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The Looks of Peter Kropotkin and Some Other Russian Anarchists at the Events of October 1917 in Russia and The Conflict Between Peter Kropotkin and the Russian Anarchists

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Abstract

The conflict in relations between Peter Kropotkin and the Russian anarchists emerged even before Kropotkin returned from emigration to Russia in 1917. After the February Revolution 1917 in Russia, Peter Kropotkin repeatedly expressed the need to create a federal republic in Russia along the lines of the United States of America and cantonal Switzerland. According to Kropotkin's new views, the decentralization of power did not mean the liquidation of the state, but only its unification on the more free and universal progressive principles of the development of the state toward democracy.

Keywords: Peter Kropotkin · Russian Anarchists · Russian Revolution · Conflict

Until now the Bolsheviks (and after them the communist ideologists in Russia and around the world) represent Peter Kropotkin as one of the main ideologists of the creation of the communist regime. Unfortunately, this point of view has become widespread both in Russia and abroad.

Peter Kropotkin's refusal of radicalism in favor of a reformatory transformation of society through progressive democratic forms of the state into a future anarchist system was responsible for an abyss of misunderstanding, contradictions and mutual divergence in anarchist views

between Kropotkin and the overwhelming majority of Russian anarchists in the period between 1917 and the 1920s.

The beginning of the conflict between Peter Kropotkin and the Russian anarchists begins with their different attitudes towards the wars (including the Russian-Japanese war of 1904-1905). We find a reflection of Kropotkin's position on the war in manuscripts that Kropotkin left at the Dmitrov house and which are now part of the Archives of the Reserve Museum "Dmitrovsky Kremlin" in Russia. He lived there for the last two and a half years of his life. The manuscripts are *On the War*,¹ *Letters about War*,² *German Declarations on War*,³ *How an English Soldier Looks at War*,⁴ and *Letters on Current Events*.⁵

Peter Kropotkin, according to the socialist David Shub, – “was an ardent...Russian patriot”, – although in those days not only socialists of all directions, but even many liberals were opponents of this war and fought against the tsarist government". During World War I, Kropotkin, with a few anarchists in support of the Entente, ended up in the camp of the “defencists”. A consequence of Kropotkin's defensism was his isolation from the bulk of his comrades. Some Russian anarchists even claimed the "political death" of Kropotkin as an anarchist.⁶

Although there was no clear line in the attitude of the Russian anarchists—including anarchist-communists—towards the new views of Peter Kropotkin, one of the anarchists, Alexander Atabekyan, who was amongst the closest to Kropotkin's ideas, noted that one part remained true to the foundations of the old doctrine, while “the other part – let us call it progressive or renovationist – together with P. A. Kropotkin be-

¹ Архив Дмитровского музея-заповедника «Дмитровский Кремль». Ф. 22/5152. Оп. 1. Д. 8.

² Архив Дмитровского музея-заповедника «Дмитровский Кремль». Ф. 22/5152. Оп. 1. Д. 7.

³ Архив Дмитровского музея-заповедника «Дмитровский Кремль». Ф. 22/5152. Оп. 1. Д. 217.

⁴ Архив Дмитровского музея-заповедника «Дмитровский Кремль». Ф. 22/5152. Оп. 1. Д. 219.

⁵ Крoпoткин П. А. Письма о текущих событиях. М.: Задруга, 1917 (вперв. в сент. и окт. 1914 г. в «Русских Ведомостях»). 126 с. С. 3.

⁶ Шуб Д. Н. (Давид Шуб) Политические деятели России (1850-х – 1920-х гг.). Нью-Йорк, 1969. С. 44.

gan to overestimate their ideological values in accordance with the new historical situation”.⁷ Unfortunately, Kropotkin did not come to a complete understanding with any of the Russian anarchists.

One of the reasons for the defensism of Peter Kropotkin during the First World War was his belief in the vanguard role of France in the world revolutionary process, in her special revolutionary mission in Europe and in the world. For Kropotkin, saving France meant saving European progress and the future anarchist revolution.

Peter Kropotkin defended freedom and statehood in other Entente countries. Kropotkin believed that England, France, Italy, and the United States had entered at this time in a period of deep social restructuring, and that militaristic Germany could interfere with this process. In addition, Kropotkin was sure that the defeat of France and other Entente countries would lead Europe to stagnation, militarism, the triumph of the greedy bourgeoisie and regression in the entire mental life of Europe, at least for half of a century.

For Kropotkin the “great democracies” of the West symbolized all the best that Europe could achieve, while the “whip-German empire” was inclined to see a stronghold of militarism. Kropotkin was convinced that “the struggle in Europe is now going on between two opposite principles: the popular, democratic principle and the principles of reaction”.⁸

Believing that the Entente powers are waging a just war, Peter Kropotkin, unlike many anarchists, social democrats, and even bourgeois politicians, completely refused to criticize governments, even for military defeats. He even considered discussions of this issue harmful among not only left-wing parties, but also within anarchist publications.

“Peter Kropotkin asserted the Social Democrats wanted to gain power and hoped on the parliament. We wanted – he wrote – to seize the means of production and we hoped...on the only people who can do this – on workers”.⁹ And Kropotkin did not accept the October overturn of

⁷ Атабекян А. М. Материалы к изучению жизни и творчества П. А. Кропоткина // Почин. М., 1922. № 3. С. 5.

⁸ Мкртчян А. А. «Всякого угнетателя личности я ненавижу» // Труды комиссии по научному наследию П. А. Кропоткина. Вып. 2. М., 1992. С. 13.

⁹ Кропоткин П. А. Наше отношение к крестьянским и рабочим союзам // Листки «Хлеб и воля». 1906. № 2. 14 ноября. С. 3-4.

1917 in Russia.¹⁰ He believed that any dictatorship, including the dictatorship of one party, would lack value. According to the memoirs of Kropotkin's daughter, he believed that the revolution had gone "from the first steps along the wrong path".¹¹ Moreover when the first armed clashes between the Bolsheviks and the troops of the Provisional Government began in Moscow in October 1917, Kropotkin declared that the Bolsheviks "were burying the Russian revolution".¹²

Many anarchists believed that neither the state socialists, nor even the anarchists, would be able to establish the desired socialist or communist system in one trick, one revolution; it would take more than one coup. In their opinion, neither socialists nor workers should join the state administration, because doing so would give only a burst of new forces to this obsolete form of exploitation. All of them knew that it is impossible to achieve a socialist or communist system immediately without several successive coups, first in peoples' minds and then in the real life. Anarchists considered any strengthening of the state harmful and they refused all participation in state power, capitalist exploitation, the war for the interests of the bourgeoisie or the use of religious beliefs.¹³

In 1917-1918, after the February Revolution in Russia, Russian anarchists worked feverishly. Anarchist congresses, conferences and meetings were called; anarchist regional associations were created, along with all sorts of anarchist bureaux. At this time, in many cities of Russia, 30-40 anarchist monthly and weekly newspapers were published. In total, up to 100 periodicals were published in Russia during the revolution. The post-revolutionary anarchist movement in new Russia was a bizarre and intricate

¹⁰ Sergey V. Saytanov The judgment on Bolshevik political regime of famous Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin // Збірник центру наукових публікацій «Велес» за матеріалами III міжнародної науково-практичної конференції 2 частина: «Інновації в сучасній науці», м. Київ: збірник статей (рівень стандарту, академічний рівень). – К.: Центр наукових публікацій, 2017. С. 5-12.

¹¹ Кротопкина А. П. П. А. Кротопкин // П. А. Кротопкин и его учение. Интернациональный сборник, посвященный десятой годовщине со дня смерти П. А. Кротопкина. Чикаго, 1931. С. 290-292.

¹² Шуб Д. Н. Политические деятели России (1850-х – 1920-х гг.). Нью-Йорк, 1969. С. 306.

¹³ П. А. Кротопкин. Что такое анархия? (Из неизданной рукописи П. А. Кротопкина) // П. А. Кротопкин и его учение. Интернациональный сборник, посвященный десятой годовщине смерти. Чикаго, 1931. С. 7-8.

network of all kinds of unions, circles and organizations that were constantly splitting up and merging with each other, disintegrating and emerging again, existing either legally or illegally or underground.

Upon his return to Russia, Peter Kropotkin was initially keenly interested in the activities of Russian anarchist groups, who sent him books, newspapers and leaflets that they published. However, Kropotkin never once expressed his attitude towards the activities of these groups. He took part in meetings of workers, soldiers, sailors, officers and teachers, but never formally joined them. Meanwhile, in Russia, Kropotkin was disappointed by the rude, cheeky young people who called themselves anarchists and claimed to embrace both freedom and respect for the individual, but who were too irresponsibly permissive and licentious.

At that time, anarchist groups operated in 130 cities and towns and published about 40 newspapers and magazines. Their main products were Kropotkin's earlier, radical works, previously published in the West. In 1917-1918, more than 100 of these publications, mainly in separate editions, appeared in Russia.

In August 1917, Kropotkin moved from Petrograd to Moscow to attend the State Conference at the invitation of Prime Minister Alexander Kerensky. There, he called for the abandonment of all inter-party disputes and proclaimed Russia a democratic federal republic. This became Kropotkin's main task. Therefore, when the prominent Russian anarchists Ya. I. Novomirsky and A. A. Borovoy visited Kropotkin in Moscow and offered to cooperate in anarchist publications, he refused in order to help the Provisional Government in building a new Russian state instead. These plans, however, were prevented by the Bolshevik *coup d'état*.¹⁴

After seizing power, the Bolsheviks strove to build centralized state socialism in Russia. This position was absolutely unacceptable to the anarchist views of Kropotkin.¹⁵ He viewed both the Bolsheviks and all Social

¹⁴ Цовма М. А. Алексей Боровой и Петр Кропоткин // Там же; Бирюков А. В. П. А. Кропоткин и А. М. Атабекян // Труды Комиссии по науч. насл. П. А. Кропоткина. Вып. 2. М., 1992. С. 26-37

¹⁵ Рихтер Г. Полиция не может быть строительницей новой жизни: П. А. Кропоткин и Октябрьская революция [сокращенный текст доклада, сделанного на конференции в Лейпциге 7 сентября 1992 г.] // Труды Международной научной конференции, посвященной 150-летию со дня рождения П. А. Кропоткина. Вып. 3. П. А. Кропоткин и революционное движение. М., 1995. С. 145-161.

Democrats in general as centralists and Statesmen. Kropotkin constantly criticized the Bolshevik authorities for the establishment of a fully centralized government, which included all the enforcement agencies.¹⁶

Expecting that the Bolsheviks would not retain power for long time, Kropotkin headed the League of Federalists—that he had created in Moscow— at the beginning of 1918. In the League, Kropotkin, together with representatives of various socialist and non-socialist parties, promoted and popularized the ideas of federalism and state decentralism. Thus, the anarchist Kropotkin, who considered the establishment of anarchy as the ultimate goal of human development, did not embrace the immediate abolition of the state and opposed obstacles imposed on society "to develop freely from simple to complex forms through a free union of free groups".¹⁷

Kropotkin was convinced that self-government was the universal vector of the progressive development of mankind at the beginning of the 20th century. At the same time, his concept of decentralization of power did not mean the elimination of the state. Rather, society was supposed to unite on universal progressive principles in the direction of democracy. Kropotkin defined this as "widely developed self-government" in his unpublished manuscript "On the question of federation".¹⁸ After the February Revolution, he repeatedly expressed the need to create a federal republic in Russia similar to that of the United States of America and cantonal Switzerland.

Nonetheless, a monstrous bureaucratic system continued to develop in Bolshevik Russia built on the massive use of "red terror" and the barbaric spread of hostage-taking practices. In addition, the Bolshevik government completely overrode all democratic principles and federal ideas that Kropotkin so highly valued in the last years of life in accordance with his anarchy-reformist convictions. For this reason, he often compared the Bolsheviks to the Jacobins of the French Revolution. Constantly analyzing the experience of the Great French Revolution, Kropotkin summed up

¹⁶ Мкртчян А. А. П. А. Кропоткин и Западная Европа // Новая и новейшая история. М., 1991. № 2. С. 57.

¹⁷ Михайлов Е. И. Теория федерализма П. А. Кропоткина // Социально-гуманитарные знания. М., 2001. № 5. С. 112.

¹⁸ Бубенко О. Н. Федерализм как основа будущего общественного устройства в теории П. А. Кропоткина // Конституционализм и федерализм в России (XIX-XX вв.). Барнаул, 2004. С. 67.

the fact that, in the beginning of the 20th century in Russia, “the police cannot be the creator of a new life. But meanwhile it is now becoming the supreme authority in every city and every small village”.¹⁹

It should also be noted that Kropotkin did not deny the idea of a social revolution and maintained the prospect of building anarchy-communism in the future. But watching the actions of the Bolsheviks he was perplexed “why they push the revolution to the path that would lead to its death mainly from shortcomings that are not peculiar to Socialism and Communism but represent a relic of the old system and old ugliness of unlimited all-devouring authorities of Power”.²⁰

Under these conditions the main hopes of Kropotkin were directed at the workers' movement and federalism. The development of the labor movement attracted Kropotkin's attention as a priority. After the revolutionary workers' demonstrations in Russia in 1905, Kropotkin expounded his views in the article “The Russian Workers' Union”,²¹ in which he returned to the ideas of Bakunin's International Workers' Unions.²² In a letter of March 24, 1901 to the secretary of the Central Workers Union of Chicago, Kropotkin wrote that the important task of the Union is the education of the working class.²³

Therefore, the idea of unions and federations that existed outside the state was very important for Kropotkin. Moreover, he saw in the political federation of the State a transitional period of the emergence of an anarchic social order. That is why at the end of his life he highly valued the syndicalism and cooperative movement.²⁴

¹⁹ Рихтер Г. Полиция не может быть строительницей новой жизни: П. А. Кропоткин и Октябрьская революция [сокращенный текст доклада, сделанного на конференции в Лейпциге 7 сентября 1992 г.] // Труды Международной научной конференции, посвященной 150-летию со дня рождения П. А. Кропоткина. Вып. 3. П. А. Кропоткин и революционное движение. М., 1995. С. 145.

²⁰ Пирумова Н. М. Письма и встречи // Родина. № 1. 1989. С. 29.

²¹ Кропоткин П. А. Русский рабочий союз // Хлеб и Воля. СПб., 1905. С. 181-198.

²² Максимов Г. Кропоткин и синдикализм // П. А. Кропоткин и его учение. Интернациональный сборник, посвященный десятой годовщине со дня смерти П. А. Кропоткина. Чикаго, 1931. С. 107.

²³ ГАРФ. Ф. 1129. Оп. 2. Ед. хр. 411. Л. 1.

²⁴ Шапиро А. П. А. Кропоткин и анархо-синдикализм. Рабочий путь (ор-

However, seeing the active contradiction of the new Bolshevik power in this direction, Kropotkin stated that “the destruction of free initiative in the entire economic and political life of the country, and even in the expression of thought, could be an inevitably fatal restoration of the pre-revolutionary regime”.²⁵

At the same time Kropotkin repeatedly noted “in the Russian people – a large supply of creative, building forces. And as soon as these forces started building life on a new socialist basis the duties of a police investigation entrusted to them by terror began their corrupting, pernicious work, paralyzing all construction and putting forward absolutely incapable people... Where does it lead Russia? To the most malicious reaction”.²⁶

Kropotkin was convinced that the "October Revolution" in Russia "did not follow the path that we prepared for it ... It creates horrors"...²⁷ Similar thoughts of the Bolshevik coup as a “return to the old” order can be found in Kropotkin's draft of a letter to Lenin dated December 21, 1920.²⁸

Emma Goldman, an American anarchist of Russian origin, shared Kropotkin's political views on the Bolshevik October revolution, considered herself to be Kropotkin's pupil and personally met him since 1895. Goldman accurately noted that “after the October Revolution Kropotkin saw with the clairvoyance of a prophet that the revolutionary efforts of the people were channeled into government channels and away from the ideals that inspired the masses during the holy ascent of the first October days”.²⁹

At the same time, observing the death of the Russian revolution and the participation of the Russian anarchists in the new order, Kropotkin came to the conclusion that the principle of “innate anarchism” that he had previously put forward does not work in man. In his declining

ган русских анархо-синдикалистов). Изд. Комитета Защиты Анархо-синдикализма при Международном Товариществе Рабочих. № 2-3. Берлин, апрель-май 1923 г. С. 5-6.

²⁵ Кропоткин П. А. Письмо С. Л. Мильнеру от 6 фев. 1919 г. // Вопросы философии. 1991. № 11. С. 56.

²⁶ Пирумова Н. М. Письма и встречи // Родина. 1989. № 1. С. 27.

²⁷ Кропоткин П. А. Несколько мыслей П. А. Кропоткина о русской революции // Дело труда. Чикаго, 1927. № 20-21. янв.-февр. С. 5-6.

²⁸ НИОР РГБ. Ф. 410. Картон 12. Ед. хр. 57. Л. 1.

²⁹ Гольдман Э. П. А. Кропоткин // Былое. Берлин; Прага, 1922. № 17. С. 102.

years, he came to the conclusion that anarchic morality is not inherent in man, and that it must and should be taught. Therefore, Kropotkin dedicated his last efforts to the creation of an extensive philosophical work expressing his anarchic worldview entitled *Ethics*, realizing that, without improving morality in man, the very construction of an anarchic society is impossible. At the same time, Kropotkin wrote in his letters that “it is necessary to start it [i. e., this work – S. S.] with new workers. With our current cadres of intellectuals, who already have, each, his favorite outlook, neither we nor anyone else will do anything”...³⁰

Subsequently, in one of her works about Peter Kropotkin, Emma Goldman wrote: “I know that in the past every great political and social change required violence... But it is one thing when violence is used only for defense purposes, and another when it is raised as the supreme principle, when terror becomes one of the institutions and is put in place as the main instrument of social struggle. Such terrorism engenders counterrevolution and even becomes a counterrevolutionary one”.³¹

Goldman came to the conclusion that never before the government and a State had so many powers as in Russia. This proved the reactionary and counter-revolutionary nature of the regime that came to power. In a word, Bolshevism demonstrated itself as the very opposite of the revolution. Goldman even came to the conclusion that the Bolsheviks had restored capitalism in Russia.³² In this regard, Goldman identified not only capitalist exploitation but also the suppression of personality under the communist regime. In the last years of her life, she paid much attention to the question of the connection between different forms of totalitarianism, including the proximity of Hitlerism (National Socialism) and Stalinism (class socialism).³³

³⁰ Лебедева А. П. Идеи П. А. Кропоткина и современное анархическое движение // Труды Междунар. науч. конф., посв. 150-летию со дня рожд. П. А. Кропоткина. Москва, Дмитров, С.-Петербург. 9-15 декабря 1992 г. Вып. 3. П. А. Кропоткин и революционное движение. М., 1995. С. 58.

³¹ «Автономное действие» / Свобода! Самоуправление! Либертарный коммунизм! / «Самая опасная женщина в Америке». Эмма Гольдман: путь борца URL: <http://www.avtonom.org/index.php?nid=394>

³² Гольдман Э. Лозовский приподымает завесу // Анархический вестник. Берлин, 1924. № 7.

³³ Гольдман Эмма [Электронная Еврейская энциклопедия] URL:

Goldman was not alone among the anarchists in such an assessment of the Bolshevik regime. This was expressed by many, for example, the Russian anarchists B. G. Sandomirsky in his work *Fascism* (1923). Vsevolod Eikhenbaum (Wolin), a friend and a pupil of the author of *Mutual aid*, was one of the first to determine that totalitarianism has two faces: national fascist and communist. In 1934, Wolin wrote a pamphlet entitled “Red Fascism” in which, as a prelude to his work *The Unknown Revolution* (1946), he compared the victorious communism in Russia to Italian and German fascism.³⁴

To a large extent, the misunderstanding and rejection of the new ideas of Peter Kropotkin by the majority of the Russian anarchists was due to Kropotkin himself. While still living in England, he tried to avoid direct discussions with them, even in regard to his political opponents. Kropotkin not only feared the depersonalization and degeneration of anarchism, but also discussions within the anarchist current itself.

In the letter to the anarchist Alexander Shapiro in 1920, Kropotkin expressed himself more definitely: “Is it possible to unite anarchists of all teachings in Russia? The answer should be straightforward – no! Undesirable and – impossible! We remained anarchists precisely because we consider it necessary to carry out our [emphasized – S. S.] views, that we remain ourselves, and do not depersonalize ourselves: otherwise, we would have long been absorbed in conspiratorial Blanquism”...³⁵

Peter Kropotkin did not accept the October Revolution and Bolshevik dictatorship because they distorted the idea of the Soviets as a nationwide representative body and rejected the principle of federalism in building a State and society. Instead of the cooperative movement – the foundation, according to Kropotkin, of building the future anarchist so-

<http://www.eleven.co.il/article/11228>

³⁴ Йоренс Игнасио Невозможный диалог (комментарии к письмам П. А. Кропоткина В. И. Ленину) // Петр Алексеевич Кропоткин и проблемы моделирования историко-культурного развития цивилизации: материалы международной научной конференции / сост. П. И. Талеров. СПб., 2005. С. 422.

³⁵ Шапиро А. П. А. Кропоткин и анархо-синдикализм. Рабочий путь (орган русских анархо-синдикалистов). Изд. Комитета Защиты Анархо-синдикализма при Международном Товариществе Рабочих. № 2-3. Берлин, апрель-май 1923 г. С. 5-6.

ciety – they established a dictatorship and imposed terror. Under the Bolsheviks, democratic freedoms and respect for human rights became impossible. All these were at odds with the anarchy-reformist socio-political views of Kropotkin.

Moreover, Kropotkin's initial interest in various activities of anarchists in Russia was replaced by disappointment. The Bolsheviks wanted to isolate Kropotkin from all kinds of “unwanted” contacts, and also Kropotkin, the greatest anarchist, chose to isolate himself from anarchist visitors of all kinds. While living in Dmitrov, Kropotkin repeatedly received offers from various anarchist groups to participate in anarchist publications and public events, up to the congress. Kropotkin invariably turned down such proposals. All Kropotkin's active social activities were limited only to participation in the work of the local museum of local lore and to activities in the local union of cooperators. His main occupation was writing *Ethics*.³⁶

Kropotkin's work towards the end of his life was dedicated to his own original conception of anarchism and the principle of the maximum freedom possible for society and of his individuals. This led him to a dramatic crisis in his status as an “ideological leader” and “banner of Russian anarchism.” In fact, Kropotkin was a unique and largely symbolic figure in Russian history at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Still, among the revolutionaries of that time, Kropotkin had tremendous authority, and was often called “the grandfather of the Russian revolution”.³⁷

The change in the anarchist views of Peter Kropotkin was contrary to radical anarchism in Russia. After the Bolshevik coup in Russia, Peter Kropotkin actually moved away from practical participation in the Russian anarchist movement. And although in his “political testament” Kropotkin developed a plan to fight the Bolsheviks, he did not expect the help of any of the existing anarchist movements and groups.

These factors, as well as the fundamental discrepancy between Peter Alekseevich Kropotkin and the majority of anarchists, served as the

³⁶ Крoпoткин П. А. Этика: происхождение и развитие нравственности. 2-е изд. Нью-Йорк: Комис. при Рабочем союзе самообразования, 1923. Т. 1.

³⁷ Кондратьева Т. А. П. А. Крoпoткин o нравственном смысле революции // София: Рукописный журнал Общества ревнителей русской философии. Вып. 5. 2002. (дата обновления: 07.02.2007). URL: <http://www.eunnet.net/sofia/05-2002/text/0514.html> (дата обращения: 21.02.2009).

reason for the rejection of his views among Russian anarchists. It was Peter Kropotkin's embrace of the revolutionary reformist transformation of society through democratic forms of the state toward the future anarchist system that caused the crisis between Peter Kropotkin and the vast majority of Russian anarchists in 1917-1920 years.

The Bolsheviks' defeat of anarchism in Russia led to a distortion or misunderstanding of Kropotkin's final ideas, which can be designated as "anarcho-reformism".³⁸ Atabekyan noted that one part of the Russian anarchists remained true to the foundations of the old anarchist doctrine, "the other part – let's call it progressive or renovationist – together with P. A. Kropotkin began to re-evaluate their ideological values in accordance with the new historical situation".³⁹

³⁸ Sergey V. Saytanov The argumentation of Peter Kropotkin's anarcho-reformism in his social-political and anarchist views. Москва, 2014.

³⁹ Атабекян А. Перелом в анархическом учении. М., 1918. С. 3.