

Declaration of the Melekessian Group of Anarcho-Communists

COMRADES!

We are very disturbed by the news about the disarming of anarchists in Moscow, no matter who they were. We have just sent a telegram of protest to the Moscow Sovdep [Soviet of Deputies]. We know very well what this is all about. Our local Soviet has also raised its head and has begun to misrepresent the idea of anarchism and slander us, the anarchists. But the workers here don't trust the government very much, and the authorities have had to back off.

With each passing day, dissatisfaction with the government grows stronger, thanks to its inaction in dealing with unemployment and the economic life of the remaining workers. Factories are barely operating, and the managers have abandoned them, but the Soviet will not hand the factories over to the workers so they can run them independently. Instead the Soviet tries to act as a trustee and mediate between the workers and managers. The result is the workers take up drinking and no longer have hopes for increasing production. Their only hope is that the Soviet will come up with the money to pay them.

Other aspects of life here are a mess. We have to put up with commissars who speak at meetings in favour of the Constituent Assembly, instead of the total victory of the workers. That's the way they carry on at meetings, but what goes on in private is even worse. All the commissars go their own way and engage in debauchery and heavy drinking, while not worrying about censure by the workers. The food police steal butter, sausage, flour, etc. at the railway station and sell it on the side.

Such actions have forced me to write an open letter to the government of the Bolsheviks, which I request to be printed in the next number of the newspaper "Anarkhia." We will also be sending a letter about the decree about the socialization of women, which is causing quite a stir in our region.

With comradely greetings,

Nikolai Melgunov
Secretary of the Melekessian Group of Anarcho-Communists

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Melekess is 786 km. east of Moscow.

Translator's Notes

Melekess in 1918

In 1918 Melekess was an industrial town of about 16,000 in the middle Volga region. The local economy was based on processing wood and agricultural crops. For photos of Melekess in the early 20th century, see: <https://chronograph.livejournal.com/255313.html>.

In May 1918, as a result of the revolt of the Czech Legion, a military force originally set up by the tsarist government, the

town suddenly found itself in a war zone. A battle took place at Melekess on July 16-18 between the Czechs and the Red defenders led by the sailor Andrey Polypanov, who had two armoured trains at his disposal. Polypanov, who only a few months earlier had been fighting alongside anarchist detachments in Ukraine, was forced to withdraw, abandoning the town to the invaders. The new regime promptly arrested and executed 12 citizens associated with Soviet rule. A memorial to these martyrs still exists, but only five of them were posi-

tively identified. Melekes was recaptured by the Reds on October 6 1918, this time for good.

Melekes today is known as Dimitrovgrad, named after the Bulgarian communist Georgi Dimitrov. For a few months in 1919 it was called Luxemburg, but the name didn't stick.

Socialization of Women

In early March 1918, an angry mob of women stormed the anarchist club in the Volga city of Saratov, about 400 km southwest of Melekes. The reason for their indignation was a "Decree on the Abolition of Private Ownership of Women" allegedly issued by the "Free Association of Anarchists of Saratov." The anarchists in the club barely made it out the back door while their premises were being trashed.

The decree, pasted up about the city, certainly had an official appearance: it consisted of a preamble and 19 paragraphs. But it was the work of a provocateur, Mikhail Uvarov, owner of a tea room and reputedly a member of the Union of Russian

People, a Black Hundreds organization. Uvarov soon received a visit from a squad of 20 anarchists who had been instructed to arrest him. According to the local Soviet newspaper, the anarchists "on their own initiative" decided it would be "dangerous and useless" to keep such an ardent counterrevolutionary in prison, and killed him on the spot. The anarchists then issued a proclamation denouncing Uvarov for publishing his libelous, sexist, and pornographic Decree and claimed that his execution was completely justified.

Uvarov's Decree was only the first of many such provocations perpetrated or encouraged by the White movement in the Russian Civil War. These decrees were taken up by the bourgeois press to discredit revolutionary Russia and were believed authentic by many prominent persons in the West. Curiously, Soviet historians seem to have been reluctant to write about these decrees, so much of what is known about them has only come to light in the last 30 years.

For more information, see the article by Aleksei Belidov here: http://ataka-zine.narod.ru/Istoria_odnoy_mistifikacii.htm.

*Translation and notes by Malcolm Archibald. The translation was prepared from a transcription published in *Anarkhisty: Dokumenty i materialy*, Vol. 2, 1917–1935, ed. V. V. Krivenky, (Moscow, 1999), pp. 252–253.*