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**ANARCHISTS AND THE WORKERS MOVEMENT OF THE FIRST
QUARTER OF THE XXTH CENTURY IN UKRAINE:
THE PROBLEM**

- Abstract -

The article focuses on the role of anarchists and anarchists-syndicalists in the labor movement in Ukraine. Starting with 1906, the anarchists-syndicalists influenced the labor movement in the largest cities of the south of Ukraine (Odessa and Ekaterinoslav (Dnepropetrovsk), they succeeded to organize sailors of the Black Sea merchant fleet and workers of the Odessa port for a number of strikes and to create the first marine trade union organizations. After the revolution of 1917, sailors of Odessa were once again under the influence of the anarchists. The anarchists in Ukraine in 1918 were able to extend their influence over the miners and metallurgists of Donbas, the Black Sea sailors, railway workers, trying to hold socialization of the merchant fleet, mines and factories. But the power of Lenin defended the way of nationalization of industry and did everything to push the anarchists from the trade unions and labor movement in the early 1920s.

Keywords: anarchists, anarchists-syndicalists, workers, sailors, propaganda, strike, union, Odessa.

Evaluation of the anarchists, as outsiders completely detached from the labor movement, was actively spread by anarchist political rivals throughout the 20th century. The attitude of the Soviet and post-Soviet historians, political scientists,

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sociologists (from the USSR, the Ukrainian SSR, the Russian Federation, Ukraine) to the anarchist movement as to something not serious (even somewhat comical), without any roots, supported by “cranks” or “bandits”, became rather natural for “fundamental researches” of a significant number of historians, which tried to show anarchism as a “quasi-political phenomenon bordering with criminal.”¹ These historians asserted that anarchists organized “terror for terror, robbery – for the sake of robbery.”

Archival researches indicate that such a vulgar description of the anarchist movement in the Russian Empire in the early 20th century does not reflect the historical reality: anarchists conducted acts of terror to “push” the protest movement among the workers and peasants, for “intimidation” of the authorities and the majority of expropriations were held to support revolutionary organizations and workers' strikes, for mass publication of propagandistic materials.

Since the time of the “Union of Irreconcilable” (1903, Odessa) anarchist propaganda was directed upon the working class: anarchists published thousands of copies of leaflets with evocative titles: “To Comrade Workers”, “To Comrade Workers and Peasants”, “To Comrade Workers and Sailors” (about a hundred editions of such leaflets were made only in Odessa in 1903-1908). In 1906, anarchist propaganda in Odessa seized a part of working slipways of the “Russian Steam Navigation and Trading Company” (“ROPIT”), longshoremen, sailors and stokers of merchant fleet, factory workers of Bellino-Fenderih, agricultural machinery of Gen, tin ware of Valtuch, foundry plant of Shpolansky, cork factory of Arps and Julius, tobacco factory of Popov, sugar refinery of Brodsky, a candle factory, a number of printing houses and bakeries. Anarchists worked in Odessa “Union of Typographical Workers” and “Revolutionary Syndicate of Packing Fruit Workers.”²

The leaders of the anarchist movement were former Socialist Revolutionaries and the Social Democrats, who already had experience of propaganda in working teams, of organization in working groups. So the leader of the Odessa anarchists-syndicalists Y. Kirillovsky-Novomirsky headed the working groups of RSDLP in Odessa worker suburb “Peresyp” until 1905. Such a biography had the majority of the anarchist leaders of the Ukrainian provinces (V. Striga-Lapidus, I. Grossman, O. Taratuta, K. Erdalevsky etc.). Future anarchists

¹ Петришина Л. В., Юрій А. К., Анархісти в Одесі в період першої революції в Росії // Наукові праці з питань політичної історії. Вип. 172. - К., 1992. С. 61-63.

² Центральний державний історичний архів України (ЦДІА України). Ф. 268. Оп. 1. Спр. 453. арк. 203; Ф. 419. Оп. 1. Спр. 5649. арк. 2; Государственный архив Российской Федерации (ГАРФ). Ф. 102. Оп. 237 (1907). Спр. 12. ч. 68. 1. арк. 12; Державний архів Одеської області (далі ДАОО). Ф. 314. Оп. 1. Спр. 146. арк. 184.

had their “political training” in the ranks of the socialist parties (Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party – RSDLP, Party of Socialists-Revolutionaries – PSR, Jewish Workers' Union – “Bund”), but the tactics and strategy of these parties did not meet the radicals that passed in the ranks of the anarchists. Anarchists, denying parliamentary struggle (as a compromise with a potential enemy), believed that only a general workers’ strike could change the society, eliminate the “power and capital”, free all the workers. They rejected the party structure (fixed membership in the party, the party hierarchy and discipline), considering that the task of anarchists was to dissolve in the mass of protesting workers, directing it to the most radical way.

Anarchist ideologists advocated the organization of labor unions and factory committees, housing committees, where they saw bodies of “direct” struggle against capital, the embryo of the future powerless society.

Anarchists of the Russian Empire of the early 20th century, without pretending to “intercept” power from their opponents, considered that the main arena of their activities was not the political capitals (St. Petersburg, Moscow), but working megacities (Odessa, Ekaterinoslav (Dnepropetrovsk), Kharkov, Baku, Lodz, Belostok), where the majority of the population were workers and outsiders.

Anarchists, whose activity in the Russian Empire became visible only at the end of 1905, played an important role in the working strike movement, competing for influence with the “old” socialist parties.

Anarchists considered workers to be the main revolutionary force, and it was reflected in their support of labor movement, in social composition of the groups, in “specialization” of the anarchist circles, in targeted propaganda and agitation, in defining the ultimate goals of the anarchist movement. Popularity of anarchists in the workers’ environ was based on total rejection of compromises with the government and capital, on radicalism and extremism.

Anarchists invoked not only to destroy any power, but also to eliminate the bourgeoisie and nobility as classes (often it was a direct physical violence). Particularly radical in the Russian Empire became the so-called “southern anarchism” (tactics of the anarchists of Ukrainian and Caucasian provinces) which did not stop before political and economic terror.

Workers of the Russian Empire perceived the anarchists as “strike providers” and at times supported their struggle to the extent to which it was appropriate for the specific local problems of the workers’ struggle for their rights. Combat troops of the anarchists (in 1906 - 1907) were created in large factories of Odessa: Gen, “ROPIT”, “Association of Mechanical and Iron Foundry of Odessa”, among workers and bricklayers of the Odessa districts “Peresyp” and “Slobodka”.

Police reports recorded that in Odessa factories anarchists “spread Bakunin’s brochures”, leaflets of anarchists, that anarchist circles worked among future professional workers – students of Admiralty slipways and Odessa Electrotechnical School.³

A part of workers and artisans among the anarchists of Ekaterinoslav (Dnepropetrovsk) and of other cities of Ekaterinoslav province was 70-80%, in Odessa it gained 60%. According to the professional affiliation the most numerous Odessa anarchists-workers occurred were among sailors and stokers of trade fleet, fitters, turners, metallurgists, electricians, printers, food industry workers, tailors.

The core of the “Ekaterinoslav Federation of Anarchists” made anarchist federations of Tubal and Bryansk plants, railway workshops, Interplant Federation.

The Kiev anarchist group “Black Flag” was engaged in propaganda activities among workers of the plant “Arsenal”, food industry workers, cart wrights, sugar makers. Zhytomir Anarchist Federation formed a strike mood among metalworkers, and furniture makers.

In 1906, “South-Russian Group of Anarchists-syndicalists “New World” (the base of federation was in Odessa) became the most numerous and active anarchist groups throughout the Russian Empire. Anarchist K. Feigelman wrote about this group: “Organization of anarchists-syndicalists managed to put deep roots among workers, especially sailors.”⁴

Anarchists-syndicalists became the major force in organization and development of the Trade Union of Workers of Water Transport on the Black Sea. In Odessa from November 1906 to March 1907 it took place a powerful strike of port workers and sailors (the strike was called “Registration”), which was organized by anarchists-syndicalists. The strike involved up to 4 thousand seamen and workers of port factories, as well as hundreds of workers of other factories of Odessa which hold strikes of solidarity with the “Registration” and collected donations to help strikers of “Registration”.

At the beginning of 1907 in Odessa, Nikolaev, Kherson, Sevastopol, Ekaterinoslav there were more than 3 thousand anarchists-syndicalists, 80% of which being workers. About two more thousand people participated in groups of anarchists-communists and illegalists in the Ukrainian provinces.

In 1909, the anarcho-syndicalists, anarchists-communists and members of other revolutionary socialist groups of Odessa recreated illegal trade union of

³ ЦДІА України. Ф. 419. Оп.1. Спр. 5082. арк. 2; ДАОО. Ф 314. Оп. 2. Спр. 146. арк. 4; Ф. 2. Оп. 4. Спр. 8269. арк. 9.

⁴ ДАОО. Ф. 2636. Оп. 1. Спр. 268. арк. 8.

ships' crews "Seamen's Union", which collapsed after the marine strike in Odessa in the spring of 1907.

On the ships of "ROPIT" (and other Black Sea marine companies), among dock workers there were "activated" secret trade union cells; at the Odessa port there were spread anarchist leaflets "Comrades sailors and dock workers!", the local police informed the Police Department of the Empire about restoring of the anarcho-syndicalist propaganda among sailors of Odessa. Cells of illegal "Seamen's Union" were created in the Crimean and Azov ports, on the ships of Dnieper flotilla.⁵

In 1911, in Istanbul, it was created an illegal foreign center of the "Union of Black Sea Sailors" – "Union of Black Sea Crews". Thanks to this "Union" anarchists were able to increase their influence on the sailors and dockers of the south of the Russian Empire. In August 1911, in Odessa it was held a new strike of ships' crews, supported by water transport workers of the Black, Azov, Caspian and Baltic Seas, the Danube, the Dnieper and the Volga. That time in Odessa anarchists distributed leaflets "To all the sailors of the Black Sea!"⁶

In Alexandria (Egypt) in February 1913, the "Union of Black Sea sailors" (by that time the "Union" consolidated two thousand sailors of 84 merchant ships of the Black Sea – Azov basin) illegally conducted the 1st All-Russian Conference of maritime professional organizations of ships' crews of the Black Sea, Baltic, Caspian and Azov sailors, secret professional organizations of trade fleet, in which anarchists, as well as representatives of the RSDLP and PSR played an active role.

In the spring of 1913 the revolutionary organizations planned to start an all-Russian maritime strike. However, in January-May of 1913 the police of the Russian Empire arrested the core of the group "Union" in the amount of 233 people (including the head of the "union" M. Adamovich). In 1914-1916 arrests of seafarers – supporters of anarchists continued.⁷

The anarchists operated in secret structures of "All-Russian Railway Union" which had its cells in Odessa, Ekaterinoslav and in other large industrial cities. Work of anarchists-syndicalists and anarchists-communists in the working environ in the south of Ukraine did not stop during the years of reaction and World War I (1907-1917). This work determined a certain influence of anarchists also after the revolution in the Russian empire in 1917.

⁵ ЦДІА України. Ф. 268. Оп. 1. Спр. 406. арк. 16; Ф. 339. Оп. 1. Спр. 180. арк. 8.

⁶ ГАРФ. Ф. 102. Оп. 260. Спр. 30. арк. 231; ЦДІА України. Ф. 3850. Оп. 2. Спр. 31, арк. 22 – 29.

⁷ Волков Е. З., Среди моряков и речников торгового и военного флота (1906-1914 гг.). - М. - Пг., 1923. - С. 219 – 234; Адамович М. П., «Моряк» и моряки перед судом // Материалы по истории профессионального движения в России. - М., 1924. - С. 199 - 210; Моряк. - Одесса. - 1921. - 26 апреля, - 25 мая, - 23 июня.

In the spring of 1917 the anarchists organized the labor movement in Odessa: in the trade union of shoemakers “Needle”, in the Union of Bakers, Union of maritime transport workers “Union of Seafarers”, among port workers, workers of the tobacco factory of Popov, plants of Gen.

It should be noted that in mid-1917 to the southern megalopolises of Ukraine back from the United States there came hundreds of anarchists – re-emigrants, activists of anarcho-syndicalist union “Industrial Workers of the World” and “Union of Russian Workers of the United States and Canada”, which brought to the Ukrainian labor movement the patterns of the world working resistance and the anarcho-syndicalist organization.

At the initiative of the anarchists-syndicalists who started fighting back in 1906 during the strike “Registration”, in 1917 in Odessa there was established a center of association of trade unions of merchant fleet workers in a single union of merchant fleet workers – “Union of Sea and River Sailors” (Committee on the organization of the All-Russia Seamen's Union). It was founded by the Congress of Merchant Fleet Workers in June-July 1917. The Odessa board of directors of this union consisted mainly of anarchists, having a huge impact on the sailors, stokers, port stevedores⁸.

In Odessa, on November 14, 1917 at the general meeting of sailors there was approved the anarcho-syndicalist resolution on socialization of the merchant fleet in the Black and Azov Seas. In January 5, 1918 at the meeting of the Odessa branch of the “Union of Sea and River Sailors” it was given a “start” of socialization of the fleet and the plant “ROPIT”, which began to be managed by the commissars of the “Union” – “Council of Nine”, anarchists V. Chernyavsky (chairman of the “Union” and the “Council of Nine”), F. Alexandrovich (Commissar of the Black Sea Fleet), G. Reev, M. Batsoev. Since then it began confiscation of vessels, capitals, enterprises and institutions of water industry of the Black Sea and transferring of the property directly to the labor collectives of sailors.⁹

On January 20, 1918 in Odessa it was held the “Congress of Sea and River Sailors of the Merchant Fleet of the Black and Azov Seas and Rivers Flowing in Them”. Anarchists dragged the decision on socialization of the fleet and of free trade unions. In March 1918 at the All-Russian Congress of Sea and River Workers anarchists demanded to confirm the socialization of the fleet, its management by “Union of Sea and River Sailors” but the Lenin's Council of People's Commissars blocked such a resolution.

Departments of “Union of Sea and River Sailors” in Kherson, Kerch, Feodosia, Novorossiysk, where the influence of anarchists was prominent,

⁸ ЦГАВМФ. ФР. 183. Оп. 1. Спр. 36. арк. 7; ДАОО. Ф. 2. Оп. 1. Спр. 567. арк. 2.

⁹ Одесский листок. – 1918. - 24, 26 января.

announced socialization and decentralization of the civil fleet in their ports. Although the Central Committee of Seas and Rivers, which was created in Petrograd, supported the Decree of the Council of People's Commissars of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic on nationalization of the fleet, and in February 1918 the All-Russian Congress of Sailors supported the decision of nationalization, the Odessa "Union of Sea and River Sailors" considered the Black Sea Fleet as already socialized being the property of the specific groups of sailors. At the beginning of 1918 anarchists had a strong influence on the sailors of the Black Sea Navy; the image of a "sailor-anarchist" became a pattern in the Soviet literature of the 1920s-1930s.¹⁰

After March 13, 1918, when the Austro-Hungarian troops occupied Odessa, the anarchists declared the merchant fleet in the Black Sea "free" – independent of any state institutions and laws, trying to turn the fleet in "hiring company". V. Cherniavsky announced by radio the "Declaration on Free Fleet" to all the Black Sea states, calling on the governments of these countries to recruit teams of the "Union of Sea and River Sailors" for any cargo transportation operations¹¹.

In April 1918 "The Council of the Black and Azov Seas Sailors" confirmed socialization of the fleet according to the decision of the 2nd Congress of the Sailors. But when the Congress of the Sailors moved to Rostov-on-Don (May 1918) most of the representatives of the Congress (collected from the representatives of the seafarers of the Azov sea) rejected the anarchist plan of socialization and voted for nationalization of the fleet.¹²

Anarchists had a significant impact in mining collectives and trade unions of Donbass. They created the "Bureau of Anarchists of Donbass", newspaper "Voice of an Anarchist" (Ekatrinoslav, 1918), tried to hold in January 1918 socialization of the mines. Anarchists-railwaymen were in favor of socialization and transmission of the South Western Railway in the ownership of the local "Union of Railway Workers." This "Union" created the "Committee of Five" to control railway transport. Under the influence of the anarcho-syndicalist slogans, in favor of the socialization of industry, there began to vote workers of the Odessa sugar factory, plant of Gen and tobacco factory, bakers, workers of manufactory shops and hotels. Odessa "Council of Unemployed" urged the unemployed to "direct action" – to immediate seizure of homes "in the bourgeois quarters", of mills and factories, to transferring them to the House Committees and groups of workers.

¹⁰ ГАРФ. ФР. 6863. Оп. 1. Спр. 67. арк. 4; ФР-5584. Оп 1. Спр. 1; Ачканов Г. Очерки Февральской и Октябрьской революции в Одессе. - Одесса, 1927. - С. 51, 54, 70.

¹¹ ГАРФ. Ф. 6863. Оп. 1. Спр. 66. арк. 8, 12, 19; Моряк. –Одесса.- 1921. - 26 апреля.

¹² Известия Одесского Совета рабочих депутатов и представителей армии и флота. – 1918. - 10 января, - 31 января.

In April 1919 (after establishment of the Soviet power in Odessa) anarchists and anarchists-syndicalists of Odessa revived “Union of Sea and River workers”. The head of the trade union became the well known anarchist, sailor A. Zheleznyakov. The union of the radical wing legally existed in Odessa before the occupation of the city by White troops in August 1919, and after that it continued its activities underground.¹³

With the return of the Soviet power in Odessa in February 1920, the anarchists tried to keep the impact on the workers of Odessa. In 1921-1924 anarchists were among the organizers of strikes of the port stevedores and shipyard workers, railroad workers, shoemakers, unemployed. In the 1st Provincial Congress of Trade Unions (May 1920) 9 anarchists were elected in the Odessa Council of Trade Unions and 6 – in the Odessa City Council. Starting from December 1920, repressions of the state and of trade unions governmentalization of trade unions gradually minimized the anarchist influence in the workers’ environ in the cities of the south of Ukraine.

Anarchists had a significant impact on certain groups of workers in 1906-1920 in the south of Ukraine. They were able to form a constant core of supporters among professional workers (mostly workers of Water Industry of the Black Sea Fleet), which supported the protests of anarchists.

Anarchists developed a unique theory of creation of the workers' movement, which could potentially develop into a general revolt against the authority and capital of the whole class (strike, uprising). In this movement there was no room for compromise and political battles. Based on its theoretical foundations, anarchism should become a broad social movement of working people rather than form a political party.

Anarchist organizations and groups in the Russian Empire in 1906-1908 were popular among the working class. Quantitatively, among the socialist parties and movements, they conceded only RSDLP, PSR and the “Bund”. The popularity of the movement led to the fact that the anarchist groups and clubs began to form everywhere (in factories, handicraft workshops), including people not familiar with the theory of anarchism.

As it is well known, political movements are unstable, their participants are removable, so the anarchist movement became a reflection of the labor movement in those years, trying to bring in it certain ideological signs. Having not created a single party, the anarchists failed to lead the overall labor movement, since they abandoned a number of important instruments of political influence on the masses and the possibility to structure the spontaneous movement.

¹³ Одесский коммунист. 1920. - 30 мая 1922; Моряк. –Одесса. - 1921. – 7 ноября.