

# Russia: Muted anti-fascism in the shadow of the invasion

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**The war in Ukraine has been followed by increased repression of the Russian left. The atmosphere was therefore tense during the annual memorial ceremony for two murdered socialists in Moscow.**

**UTRIKES** The political schizophrenia that has characterised the Russian street scene since the fall of the Soviet Union was more evident than usual on the evening of 19 January. A stone's throw from a metro station named after the anarcho-communist Pyotr Kropotkin, behind the back of a Frederick Engels statue several metres high, and in front of the eyes of the soldiers who are being hailed on advertising posters for their participation in the ongoing "special military operation" in Ukraine, several hundred metres of riot fence, several picket buses, a hundred riot police and a bunch of civilian police from the special department against extremism stood ready in the drizzling rain. The reason for this state force demonstration was the annual anti-fascist memorial ceremony for two left-wing profiles who were shot dead by Nazis there exactly 14 years ago.

**The murder victims were** human rights lawyer Stanislav Markelov and journalist Anastasia Baburova, aged 34 and 25 respectively. He was a socialist, she an anarchist, and both were close to Russia's anti-fascist movement. As a lawyer, Markelov had defended left-wing activists, civilians abused by Russian forces during the Second Chechen War, and well-known journalists such as Anna Politkovskaya of the independent newspaper Novaya Gazeta, who was herself murdered two years before he was shot dead. Baburova worked for the same newspaper at the time and was an activist on environmental issues and other topics.

Markelov's and Baburova's killers belonged to the Nazi Russian Nationalist Struggle Organisation (БОПН), and had links to people in the Russian presidential administration and security services. Since the assassination, 19 January has become an important date for Russian anti-fascists and the broader left. In previous years, the ceremony also used to include a march, often with several hundred participants, under the slogan "To remember is to fight".

**This year, the mood was** subdued to say the least.

With the escalation of political repression since the beginning of Russia's invasion of Ukraine almost a year ago, this year's ceremony had to be held without banners or slogans. Participants gathered in silence and laid flowers inside the white stone archway over the gate where the killings took place. Some hurried on, others lingered, chatting quietly.

- There were noticeably fewer participants this year, about 200, said a disappointed activist in his 60s whom Flamman spoke to after the event.

**The man has been** involved in the anarchist movement for decades.

- Many who used to attend have left the country in recent months, he added.

**The war has brought not only** harsher repression, but also the risk of being forcibly recruited into the army. As a result, many activists, especially men of gun age, have gone into exile. Judging from social media posts, several Russian left-wing groups, such as the Russian Socialist Movement (RSD) and Autonomous Action (AD), seemed to be more well represented at similar celebrations abroad, including in Stockholm, Berlin, Paris, Yerevan and Tbilisi, than in Moscow.

Asked how Markelov and Baburova would have acted today, the anarchist veteran reacts with a sad smile. He was personally acquainted with the murder victims, and therefore uses the informal variants of their first names, which by Russian convention are reserved for personal friends.

- I have heard this question several times in the last few days. Nastya would certainly have been involved in some good media project, for which she might also have had to go into exile for practical reasons. Stas, I like to think, would have stayed, if only because he was needed here. We lack good lawyers like him.

**Late at night** the streets are empty, only the riot fence remains along the curb. The portraits of Markelov and Baburova that had been set up at the murder scene have been removed, leaving only a pile of flowers. A lone young woman stops, adds another red carnation, stands still for a minute, and hurries on. On her way down to Kropotkinskaya station, she passes a lighted billboard with the words "Honour to Russia's heroes". The portrait adorning the poster belongs to a lieutenant colonel in dress uniform. He serves in the Russian air force, which is currently bombing Ukraine.

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