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LEFT-WING EXTREMISM IN MODERN RUSSIA: DEFINITION, CLASSIFICATION, TRENDS

The article examines the process of activization of the left-wing extremist groups in modern Russia. The author draws attention to the social protest rallies that have unfolded in recent years and coincided with the growing demand for social justice in the mass consciousness of Russians. Modern left-wing extremist groups, according to the author, may be based on the “orthodox authoritarian”, “new left” or “anarchist” ideological platforms. It is anarchism that will be dangerous as a form of youth radical protest. The only effective way to prevent left-wing extremism is a developed state social policy aimed at equalizing the level of income between the various strata of the economically active population, as well as helping low-income categories of citizens. Special attention should be paid to the development of “social elevators” which open up new prospects for Russian youth.

Key words: *left-wing extremism, terrorism, Marxism, anarchy, ideology, social justice.*

A noticeable, though uneven growth in the standard of living of the majority of the strata of the Russian society, which began in the zero years of the twentieth century against the rise of the global energy market, the individualization of civil consciousness, focus on personal career success as a new vital value of the younger generation – all these factors suggested that the Russian community as a whole has overcome the historical trauma of the socialist experiment and has largely lost an interest in the left political spectrum. Even in the 90-ies of the twentieth century, at the peak of the fall in popularity of the B. N. Yeltsin’s political regime, the parliamentary Communist opposition (the Communist party and its political allies) did not have enough support to take power. The left “street” opposition represented by Trudovaya Rossia (Labour Russia) has not coped with this task, not to mention the several dozen small marginalized ultra-left extremist groups such as New Revolutionary Alternative [10; 11. P. 111].

On October 31, 2018, a suicide bomber exploded an improvised explosive device in the lobby of the FSB building in the Arkhangelsk region, killing himself and injuring three employees of the Russian Federal Security Service. The news was that the crime was committed not by an Islamist or a supporter of neo-fascism, as before, but by an anarchist – M. V. Zhlobitsky, a 17-year-old student of the Arkhangelsk Polytechnic College, who had a pseudonym “Valerian Panov” in social networks, as well as “Sergey Nechaev”, in honor of the organizer of the revolutionary-terrorist group “People’s Massacre” active in the Russian Empire in the XIX century. In social networks, M. V. Zhlobitsky called himself a supporter of anarcho-communism and used the emblem of the West German ultra-terrorist group Red Army Faction (RAF) as a self-presentation. His crime M.V. Zhlobitsky motivated by the fact that “the FSB fabricates cases and tortures people [1]”.

Following these events, on November 2, 2018, a 14-year-old student, whom M. V. Zhlobitsky called on the eve of the terrorist attack, was accused of making an explosive device, detained in Moscow and then arrested by a court decision. On February 1, 2019, there was a report about the detention of A. Miftakhov, a graduate student of the Faculty of Mechanics and Mathematics of Moscow State University, who was also accused of making an explosive device to undermine the gas pipeline, it was also reported that the young scientist is interested in the ideas of anarchism and is a member of the capital’s anarchist group called “People’s Self-defense”.

This chain of events actualizes the question of what social phenomenon we are witnessing: are they separate outbreaks of criminal activity of mentally unbalanced people posing as anarchists or is it the beginning of a new process of formation of the youth left-wing extremist movement inclined to use terrorist methods? At the moment, Russian youth, according to Russian researchers, in terms of socio-political activity is a controversial phenomenon: dissatisfaction with their situation is combined with the fact that “they are not ready to take part in radical actions at the personal or group levels, that is, there is no collective subject of unconventional activity [5. P. 308]”.

In the regulatory field of Russia there is no official definition of “extremism” as a phenomenon, in contrast to the concept of “extremist activity” [4. P. 98-110]. Therefore, it is terminologically appropriate to rely on the definition given in the “2001 Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism,” which defines extremism as an act aimed at forcible seizure of power or forcible retention of power, as well as a violent change in the constitutional system of the state, a violent attack on public security, including the organization of illegal armed groups or participation in them [8]. In this case “left extremism” can be defined as a corresponding act motivated by left-wing radical ideology. A distinctive feature of left-wing radicalism is the willingness to implement the idea of social justice by violent, armed means, from popular uprising to acts of individual terror.

The left radicals distinguish their main adversary on an economic basis, being tolerant or even positive in respect of ethnic, religious or gender differences, this trait distinguishes them from other extremist movements. Previously, left-wing extremist movements were defined by comparison with the then official position of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. All political forces ready to use more intransigent rhetoric and methods of dealing with capitalist-type political regimes were extremist [12. P. 208]. At the moment, this marker is not working, taking the Communist Party as a point of reference is incorrect due to the *de facto* social democratic nature of this political party. Therefore, the author of this article proposes to consider the declared readiness to use violence as the main criterion for defining the left-wing extremist movement, especially if such readiness is justified by the motives of social justice. Among the supporters of the left-wing radical ideology are three main branches of followers:

Authoritarian orthodox communists still use the concepts of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, sometimes with modifications that were made by Mao Zedong, Ho Chi Minh or Fidel Castro. They see social justice in defending the economic and political positions of the proletariat, the peasantry and other oppressed social groups, special attention is being paid to freeing peoples from the colonial oppression of the Great Powers, the main method being a revolution in the form of armed struggle of the people, as it was understood by Che Guevara, Franz Fanon and Regi Debré. This trend was popular abroad in the 50s-60s of the twentieth century, then came into a crisis due to the general disappointment in the Soviet, then Chinese and other orthodoxy, expressed in the policy of the relevant communist parties. In Russia, interest in it was observed in the 90-ies of XX in connection with the collapse of the party ideology of the CPSU and the search for an alternative of irreconcilable character. The most significant representative of this movement was Labor Russia headed by V. I. Anpilov, who took part in armed clashes in Moscow in October 1993, but then lost its political power. To some extent, the following organizations can be included in the above list: "Vanguard of the Red Youth" and "Left Front" that replaced it and was headed by S. S. Udaltsov. The "Left Front" began to disintegrate after the end of the protest wave of 2011-2012, and now this niche is occupied by the "Left Block," a network organization without a clear hierarchical structure and a recognized leader, conducting from time to time local protests, representatives of which are periodically detained by law enforcement agencies.

New left do not deny the classics of the theory of communism as a whole. The followers of this trend, which goes back to the theorists of the "Situationist international" and the practices of the "student revolution" of 1968, strive to take into account the socio-economic changes that have occurred in the second half of the twentieth century, in particular, the disappearance of the proletariat and the peasantry in their former sense, that is, disappearance of the classical Marxist subject of the revolution. They consider the students as a replacement of

this subject and as the social strata most ready for protests, around which all the disgruntled strata of society will be united, including migrants, the unemployed, representatives of oppressed religious, ethnic and sexual minorities, feminists, prisoners and patients of psychiatric clinics. Guy Debord, György Lukács and Herbert Marcuse inspired this movement ideologically. Methods of their struggle are varied from organizing riots up to the creation of the extremist terrorist groups. In Western Europe, this movement developed as a reaction to the defeat of the student revolution of the late 60s and in the early 90-ies of the XXth century it came off the scene. In Russia, the heyday of the movements of this type occurred just at the end of the 90-ies of XXth century and zero years of the XXI century, the main force on this flank of left extremism was represented by the E. Limonov's "National Bolshevik party". By the end of the zero years, NBP began to lose influence on the young people and in a weakened form it is now represented by "Other Russia".

Anarchists represent the third ideological branch of the left-wing extremist movements and they started to be a threat to public safety just in recent years. Now in Russia there are at least a dozen anarchist groups of various size and social composition, disintegrating and reuniting, the most famous of them are "Autonomous action" and "National Self-defence," that has withdrawn from the ranks of "Autonomous action." "Antifa" movement also largely adheres to the anarchist positions.

The anarchist movement is multifaceted, as is the anarchist ideology. **Anarcho-communists** advocate the socialization of property and the construction of society on the basis of primitive forms of direct democracy. **Anarcho-syndicalists** are in favor of self-management of the working groups in the workplace, coming to the idea that professional managers are of no need and even harmful to the labor man. **Anarchists-individualists** appreciate personal freedom. In contrast to the crimes of Islamists and nationalists, which are readily covered and criticized in the media, there is scant information about anarchists or other left-wing radicals in the legal information field. It seems that there are attempts not to notice the anarchists and to stop any public discourse on this issue. An example is the criminal case against journalist S. Prokopieva (public justification of terrorism), who discussed the motives of the M. V. Zhlobitsky's act. Media resources that published her interviews about the Arkhangelsk events were fined and the materials were removed from free access.

It can be assumed that this tactic is due to the fact that the Russian state and civil society have developed a certain ideological immunity against radical nationalists and Islamists and there is a certain consensus between the society and the government in assessing their actions. There is no such consensus in regard the left-wing radicals. Moreover, there is a serious concern that it is the request for social justice that becomes the key element of protest sentiment among Russians. The state has nothing but tactical maneuvers to oppose the left idea, un-

derstood in a simplified “Robinhood” sense, as the struggle of the poor against the rich and the protection of the “little man” from the state repressive apparatus, while terrorist organizations traditionally focus on the recruiting among the youth circles [9. P. 150].

Back in Soviet times, the image of an anarchist was severely distorted by the state propaganda for political reasons. The anarchist was presented as a political subject, completely unrelated to the left ideology and shown either as the leader of bloody gangs, like N. Makhno, or as a deserter sailor in Petrograd who denied any laws and marauded under the guise of revolution. As a result, there are few specialists in real anarchism who understand the essence and possibilities of this phenomenon. But the protest potential of anarchy was shown by the anti-globalists who smashed the streets of the European and American cities in the past decade (the anarchist movement “Black block”) and modern “Yellow Vests” in France.

The difference between anarchists and orthodox left-wing revolutionaries is that the anarchists are not clearly tied to one socially structured subject of revolution, unlike the classical leftists, who are focused on the working class or its ersatz, such as the modern precariat. From the point of view of the anarchist, the subject of the revolution is the one who opposes the system of oppression of human freedom and acts in the “here and now” mode. However, it would be a great simplification to assume that anarchists do not recognize any forms of power, laws or restrictions. Anarchists are against government, against a professional government, building a hierarchical society and concentrating in its hands the resources and power.

The anarchists deny even the socialist state, and this is still one marker distinguishing them from the orthodox left. The telegram sent to the Politburo of the CPSU Central Committee by the French radical left students who had captured the Sorbonne in 1968 is typical in this sense: “Bureaucrats, tremble! The international power of the Workers’ Councils will soon sweep you from your tables. Mankind will not live free until the last capitalist has been hanged in the entrails of the last bureaucrat! Long live the struggle of the Kronstadt sailors and the Makhnovshchina against Trotsky and Lenin! Down with the state! [2. P. 29]”

The strength of anarchist ideology, in contrast to the one offered to the modern society by the ruling elites (to whom the history has already “stopped” and the political game is now reduced to the “keeping the score,” stability or even the turn to the past, to the “traditional values”) is an appeal to the future, the formation of the image of a certain ideal society that is awaiting the humanity ahead. For the state ideologist be it in Russia, in the USA or the EU countries, the “bright today” has already come, the social statuses and roles have been distributed, the elites have formed and the human masses as a whole have finally discovered the “true meaning” of their existence – consumerism, therefore it remains only to work for the sake of improving the level of consumption, changing cars for faster cars and apartments for more spacious ones. For an anarchist, a man in the street who

thinks like this is a “pump” useless for society, whose meaning of life is reduced to the egoistic desire to drive out through itself the greatest amount of resources taken from nature, to dissolve themselves in prestigious work, and to spend non-working time with entertainment, but not self-development, and even more no reflections and principles of the structure and justice of the surrounding being.

As an introduction, it can be stated that anarchist views are not yet widespread among Russian youth and note the psychological unwillingness of the majority of young Russians to personally participate in protest actions. But there is no reason for an optimistic forecast that this will continue, given the growing socio-economic tensions in society [7. P. 100-102; 6. P. 172-182]. It can already be stated that the stake is mainly on information and propaganda methods in the fight against left-wing extremism in the EU [3. P. 57-64], has not justified itself and Russia should not repeat these errors. The only effective way to prevent left-wing extremism is a developed state social policy aimed at equalizing the level of income between the various strata of the economically active population, as well as helping low-income categories of citizens. Particular attention should be paid to the development of “social elevators”, which open up new prospects for Russian youth.

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