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## THE IDEOLOGICAL LEGACY OF PYOTR KROPOTKIN IN THE CONTEXT OF MODERN-DAY REGIONALISM

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*The article aims to find the constructive conceptual elements in the ideas of the anarchist theorist Peter Kropotkin which are suitable for resolving one of the fundamental contradictions of the modern world – the impossibility of an effective state-legal solution to many of the conflicts between states and their regions. This seemingly dead end conflict lies primarily in the internal contradiction of the original international legal document: the UN Charter. The article analyzes the views of Kropotkin on the problem of confrontation of communal and imperial beginnings throughout human history. Kropotkin's ideas are noted for their potential productivity in the theoretical analysis and practical resolution of modern territorial conflicts on the basis of reforming international law. The concept of "regional sovereignty" is introduced into the terminological context.*

**Keywords:** Kropotkin, regionalism, state, bureaucratic model of governance, regional sovereignty.

## ИДЕЙНОЕ НАСЛЕДИЕ П.А. КРОПОТКИНА В КОНТЕКСТЕ АКТУАЛЬНЫХ ПРОБЛЕМ РЕГИОНАЛИЗМА

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*Целью статьи является поиск конструктивных концептуальных элементов в идеях анархистского теоретика Петра Кропоткина, способных помочь разрешению одного из базовых противоречий современного мира – невозможности эффективного государственно-правового решения многих конфликтов между государствами и их регионами. Этот, на первый взгляд, тупиковый конфликт заключается главным образом во внутреннем противоречии основного международно-правового документа: Устава ООН. В статье анализируются взгляды Кропоткина на проблему противоборства общинных и имперских начал на протяжении всей истории человечества. Отмечается потенциальная продуктивность идей Кропоткина для теоретического анализа и практического разрешения современных территориальных конфликтов на основе реформирования международного права. В терминологический оборот вводится понятие «регионально-суверенитета».*

**Ключевые слова:** Кропоткин, регионализм, государство, бюрократическая модель управления, региональный суверенитет.

In the political life of many modern states, there is a confrontation between centralist and regionalist tendencies. In some cases, this confrontation takes place in the form of a constructive dialogue between the parties (Quebec's and Scotland's independence referendums were agreed upon by the central government), but sometimes it enters a phase of protracted political confrontation (Catalonia's struggle against Spain for the right to a referendum on independence) or even prolonged armed violence (multiple conflicts in the Middle East, Africa and Asia).

The impossibility of an effective state-legal solution to many of the conflicts between states and their regions lies primarily in the internal contradiction of the original international legal document: the UN Charter. On the one hand, Article 1 of this document declares the right of people to self-determination and states that the UN's goal is to "develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples" [1]. On the other hand, Article 2 of the same Charter confirms the sovereignty and integrity of all UN member states: "The organization is based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all its members" [1].

It seems that one of the ways to overcome the resulting political and legal impasse may be an appeal to the ideological

legacy of the Russian political thinker of the second half of the XIX – beginning of the XX centuries, the anarchist theorist P. Kropotkin (1842–1921). In the long years he spent in political emigration in Switzerland, whose political structure retained the features of a confederation, Kropotkin theoretically substantiated a regionalist model of power – he called it a "federalist" or "popular" model.

Kropotkin views the history of humanity as a punctuated cycle. Every civilizational cycle, Kropotkin believed, ends in exhaustion after travelling through all phases, then a crisis follows and the civilization passes away: "Egypt, Asia, the Mediterranean coast, and Central Europe each took their turn as the center of historical development. And every stage of that development began with a simple tribe; Tribes transformed into agricultural communes; Then free cities formed and lastly the state emerged, then developed for some time and finally, reached a period of stagnation" [2, p. 452]; "Throughout all of civilization's history two threads, two animus tendencies are visible: roman and pagan, imperial and federal, the tradition of power and the tradition of freedom" [2, p. 398] (translation is made by D. Kotsyubinsky).

It is important to emphasize: Kropotkin began with the assumption that public power is fundamentally not the same as state power. According to Kropotkin, an elective authority

that is close to the people is not a State. He defined the State as “highly centralized government”, i.e. a bureaucracy machine or empire. That is why Kropotkin called the Roman Empire “a state in the exact sense of the word”: “Her branches covered her vast lands like a fish net. Everything was concentrated in Rome: economic life, military command, judicial relations, wealth, education, and even religion. Rome imposed laws, judges, legions to defend the territory, governors to rule the provinces, gods <...>. The law written in Rome, and it alone, governed the Empire; this empire was not a union of citizens but a flock of subjects”.

Corollary to his definition Kropotkin stated that contemporary states emerged as late as the 16th century. Before that, Europeans, successors of the freedom-loving barbarians – Celts, Germans and Slavs – lived in rural communes that evolved into free cities: “<...> in the 12th century all over Europe city commons began to arise, predicated long beforehand by the spirit of federalism and born as a synthesis of craft guilds and rural communes”. “<...> this revolution started a new epoch – the epoch of free cities”; “During a single century this movement transformed Scotland, France, the Netherlands, Scandinavia, Germany, Italy, Spain, Poland, and Russia” [2, p. 412, 414].

In every aspect of life in medieval cities, Kropotkin sees ‘the reflection of the spirit of invention and creativity, the search for new horizons, the spirit of freedom that inspired all labors’ he also sees “solidarity, which developed in guilds where people united not only for practical purposes of their craft, but also for fraternity and community” [3, p. 167]. Kropotkin emphasizes that craft unions established and maintained their commercial communications “completely independently from their cities, negotiated and traded regardless of all political borders”. “And now, as we are taking pride in our international labor congress, we remain ignorant that international congresses of craftsmen and even apprentices were held in the 15th century” [3, p. 165]. In this way, local associations of medieval communal cities created their own, democratic, networked alternative to the globalism of large bureaucratic (imperial) governments.

It is also important for Kropotkin that: “when a city was unable to judge a complicated dispute, they referred for help to a neighboring city”; “The spirit of that time – the preference of an arbitration court over a ruler’s judgement, – manifested itself daily when two disputing communes asked a third commune to arbitrate their dispute” [2, p. 417]. Dynamic and full of intricate conflicts, life in a free city seemed, to Kropotkin, an extraordinarily advantageous way of life: “As a result of each such confrontation the city’s development took a step forward”; “There are conflicts and struggles that kill, and there are conflicts that contribute to humanity’s progress” [3, p. 170].

Then, in the 16th century, absolutist states appeared, which destroyed medieval civilization and the federation of free cities. “New Barbarians” – secular and religious bosses – amassed support of the peasantry in their fight against free cities. “Like Hellenic cities failed to free their slaves, medieval cities, while liberating their citizens, failed to free peasants from serfdom” [3, p. 170] – complains Kropotkin. (Although there were some cities that had forced feudal lords to liberate peasants).

The legist (Roman law expert) and the priest – those, according to Kropotkin, are guilty of mortifying the spirit of freedom in the free cities: “<...> the old federal spirit of free enterprise and free contract died, and in his stead came the spirit of discipline and hierarchical governance” [2, p. 428].

The state, in destroying medieval cities, pursued both

political and financial interests. When the state had taken full control, “it decided to subjugate all civil institutions without exception (guilds, fraternities, etc.) that used to bind together craftsmen and peasants. The state destroyed and expropriated their property” [3, p. 186]. The state cannot afford “to let citizens form civil unions that would be assigned the duties of the states” [3, p. 184].

The fact that Kropotkin did not consider federal liberal democracy as an effective alternative to bureaucratic centralism and absolutism can be explained, it seems, by two factors. First, in the period when Kropotkin created his theory, the majority of Western states in Europe remained rigidly centralized: the rapid development of federalism and local self-government would begin only in the second half of the 20th century. Secondly – and perhaps more importantly – even the most democratic system does not spare geographically large states (even federations) from the serious costs of bureaucratization. An individual in these conditions is distant from making the most important political decisions and eventually turns from a political subject into a “one-dimensional” (using the terminology of G. Marcuse [4]) political object, into the “stranger” (l’*étranger*) of A. Camus [5] – in other words, an infinitely small player on the political stage. The bureaucratic system, in its turn, forms a self-sufficient network-like caste, living, according to Parkinson’s laws, first and foremost for the sake of self-reproduction, and not for solving complex social problems which requires innovative approaches.

So, for example, the initial conversation about turning the “Europe of Nations” into a “Europe of Regions” has, in reality, led to the emergence of a “big European bureaucracy” and to the formation of a hierarchy of political subjects, in which the most economically powerful nations sit at the top. At the base of the hierarchy are “regions,” which have, in fact, been turned into objects of global European policy that operates by the redistribution of quotas, benefits and financial resources.

Thus, the European experiment of integrating the regions “through the structure of the nation-state,” – in favor of affirming the “spirit of free initiative and free agreement” [2, p. 428] on which historical creativity is based and which Kropotkin once spoke about, – is today not fully recognized as successful. This was clearly illustrated by the example of the de facto anti-regionalist and pro-state position taken by the European Union in relation to the Scottish and Catalan referendums on independence.

In fact, the European model of regionalization “stumbled” over the above-mentioned political and legal contradiction, enshrined in the UN Charter, which does not give an answer to the question of how to resolve the conflict between the right of the people to self-determination (which, from the constructivist point of view, any region can claim for itself), and the right of the already-existing states (“nations”) to sovereignty and integrity. It seems that the acceptance of those regionalist principles about which Kropotkin wrote and which neither united Europe nor individual states (both unitary and federal) have been able to approach, is the first step in developing serious reform of the international legal base [6, p. 48-51]. One of the possible models of this reform could be the introduction into international law of such a category as “regional sovereignty” [7]. This would allow the international community to cut the “Gordian knot” of contradictions between the right of peoples/regions to self-determination and the principle of sovereignty and territorial integrity of already-existing states.

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