "kropotkinist" didn't agree with this and tried to propagate anarcho-communism in KAS. But I quickly learned that even the

groups in KAS which called themselves "anarcho-communists" thought that this society wouldn't come soon and would come only after a transitional period of market socialism. So I left KAS and tried to find like-minded people.

KAS was a relatively large organization for its times. Formally there were about one thousand members but most of them weren't active and knew very little about anarchism. KAS politically did not play an independent role but was like a left appendix of the democrats. Members of KAS participated in the demonstrations organized by the democrats about the Communist Party and in 1990 supported Yeltsin and during the putsch of 1991 they participated in defending the Yeltsin government.

Of course, I managed to find people in Moscow with similar ideas amongst some of the younger activists of KAS and others. In March 1991 we formed another group, the first one which was for anarcho communist revolution, the Initiative of Revolutionary Anarchists (IREAN). In Aug. 1991, our group was the only one which acted against both the communists and the democrats, calling for a general expropriation strike against both. We contacted the Secretary of the IWA and we thought that this was the only International which is for libertarian communism. And we were in favour of joining. In 1992 one of us went to observe the IWA Congress in Cologne.



**The Russian Confederation of Anarcho-Syndicalists
at the graveyard of the Novodevicy monastery
after Kropotkin's death**

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LABOUR STRUGGLES IN EASTERN EUROPE

We started to publish "Black Star" (from 1991-1994 then again in 2003), to give out leaflets about forming anarcho-syndicalist unions and to prepare for a general strike. A few times a month we held pickets in downtown Moscow against liberal and anti-social reform, price increases and privatization. We tried to find people in other cities. In 1992 we formed FRAN (the Federation of Revolutionary Anarchists) with other groups in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. Inside this there was an anarcho-syndicalist tendency – the Friends of the IWA. KAS fell apart; the anarcho-capitalists left and formed ADA (which is now in IFA) and many local groups lost lots of people or fell apart completely. Some groups made contact with us. At the end of the 1990s, KAS only existed in a few cities in Siberia. The formed the Siberia Confederation of Labour there (SKT) together with unions which left the official reformist unions. SKT calls itself "syndicalist" and not "anarcho-syndicalist"; it doesn't have any ideology and there are members of political parties in it. A strike for them is "an extreme measure". SKT is in contact with SAC and is part of SIL.

And we had some problems. Some people from our group came under the influence of some 'autonomous' people and became

against anarcho-syndicalism and the workers' movement and rather went into counterculture – then they went on to cooperate with Leninists, Stalinists and Maoists. We had to break with them.

In 1995 FRAN split. Anarcho-syndicalists from Moscow IREAN, some other anarcho-syndicalists, FRAN from Gomel and anarcho-communists from Baikalsk formed KRAS – the Confederation of Revolutionary Anarchosyndicalists. In 1996 it became a section of the IWA. But there is a lot of difficulty building the movement in Russia. People are disappointed in the results of Perestroika, the tough social consequences of market reform and the spread of individualistic, egoistic moods which led to the atomization of the society. The situation of workers and farmers got worse very quickly and there was no radical resistance or collective action. Everybody was alone and individually fought for survival. In such conditions we of course find it hard to build a mass organization and we remain a federation of anarcho-syndicalist propaganda groups. In Moscow we promote anar-

cho-syndicalist ideas among immigrants and other workers who try to self-organize; students as well. We help strikers and support different protests, etc. The Baikalsk group organized a strike at a lumber mill but it was repressed and the group fell apart. The group in Gomel left anarcho-syndicalism in 2003 and took up a reformist position.

.... One of the most important things we do now is propagate our ideas about immigrants from other countries and parts of Russia. There are a few million of them in Moscow and many of them are illegal and have no working rights. We tell them about organizing experiences and resistance movements and we encourage them to form councils and strike....



Group of anarchists released from prison for one day to be able to participate in Kropotkin's funeral