

NESTOR MAKHNO

Anarchy's Cossack



The Struggle for Free Soviets in the Ukraine 1917-1921

Alexandre Skirda

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Alexandre Skirda

Translated by Paul Sharkey

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Foreword

History Bites Back

The spectacular collapse of the so-called communist system of the former USSR has exposed the vacuousness of the regime's historians' official theses and highlighted the intellectual complacency of their western counterparts — with only a few rare exceptions. For decades, their slavish pens have peddled a single lane version of historical truth, celebrating the supposed "triumphant march of actually existing socialism." They find themselves all at sea now that their phony certainties have evaporated. However, their writings remain and endure and these carry the stamp of their aberrations. Verifying this is the easiest thing in the world: one need only take a semantic key to certain definitions or expressions.

Let me cite but a few examples: "bourgeois revolution" is used to designate the real Russian revolution of February 1917 which overthrew the tsarist autocracy: "Great October 1917 Socialist Revolution," or "October Revolution"¹ for short, refers to what virtually every Russian and indeed French socialist ever since then has described as the "Bolshevik coup d'état," and which radical revolutionaries indeed have described as the "Bolshevik counter-revolution": "dictatorship of the proletariat" means the dictatorship of a tiny caste of intellectuals "actually" exercised over the urban and rural proletariat: "war communism" means the 1918–1921 period and in fact the systematic pillaging of the peasantry and wholesale take-over of day-to-day life by the Party-State,² all of it dependent upon the most bloodthirsty terror. Let us also de-mystify the expression "soviet" which, properly rendered, simply means "council," but then we would have to explain to folk why, say, France, a country covered from top to bottom by "councils" — from municipal councils to the council of ministers — is still not wrapped in the "exotic and oh so revolutionary" whiff of "soviet"! We could go on decoding many another term or expression, but for the time being let us close with "Bolshevik," which simply means "majority," when the Russian party of that name never achieved a majority in any election in Russia, except for two obscure internal votes within the Russian Social Democratic and Labor Party at its 1903 congress, which resulted in a split. A circumstance upon which Lenin seized in order to so dub his sectarian grouplet.

This mismatch between the sign and the signified has shaped the fates of tens of millions of human beings and led ultimately to an impasse. If we are to get out of that impasse, we must return to the primary resource and re-examine everything. This is the school of thought currently in the ascendant in Russia and the Ukraine. And it is apparent in the ongoing determination to recover historical memory and fill in the many gaps from the past.

Since 1989 and especially since 1991, there has been some highly intensive publishing activity in this regard: first, we have the reprinting of all the books which had appeared in Russian in the West from surviving actors in the civil war — White Army generals (now eulogized by some!) — separatist Cossack leaders, Social Revolutionaries and even, of especial interest to us here, Nestor Makhno's *Memoirs* and Arshinov's *History of the Makhnovist Movement*, which have so far run to several editions. Indeed we are witnessing a real infatuation with the person of Nestor Makhno: over the past decade a good fifteen books on the subject have appeared, the six most recent in a little over one year. He has become a popular hero in the eyes of many, a symbol of the struggle against Red and White alike on behalf of the people's freedom and the defense of revolutionary gains. True, most of these books lack rigor and are of limited interest to anyone already conversant with the subject, but the point is that for many people he represents the only bright shining light in the dark history of the civil war of his time. Allow us, however, to highlight the *Memoirs* of Viktor Belash³ who was chief of staff of the Makhnovist insurgent movement for over a year and succeeded Makhno at the head of the movement after the seriously wounded Nestor Makhno was evacuated to Romania. Captured by the Reds, Belash's life was spared on condition that he write his memoirs so that the Red Army's strategists could finally grasp why the partisan movement in question could have held out for so long and so successfully against all its enemies. He was then released, only to be caught up in the Stalinist repression in 1937 and shot. His son rediscovered the manuscript in the archives of the Ukraine, carried out protracted, complementary personal research between 1966 and 1990 and had it published in Kiev in 1992 before his unfortunate death the following year. The whole thing represents an outstanding primary source, happily complementing Nestor Makhno's own *Memoirs* and the Arshinov book. It is essential to a fuller understanding of the organizational and military operation of the movement: it teems with telling information and undeniably illuminates the crucial part that Makhnovist insurgents played in defeating the Whites. We shall rehearse its main contributions in the bibliographical afterword to this present volume.

Let us quote one extract that perfectly illustrates what we have been saying: it is a reproduction of the uncanny address that Nestor Makhno gave at the meeting at which he bade the movement farewell on July 17, 1921 before leaving for Romania:

“The communism to which we aspire assumes that there is individual freedom, equality, self-management, initiative, creativity and plenty. We have spelled out our thoughts in our ‘Declarations.’ We have had the chance and we have striven to build a society on the libertarian principles of non-violence, but the Bolsheviks have not allowed us to proceed with this. They have turned the clash of ideas into a struggle against men. Not only has the entire State apparatus, despised by the people, with its functionaries and its prisons and so on, not been liquidated, but it has simply been re-cast. The Bolsheviks have proclaimed might as their only right.

The foundations of the society that the Bolshevik-Communists have laid, after eliminating all other parties and rivals, have nothing to do with communism. They amount to a closed, semi-military sect of ‘soldiers of Marx,’ blindly disciplined and with pretensions to infallibility, rejecting any quibbles and in hot pursuit of the goal of a totalitarian State which grants neither freedoms nor rights to its citizens and which peddles a novel brand of ideological racism. It breaks the people up into ‘their own’ and ‘the rest.’ In many respects, it is an absurdity. They deprive the toilers of all their dreams of a better life and they are building the most wretched, most unfair police society from which the joys of labor, creativity and the spirit of enterprise are to be banished.

Their experiments will be pointless and they will co-opt folk of the same outlook, authority will be extended through the conjuring up of unanswerable demagogues and dictators. They will rule and, by means of prisons and coercion, they will compel the toilers to work themselves to death for a glass of buttermilk ... They will tear everything down and eliminate all who are not to the Party’s taste or ideologically in tune with it ... They will devise an astronomical schedule of punishments ... People’s sole preoccupation will be with survival in such frighteningly oppressive conditions. But it cannot continue forever. The strengthening of authority will inevitably lead to a complete psychological and ideological breakdown between those in charge and the toilers. Comrades! Be vigilant and do not cast aside your weapons for they will soon serve you again! Do not trust the Bolsheviks! We part with the feeling that we have done our revolutionary duty. Long live solidarity and unity of the toilers! Long live the third social revolution! My thanks to all of you for everything!”⁴

The account of this speech notes that right after it “bugles sounded assembly and the farewells were very dramatic, with some shedding of tears, no one knowing whether they would ever see one another again.” Allow us to remark here that

Nestor Makhno and the insurgents knew the real import of words, that being what they were fighting and dying for. The Bolshevik leaders also knew that but could not tolerate their existence. Viktor Belash cites the case of the Makhnovist expeditionary force which, having just played a crucial part in defeating Wrangel's Whites in the Crimea in November 1920, was treacherously attacked by the Reds: the 700 survivors, short of ammunition and forced into surrender, were promptly mown down with machine-guns!

Not that Makhnovists could have expected anything better of the Whites. We might quote the recently published (in Paris) memoirs of a young officer cadet from the Volunteer Army, who was assigned to the artillery. The author, Serge Mamontov, reveals an utter ignorance of Makhno who "called himself an anarchist but was only an out-and-out highwayman. He lived the high life, drank heavily and for that very reason was popular with the peasants who were all for him and took a hand in the fighting."⁵ At the beginning of 1919, Mamontov's unit tackled a Makhnovist detachment in the environs of Gulyai-Polye, catching it and mowing it down. His comment is as follows:

"The wounded were finished off and prisoners shot. In a civil war there are rarely prisoners on either side. At first sight this seems awfully cruel [...] What were we to do with prisoners? We had neither prisons nor the wherewithal for their maintenance. Set them free? But they would take up arms again! Shooting them was the simplest policy."

Permit me to highlight the lack of humanity in the application of such a rationale to people who, when all is said and done, were merely defending themselves against conquerors and trying to protect their possessions and their families from exactions. That thought does not even cross the mind of the thug-gish Mamontov.

By contrast let us look at the different rationale of the Makhnovists who did discriminate between enemy prisoners: officer personnel were shot but ordinary troops were set free once the beliefs of the insurgents had been explained to them. Austro-German soldiers were even dispatched homewards with provisions for the journey!

In fact the plight of the Makhnovist movement, shared by all who fought for their freedom or independence — be they peasants, Cossacks or national minorities — was that it was caught between two seemingly opposing forces which in point of fact were kin to each other in terms of their messianic imperialism: the Reds' Party-State and the Whites' Greater Russia, One and Indivisible. Moscow as the Red Mecca or as the Third Rome! Choice of side was determined by the supply of arms and munitions. Just add the disconnected, uncoordinated nature of their actions and there we have the explanation of their lack of success. This has been brilliantly demonstrated in his posthumously published book, *The Tragedy of Peasant Uprisings in Russia, 1918–1921*⁶ by Mikhail Fremkin, a soviet historian who

later emigrated to Israel. The age old yearning for “Land and Liberty” foundered upon the hegemony of the city-State. Sooner or later, though, Nature has the final word and sets the whole thing in motion again: a community of free human beings is still the order of the day.

— Alexandre Skirda
Paris, April 1999.

Notes to Foreword: History Bites Back

1. See, for instance, the academic *Dictionnaire de culture générale des noms propres* (Le Petit Robert, 1993) pp.1517–1518 and the decidedly worse history textbooks in use in schools.
2. Remember here that folk were freezing from the cold and starving to death in Petrograd at this time when they were forbidden to lay a hand on wood from the forests and to fish from the banks of the Neva river, on pain of being shot for trespass against State assets! See Marcel Body’s testimony in *Un piano en bouleau de Carélie* (Paris 1981).
3. A.V. and V.F. Belash, (in Russian) *Nestor Makhno’s Footsteps* (Kiev 1992), p. 592.
4. Op. cit. p. 570
5. Serge Mamontov, (in Russian) *Campaigns and Horses*, (Paris 1981) translated into French as *Carnets de route d’un artilleur à cheval 1917–1920* (Paris, L’Harmattan, 1998), p. 141.
6. Published (in Russian) by his widow Emma Fremkin in Jerusalem 1987, 251 pages.

1. From the Legend to the History

To anyone with any interest in the Russian Revolution, Nestor Ivanovitch Makhno, Ukrainian anarchist associated with an attempted social revolution, is a familiar figure. The experiment in which he was an active participant took place during the crucial years from 1917 to 1921 and involved millions of the inhabitants of the southern Ukraine. Moreover, Makhno and his companions were obliged to mount an armed defense of their social gains: thus it is primarily as the architects of a vast insurgent movement that they have been known thus far, especially as their fight was critical to the fate of the Russian revolution and, by extension, for the course of the century.

Having played a decisive part in that movement, Makhno has to this very day been variously perceived: to some — his adversaries — he is a sort of bogeyman, a high-born brigand whose banner of Anarchy ill disguised the simple lust for pillage and systematic destruction of the State — in any format — and of its representatives; to others — his fans — he was an exceptional libertarian militant who sought to implement the teachings of Bakunin and Kropotkin, the Russian theorists and founding fathers of libertarian communism.



By way of affording a glimpse of these different approaches, let us review some of the adjectives, epithets and labels employed about him: Denikin, the commander-in-chief of the White Army saw in him "... a sainted leader of anarchism, a daring and highly popular brigand, a gifted partisan [...] all decked out in theoretical anarchism"¹; certain Ukrainian nationalists looked upon him as "Cossack *ataman* [leader]," a "Ukrainian Napoleon," a "national hero"²; Anatole de Monzie, a French political writer has him as a "gentleman anarchist."³ While some of his Bolshevik adversaries label him "bandit president," the "uncrownable king of the partisans"⁴; as for Victor Serge, he portrays him as a "boozier, uneducated, idealistic, a born strategist quite without peer"⁵; in the estimation of the writer and historian Daniel Guérin what one has here is an "anarchist guerrillero" and a "Robin Hood."⁶ Some anarchist admirers present him as a "second Bakunin."⁷ Finally, the libertarian propagandist Sébastien Faure praises his "... sturdy, loyal, modest, dauntless, incorruptible figure."⁸ Let us add, for good measure, to these

evaluations selected hither and thither, that Makhno's brothers in arms, by way of paying tribute to his physical panache and firmness of mind yoked to his name the Cossack title *Batko*⁹ and also dubbed him the "first among equals." Not because he was a little more equal than the rest, as some might sneer, but in the sense of "team leader," in that he was always to be found in the front rank of the charges of his famous horse-soldiery and that he was also in the forefront in dissemination of the ideas of libertarian communism. The legend of his military invincibility derives from the fact that, literally death-defying, he survived more than 200 attacks and engagements although gravely wounded on several occasions. Complementary to this diversity of appreciations, let us note that Soviet historians, like their leaders of the day, often talk of the "kingdom" or "republic" of "Makhnovia," when referring to the region that came under the direct influence of the Makhnovist movement. That territory covered the provinces of Ekaterinoslav and the Northern Tavrida as well as the eastern part of the province of Kherson and the southern portions of those of Poltava and Kharkov — which is to say a rectangle measuring 300 kilometers by 250 — and inhabited at the time by about seven-and-a-half-million people.

This mass movement has been dubbed the "Makhnovschina" from the name of its initiator and the suffix appended to that name can be half-pejorative in Russian. Let us point out finally that — acme of a personality cult in reverse! — Makhno's little home town, the movement's capital as it were, Gulyai-Polye, has often been dubbed "Makhnograd" by his Bolshevik enemies!¹⁰

In the biographical entry given for him in the latest edition of the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, encapsulating the regime's last word on history, we may read the following.

"Makhno, Nestor Ivanovitch, one of the leaders of the petit-bourgeois counter-revolution in the Ukraine in 1918–1921, during the civil war. Born into a peasant family, he was educated at the parish school. During the 1905–1907 revolution, he joined an anarchist group, participating in acts of terrorism and 'expropriations.' In 1909 for the murder of a police superintendent, he was sentenced to death, this being commuted on account of his tender years to ten years' penal servitude. While serving his sentence in the Butyrki prison in Moscow, he completed his grounding in anarchist theory. Freed by the revolution in February 1917, he set off for Gulyai-Polye and founded an anarchist detachment in April 1918. This detachment embarked upon a partisan war against the Austro-German occupiers and the power of the hetman Skoropadsky. In this way he earned great popularity among the peasants. Makhno distinguished himself by his bravery and his savagery. In 1919–1920, he waged war on the White Guards and the Petliurists¹¹ as well as on the Red Army. Three times he allied himself with the Soviet authorities and three times he broke off this alliance by rebelling. In 1921 Makhno's detachments turned once and for all into gangs of looters and criminals. On August

26, 1921, he fled into Romania: he crossed into Poland in 1922 and wound up in France in 1923 where he worked as a shoe mender and printworker.”¹²

Contrary to the usual hotchpotch served up by modern Soviet historiography — as we shall have occasion to appreciate — which consists of blending lie and truth, with the accent solidly on the former, this summary, aside from a few inexactitudes — which we shall set straight anon — and the customary abuse — “petit-bourgeois,” “looters,” “criminals” — appears essentially correct. In the same work, the entry under “Makhnovschina” rounds off the official version: it is stated there that the movement’s social base comprised of the well-to-do peasantry, or “kulaks,”¹³ that it was not merely a local movement, for it stretched from the Dniepr to the Don, that it was made up of volunteers, that its armaments were exclusively seized from the enemy and finally that its ideology was encapsulated in the watchwords “libertarian State” (sic!) and “free Soviets,” which, according to the authors, boiled down to fighting against the proletarian State.

It is very interesting to compare that evaluation with the one contained in the lengthy obituary notice carried in the columns of the (generally well informed) newspaper *Le Temps* — the forerunner of *Le Monde* — under the byline of its Moscow correspondent, Pierre Berland:

“Le Temps has registered the premature death of the famed Makhno, who died in Paris on July 27, 1934 of tuberculosis and was cremated at the Père Lachaise cemetery. Soviet newspapers have not found room the space for an obituary of the anarchist leader, nor as much as a single line at the foot of page 6 to record his demise.... This Nestor Makhno was nonetheless a very curious figure and no conspiracy of silence will succeed in erasing the memory of the important role that the popular ‘Batko’ played during the Russian revolution, particularly in the struggle against Denikin. Though his ephemeral Bolshevik allies, who wasted no time in getting rid of him once victory over the Whites had been secured, may not, historians of the future will reserve him the place that he deserves among the architects of the revolution.

[. . .] His political program? An anarchist, he sought to give land to the peasants, factories to the workers intact and advised them to organize themselves into federations of free communes. Which is to say that in the White generals who wanted a return of the “pomieschikis”¹⁴ he saw enemies. [. . .] On several occasions he allied himself with the Bolsheviks upon whom he looked at the time as the lesser of two evils [. . .] Acts of looting, terror or anti-Semitism were severely punished by Makhno and his lieutenants. He managed to maintain his power in the southern Ukraine and attempted to make reality of some of his ‘utopias’ — the elimination of prisons, the organization

of communal life, 'free communes,' 'workers' soviets' from which no stratum of society was excluded. Under his short-lived government, there was complete press freedom, and he allowed publication of Right Social Revolutionary and Left Social Revolutionary newspapers, as well as Bolshevik organs, alongside anarchist news-sheets. But it was during 1919 and Denikin's offensive, that the role of Makhno and his bands of partisans proved crucial.

[. . .] Against Wrangel, Makhno dispatched several detachments of his partisans, and it was his cavalry that crossed the marshes and seized the Perekop Isthmus. [. . .] There can be no question but that Denikin's defeat can be accounted for by the peasant uprisings that hoisted Makhno's black flag, rather than by the successes of Trotsky's regular army. The partisan bands of the 'Batko' tipped the scales in favor of the Reds, and if Moscow today prefers to forget that, impartial history will take it into the account."¹⁵

Berland ascribed the disagreement between Makhno and the Bolsheviks to the latter's aversion to anarchist propaganda in favor of a regime without central authority, and in favor of a federation of "free soviets," in short, for everything at odds with the "Marxist notion of the dictatorship of the proletariat, exercised in the name of the masses by the Communist Party."

This latter appreciation acts as a counter-balance to the first and enables one to restore the true measure in the historical perspective of the actions of Makhno and his people. Nevertheless, intervening between these two most believable official versions there is a teeming host of others which are mixed up and inaccurate, ranging from misapprehensions to blatant calumnies both petty and huge and all helping to cloud the issue seriously.

That a lie piously repeated can sometimes achieve the standing of a half-truth in some minds, we know: this is the case with several charges that are at once crude and serious: the charges of anti-Semitism, banditry and "military" anarchism. Be that as it may the procedure is a familiar one: one besmirches the leader or leaders and thereby belittles the movement, and the advantage is that this offers justification for the most atrocious massacres and repressions — as witness the treatment doled out to the rebels of June 1848 and the Communards of 1871.

Be that as it may, we shall return at some length to all these charges and with the assistance of manifest, obstinate facts we shall establish the truth of the matter.

However, we would do well to correct, straight-away, several habitual errors including the one that automatically identifies the person of Makhno with the movement to which he lent his name. Although, to be sure, the two are interconnected, they are not one and the same, and one cannot ascribe to Makhno alone responsibility for certain vital or disastrous decisions, for instance, the decision to

enter into alliance on two occasions with the Red Army and the Kremlin authorities. Those decisions were taken collectively on each occasion after long and bitter discussions concluding in a vote. On the contrary, certain decisions were made by Makhno alone. Moreover, the movement's political complexion was not confined to the black of Anarchy but also took in the whole spectrum of the far left of the day: Left Social Revolutionaries, Maximalists, Bolsheviks at odds with the party and even "non-party," all united on a basis of free soviets. Here let us stipulate further that the Makhnovist movement was only the most important — by reason of its strength and duration — and the most remarkable — by virtue of its social achievements and internal structure — of the dozens of partisan movements that burgeoned from the Ukraine to Central Russia and Siberia, most of them similarly attached to free soviets and stamped out by the Leninist regime only with great difficulty over the years 1920–1924. Finally, if Makhno was the symbol of his movement, the Gulyai-Polye libertarian communist group was its soul. It is within that overall framework that our study is situated, although Makhno's destiny and individual actions may serve as the guidelines of our work.



In support of our narrative, we shall be making use of the writings of the chief protagonists, most of them in Russian and hitherto unpublished: to it we shall add certain characteristic documents by way of appendices.

Regarding the latter part of Nestor Makhno's life — his stay in Paris — we have collected several testimonies and interviews from individuals who knew or associated with him and to whom we owe thanks here. For a start, there is the 96-year-old doyen: Grisha Bartanovsky (d. 1986), known as Barta, who first met Makhno in 1907 in Ekaterinoslav when they worked together in a factory and frequented the same nocturnal haunts, before meeting up again in exile in Paris. Then let us mention the Bulgarian libertarians who were very close to Makhno at that time: Kiro Radeff (d. 1979), Erevan (d. 1976), Nikola Tchorbadjieff (Jossif Sintov, d. 1994), and Iossif Sintov (d. 1994). Ida Mett (née Gilman, d. 1973), Makhno's secretary from 1925 to 1927, enlightened us about certain of his character traits and his living conditions during those years. Let us also salute the *grande dame* of the French libertarian movement, May Picqueray (d. 1983) who took Makhno, his wife and family in upon their arrival in Paris. Finally Nicolas Faucier and René Boucher, militants very active at that time, have briefed us on his dealings with the French anarchists.

To that gamut of sources — built up since 1964 — let us add those from the family circle of the present writer, several members of my family having been variously mixed up in the events described,¹⁶ a circumstance not unconnected with the reasons that have prompted me to pursue my laborious researches, but which involve not so much indulgence, apology, or — who knows? — denigration, but maybe shall we say a greater readiness to show understanding of our subject.¹⁷

Notes to Chapter 1: From the Legend to the History

1. General A.I. Denikin, *Očerki russkoj Smuty* (in Russian), Berlin, 1926, Tome V, p. 134.
2. V. Doubrovsky, *Batko Makhno: A Ukrainian National Hero* (in Ukrainian), Hensfeld, 1945.
3. A. de. Monzie, *Petit Manuel de la Russie nouvelle*, Paris, 1931, p. 124.
4. E. A. Chtchadenko, *The Civil War* (Russian), Moscow, 1928, Tome 1, p. 91: and V.M. Primakov *Etapy bolshovo puti* (Russian) Moscow, 1963, p. 194.
5. V. Serge, *Mémoires d'un révolutionnaire*, Paris, 1951, p. 134.
6. D. Guérin *L'Anarchisme*, Paris, 1965, p. 115. We would rather have said "Robin of the Steppes," that being truer to the local topography.
7. Quoted by Marc Mratchny in the Russian anarcho-syndicalist periodical *Rabotchij Puts* (Russian) No. 5, Berlin, 1923.
8. Sébastien Faure in his foreword to P. Arshinov *Histoire du mouvement makhnoviste (1918–1921)*. Paris 1924, p. 44.
9. The literal translation, "little father" does not quite capture the meaning that the word had in the Ukrainian; ever since the days of the Zaporog Cossack warrior communities it had implied an elected and revocable military leader. At the same time when he was being so called, Makhno was only 29 years old and thus had nothing about him that was paternal or venerable; anyway, there were other "Batkos" even in the Makhnovist movement and throughout the region.
10. S. Rosen, in *Letopis revoliutsii* (Russian), the Ukrainian C.P.'s historical review, Kharkov, 1926, 2(23), p. 121.
11. Supporters of Simon Petliura, the Ukrainian nationalist leader.
12. See the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* (Russian), Tome XV, 1975, pp. 524–526.
13. Broadly, this term indicated well-to-do peasants but in Lenino-Stalinist mythology, it acquired a broader meaning embracing any peasant who owned his means of production (i.e., at least one cart and one horse) and not working directly for the Bolshevik State and thus a potential enemy. This semantic difficulty was resolved following the forcible collectivization of 1929–1930 (with at least 13 million deaths) for, thereafter there were only "Kolkhozians" or State-paid farm laborers.
14. The big landowners.
15. *Le Temps* August 28, 1934. This article was included in the anthology *Georges Luciani* (Pierre Berland): *Six ans à Moscou*, 1937, Paris, under the title, "Anarchists and Bolsheviks: Makhno," pp. 26–29.
16. The product of a Ukrainian father who lived through the civil war and for whom Makhno "... fought the Whites to get them to turn red and the reds to turn them white!" and a Russian mother, the author has no direct connection with the Skirda who commanded a Makhnovist detachment, as mentioned by Kubanin, the official Soviet historian of the *Makhnovschina*, Moscow, 1927. p. 111. Although some distant relationship cannot

be ruled out, it is probable that we share a name, Skirda, literally “rick,” a name rather commonplace among the peasants and Zaporog Cossacks of this part of the Ukraine. 17. All translations from the Russian, Ukrainian and English have been made by the author.

2. In the Land of the Zaporog Cossacks

Before we proceed, it might be useful to provide some geographical, ethnographic and historical details of the territory that is to be the theater of operations for Makhno and his movement: the Ukraine and more especially its eastern portion, the left bank of the River Dniepr.

The Ukraine is the name of a land that extends from the foothills of the Urals and the Caucasus to the foothills of the Carpathians, more precisely between the two great rivers, Dniestr and Don, then between the River Pripet and its tributaries the Bug and the Desna, to the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. An area slightly larger than France, it is almost entirely covered by steppes that are the natural extensions of the Asiatic steppes: which explains how this territory was for centuries on the main access route for countless invasions of peoples who gradually occupied Europe and made cousins of most of the inhabitants of the old continent. The most recent of these invaders before and shortly after the Christian Era, the Scythians and Sarmatians — Aryans — lived there in their turn, before the Khazars and Turkomens drove them out, only to be dislodged themselves by nomads, the Pechenegs and Polovtsians. The Slavs appeared there around from the fifth century, later in the ninth century under the designation of Russians; they regrouped around Kiev, a flourishing city which, having become a rival of Byzantium, is described as the mother of Russian cities. Converted to Christianity in the tenth century, they represented Europe's bulwark against Asiatic invasions, until the countless hordes of Genghis Khan overwhelmed them and laid the whole land waste in the thirteenth century. It was at that point that the land of the northern Slavs, Moscovia, adopted the name (retained to this day) of Russia, while the former Russia was henceforth to be known as the Ukraine, meaning "border land" and the "outlying land" of the civilized world.

After the Tartar domination, a real calamity, that was to persist for two-and-a-half centuries, the country came under the control of the Lithuanians, the Poles and then, from 1654 on, of Moscow and thereafter, its eastern part belonged to the Empire of all the Russias, first under the name of New Russia and then as Little Russia.

Nevertheless, the Ukrainians have always been distinct from the Russians — despite claims to the contrary from Muscovite patriots — in physical, linguistic,

political and social terms. They are much more homogeneously Slavs than the Russians who intermingled with the Finns from the Northwest as well. This is evident in the physical make-up: the vast majority of Ukrainians are dark-eyed brunettes whereas among the Russians the blond or brown-haired type with light-colored eyes predominates.

Although both emerged from a common Slavic root, the two languages are as different as, say French and Italian. Customs and dress habits differ also. Ukrainian peasants wore an embroidered blouse tucked into their *charavary* or baggy trousers, wore leather boots, and the *papakha*, a large fur hat and the *armiak*, a homespun cloak. The Russian peasants or *muzhiks* (little men) wore their great blouse or *kosovorotka* outside their trousers, tucked into a broad belt and wore on the feet *valinki* (felt boots) or *laptis* (braided booties), dressed in a caftan or *poddirovka*, a wrap-around greatcoat, and on their heads wore a *chapka* (fur bonnet) and, once married, sported bushy beards whereas their Ukrainian counterparts let only flowing mustaches sprout. The counterpart of the Russian *isba* (log cabin) was the Ukrainian *khata*, with its wooden or mortar walls, whitewashed and topped with a thatched roof and surrounded by a tiny garden.

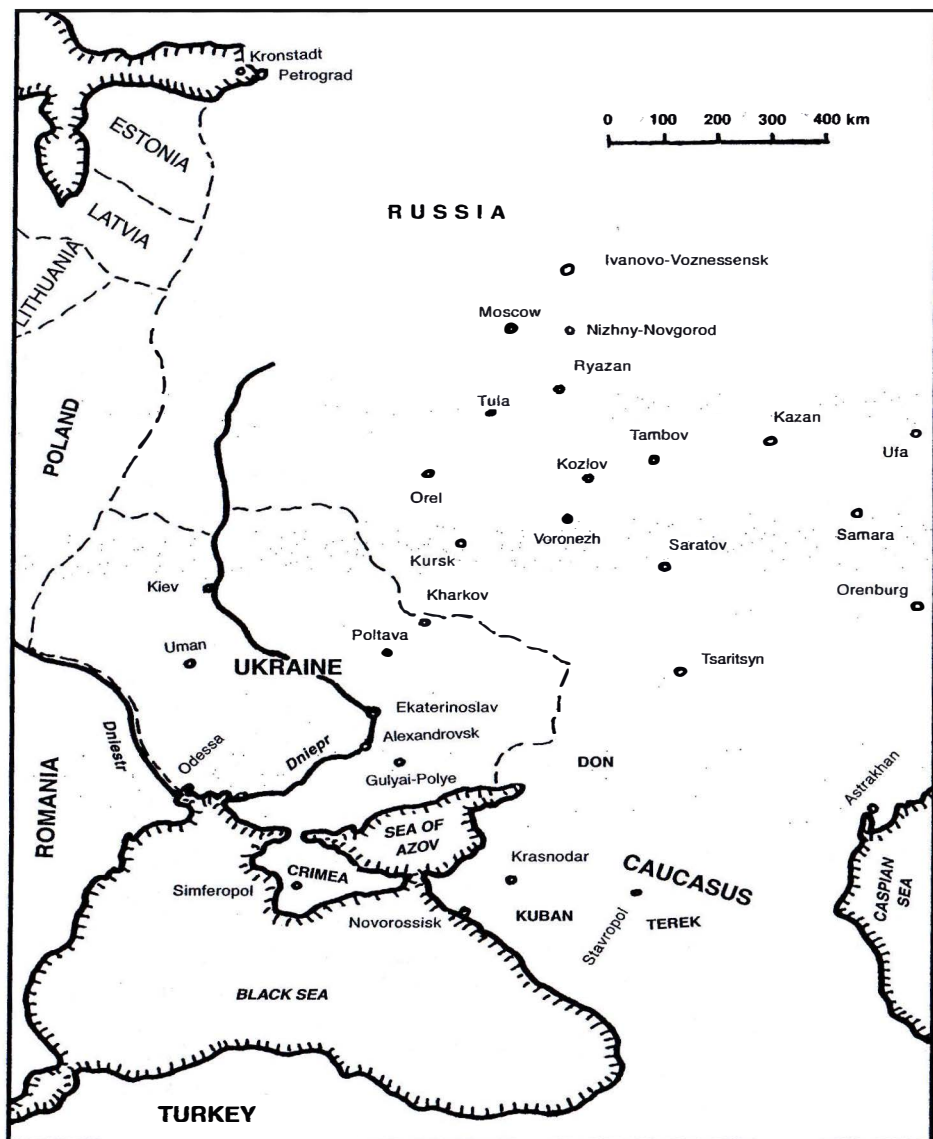
To conclude our rapid schedule of the differences between the two peoples, let us note that there has always been a certain animosity between them, as is often the case between Northerners and Southerners, and this has led them to give each other rather pejorative names like *Katsapy* (Russians) and sometimes *Moscaly* (Muscovites), and *Khakly* (Ukrainians).

The only common bonds between the two countries were originally dynastic alone, through the Scandinavian Rurik who established himself as prince of Kiev in the ninth century.



Whenever the Ukraine placed itself under the protection of Moscow's Tsar in 1654 on account of their shared religion, Orthodox Christianity, it was, paradoxically, in order to safeguard its independence, recently regained following a long and exhausting national liberation struggle against Pole and Turk. Not that that prevented Moscow from turning her into a vassal and from gradually reducing her population of peasants and Cossacks, holding the land collectively on the basis of egalitarian democracy to the status of an enslaved mass dispossessed of its lands; this by means of direct colonization by the tsars and their prebendaries, courtesans and favorites of every hue. This factor, added to internal social differentiation (privileges for the Cossack hierarchy), led to the emergence of Ukrainian feudal potentates. Despite revolts and sullen resistance from the peasant mass, this process was enshrined by Catherine II who formally introduced serfdom in 1781, which is to say, a century and a half after its introduction in Russia.

The better to bring its new colony to heel, Moscow encouraged intensive settlements of foreign colonists. In Ekaterinoslav province in 1751–1755, lands were awarded to Orthodox Slavs who had escaped the Turks: Serbs, Vlachs, Moldavians,



The Borders of the Ukraine in 1919

Bulgars and Montenegrins were settled in the Slaviansoserbsk district. In 1779, Greeks, Georgians, Poles and Gypsies, as well as Turkish and Tartar captives were also planted in the Ukraine. An enormous land distribution was made between 1775 and 1782: five million hectares were awarded to seigneurs in good standing at the court of Catherine II, the enlightened despot so celebrated by French philosophers. Nor did she overlook her German compatriots whom she had pour in great numbers on to the richest lands, the famed “black lands” (*chernozyom*) whose fertility derived from the rapid sprouting of grass upon the loose steppe soil and the decomposition of layer upon layer of vegetation. The proverbial excellence of the land had made the region, since time immemorial, the granary of Byzantium and Europe and, as such, it had always invited the covetousness of its more powerful neighbors.

Catherine II's successors continued her pernicious policy; in 1803, some 1000 hectares were assigned to every retired officer, and 500 to every non-commissioned officer in the same circumstances. To work all this land, almost 100,000 peasants from middle Russia — serfs of course — were imported. In 1846–1850, on an experimental basis, the State settled Jewish farming colonies in the Alexandrovsk and Mariupol districts. Since before the Christian era, Jews had come along with the settlement of Greek traders around the shores of the Sea of Azov. This ancient presence had been given a massive boost under Polish rule, especially in the western Ukraine as the Polish lords found it to their benefit to use Poland's many Jews as commissariat and administrative agents. These Jews subsequently made up a significant national minority, especially in the great cities of that part of the Ukraine.

As a result of this plantation of foreigners, by 1917 the Ukrainians accounted for only two thirds of their country's population. After them, in descending order, came the Russians, the Jews, the Germans, the Bulgars, the Tartars, the Greeks, and in insignificant numbers, the representatives of other nations — Serbs, Armenians, Georgians, etc.

Let us note, further, that in this land of settlers there were 100 men for every 93 women. Finally there were four million Ukrainians serving in the Tsarist Russian army in 1914.



At the time of the general abolition of serfdom in the Russian Empire, most of the Ukrainian peasantry were awarded only quite tiny parcels of land — three hectares on average — and these they had in any case to buy back from their former seigneurs on many occasions. Just like their Russian brethren, among whom communal ownership of the land (*Obschina*) subsisted, they continued to govern themselves by means of the communal assembly, the *Gromada* (corresponding to the Russian *mir*). In both cases, they were all denied the best lands which were set aside for the tsar (Crown lands), the *pomieschikis* (nobles) and the clergy, i.e., the famous trilogy of “Holy Russia.” Thus in 1891 to take the province of Ekaterinoslav

(the figures being essentially valid for the whole of the Ukraine), the nobles who accounted for 0.9 percent of the population held 31.06 percent of the arable lands; the Ukrainian peasants, 70 percent of the population, farmed only 37.55 percent of the land; the German planters, some four percent of the population, had 9.46 percent of the land (and generally the best land); as for the Greek two percent of the population, they had 6.62 percent of the cultivable land (usually not very good land at that). The Jewish farming colonies accounted for only an insignificant figure — some 0.34 percent of the land.¹



Agriculture was the main economic activity and occupied three quarters of the population. Agricultural production was made up of grains, beets, tobacco and sundry vegetables. Livestock were numerous, and there was on average one horse for every five inhabitants.

Nearly ten percent of people depended on the industry and mines of the Donetsk coal basin or the iron mines of Krivoi Rog. Five percent of the population made a living out of trade while the remainder was made up of officials and public service employees.

The Sea of Azov ports of Berdyansk (47,000 inhabitants) and Mariupol (45,000), very active all year round, were linked by rail to Ekaterinoslav (220,000 inhabitants in 1917), the capital of the southern Ukraine, itself connected via the important rail junction at Sinelnikovo with the Crimea, via Alexandrovsk (population 52,000) and Melitopol (population 18,000).

Contrary to prejudices widespread in the West, the population did not wallow in crass ignorance; in 1923 for instance, out of those of school age in 1914, the numbers who could read and write in the Ukraine stood at 90 percent in the towns and 73 percent in the countryside (for Russia, the figures were, respectively, 82 percent and 57 percent).

Another feature of the province of Ekaterinoslav, cradle of the Makhnovschina, is that it had been the historical heartland of the Zaporog Cossacks, warrior communities of free men who over the centuries had fought ferociously to cling on to their independence. This is rather more than a coincidence, and we might do well to dwell upon it a little.



The origins of the Cossacks go back to the Middle Ages, in particular to the resistance against Tartar oppression, when a section of the Slav population opted to stand its ground and fight. The term “Cossack” is itself of Tartar origin and means at once shepherd, horseman, free warrior, vagabond and sometimes bandit. The people so called began by establishing a sort of confraternity situated along a river. At the origin of all those that followed there were two: the Don and the Dniepr confraternities formed at around the same time — in the 15th and 16th centuries. The first formation, the Don group, was made up of Russians drawn from the democratic towns of Novgorod, Pskov and Riazan, driven out by the

awful persecutions visited upon them by Moscow's autocratic tsars. Taking refuge in the eastern Ukraine and the northern Caucasus, they clung to their republican traditions, what was known as "Cossack freedoms," namely, the practice of settling all their problems in general assembly, the *Krug*, (equivalent to Novgorod's democratic assembly, the *Vetchey*), and of appointing their own ataman, an elected and revocable military leader.

The second band established itself in the Ukraine along the banks of the Dniepr and, to begin with, comprised exclusively of Ukrainians. Both bands maintained close ties of friendship and cooperation with each other; it was said that the "two armies of the Don and the Dniepr are as brother and sister." It was only towards the end of the 16th century that, in the face of the Turkish threat, one of them threw in its lot with the Muscovite tsar and the other with the kingdom of Poland, all save the Cossacks from the lower Dniepr — the Zaporog Cossacks — who remained independent.

Given the crucial role played by the descendants of these two Cossacks bands in the Russian civil war of 1917–1921 and thus in our narrative, we shall take a closer look at the main features of their evolution.

From their earliest days the Don Cossacks swarmed over the adjoining regions — the Volga, the Urals, Astrakhan, etc. — thus it was one of their people who had become a Volga Cossack, Ermack, who in the 1580s conquered virtually the whole of Siberia for the Tsar. They played a vital role for Moscow and indeed for the whole of Europe by repulsing and then subjugating all the nomadic peoples of central Asia and of Siberia, who hitherto had been wont to invade and ravage northeastern Europe.

The linking of the Don territory to Moscow in 1570 was merely federative: thus, when the Tsar openly trespassed against their rights, they first displayed some agitation and then exploded in open revolts, the best known of which were the revolts of Stenka Razin in 1670, of Bulavin in 1708 and of the Ural Cossack Pugachev in 1775. These uprisings were harshly put down, (especially that of Bulavin) by Peter the Great who had a large number of Cossacks from every part executed. Those who survived these decimations were then scattered to the extremities of the empire. Turned into border guards, they formed regular troops called *Voiskos* (armies) after the rivers and regions to which they were assigned: in 1914 in order of importance these were as follows: the Don, Kuban, Terek, Ural, Orenburg, Astrakhan, Transbaikalia, Semirechinsk, Amur and Ussuri. Meanwhile they lost their Russian ethnic homogeneity either by mixing with women carried off or by absorbing adjacent local peoples: Kalmucks, Buryats, Chechens, Cherkesses, or through the arrival of exiled Ukrainians and Zaporogs.

The eleven *Voiskos* appointed after that formed staunch soldiers of the empire, coddled and privileged as such by those in power. They distinguished themselves in the campaigns and wars of imperial Russia especially when they smashed Napoleon's hitherto undefeated cavalry in 1812–1814 and watered their mounts at the fountains of the Champs Elysées in Paris.

Having become pillars of the empire, the Cossacks were not content to wage war and "carry Russia's borders on their saddles": they were also deployed for internal security. They were required to regularly dispatch *somias* (150-man squadrons) and regiments for service as police either garrisoning the leading towns and settlements in the country, or for use in the Tsar's personal guard. It was as the regime's praetorian guards that they cruelly put down the 19th century Polish uprisings and the great revolutionary upheaval of 1905. Their *nagaika* (leather whip) henceforth was of sinister reputation among the unbroken population.

In peacetime the Cossacks could supply nearly 70,000 men and almost three times that number in times of war and when the 1914 war broke out they formed numerous units: 162 horse regiments, 171 independent cavalry *somias*, 24 battalions of infantry including the *plastunes* — shock commandos — from the Kuban, as well as numerous artillery batteries, in all around 450,000 troops.

Their order of battle was novel compared with the open file formations of the Russian regular cavalry, the forager's charge of French regulations and the single line of attack of the German cavalry. Among Cossacks the charge — the lava-flow — consisted of fighting in a dispersed way such as to facilitate to the utmost the individual action of each fighting-man and officers of every rank in taking whatever initiatives were best suited to the circumstances. The interval between the attackers made it possible for them to advance at speed across any terrain, and it made their actions particularly devastating. Their usual armaments comprised, of course, the saber without which the Cossack is inconceivable, the lance, the rifle, the dagger and sometimes a hand-gun. Their pugnaciousness and daring made them formidable warriors.

In 1917 the most numerous were the Don and Kuban Cossacks who alone accounted for nearly three quarters of the Russian army's Cossack complement. Come the civil war, they were to account for a similar fraction of General Denikin's anti-Bolshevik forces.

In addition, tremendous social differentiation prevailed among the populace of the Cossack lands: there were many Russian immigrants, looked upon as non-Cossack intruders and who worked as share-croppers on the lands of wealthy Cossacks. Among the Cossack masses, there were some indigents for, although each Cossack was automatically entitled to a parcel of land, the size of the holding varied according to rank. In the case, say, of the Kuban, in 1870 the hitherto collectively-held lands were divided up as follows: a general got 1,500 hectares, a colonel 400 hectares, an *essaul* (commander) 200, and a mere Cossack only 30 hectares. Moreover in the Kuban there was gulf between the Littoral Cossacks who were of Zaporog origin, and those of the interior who were of Russian extraction and clashes and rivalry between them were not unknown.

These different characteristics explain why many poor or even medium Cossacks as well as some non-Cossack inhabitants of their lands were to opt during

the civil war, in the beginning at any rate, for the Bolsheviks who seemed to them to offer assurances of greater social justice.

The Dniepr Cossacks, Ukrainians, were, in spite of various adventures and revolt, brought into subjection to the power of the Polish lords — the *pans* — and were gradually absorbed into the general population under Polish control; those under Russian rule, who were also subjected to repression by Peter the Great, nonetheless supplied some regiments which, subsequently, in the wars of the empire also came to pitch their tents in Paris in 1814 and then melted into the population. In 1918 their descendants rallied in large numbers to the yellow and blue Ukrainian nationalist colors of Petliura's troops.

Finally, and of greater interest to us here, there were the Zaporog Cossacks, whose name derives from the fact that the first of them sought refuge on islands amid the inaccessible rapids of the lower Dniepr (their name means literally "beyond the cataracts"), from where they organized raids against the Tartars and Turks. They drew victuals from the wild fastness of what was termed Little Tartary, today's southern Ukraine, where a prodigal nature offered an abundance of game, fish, wild honey and natural shelter.

The Zaporogs were free men or men whose ambition was to be such, and above all, men who aimed to remain such. As such, on condition that they were of the Orthodox faith, they welcomed many outsiders to their ranks: Russians fleeing their despotic rulers or serfdom, retainers, peasants, townsfolk, vagabonds of various origins fleeing taxation, constraint and all manner of servitude and lured by the Zaporogs' manner and free way of life — their *Volnitza*.³ They could stay permanently or just sample Cossack life for a spell. In principle, every free Ukrainian was a Cossack, while retaining his land and could be mobilized at a moment's notice.

The Zaporogs were a military and political force that played a crucial role in the 16th and 17th centuries in that part of the continent. They allied themselves with the Swedes and with Cromwell in their struggle against the Poles and Muscovites; sturdy sailors as well as valiant warriors, they could field an army of 40,000 men, a considerable figure for that time. Their forces, scattered right across the Ukraine, were divided into *polks* or regiments, and into *sotnias* or squadrons. As their military, administrative and religious capital they had the *Sitch*, a wooden stockaded stronghold on an island in the Dniepr, first at Khortitsa and then on two other islands further downriver. Women and children were not admitted to the *Sitch*; it was divided into 38 *Kurens* or working and living communities, each one bearing the name of the area of origin of its 150 men who garrisoned there, making in all nearly 6,000 Zaporogs permanently available.

Organization was democratic and egalitarian, with the elective principle in operation at all echelons of command and of civilian office; they were all directly elected for a one-year term. They could be confirmed in or recalled from office at any time by a general assembly — the *Kosh* — and any mere Cossack could

accede to any post. Elections normally were held in the month of October; they determined the atamans of the *Kurens*, the hetman or ataman of all the *Kurens* as well as his staff (secretary, attendant, judge, etc.). At the same time, all territories administered by the *Sitch* were reassigned by means of the drawing of equal lots. Aside from filling those lots, the Zaporogs went in for hunting, fishing — they had a significant fleet — and, naturally, given the historical circumstances of the day, for warfare. Following Pugachev's revolt, the *Sitch* was destroyed in 1775 by order of Catherine II; Khortitsa became the site of a German settlement and the Zaporogs were either enslaved or forced into exile in the Kuban, the Crimea, Siberia or even Turkey.

Thus after many vicissitudes, the lands and liberties of the Zaporogs were whittled away and confiscated by local feudatories and agents of the Muscovite tsars; however, the memory of that era of autonomy and freedom represented by the *Volnitza* stayed lively among the region's population (the region was called *Zaporozhye*), and it is striking to note that the Makhnovist movement merely and naturally adopted the Zaporogs' traditions of an embryonic libertarian communism.

Consequently, throughout the evolution of tsarism we witness a double phenomenon: the Cossacks, libertarian-minded warrior-peasants have been either courted, dragooned then domesticated or persecuted, decimated and suppressed for that very reason. So it may be argued, paradoxically, that the true Cossacks have gone, while leaving their achievements alive, and that the people called by that name are no longer anything more than a warrior caste in the service of an autocratic authority that is the very antithesis of their initial ideal. In which case the 1917 revolution triggered a formidable reversion.

Notes to Chapter 2: In the Land of the Zaporog Cossacks

1. Statistics supplied by the *Encyclopedic Dictionary* (Russian), St. Petersburg, 1893, Tome XI, pp. 582–586 and by the *Great Encyclopedia* (Russian) St. Petersburg, 1902, Tome IX, pp. 167–172.
2. After 1926 the town was renamed Dniepropetrovsk.
3. The *Volnitza* has always been the *bête noire* of all succeeding authorities in the Russian empire, and its remembrance today is equally out of favor with the historiographers and ideologues of the Lenino-Stalinist regime.

3. A Rebellious Youth

Nestor Makhno was born on October 27, 1888 in Gulyai-Polye, a sizable town crossed by the Gaichur River and belonging to the Alexandrovsk district of the Ekaterinoslav province. Gulyai-Polye means “fair green, walking green” and the name derives from the fact that, from time immemorial fairs frequent and of high repute in the region have been held there. Some Zaporog Cossacks had settled there over two centuries before, which accounts for the town’s being divided up along military lines into rotas or centuries. When Catherine II had ordered the destruction of the Sitch, many Zaporogs, rather than submit, had gone into exile; those who had not had the opportunity or time to do so had been enslaved. The ones from Gulyai-Polye had been awarded to one Shabelsky on the whim of some favorite of the empress.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Gulyai-Polye boasted nearly 10,000 inhabitants and by 1917 the figure was nearly 25,000¹: a cantonal capital and the residence of the cantonal police superintendent, the communal magistrate and the rural agent, it possessed two orthodox churches, a synagogue, three schools, a rural first-aid post and a posts and telegraph office. Two factories, Krieger and Kerner, churned out farm implements and employed cheap local labor. There were also two steam mills, several artisan workshops and some small undertakings. The bulk of the land belonged to the big landlords while the peasants owned only 45 percent of the arable land; the poorest of them — the *batrakis* — worked for the big landlords who also hired seasonal workers who poured in from the provinces of Poltava and Chernigov at harvest times. Seven kilometers away lay the town’s railway station, located on the Sinelnikovo-Chaplino–Berdiansk railway connection. Heavy traffic passed along the road that linked Gulyai-Polye to the station where there were convoys delivering loads of wheat and flour, farm machinery and from where coke and ore for various local firms were brought back.



Nestor was the fifth son of Ivan Makhno and Evdokia Makhno née Perederi. His parents had been serfs of the Seigneur Shabelsky prior to their being given their freedom when Tsar Alexander II abolished serfdom in 1861. Their plot of land being insufficient to feed their family, the father went on working at his former

master's place as a stable boy. When Nestor was born, his father was taken on as a coachman by a wealthy Jewish industrialist, Kerner, who owned a farm-machinery plant, a steam-driven mill, a large store and 500 hectares of land leased out to some German settlers. A short time later, with Nestor scarcely eleven months old, his father died leaving his widow utterly unprovided for and with five young boys to care for.

In these circumstances, Nestor's early childhood was marked by great poverty and by an absence of the games and gaiety that befit such tender years. His mother was reduced to entrusting him to a couple of well-to-do but childless peasants who intended to adopt him. She took him back after several weeks at the insistence of his older brothers because he was unhappy with the couple. At the age of eight, he entered the secular municipal school. To begin with he was a good pupil, then he began to play truant spending his days along with about a hundred urchins of his own age "studying" skating and all sorts of games. These "parallel classes" continued for weeks at a time until one fine day the ice gave way and Nestor was only just saved from drowning in the icy waters. This incident must have been at the root of the weakness in his lungs which subsequently proved fatal to him, for this soaking froze his clothing, and he stayed like that for a time, before seeking the shelter of his uncle's home and getting help.

His mother "tended" him by means of a memorable thrashing. He went back to school where he again became a good pupil until the summer arrived; then he had himself taken on as the handler of a team of oxen on the land of a comfortably off peasant, Janssen, at the daily wage of 25 kopecks. His greatest delight was to race the seven kilometers to his maternal home to hand over his daily pay to his mother. It was only with that thought in mind that he was able to hold out all summer, despite two lashes from a whip doled out for some minor offense by the under-manager, a brute. In all this work brought the nine-year-old Nestor some 20 rubles, and these first earnings were handed over in their entirety to his mother to whom he was at all times to display the greatest attachment.

His brothers also worked as farmhands, and they helped their mother who was in dire need. If one is to credit the memoirs of Anatol Gak, a Gulyai-Polye peasant who subsequently fled to Canada, Makhno's house on the edge of the town's fairground was extremely poor; neither pig nor any of the usual amenities of a Ukrainian *khata* were to be seen in their courtyard or farmyard, he stipulates.



Nestor went back to school that autumn and was revealed as a good pupil in arithmetic and especially in reading, the first inkling of his future gifts as an orator. Unfortunately, that was the sum total of his studies for, at the end of the school year, his family's circumstance became so straitened that he had to carry on working throughout the year, although only ten years old. This sad circumstance aroused in him a "sort of rage, resentment, even hatred for the wealthy property-owner" on whose holding he worked, and above all for his progeny: "For these young idlers

who often passed close by him, all fresh and neat, with full bellies and in cleanest clothes, reeking of perfume while he, filthy and in rags, barefooted and stinking of dung, scattered bedding for the calves.”²

It was at this point that he began to awaken to social injustice although he still thought like a resigned slave, reckoning that “that is how things are”: the landlord and his were the “masters,” whereas he was paid for the unpleasantness of “reeking of dung.”

The years passed. Nestor moved on from calves to horses, accepting his fate willy-nilly until one day he witnessed a scene that was to leave its indelible mark upon him. The landlord’s sons, the manager and his under-manager were wont to give the stable lads a drubbing for the slightest peccadillo. The “dark recesses of his mind” made Nestor accept this craven spectacle and “. . . like a real slave, he strove just like the others about him to avert his eyes and pretend he saw and heard not a thing.” However, his mother had told him how, under serfdom, corporal punishment was quite commonplace and how she herself as a child had on two occasions been birched, merely because, quite within her rights she had refused to perform the *corvée*. She had had to present herself on the steps of the seigneur’s big house to receive 15 strokes of the birch in the presence of the “master.”

His mother had also told him of the epic struggles of their Zaporog Cossack forebears against enemies on every side in order to safeguard their freedom.

Thus, one summer’s day in 1902 the young Nestor, thirteen years old, was present at a run-of-the-mill scene: the landlord’s sons, his manager and his assistant set about insulting then raining blows on the second stable boy in the presence of all the other stable hands . . . “half dead from fear at the wrath of their masters.” Nestor could take no more and off he ran to alert the head stable boy, Batko Ivan, who was busy in a cowshed trimming the horses’ tails. Learning of what was afoot, Batko Ivan, an elemental force, burst, like a man possessed, into the room where the “chastisement” was underway, pitched into the “young nobles” and their acolytes and sent them rolling in the dirt with swathing punches and kicks. The attackers, attacked, fled in disarray, some through the window, some through the nearest doorway. This was the signal for revolt; all of the day laborers and stable boys were outraged and went off in a body to demand an explanation. The old landlord took fright and in conciliatory tone besought them to forgive the “idiocy of his young heirs,” to remain in his service and even undertook to see that nothing of the sort would ever happen again.

Batko Ivan related the episode to young Nestor, treating him to the first words of rebellion he had ever heard in his life: “. . . No one here should countenance the disgrace of being beaten . . . and as for you, little Nestor, if one of your masters should ever strike you, pick up the first pitchfork you lay hands on and let him have it. . . .” This advice, at once poetic and brutal, left a terrible mark upon Nestor’s young soul and awakened him to his dignity. Henceforth he would keep a fork or some other tool within reach, meaning to put it to good use.

One year later, Nestor quit his job as a stable boy and, at the prompting of his older brothers, had himself taken on at a local foundry as an apprentice. There he learned the “art of casting harvester wheels.”

Meanwhile the family’s situation had changed considerably. His three elder brothers, Karp, Savva and Emilian, after marrying set up homes of their own. That left only Nestor and his younger brother Grigori in their mother’s care. After a time, Nestor left the foundry and worked as a sales assistant for a wine merchant. Nauseated by his job, he gave it up after three months. Perhaps it was in the wake of this experience that he was to retain an aversion for wine and alcohol; that aversion was very real, despite all the fairy tales peddled latter about his alleged inebriate tendencies.

Then he tended his mother’s four hectares of land, which he worked with their lone horse. He worked by fits and starts, especially to lend a helping hand to his brothers; for instance, he signed on with a painting and decorating firm, for just long enough to pay for the cart needed to transport his brothers’ wheat.

In 1904, one of them, Savva, was called up and set off for the Russo-Japanese front. Along came the 1905 revolution. He was enthused by events, and it induced him to read some clandestine political literature. At first he fell under the spell of the Social Democrats, won over by their “socialist phraseology and their phony revolutionary ardor.” He distributed their tracts in massive numbers. However, at the beginning of 1906, he made the acquaintance of anarchist peasants from Gulyai-Polye and soon became a sympathizer of their group. This group had been organized by Voldemar (Vladimir) Antoni and Prokop Semenyuta. Antoni, the son of immigrant Czech workers and a lathe operator himself, exercised a decisive influence over Nestor by “... ridding his soul once and for all of the lingering remnants of the slightest spirit of servility and submission to any authority.”

Gulyai-Polye’s peasant libertarian communist group operated in difficult circumstances for the Tsarist repression was at its height; a state of siege had been proclaimed nationwide, the court martial was taking a heavy toll and military expeditions were gunning down “alleged” troublemakers. A detachment of Don Cossacks stationed in Gulyai-Polye to counter any eventuality set about gratuitous bullying of peaceable inhabitants. Anatol Gak describes one scene when he saw a teacher dragged along by two Don Cossacks with sabers at the ready, while a third beat him with rifle butt, shrieking with each blow: “Take that, you wastrel, for your revolution!”³

Despite this oppressive atmosphere, the town’s anarchist group met regularly at least once each week and sometimes more often, with its 10-to-15 members. A melancholy Makhno recalled those meetings: “For me such nights (we most often would gather to meet by night) were filled with light and joy. We peasants, with our meager learning, would assemble in winter at the home of one of us, in summer in the fields, near a pond, on the green grass, or, from time to time, in

the broad daylight like young folks out for a stroll. We would meet to debate the issues that move us.”

From then on, Nestor threw himself wholeheartedly into the struggle for social revolution.

Notes to Chapter 3: A Rebellious Youth

1. According to the 1897 census there were 9,497 inhabitants, 1,173 of them Jews.
2. All quotes in quotation marks incorporated into our narrative have been borrowed from the memoirs of his youth, published by Makhno, partly in Russian, in the magazine *Anarkhicheski Vestnik*, Berlin, 1923–1924, No. 1–3, and in French in *Le Libertaire* in 1926.
3. Anatol Gak, in *Suchasnist*, Ukrainian review, autumn 1972, 9(14), Munich. The author supplies interesting information on Gulyai-Polye life before 1917 and especially on the local anarchist group. In the descriptions of the scene quoted, it is notable that Gak wonders if these were real Don Cossacks or people in disguise (it happened sometimes) so much have Cossacks to Ukrainians (from wherever they may come) always symbolized freedom, and not comprehend how they could possibly have turned into police henchmen of the autocracy.

4. From Militant to Terrorist

Nestor first completed a six-month term in the anarchist study circle, and it was only once he had fully digested the ideals and goals of libertarian communism that he became a full-fledged member of the Gulyai-Polye group. At the time he was working as a foundry worker at the Kerner plant. With a degree of success, the group disseminated libertarian ideas among the nation's peasants, publishing and distributing tracts, but it also took care to reply with direct action to the governmental terror after the fashion of other anarchists from the Russian Empire who had decreed "Black Terror" against tsarism.

In order to equip itself with the wherewithal for its various operations, the group decided to carry out "expropriations"¹ against the local bourgeois and in the surrounding areas. The indictment drawn up by the prosecution of the Odessa field court martial when the Gulyai-Polye libertarian communist group appeared before it enumerates the following:

- On September 5, 1906 in Gulyai-Polye, an attack upon the home of the businessman Pleschiner by three individuals armed with revolvers and with faces blackened.
- On October 10, a fresh attack in Gulyai-Polye upon another businessman, Bruk, by four individuals, faces concealed by paper masks, who, brandishing revolvers and bombs, demanded 500 rubles for the "starving."
- A little later, a third attack upon a wealthy local industrialist, Kerner, by four individuals, with three more acting as lookouts.
- In August 1907 in the nearby village of Gaichur, a fourth attack upon yet another businessman, Gurevitch, by four individuals wearing sunglasses.
- On October 19, 1907, attack upon the mail coach; a gendarme and postman were killed.
- In 1908, three further attacks, again upon businessmen.²

The moneys thus accumulated were used to develop propaganda and for the procurement, through Voldemar Antoni, of weapons and bombs in Vienna. The group also had contacts with the Ekaterinoslav group and certain others in Moscow.



Another aspect of the “Black Terror” consisted of torching the properties and goods of the region’s big landowners by way of replying to the so-called Stolypin reform designed to abolish the communal assembly, the *gromada*, in order to foster the emergence of a new stratum of well-to-do peasants — the *kulaks* — who, it was anticipated, would furnish fresh support for the regime.

All of these actions lit a fire under the region’s cops. The local “Sherlock Holmes” (*dixit* Novopolin), police superintendent Kariachentsev, tipped off by informers and acting on information gleaned from “rough and ready questioning” of suspects, managed to identify certain individuals as responsible for attacks, although for lack of evidence, he could not arrest them on the spot. In September 1907, Nestor was apprehended in very specific circumstances: a Social Revolutionary friend by the name of Makovsky borrowed his revolver, allegedly to take revenge on a gendarme officer who had recently “put him through the mill.” In fact, Makovsky used the gun to settle an affair of the heart with his fiancée; he fired two bullets into her and pumped the remainder into himself! Makhno, who was on hand, did not have the time to prevent this unexpected turn of events and rushed to the aid of the wounded. That solicitude was his undoing, for he was apprehended on the spot by the police. Some days later, Antoni, who was trying to communicate with him through an intermediary among the guard, was likewise arrested.

In vain did they “grill” Makhno and Antoni; nothing doing, they could not get the slightest admission out of them. Kariachentsev told the local post commander on this score.

“I have never before seen men of this mettle. I have plenty of evidence on which to state that they are dangerous anarchists.... But although I have put their flesh through a little suffering, I have extracted nothing from them. Makhno seems like a peasant dolt when one looks at him, but I have very conclusive evidence for claiming that it was he who shot at the gendarmes on August 26, 1907. Well now, I have done all I was able to extract admissions but to no effect. On the contrary, he supplied me with facts — which I have checked out and which I have been forced to acknowledge as correct — demonstrating that he was not even in Gulyai-Polye on that day.... As for the other one, Antoni, when I interrogated him, having him beaten at will, he dared declare to me... ‘You, dead meat, you’ll never get anything out of me!’ And yet I gave him a good taste of the ‘swing’....”

Despite the flimsiness of the charges against them, Antoni was released only after a month and Makhno only after ten months; it was with that lengthy stay that Nestor, at the age of 18, began his lengthy acquaintance with prisons.

Paradoxically it was a Gulyai-Polye industrialist, one Vitchlinsky, who secured his release by posting bail of 2,000 rubles. All of the rest of the group’s militants being outlawed, it was decided that Makhno would adopt a “line of behavior” i.e.,

that he should remain within the law. He then found himself employment with a decorating firm but continued to be an activist by founding an anarchist study group made up of 25 young peasants from Botchani, a village near Gulyai-Polye. At its weekly get-together, he would peruse and discuss with them sundry basic texts of anarchist doctrine.

The militant group uncovered two names who had infiltrated their ranks — Gura and Kushnir — and promptly executed them, then decided to hold a general meeting to wind up the episode, for one of its members, Ivan Levadny, was suspected of being in touch with the police. The suspicions were confirmed when, as the meeting was breaking up, the house in which it was being held was cordoned off by a squadron of Don Cossacks and members of the local Okhrana.³ Levadny suggested that they give themselves up, his treachery being so patent, but they all determined to tough it out and fight. In a daring sortie, abetted by the darkness, they managed to carve a path for themselves by firing their revolvers, cutting down Lepetchenko, the second-in-command of the local police, some Cossacks and detectives.

In the course of the operation, Prokop Semenyuta, who had founded the group along with Antoni, was wounded in one leg; his brother, Alexander, carried him piggy-back, but, seeing their pursuers gain on them, Prokop determined to stay behind to slow them up. Down to his last bullet, he blew his own brains out.

To avenge his brother's death, Alexander Semenyuta, accompanied by Makhno and Filip Onichenko, made up his mind to execute no less a figure than the province's governor, who was due to pay a personal visit to Gulyai-Polye to look into the whole hullabaloo. This sensational scheme was aborted, for young people were banned from getting anywhere near the governor, the latter being desirous of addressing only heads of households and of sharing with them his outrage at the presence of terrorists in the town.

Undeterred, Makhno proposed to dynamite the local Okhrana Station, using two devices weighing nine and fourteen pounds respectively and originally meant for the governor. The conspirators were ready to give their own lives. An incident prevented them from carrying out their plan; they bumped into a patrol of Cossacks who made to search them. Again they managed to shoot their way out. However, Onichenko was arrested at his home, and Makhno himself was picked up a little later. That arrest probably saved his life, for he had firmly intended to go back a few hours later to give the assassination plan a second try.

It transpired that every last member of the group had been given away, first by the careless gossip of Nazar Zuichenko, a close friend of Nestor's, with a "nark," one Jacques Brin, jailed along with him in Ekaterinoslav and secondly by the "statements" of Levadny and Althausen. Interrogated briskly by Kariachentsev, Zuichenko corroborated his admissions with details galore and claimed that what he and the group had done had been prompted purely by political objectives set by the ideas of the "people's freedom."⁴ In all, 16 members of the group were rounded

up. Only Antoni and Alexander Semenyuta escaped the dragnet and fled first to France and on to Belgium.



According to Levadny, Makhno was deemed “one of the most dangerous terrorist members of the group, after the brothers Prokop and Alexander Semenyuta.” A start was made by accusing him of several expropriations and killings of gendarmes; however, for want of evidence and confessions, only some of these charges could be proceeded with.

All of the accused were removed to a prison in Alexandrovsk. Preparation of the case lasted over a year. Meanwhile, Alexander Semenyuta, who kept in touch with his people, sent a letter of personal greetings to Kariachentsev.

“To Gulyai-Polye, to Kariachentsev, poxy devil: Mr. Superintendent, I have heard it said that you have been searching for me high and low and dearly wish to meet with me. If this be the case, I then beseech you to come to Belgium. Here, freedom of speech is unrestricted, and we will be able to chat at leisure. Signed: Alexander Semenyuta, Gulyai-Polye anarchist.”⁵

In so doing, Semenyuta was laying a false trail, for he returned to the Ukraine intent upon arranging the escape of Makhno and his comrades. Above all, he made up his mind to settle accounts with Kariachentsev, the “Sherlock Holmes” who had been behind the rounding-up of the whole group. The policeman was very fond of the theater, and, all unsuspecting in the belief that Semenyuta was a thousand leagues away, he blithely went along to see a play very highly rated in the Ukraine one autumn evening in 1909, along with his mistress. Semenyuta watched for him, took a seat three rows behind him, his pockets heavy with two loaded revolvers, but he hesitated to fire, fearing that innocent spectators might be hit. He positioned himself then at the theater exit, behind a tree, surprised Kariachentsev and pumped three bullets into him. Alexander Semenyuta had executed yet another gendarmerie officer, one who had especially distinguished himself in the repression. Then he turned his attention to planning Makhno’s escape.

It was prepared for January 5, 1910 and the removal of the prisoners from Alexandrovsk to Ekaterinoslav. Along with anarchists from the region still at large, Semenyuta positioned himself in Alexandrovsk railway station, disguised as a peasant, dressed in an enormous sheepskin cloak and wearing a papakha; some comrades waited nearby and some sleighs were ready for the off. Everything seemed to be proceeding smoothly when it was learned that the train had been caught in a blizzard and was running late. Semenyuta was thus obliged to step into the waiting room and there, in spite of his disguise, Althausen, the member of the group who had turned informer, recognized him and in the belief that he himself was the target, alerted the guards. This put paid to the planned escape but the intrepid Semenyuta again managed to extricate himself at gun point.

When the authorities learned of his return to the Ukraine, they had no doubt but that he was behind several recent, sensational outrages, and they posted a substantial reward for his capture, dead or alive, as he had been decreed public enemy number one. Over several months, he thwarted all plans to search him out but nonetheless met a tragic end, one might say on account of nostalgia for the land of his birth. Indeed, in the company of a young libertarian by the name of Martha Pivel, he arrived back in Gulyai-Polye for May 1, 1910. One of Makhno's brothers offered to put him up while he himself went off to sleep at his mother's house.

Semenyuta's presence was immediately reported to the police — as was to come to light following the seizure of police archives in 1917 — by one Piotr Sharovsky who was eager for the reward money. The police surrounded him, laid siege to the house and stormed it. They found Semenyuta dead, he having kept his last bullet for himself; his female companion was gravely wounded.

That such a daring militant so fanatically devoted to the cause of Anarchy could have exercised such influence over the teen-aged Makhno (already quite resolute himself), who was to remember him with such emotion all his life, can readily be understood.⁶

The direct actions carried out by the Gulyai-Polye anarchist group were not at all out of the ordinary for the years 1906–1909, for the Tsarist repression was in full swing and the firing squads and hangmen were busy. The timid reforms granted at the start by Nicholas II, who was very conscious of his station, were quickly annulled and the mailed fist took over. Also, every revolutionary in the Russian Empire was resorting to the same sort of activities. At the time, a number of militants like Makhno or Semenyuta met their deaths either in combat or on the scaffold or were deported to Siberia or consigned to penal servitude. The few who survived this heroic struggle were not to forget the sacrifice of their comrades and were to pledge themselves to avenge them promptly in 1917 against the police and other goons of the autocracy.

As a rule, the membership of the Gulyai-Polye libertarian communist group was quite young, the older members being 25 years of age while Makhno was the youngest. The indictment drawn up against the group charged the sixteen proceeded against, first of all, with "illegal subversive association" and then with sundry criminal activities — expropriations and armed struggle against the authorities. Fourteen individuals were implicated: Nestor Makhno, the brothers Anton and Egor Bondarenko, Klim Kirichenko, Filip Cherniavsky, the brothers Filip and Piotr Onichenko, Ivan Shevchenko (tried and hanged before the main case was heard), Martynova and Zablodsky (Ukrainians), plus Efim Orlov (a Russian) — all of them peasants — Naum Althausen, Leiba Gorelik (Jews) and Kasimir Lisovsky (a Pole) — town dwellers.

Let us note in passing the differing national origins of the group's membership (as noted for each person named); it represented rather well the diversity of

the local population and even endowed the group's activities with a quite internationalist cachet.

Obviously, the group's membership had been even larger; the others were either on the run or had not been charged in that there was no evidence against them.

The accused whose names did not feature on the charge sheet were Levadny (Ukrainian), who officially died of typhus in the prison infirmary but who, according to Makhno, was strangled for his treachery by an anarchist hospitalized with him there, and another militant of the group, who had been very close to Makhno, one Kshiva (a Jew) who was accused of having murdered the agent provocateur Kushnir and was hanged on June 17, 1909.

Nazar Zuichenko (Ukrainian) whose "loose talk" had led to the discovery of the group, contracted an acute form of typhus and could not stand trial alongside the others (this was undoubtedly a sort of ruse by the authorities who were unwilling to compromise their informant).

Voldemar Antoni, having fled to Belgium, emigrated shortly after that to South America where he spent many a long year working hard before turning into a "soviet patriot," returning with his family to the Soviet Union (to Kazakhstan, specifically) in the 1960s. In 1967 he even made a trip back to Gulyai-Polye for the 50th anniversary celebrations of October 1917, but his anarchist beliefs had been lost. The other members of the group who made good their escape continued to carry out propaganda and organizing activities in the Gulyai-Polye region, thereby clinging to the progress made by the activities of their vanished or imprisoned comrades. These activities were thus not to be in vain and were to pave the way for the burgeoning of libertarianism come 1917.

Notes to Chapter 4: From Militant to Terrorist

1. At this time "exies" were the common currency of all revolutionary groups, whether Social Revolutionary (SR), Maximalists (a breakaway from the SRs, who espoused a "maximal" program), Bolsheviks, Polish nationalist socialists and sundry other organizations. They consisted of "expropriating the expropriators" (robbing the robbers); nowadays we would call them hold-ups.
2. Quoted in G. Novopolin's excellent study, "Makhno and the Gulyai-Polye anarchist group" in the magazine *Katorga i ssylka* (Imprisonment and Exile), Moscow, 1927, pp. 70–77.
3. The Tsarist political police, highly effective and the model for the Cheka.
4. It seems that Makhno was not aware of Zuichenko's treachery, for in 1917 he was to come across him without calling him to account but speaks of him in a warm friendly way in his memoirs.
5. G. Novopolin, op. cit.
6. At the time of publication of the first volume of his *Memoirs*, Makhno regretted not being able to include a photograph of the Gulyai-Polye anarchist group. We are pleased to make good the deficiency by reproducing the photograph taken of the group in 1907.

5. Penal Servitude

The trial of the Gulyai-Polye anarchist group took place in March 1910 in Ekaterinoslav. The court was ringed by a mass of gendarmes and troops, such was the fear, despite such prolific precautions, of an armed move by Alexander Semenyuta (then still alive) and his comrades, aimed at freeing Makhno and his jailed confederates. The guards were under orders to kill the accused on the spot at the slightest sign of external attack.

A local bigwig who arrived to visit the accused in prison had Makhno presented to him, looked him over and then declared to the chief warder: "To look at him, this Makhno seems harmless enough.... Yet they say he is very dangerous."

After five days' proceedings, the verdict was delivered on March 26, 1910: Martynova, Lisovsky and Zablodsky were sentenced to six years penal servitude; Kirichenko, Egor Bondarenko, Orlov, Althausen and Makhno were first sentenced to fifteen years hard labor for "criminal association" and then to death by hanging for terrorist offenses and "expropriations."

Counsel suggested to the condemned that they seek leave to appeal; aside from Althausen, they scornfully refused. Makhno announced to his defense lawyer: "We have no intention of asking anything of this good-for-nothing tsar.... these rascals have sentenced us to death, so let them hang us!"

Nestor and his companions were locked up in a special condemned cell, the walls of which were covered by inscriptions from all who had preceded them into that antechamber of death. This dramatic circumstance drew a few pathetic lines from Makhno in his memoirs:

"Once inside these cells, one half feels that one has climbed down into the grave. One has the feeling that only one's straining fingertips are clinging to the surface of the earth ... One then thinks of all who, being yet at large, cling to their belief and their hopes, intent upon doing something good and useful in the struggle for a better life.

Having sacrificed oneself for this future, one feels flooded by a quite profound and very heartfelt love for one's comrades in the struggle. They seem so near, so dear! One wholeheartedly hopes that they may

hold on to their faith and their hopes to the very end and take their love of the oppressed and their hatred of their oppressors further.”

The twelve condemned men in the cell had as their sole and exclusive preoccupation the obsessive thought of their imminent execution and tried to prepare for it with courage.

Egor Bondarenko, one of his closest comrades, predicted a most active revolutionary future for Makhno:

“Listen, Nestor! There’s a chance that your sentence may be commuted to hard labor. Then the revolution will come along and set you free. It is my profound conviction that, once freed, you will hoist again the black flag of Anarchy that our enemies have snatched from us.... You will wrest it from them and raise it proudly on high.... I have that premonition, for I have seen you in action, Nestor, and you do not tremble before torturers.”

Bondarenko wanted to get him to promise to shoulder that responsibility, but Nestor, supported by two other comrades, Orlov and Kirichenko, protested that he was too much of a weakling physically as well as having intellectual shortcomings. To which Bondarenko replied that to hold on to one’s faith and inner strength, what was needed was not great physical might or exceptional intellectual gifts but evidence of great determination and profound commitment to the cause.

One night they came to collect Kirichenko and Bondarenko for hanging; the former took his own life with strychnine while the second, before going to meet the hangman, and realizing that Makhno would indeed escape the gallows, said these short farewells. “... Nestor, my brother, you are to live ... I shall surely die.... I know that you will regain your freedom.” They embraced one another as brothers and Egor Bondarenko strode firmly toward his executioners; as if there was any need of that, his pre-death prediction invested Makhno even more with the will and determination he needed to keep his promise.

After a 52-day numbing delay, Makhno was indeed informed that his sentence and that of his comrade Orlov were to be commuted to hard labor for life,¹ in view of their youth at the time of the offenses in question and, in Makhno’s case, probably also on account of his steadfast behavior throughout the preliminary investigation, during which he had systematically denied all the accusations leveled against him.



After this emotional strain, Makhno greatly weakened physically, fell ill and contracted typhoid fever. He spent two months in the hospital, was several days in a coma, written off by the doctors and moved to a terminal ward. Even so he managed to come through this bad patch and summoned up enough strength to

object to the treatment meted out by the doctors. Let us make it clear that at this time inside prison and during penal servitude every convict deemed dangerous was shackled hand and foot and, in principle, around the clock, but certain inmates adept in the art of forcing locks abetted their fellow-prisoners to get relief at times. He was to wear his chains right through his prison term, or for upwards of eight years, so that it was some time after his release before he was able to walk normally without losing his balance!

He was then transferred to the prison in Lugansk where he was held for almost a year in extremely harsh conditions; some inmates could not bear them and took their own lives while others managed to keep going only on the hope of escape or of an imminent revolution that would set them free. He received visits from his mother and brother Grigori who bore news from home and briefed him on the death of Alexander Semenyuta.

After a further five-and-a-half month stay in Ekaterinoslav prison, he was dispatched on August 2, 1911 to Moscow's central prison, the ill-famed Butyrki. His dossier, which followed, drew a remark full of promise from the officer in charge of the convict section. "Here your dreams of escape are ended!", a reference to all the escape bids he had planned with his fellow inmates in earlier prisons, only to see them all frustrated. To drive home this threat, they replaced his handcuffs with riveted irons then placed him in quarantine for eight days. Then he got to familiarize himself with his new abode.

Most political prisoners, of any and every persuasion and assessed as being among the most dangerous or significant, were housed in this penitentiary; all in all, nearly 3,000 inmates were watched over by several hundred jailers or "two-legged curs" as Makhno described them. On the other hand, and this was a real windfall for him, there was an exceptional collective library amassed by the convicts. Thanks to that, he was going to be able to round out his knowledge of history and literature; he devoured it all with gluttonous appetite; Klyuchevsky's Russian history course, the works of Bielinski, Lermontov and even Leon Shestov. He also familiarized himself with the basic texts and programs of the various revolutionary groups — the Social Revolutionaries, Social Democrats, and their sundry tendencies, etc. He also read anarchist literature and was thunderstruck by Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid*, which never left his side thereafter.

His bridling at the provocations of the turnkeys earned him lengthy stays in the solitary confinement cell, and he fell seriously ill, laid low by a bad pneumonia. He was hospitalized, but, after three months, a tubercular lung was the diagnosis. He spent eight months in the hospital, and — thanks to the well-organized assistance to political prisoners — he made a good recovery; however, during his detention, he was to spend two or three months a year thereafter in the hospital ward.

It was there in Butyrki that he came upon another famous anarchist activist, Piotr Arshinov (Marin) with whom he was going to be bound with the ties of a solid friendship for nearly twenty years. Also he noticed the difference in treatment doled

out by the administration in its dealings with intellectual and political "bigwigs" on the one hand and to mere workers and peasants on the other and likewise the attitude of the former lot of inmates towards the latter. Whereas the latter were frequently beaten, the intellectuals had no hesitation in shaking the hands of those responsible for such maltreatment; likewise, they had no problem in securing the privilege of not being obliged to carry their irons with them all the time. They worked in the workshops that were interesting and above all monitored the inmates' internal administration very closely, which meant that all help from the outside passed through their hands and that they shared out this booty as they saw fit. In this way Makhno grasped once-and-for-all that "... such is the psychology of these intellectuals who seek from the socialist idea and from their militancy only the means of ensconcing themselves as masters and governors. These gentlemen wind up unable to understand anymore that the offering of handshakes and the making of gifts in kind or in cash to torturers who, pocketing these gifts, go off to beat up the co-religionists of the very people who have just greeted them so amicably is intolerable." So much so that from then on Makhno lost all respect for "eminent political figures" of every persuasion and thereafter he called their role into question.



The years passed, swallowed up by escape schemes that came to naught and by long, heated political discussions and wide-ranging reading. Cut off from the world, Nestor was carried away with and devised fanciful schemes for combating the State; thus it was that he came to draft his first piece of writing in 1912, a violent, inflammatory revolutionary poem calling upon the exploited to revolt against their exploiters, against the authorities, against all oppressors!

"Summons.

Let us rise in revolt, brethren, and with us the people
Beneath the black flag of Anarchy will revolt.
We will surge boldly forward, under the fire
of enemy bullets in the battle
for faith in libertarian communism,
Our just regime.
We shall cast down all thrones and
bring low the power of Capital.
We will seize the gold and purple scepter
And pay no more honor to anything.
Through savage struggle
We shall rid ourselves of the State and its laws.
We have suffered long under the yoke
Of chains, prisons and teeming gangs of executioners.
The time has come to rise in rebellion and close ranks.
Forward beneath the black flag of Anarchy, on to the great struggle!

Enough of serving tyrants as their tools,
That is the source of all their might.
Insurrection, brethren, laboring people!
We will sweep away all carrion.
That's the way we shall reply to the lies of tyrants,
We free workers, armed with our determination.
Long live freedom, brethren. Long live the free commune.
Death to all tyrants and their jailers!
Let us rise, brethren, on the agreed signal,
Beneath the black flag of Anarchy, against every one of them,
the tyrants.
Let us destroy all authorities and their cowardly restraints,
that push us into bloody battle!"²

This vibrant summons to insurrection is a good expression of Makhno's intractable character at the age of 23 years and which he was subsequently not to renege upon. Imprisonment, torture, penal servitude; nothing succeeded in breaking the young rebel's white-hot determination. He was bolstered in his beliefs by remembrance of the stories with which his mother had fed his childhood, tales of the life of free communities of Zaporog Cossacks in bygone times. He did not have any inkling that a "...day will come soon when he will feel himself their direct descendent and draw his inspiration from them in order to contribute to the free re-birth of his country!"

Although he remained hostile to any national separatism, he did take an interest in the ideas of his Ukrainian compatriots. The 1914 war split the inmates into two camps: patriots versus internationalists. Makhno naturally gravitated to the latter despite Kropotkin's having come out in favor of the Entente western powers. Increasingly he was alive to the noxiousness of every State system and the political and chauvinistic aberrations that this involved.

The revolution of March 1917, so long awaited, erupted at last and opened the gates of the prisons, though not readily, for certain of the people newly in charge wanted to conduct a sort of triage and to make a specious distinction between "common" and "political" prisoners. Makhno, delivered of his irons, after eight years of getting used to them, wobbled on his legs sometimes, having lost his sense of balance. He registered at Moscow city hall then, equipped with identity papers in order, was put up in a former hospital. He was advised to take himself off to the Crimea to have his lungs, in a terrible state, looked after. However, he had an "...intuition that only the tempest will be enough to cure him" and his sole concern was to hurl himself wholly into the whirlwind of revolution. He linked up with the anarchist militants of Moscow and participated with them in the Pan-Russian workers' demonstration.

At first he planned to settle permanently in Moscow, and it was only on the prompting of his mother and comrades from the Gulyai-Polye libertarian communist group who bombarded him with telegrams that he decided to go home. His reluctance to return to the place of his birth, paradoxical though it may appear, can be explained by the fact that decisive events were expected in Moscow. Be that as it may, he took the train and, after two days journey, was again in the bosom of his family.

Notes to Chapter 5: Penal Servitude

1. Nestor's mother had interceded with the governor of the province, but it is doubtful whether her intervention could have had any influence in the clemency shown her son; it was indubitably his tender years that suggested the possibility of redemption; moreover, his case was not unique, for that very reason, in those post-repression times.
2. The "Summons" appeared in the Russian libertarian magazine *Probuzhdeniye*, published in Detroit, Michigan, USA, No. 50-51, in September–October 1934.

6. Social Revolution in Gulyai-Polye

After nine years' absence, Makhno was understandably moved when he came to breathe again the air of home. Now aged twenty-seven-and-a-half years, the best years of his youth had been spent in the jails and dungeon recesses of a despised Tsarism. He had vengeance to take against life, but he was a militant of repute and only action could slake his thirst for social achievement.

He went first to the home of his seventy-year-old mother who struck him as greatly aged and stooped by the years. He saw again his older brothers Savva and Emilian; his other brothers who had set up homes of their own while he was away were still serving at the front.

He came upon the surviving members of the Gulyai-Polye libertarian communist group, discovered what had become of this one and that, and made the acquaintances of the new young members of the group whose main activity consisted of surreptitiously distributing leaflets. Many peasants, male and female, showed up to greet this "man back from the dead," as they called him, and this gave him a chance to gauge how receptive they were to libertarian ideas. This sampling of opinions set him at his ease, and he cobbled together a meeting with his comrades from the group. To them he spelled out his analysis of the situation; without waiting for the libertarian movement nationwide to recover its strength and start to organize itself, anarchists ought to be in the vanguard of mass revolutionary action. His activism clashed with the opposition from certain traditional anarchist militants who were calling for a propaganda drive to target the workers and designed solely to familiarize them with libertarian ideas. He and his friends found themselves outnumbered in the group. Not that that mattered for on no account could he make do with such a passive approach and the urge to act, suppressed over so many years, was seething inside him. From the moment he arrived back, he took the initiative by suggesting that local peasants appoint delegates and establish a Gulyai-Polye Peasants' Union. Some days later, on March 29, 1917, they did precisely that: the union represented most of the commune's peasants and in the ensuing days was to embrace the peasants from the district and then of the whole region. Hot on the heels of this, the metalworkers and woodworkers organized committees of their own; a contingency fund was also set up. Infected

by Makhno's radical enthusiastic speechifying, they all elected him as their chairman, ignoring his wishes!

Although this amounted to a relative infringement of the anarchist teaching that forbade acceptance of any formal authority, Makhno accepted all the posts that they sought to confer upon him and was everywhere at once, in the committees and at the anarchist group; he also toured the surrounding militants, he even undertook to ransack the archives of the local police; thus it was that he discovered that an erstwhile group member, Piotr Sharovsky, had denounced Alexander Semenyuta for the 2,000 ruble reward posted for his capture; not that his greed had been fully satisfied, for, according to the very same archives, only 500 rubles had been paid out to him! Nestor in this way came to realize just why this old friend had been nowhere to be found since his return.¹

Whenever he was further elected as chairman of the communal committee, Makhno refused the appointment, for, on the one hand, he still did not know how anarchists stood nationally with regard to such elections, and anyway, if he had accepted the chairmanships of other committees, it had only been in order to reduce the authority of those committees and forestall the election of party political representatives in his place. If the latter were to succeed in gaining the upper hand over the wishes of the workers, he reckoned that they "...would inevitably kill any creative initiative in the revolutionary movement."² So if he did take up these various responsibilities, it was temporarily only, in order to be better informed about the actions of the formal authorities and to get the workers used to doing without "tutors" and to learn to shift for themselves.

He was also dabbling here and there and indeed, once the operation of these committees had been well "run-in," he handed them over to a thoroughly reliable comrade, while keeping "one eye on business."

His tireless activity led to his being delegated to the Alexandrovsk regional peasant congress. There he pushed through a vote to have the estates of the big landowners handed back to the peasant communes, without payment of compensation, to the great displeasure of the Social Democrats and Cadets³ who advocated a buy-back policy.

His calls for collectivization of the land, factories and workshops had a tremendous resonance throughout the region, and many a person traveled for a great distance to consult him and take a lead from him. So much so that even the anarchists from the big cities of Alexandrovsk and Ekaterinoslav, learning of his successes, called upon him to come and take up a place in their organization or lend them a hand in their undertakings.

But Gulyai-Polye was his priority, and there, constantly on call, he never shirked. We might cite the case of the strike by the commune's workers, of whom he had been elected trade union chairman. Begged by the workers to assume leadership of the strike, he agreed, for one thing because it was incumbent upon him by virtue of his office, and for another, because he hoped to win the most pugnacious of the workers over to the libertarian communist group.

Before launching their strike, the workers, gathered together in a general assembly, called upon him to draft and present their demands to the bosses. After lengthy common discussion, he summoned the bosses and demanded of them an 80-to-100 percent wage increase under threat of an immediate and complete stoppage. The furious employers refused; he gave them one day to mull it over; the following day they showed up with proposals for a 35-to-40 percent raise. He “deemed that offer an outright insult” and urged them to take another day to think it over. Meanwhile, he arranged with the factory committees and workshop representatives to have the strike declared simultaneously throughout, should the bosses again refuse to meet their conditions. He even proposed to the workers that they proceed immediately with seizure of all capital assets whether on company premises or in the Gulyai-Polye bank, with an eye to utterly disarming the local bourgeoisie and to forestall possible steps by the authorities against strikers, pending their taking effective control of the firms upon themselves. The workers decided to leave this latter move until a later date, for they reckoned that they were ill-prepared for it, and they preferred to have the expropriations of the firms contemporaneous with the wresting of the estates from the big landowners.

The next day, the employers came back and, after two hours of quibbling, came up with an increased offer but one that was still less than had been asked for, hoping to hold out for a compromise. Whereupon Makhno told them that the negotiations were over and that he was winding up the talks. At this point, Kerner, the richest of the businessmen and one-time employer of Nestor as well as of his father Ivan, — an old fox sensing that things were taking a turn for the worse — hurriedly told him: “Nestor Ivanovitch, you were too hasty in winding up the meeting. I reckon that the workers’ demands are justified. They are entitled to have us meet them, and I for my part am going to sign right away.”

Willy-nilly the other bosses followed the example of their most prominent colleague and the protocol of agreement was signed. “Henceforth, the workers of Gulyai-Polye and surrounding area take all firms under their control, examine the economic and administrative implications of the affair and make ready to take over effective management.”

Incidentally, Makhno and his comrades disarmed the local militia and rescinded their powers of arrest and search and reduced them to the role of town criers. Then they assembled the pomieschikis, confiscated title deeds and on that basis, conducted a precise inventory of all these land holdings. It was at this point that the region’s peasants refused to pay the usual farm rents to these landlords, hoping to recover the land from them once the harvest was in, without “bandying words either with them or with the authorities which looked after them, and then to share the land out among all, peasant or worker, desirous of working it.”



In view of all these moves and of the positive results that flowed from them, Makhno was startled by the smallness of the anarchist movement in the Ukraine

and in Russia, whose militants were quite numerous at several tens of thousands but ultimately rather passive compared with the left-wing political parties when not swept along in their wake. Indeed, the majority of anarchists were content to peddle libertarian ideas and notions among the working population and simultaneously to organize communities and clubs. Makhno found all this very regrettable and he deplored their failure to organize themselves into a powerful all-Russian movement capable of espousing a shared tactic and strategy so as to play an active part in the movement of the revolutionary masses, thereby shaping events and linking up life and activity in towns with those in the countryside. Only thus, he reckoned, would it be possible to keep the social movement on course for libertarian communism.

All his life, Makhno was to regret the chronic disorganization of anarchists and its baneful impact, for all their numbers and good qualities, their inability to work to make hard and fast reality of their schemes of emancipation. He was even to attribute the failure of the Russian revolution and of the libertarian movement to this grave shortcoming.



For his part, Makhno feared nothing in that year of 1917 and carried away by the sort of faith that moves mountains he contributed to the most radical, most daring ventures. On August 29, 1917, General Kornilov's thrust towards Petrograd, intent upon overthrowing the provisional government of the socialist Kerensky and establishing a strong authority, accelerated events. A committee for defense of the revolution was hastily set up in Gulyai-Polye; chairmanship of it was entrusted to Makhno. As he was simultaneously chairman of the Peasants' Union which had now become a "soviet," he had to divide his time between the two tasks. To counter the attempted counter-revolution, he suggested "...disarming the entire local bourgeoisie and abolishing its rights over the people's assets: estates, factories, workshops, printing works, theaters, cinemas, and other public enterprises," which would henceforth be placed under the collective control of the workers. The defense committee accepted his proposal; however, as Kerensky had managed to cling to power, the balance of forces did not make it possible to implement every decision made. For the time being, the peasants made do with withholding rents from the landlords and with assuming control of the land, livestock and machinery. Only several huge estates were collectivized; some farming communes, made up of landless families and small like-minded groups settled on them. Each commune numbered about 200 individuals. There was a huge number of communes dotted around the whole region. Let us look more closely at the ones that Makhno personally organized in the former German settlements of Neifeld and Klassen.

These libertarian communes were founded upon the principle of equality and fellowship among all their members, male and female. Cooking and dining facilities were shared although any individual could see to his own meals provided proper notice was given. Everyone rose early and set to work right after breakfast. In the event of absenteeism, the commune member would let his neighbor know

so that a replacement could be found. The work program was arranged by common consent at general assemblies. Farming was not the sole activity; there was also craft production and even a machine shop.⁴

As a member of one of these communes, Makhno helped out with the work on two days a week; come the planting in the spring, he helped with the harrowing and sowing; the rest of the time, he busied himself about the farm or even lent a helping hand to the mechanic at the electricity station. At this point he was living with a companion, Nastia.

All of the participants looked upon this free communal lifestyle as the "highest form of social justice." Certain landowners came around to that way of thinking and set about working the land for themselves. Indeed, it was left up to the former landowners to choose whether to take an equal share in the commune's lifestyle and work.

From Victor Kravchenko, the future sensational defector, we have a description of yet another libertarian commune set up in the same area, near Korbino on the Dniepr.⁵ Kravchenko's father was one of the promoters of this commune which was named "Nabat" (The Tocsin). It was comprised of about 100 worker families from Ekaterinoslav who had settled on the central portion of an old estate, comprising 200 hectares of wheat land and some orchards, as well as the seigneurial home and its outbuildings. Victor Kravchenko's father had refused to join the Communist Party for he "... had no taste for dictatorship and terror, he bluntly confessed, even if these were wrapped in the folds of a red flag" and so he wanted "...to remain free and to struggle on alone for a better world."⁶ The settlement proceeded with the agreement of the local peasants who had divided up the remainder of the estate:

"The local Soviet, endorsing the initiative, had divided up the estates; it had also provided the provisions and livestock needed to complement what was left of the assets of the former owners.

In the towns, industry had ground to a virtual standstill due to lack of raw materials and food rationing was so strict that people were all but dead of hunger. So the flight to the land, which held the promise of well-being for everybody, had been well-received. The wish to appease certain intellectual urges had also prompted many to throw in their lot with us. Many men, in fact, burned with the desire to put into effect, within the narrow parameters of a cooperative farm, some of the theories that had been the stuff of their dreams over years of revolutionary fervor. The Tocsin, they told themselves, would ring out as a constant reminder of the ideal of brotherhood that seemed to have been forgotten completely in the tumult of the fratricidal war in which the communists, with their Cheka, were carrying out mass arrests and wrongly shooting folk on the most absurd pretexts.

[...] To the farm workers the urban workers brought the energy of despair. Of course, above all else, they wanted to be able to feed their

loved ones, but they also sought to justify the sacrifices they had made in the past for their Cause. The local peasants made fun of these city workers-turned-farmers: We shall see, they used to say with a wink of the eye, how these 'communists' shall work our land!

At bottom such teasing was without malice; it was, rather, symptomatic of friendly interest. Many peasants hastened to advise us and to help us every occasion that they had the chance. Far from resenting our experiment, they looked upon it like good neighbors, with sympathetic interest. More than once, when we were overloaded with work, they supplied us with precious assistance, and it was they who made a success of our first year.”⁷

Later this commune was to fold, a victim of events. The idyllic dream of “cooperative enterprise” was to dissolve in discord and bitterness, or even in “dismal despair,” with commune workers quitting one after another.

The work of the Gulyai-Polye soviet’s procurement section was remarkable also. It established contacts with the textile factories in Moscow and elsewhere, with an eye to arranging direct barter with them. Despite hindrance from the “new powers that be” at the center – Bolsheviks and Left SRs⁸ in coalition, die-hard statists to a man — who could not tolerate barter between the towns and the countryside unless channeled through State agencies, two trade-offs were arranged; several wagon loads of wheat and flour, against wagon loads of cloth ordered by the soviet’s procurement section. It was not a question of simple barter of goods of equivalent value, i.e., of circuitous commercial dealings, no; This was an exchange of goods in quantities that varied and determined only by the stated needs of both parties.



It is also interesting to learn how dealings between the commune’s different committees and the delegates whom they appointed were handled. These delegates, did they not become bureaucrats jealous of their prerogatives, uncontrollable and thus unaccountable, as has often been the case in history? The “Leon Schneider” case is a perfect illustration of the control that the committees sought to exercise over their elected or appointed officers. Schneider was a militant of a local anarchist group, delegated by the metalworkers’ and woodworkers’ committee as their representative to the Ekaterinoslav departmental soviet of peasants, workers and soldier deputies. His task was to oversee the supply of iron, cast iron, coal and other vital raw materials to the factories and mills of Gulyai-Polye. Schneider, contaminated by the “bureaucratic” atmosphere, neglected his duties and when called to account over the tardiness or absence of supplies, his answer was that he had no time to bother with that any more, that the departmental soviet had assigned him another duty, and he invited the Gulyai-Polye committee to appoint someone else in his place. He then received a telegram hinting that he should return to Gulyai-Polye forthwith to render an account of his stewardship; otherwise, two comrades would be dispatched to bring him back.

Suddenly more solicitous of his rank and file, he went back, delivered his report and was sent back to his workbench in the Kerner plant. Mortified he was to seize the earliest opportunity to avenge himself, as we shall see.

As for Makhno's role, at this time it is hard to get the precise measure of it; for all his offices and intense activities, he was regarded only as a sort of number one advisor, which is to say his advice and opinion were forever being sought but were not automatically adopted, far from it, either in the anarchist group — where he was often challenged, especially by the younger members — or in the soviet or indeed on the committee for defense of the revolution. In short, his responsibilities were enormous but his power small. In that he was indeed the consistent libertarian militant.



However, dark clouds were gathering in the blue skies of revolution; first of all, there was the Bolshevik coup d'état in October, with which the Left SRs threw in their lot, the aim being to monopolize power, supposedly on the soviet's behalf; then along came the anti-Bolshevik rebellion by Kaledin, the ataman of the Don Cossacks, and that of the Ukrainian nationalists who aimed to drive out the *Katsapy* (Russians) and above all challenge all of the social changes made by the revolutionary peasants.

Faced with this situation, the Gulyai-Polye soviet decided to come to the aid of Alexandrovsk which was threatened by the troops of the Central *Rada* (Council), the government set up by the Ukrainian nationalists. That decision faced the local anarchists with a problem, for it had them support governmental forces here which, even if they were of the "left," were nonetheless potential enemies of the masses' autonomy. Makhno reckoned at the time that "...as anarchists we must, paradox or no paradox, make up our minds to form a united front with the governmental forces. Keeping faith with anarchist principles, we will find a way to rise above all these contradictions and, once the dark forces of reaction have been smashed, we will broaden and deepen the course of the revolution for the greater good of an enslaved humanity."

On January 4, 1918, a detachment of some 800-to-900 men was formed, some 300 of whom were members of the Gulyai-Polye anarchist group. Nestor's older brother, Savva Makhno, assumed command and off they went by train to Alexandrovsk to join up with Red Guards commanded by Bogdanov. Then Nestor was appointed a member of the city's revolutionary committee. He was placed in charge of the commission of inquiry into imprisoned officers accused of conspiring against the revolution: generals, colonels, militia commanders.... He was startled to discover among them the former prosecutor who had handled his case in 1909 and who had had him placed in the "hole" for complaining about his conditions of imprisonment. Makhno in turn had him placed in the very cell that he had occupied in those days, prescribing identical conditions for this ex-prosecutor. The wheel had turned; an irony of history that should still give all who bear the responsibility for repression good pause for thought.



Nestor availed of his position to secure the release of workers and peasants still imprisoned under Kerensky and whom the Bolsheviks had refused to set free for fear that they might revolt against them too!

It was at this point that Nestor underwent his baptism of fire by confronting several Cossack regiments from the Don who were returning from the front to link up with Kaledin. In view of the lively resistance that they encountered, they surrendered; their weapons were taken from them and then they were sent home. That operation over, the Gulyai-Polye detachment made for home, though not without ferrying away some additional weaponry.

Makhno ran up against the thorny problem of finding funds for the activities of the soviet and commune. To be sure, he could have obtained any sum from the Alexandrovsk revolutionary committee, but in that case he would have acknowledged its authority and thus that of the Lenin government; Makhno would have none of that at any price. So he suggested to the soviet that it commandeer 250,000 rubles from the local bank. His suggestion was unanimously accepted. The money was seized from the bank in the name of the revolution to meet the needs of the soviet; delivered within a few days, it was shared, at Makhno's instigation, between a home for war orphans set up in the residence of the former superintendent of police, and the soviet's procurement branch; the remainder was to meet the needs of the revolutionary committee.

So it was that in the space of a year the Gulyai-Polye libertarian communist group, at the instigation of the compulsive Nestor with his multifaceted activities inside agencies representative of the working class, managed to contrive the winning of new social rights and, thanks to that, awaken a radical revolutionary consciousness in the region.

Notes to Chapter 6: Social Revolution in Gulyai-Polye

1. Not to be confused with his relation Vassili Sharovsky, a fervent libertarian who was to play a significant role in the Makhnovist movement.
2. All quotations in this chapter have been lifted from N. Makhno's memoirs *La Révolution Russe en Ukraine*, Paris 1927 (republished by Editions Belfond in 1970).
3. Constitutional Democrats, a liberal bourgeois party known by the initials KD or as the Cadets.
4. Yuri Magalevsky, a Ukrainian nationalist from Alexandrovsk, has plentiful details of this whole period of Nestor Makhno's life in his article, "Batko Makhno," which appeared in the *Dniepr Calendar* (in Ukrainian), Lvov, 1930, pp. 60–70.
5. V.A. Kravchenko *J'ai choisi la liberté*, Paris 1947.
6. Ibid. p. 45.
7. Ibid. pp. 44–45.
8. Social Revolutionaries, in short, SRs, who split with the bulk of the party to form a so-called Left fraction.

7. Ebb and Flow in the 1917 Revolution

Thus far we have followed events as they occurred in the southern Ukraine; the better to understand the narrative which follows we would do well at this point to recapitulate in brief the general situation in the erstwhile Russian Empire.

The days of rioting in February 1917 — known under the name of the February revolution¹ — put paid to the Romanov dynasty which was incapable of resolving the problems posed the modernization of the country and its assumption of its place among the most advanced nations. The world war of 1914 cruelly exposed this impotence. Commanded by generals whose sole concern was for their own personal advancement — often proportionate with the number of their troops killed — poorly armed and haphazardly equipped, the Russian army had suffered colossal losses — upwards of nine million dead and wounded, including the Poles — and had no precise notion of why it was fighting. Officially the goals were the capture of Constantinople and the independence of a reunified Poland; in fact, the backstairs intrigues of French and British imperialism against the German could hardly but leave the Russian peasant masses cold as they profoundly yearned for peace. To that basic aspiration were added the claims of the Empire's numerous nationalities and above all, the pressure for the agrarian reform urgently desired by the peasantry which accounted for almost 85 percent of the total population.

The provisional revolutionary government that succeeded the Tsar felt itself obliged to honor the alliance agreement with the Western allies and continued the war, which was increasingly unpopular in the land. As for the urgent nationalist and land questions, it put these off until after the election of a Constituent Assembly — the old dream of Russian democracy — which, equipped with full powers, would resolve all these thorny issues for the best. This political foot-dragging and legislative formalism sparked off an initial left-wing revolt by the Kronstadt sailors, limply supported by the Bolsheviks in July 1917 and then there was an attempted military putsch from the right in August 1917, by General Kornilov, the army's supreme commander, seeking to restore discipline and prosecute the war to victory; both threats were contained without much problem and they merely bolstered the power of Kerensky, an incorrigible chatter-box and "cardboard Robespierre."² Kerensky continued to play for time and lost all credibility to the advantage of

Lenin whose influence was ceaselessly growing in that he was promising the masses so much and then some.

Identical causes produce identical effects, and Kerensky's "house of cards" was collapsed in turn by an uprising of several thousand workers and Baltic sailors. Lenin capitalized upon this windfall, picked up the power "lying in the street" and cobbled together a new government, this time of "people's commissars."

The Bolshevik coup d'état was generally well-received by working people. Indeed, the watchwords on behalf of which it had been mounted ... "All power to the soviets!", "Land to the peasants, factory to the workers", "Immediate peace" and "national autonomy for the different peoples of the Empire" could not have been better attuned to the aspirations of the populace. However, the "shrewd Lenin" (*dixit* Makhno) had merely played upon these aspirations for the sole purpose of ensconcing himself in power; once at the controls, he was to devote himself primarily to consolidation of his tenuous authority for it seemed the soviets and other factory committees or soldiers' committees were there for appearances' sake only, all decisions being made without any consultation with them, through decrees handed down and railroaded through by the "new worker and peasant government."

A de facto armistice was arranged with the Central empires; the soldiers' committees were overseen by Bolsheviks who wasted no time in getting rid of hostile officers and generals.

However, Lenin and his cohorts did not dare prevent the elections for the Constituent Assembly scheduled for late November, or over a month after their coup d'état. The elections — the only free elections in Russia's entire history — provided the Social Revolutionaries with a very substantial majority; almost sixty percent of the votes, whereas the Bolsheviks, even by stuffing the ballot boxes in the big cities which they controlled, picked up only a quarter of the votes.³ This was a resounding repudiation. In principle, the new assembly, due to meet on January 5, 1918, was to assume the reins in the country and form a government representative of the generality of the citizenry. The Bolsheviks, though, continued to act as if nothing had happened and indulged themselves with a "temporary" ban on hostile liberal newspapers, set up the Cheka at the beginning of December 1917 and set about winning over the so-called Left faction of the Social Revolutionaries by offering them some portfolios and junior positions in the government. They succeeded in this latter undertaking by adopting wholesale the agrarian program of their allies and immediately declaring the land socialized, without compensation or conditions, thereby usurping the General Assembly that was to have pronounced upon this. The measure was favorably received by the peasant masses for it often sanctioned a *fait accompli*.

Hence the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly on the day following its opening session on January 6, 1918 triggered no great or immediate upset in the country. The Social Revolutionaries and their Social Democrat allies — the Mensheviks — the big losers in the episode, were convinced that in the end their

legitimacy would win through, and they omitted to conduct a military operation (for which they did not in any case have the wherewithal) against these usurpers, having no wish to see even "... a single drop of Russian blood spilled" (Chernov, the Social Revolutionary speaker of the Constituent Assembly) this sort of squeamishness was to lead to an unprecedented bloodbath (the blood being shed was not just Russian but all types).

Confronted with this confused situation, several nations of the erstwhile Empire realized their ambitions: Finland, Poland, Georgia, and the Ukraine seceded and set themselves up as independent countries. The Don, Kuban and Terek Cossacks too wished to become autonomous and to set up a Cossack federation.

The Austro-German armies, hitherto observing a watching brief, capitalized upon the situation to unleash a mighty offensive in February 1918. They forged irresistibly ahead, for the Russian army had been demobilized and there were only Red Guards, who more readily fired on unarmed civilians than tackled real soldiers⁴, to stop them. The Germans got to within 150 kilometers of Petrograd, passing through the Baltic lands, signed a separate peace treaty with the Central Rada, the government of independent Ukraine, and threatened the Bolshevik regime with complete collapse. Lenin insistently sued for negotiations, first of all without annexations or tribute, and then, with his back to the wall, agreed without further ado to all conditions imposed by the people who, in April 1917, had allowed him to return to Russia aboard the famed "sealed train"! He had the treaty hastily ratified by his party's central committee and the agreement was signed on March 3, 1918 at Brest-Litovsk. It provided for dismemberment of the former Russian empire, i.e., formal recognition of the independence of Finland, Poland, the Baltic states and the Ukraine, which is to say of territories covering an area of 780,000 square kilometers and a population of 56 million, all of them placed under the protection of the Austro-Germans.

Paradoxically, this situation worked to Lenin's advantage, and the operation proved a boon to him; he had had his power recognized by the central Empires, and he had no control over the ceded territories anyway; on the other hand, this capitulation afforded him some respite during which to better consolidate his shaky authority.



For Ukrainian revolutionaries it was a real stab in the back. Their units had to let themselves be disarmed or evacuate the country and be disarmed anyway by Red Guards under Moscow's orders.

The Austro-Germans swooped on the Ukraine, guided by their local allies and bringing in their wake all the former great estate owners thrown out the year before by the revolutionary peasantry. Almost a million Austro-German troops occupied the territories ceded by Brest-Litovsk. The exactions and repression of the occupiers and of the Ukrainian oligarchy quickly triggered a popular resistance movement; dozens of local insurgent detachments sprang up to harry enemy troops, engaging in a savage war of national liberation.

This was the context in which Makhno found himself. At first, he thought of resisting the invasion of the German and Austro-Hungarian troops, in all several hundred thousands of well-equipped and organized soldiers — Makhno sets the figure for the Ukraine at 600,000. To this end, he proposed in Gulyai-Polye the formation of several battalions and companies, totaling nearly 1,500 volunteers. With this detachment he meant to join up with Red Guards and partisan groups that looked likely to stand up to the invaders. He managed to secure arms from the Ukrainian Red Guard command and received several carriage loads, containing 3,000 rifles, some cartridges and six cannon complete with shells. The city of Alexandrovsk asked the volunteers of Gulyai-Polye to come to its aid. A battalion of peasants plus the cavalry detachment made up of the members of Gulyai-Polye's libertarian communist group made for Alexandrovsk. As for Makhno, he was drafted on to the staff of Yegorov, the commander of the front. While trying vainly to get there, the rout having worsened, Makhno found himself stuck in a railroad marshaling yard. It was there that he got the stunning news that Gulyai-Polye had been occupied by German troops.

In fact, a handful of Ukrainian nationalists from the town, capitalizing upon Makhno's absence and that of the region's most dependable units, had managed to bribe the company formed by the town's Jewish community and abetted by them had arrested the available members of the soviet, the revolutionary committee and the anarchist group on April 15 and 16. Their treachery complete, these conspirators had then called in the Germans.

Among these Ukrainian nationalists were some landowners keen to recover estates confiscated for the use of the farming communes, which is scarcely surprising, but there was also Vassili Sharovsky, the artillery chief, who had been led astray. The worst thing was the part which the town's armed Jewish company had played; its leader, Taranovsky (who later on was also to be the last chief of staff of the Makhnovist movement) had refused to get involved in the plot; his adjutant, Leimonsky, had jumped at the chance to replace him and with the backing of the company membership — shopkeepers afraid of libertarian collectivism, their children and other young folk misled by the demagogic speechifying of the Ukrainian nationalists — had carried out arrests of local revolutionaries, as well as tricking into disarming the anarchist detachment just back from the front.

To make matters worse, Leon Schneider, the delegate called to order by those who had mandated him, had played an extremely active role, sacking the premises of the libertarian communist group and going so far as to trample upon portraits of Bakunin, Kropotkin and Alexander Semeniyuta.



Makhno was flabbergasted by the news; he was devastated that such a tiny number of conspirators — a few dozen — should have been able to undo so rapidly the achievements built up at the cost of so much effort over a year. He was immediately worried about the dangers of anti-Semitism that might be evoked

in the peasants by the conduct of the Jewish company under arms. He wanted to get home but was talked out of it, for the Austro-Germans were already in control of the commune, and he would have been shot out of hand. He then thought up a title for an appeal that he set about drafting: "The traitor's soil and tyrant's conscience are as black as a winter's night." Yet the enemy troops' advance was lightning fast, and, in order to avoid encirclement, the partisan groups to which he was attached fell back to Taganrog, a port and railroad junction on the Sea of Azov. Towards the end of April, a conference drew together all the anarchists from Gulyai-Polye and its environs who had managed to reach Taganrog. The situation was reviewed, and it was decided that some of them should make a tour of revolutionary Russia in order to gauge the difficulties that she faced. Others were to remain behind to work on clandestine organization of revolutionaries. A rendezvous was set for late June — early July, a time that it was reckoned would be favorable for a return to Gulyai-Polye, and the initiation of a general uprising against the occupiers and their allies.

Notes to Chapter 7: Ebb and Flow in the 1917 Revolution

1. The Russian (Julian) calendar was then 13 days behind the calendar observed in other countries, so the February revolution is sometimes called the "March revolution" just as the October coup d'état has since been commemorated on November 7.
2. He collected titles: prime minister, justice minister, minister of commerce, and he styled himself "revolutionary generalissimo," commander of the army, to boot!
3. Out of 36,262,560 electors, the Social Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks took a total of 22,600,000 and 270 seats; the Ukrainian SRs and the Ukrainian Mensheviks took 41, the national minorities 33, the Cadets 15 and the Bolsheviks 161. The last-named, however, took nearly half of the votes in Petrograd and Moscow and a large percentage also from the army.
4. As they did against the peaceful demonstration in Petrograd in favor of the Constituent Assembly on January 6, 1918.

8. Wanderings

Makhno then embarked upon his tour from town to town, moving in a northerly direction, for he was due to visit Moscow and Petrograd. In Rostov-on-Don he was struck by the disarray of the revolutionaries, anarchists included.

In Tsaritsyn¹ he came upon his fellow communards from Gulyai-Polye who had had time to escape the vengeance of the estate owners. He saw again his companion, Nastia, pregnant and near to giving birth, but, with a heavy heart, he had to leave her to continue his travels.

Along the route he witnessed disturbing scenes: “revolutionary” authorities arbitrarily and systematically disarming all autonomous partisan units on threat of shooting any who refused to abide by their *ukases*. In particular he was an eyewitness to a confrontation between the partisan groups of Petrenko, an active but non-aligned revolutionary, and Cheka units. The latter had been routed and Petrenko could have taken control of the situation and “cleaned house,” but he magnanimously declined.² Whereupon the authorities sued for negotiations during which they treacherously had him arrested before disarming his unit. Petrenko was shot a short time later on some trumped-up charge. At this same time the attack upon anarchist associations all over Russia was mounted in a concerted way; their premises were wrecked, their publications banned or tolerated only on specific Draconian conditions; the recusant were either jailed or shot on a variety of pretexts. The Bolsheviks and their Left SR allies rid themselves of their “troublesome” companions and indeed of all who might challenge their arrogation of power.

Everywhere, Makhno came to appreciate the revolutionary faith and commitment that motivated workers but also their lack of clear-sightedness regarding the ever increasing “prerogatives” of “revolutionary government.” He saw at work certain so-called revolutionary elements made up of artisans, shopkeepers and déclassé workers, many of them Jewish, and who, for all their belonging to revolutionary groups of every hue, anarchist ones included, were wheelers and dealers in the circles of power. They were going to wind up as a breeding ground ready to tackle all manner of dirty work assigned to them: as Chekists, members of requisition detachments dispatched against the peasants, bureaucrats of every kind, etc.

These sad revelations led Makhno to wonder if "... the revolution is not destined to perish by the very hand of revolutionaries; in the way of its development stands an executioner sprung from the revolutionaries' very own ranks, the government of two revolutionary parties which, for all their titanic endeavors, cannot confine the whole of the broad, deep life of the workers within the narrow compass of their teachers."³ He saw what these "institutional" revolutionaries were made of, who placed themselves athwart the road to liberation of the masses in revolution.

Makhno continued his journey aboard an armored train, with a company of Red Guards in tow. He saved them from capture by the Don Cossacks; at a halt, the Cossacks surrounded the train and prepared to swoop gently upon the passengers. Nestor ingeniously advised the unit's commander to fake a sudden artillery exercise so as to hold back the crowd and seize the chance to extricate the train. His ingenuity was to extricate him thus many a time from worse jams. He stopped over in Saratov in the Volga estuary for a few days before moving on to Astrakhan, albeit not without some difficulty as his only travel pass was his credentials as delegate from the Gulyai-Polye revolutionary committee. In the end, he completed the first stage of his trip by arriving in Moscow, which had been made the regime's new capital because Lenin thought that Petrograd was too exposed.

All of the personalities of the new regime and the officially-approved revolutionary groups were there. Makhno, who strove right away to make contact with the anarchists, noted how the new regime had the libertarian movement under surveillance, and it was only with difficulty that he managed a meeting with its most active militants. Attending rallies, he listened to the Menshevik Martov, to Trotsky, the commissar for War, and to the anarchist Alexei Borovoy who fired him with enthusiasm. He met up again with his prison buddy Arshinov who, for want of something better to do, busied himself with the League for the Propagation of Libertarian Ideas, publishing the classical works of Bakunin and Kropotkin.

Moscow struck him as the heartland of a "paper revolution" that attracted all — socialists or anarchists — who were enthused by one and the same thing "... Lots of talk, writing and from time to time a condescending offer of advice to the masses, but at a distance, from afar..."⁴

He met Kropotkin, on the eve of his moving house to Dimitrovka on the outskirts of the capital. The apostle of Anarchy made him affectionately welcome, answered his questions satisfactorily, and talked to him at length about the peasants of the Ukraine; but whenever he sought his advice about what he intended to do upon his return home, Kropotkin categorically refused to offer the slightest advice... "This matter is bound up with a very great risk to your life, comrade, and you alone can give it a proper answer."⁵

At their leave-taking, the old anarchist told him that "... struggle is incompatible with sentimentality. Self-sacrifice, tough mindedness and determination triumph over all on the road to the goal that you have set yourself."⁶ The theoretician

of libertarian communism had assuredly discerned Nestor's strong personality and noted his tendency to get a little carried away; otherwise there is no accounting for the author of *Ethics* having so bizarrely vetoed sentiment from the revolutionary struggle. It was probably a recommendation that Makhno not let himself be distracted from his goals. In any event, it made its mark upon the one-time terrorist and convict who was to bear it in mind at all times thereafter. A short time later, Kropotkin sent him a message urging him to "...take good care of himself, for men like him are all too rare in Russia," which just goes to show the regard he had inspired in his venerable elder, as well as the perspicacity of the latter.

Notes to Chapter 8: Wanderings

1. Later it became "Stalingrad," and after Khrushchev's de-Stalinization drive, "Volgograd."
2. Such "magnanimity" (very much in the "Russian mentality") towards the Bolsheviks was to prove very damaging for the latter always strove to steer clear of all such "sentimentality."
3. N. Makhno *Under the Blows of Counter-revolution* (in Russian), Paris, 1936, p. 41.
4. Ibid. p. 101.
5. Ibid. p. 107.
6. Ibid. p. 107.

9. Interview with Lenin

Makhno went on frequenting Moscow's revolutionary haunts and paid a visit to the peasant branch of the central Pan-Russian executive committee of Soviets. In short he briefed himself so well that he had no further need to continue his tour as far as Petrograd, and he decided to make back to the Ukraine. However, he needed some phony identity papers if he was to cross the border established between Russia and the occupied Ukraine. He made up his mind to apply to the "bureaucratic center" — the holy of holies — in the Kremlin. Passed from bureaucrat to bureaucrat, he eventually wound up before Sverdlov, the chairman of the central-executive committee of Soviets, with whom he engaged in a discussion of the overall situation in the country and the Ukraine. Sverdlov found his views of such interest that he suggested an interview with Lenin himself for the following day. An appointment was made. By contrast, Sverdlov proved incapable of obtaining a room for Makhno who was without lodgings. So, the boss of the "blotting paper revolutionaries" could arrange for him to meet the "supreme guide" but was utterly powerless in the matter of his lodgings! What a disparity of powers!

Nestor was taken in by a friend he had met inside the Butyrki, and back he came the next day, brandishing all his passes. Lenin welcomed him "paternally"; he took him by the arm, placing a hand on his shoulder and had him sit in a comfortable armchair. Then he set about questioning him minutely: from where did he come? How had the peasants of the region understood the slogan "all powers to the local Soviets?" How had they reacted to those who were against this watchword, especially the Ukrainian nationalists?

Makhno answered that the peasants had understood the watchword as the expression of the consciousness and will of the workers themselves, that the village, district or regional soviets were merely the units of a revolutionary ralliement and of a self-managing economy serving the struggle against the bourgeoisie. Lenin came back to this matter three times, asking him if he regarded that interpretation as correct: when Nestor answered in the affirmative, Lenin then stated that the region had been contaminated by anarchism, and that that influence would not last.

Sverdlov joined in the conversation and asked Makhno if anarchism should be fomented among the peasantry. Whereupon Lenin pronounced that that would

be to usher in counter-revolution and lead the proletariat to perdition. Makhno then lost his cool and protested that it would be nothing of the sort; Lenin set about rephrasing his comment; in his eyes, anarchists, having no large-scale organization of any substance, could not organize the proletariat and poor peasantry and thereby safeguard the revolution's gains.

The conversation moved on to the activities of the Red Guards for whom Lenin had a high regard. Pulling no punches, Makhno gave him an eye-opener by explaining that unlike the partisans who fought deep in the countryside, the Red Guards preferred to hold the railway lines, staying aboard their armored trains and raking their heels at the first sign of danger; that was why the populace, never having laid eyes on them, could not lend them their support. Lenin concluded from this — oddly enough — that the creation of a Red Army was the best solution and then he launched into a diatribe against the idealism of anarchists which would lead them to neglect the present for the sake of the future: “The anarchists are always full of self-denial and ready for every sacrifice but as fanatics and long-sighted, they see only the distant future and ignore the present.”¹ Yet Lenin begged Makhno not to think he was applying this thought to him, for he looked upon him as a “man with a grasp of realities and the necessities of our age”; if only Russia could boast of one “third of anarchists of his ilk” the communists would be ready, under certain conditions, to march alongside them and cooperate for the sake of free organization of producers.

Soothed by these fine words, Makhno felt welling up within him a feeling of profound regard for his interlocutor, of whose acrobatics, chicanery and opportunist U-turns he as yet knew nothing. As for anarchists' alleged concern with the future at the expense of the present, he raised the example of the Ukraine — correcting Lenin, who, like many Russians of every persuasion, had used the expression “south of Russia” or “southern Russia” — where most of the partisan groups that had fought against the reactionaries were led by anarchists. Moreover, nearly all the communes or associations had been set up at their instigation. In quoting these tangible examples, he showed that it was clear that anarchists stood foursquare in the “present,” where they looked to what might bring them closer to the future to which they gave, to be sure, every consideration. As he finished speaking, Makhno looked Sverdlov directly in the eye; Sverdlov's face clouded, and he blushed slightly but went on smiling at him. As for Lenin, he opened his arms and declared: “Perhaps I am mistaken....”²

Had he known at that precise moment that, a few years on, Makhno would be giving him sleepless nights and that he would be making him the quarry for his pack of Chekists and special units of the Red Army, Lenin would have realized that he was indeed mistaken. And without any doubt at all he would promptly have repaired his error, for all his ingratiating manner and sweet words, by having his enemy-to-be cast into the dungeons of the Cheka.

The conversation limped along a little while longer, but, the essentials having been covered, Lenin, again in his “fatherly” mode, asked Makhno’s requirements in respect of identity papers and promised to do the needful for him. Some days later, towards the end of June, kitted out with these papers, essential if he was to get through the various checkpoints, Makhno took the train bound for Orel.



His month-and-a-half long tour, which had taken him across the country, had enabled him to “take the temperature of the revolution,” gauge the weakness of the anarchist movement, a weakness both organizational and due to the depredations of the Bolshevik authorities, observe the “leading” echelons, meet with the most influential personages ... in short, to formulate an exact idea of what had been done and of all that remained to be done in order to keep the revolution on the right course.

Notes to Chapter 9: Interview with Lenin

1. N. Makhno, *Under the Blows of Counter-revolution* (in Russian), Paris, 1936, p. 131. That interview, taken from the Memoirs, appears in Daniel Guérin, *No Gods, No Masters* (AK Press, 1998) Book Two, pp. 130–137.
2. Ibid. p. 133.

10. Back Home Again

Upon arriving in Orel, a border town, Makhno was imprudent enough to climb down from the train and was unable to board again, for the carriages were swamped by passengers. He managed to get across the border even so, disguised as a Ukrainian reserve officer. He came upon some Jewish friends from Gulyai-Polye who briefed him on developments locally, including among other things the death of his older brother Emilian, a war invalid, who had been mistaken for Nestor and shot by the Germans. His other brother, Savva, had been arrested, his mother's house destroyed and his mother taken in by neighbors; finally, there were the shootings and torture directed against many anarchists and revolutionaries from Gulyai-Polye.

Although devastated by these initial reports, Nestor steeled himself; he was among his own, the peasants of the Zaporozhiye, loyal to their age-old yearnings for emancipation, far removed from the decrees and other pious pronouncements of Moscow, capital of "paper revolution." Here he was now at the heart of the real problem and only upon himself and those of his comrades from the Gulyai-Polye anarchist group who had got away could he rely for a resolution.

The closer he drew to the land of his birth, the more people he met who knew him; he was obliged to trade his Ukrainian officer's uniform for civilian clothes. At one stop, he was warned by his friend Kogan from Gulyai-Polye that the German police had boarded the train to search for him; he hurriedly left his carriage and covered on foot the twenty-seven kilometers to his destination, the village of Rozhdestvenskoye, some twenty-one kilometers from Gulyai-Polye.

At the border, Makhno had spotted some notices in German: "Deutsches Vaterland" (German territory) — the Ukraine had become an integral part of the German and the Austro-Hungarian empire! More devastating still, since Brest-Litovsk, an expeditionary corps had been in occupation, enforcing German order.

The Central empires, delighted with the assistance rendered by Lenin and his government, hoped to draw from the Ukraine's rich natural resources the wherewithal for a second wind in their war in the west against France, Britain and the United States.

The Ukrainian national assembly — the Rada — being regarded as insufficiently compliant, had been removed from power on March 29, 1918; the occupation had replaced it with the hetman¹ Pavlo Skoropadsky whose forefather had been the last hetman of a free Ukraine prior to its annexation by Russia in the eighteenth century. A mere puppet on a string, the hetman had formed a national guard — the *Varta* — an auxiliary for the Austro-German governors of the country.

The Ukrainian bourgeoisie and feudalists had wasted no time in rallying around the new regime, for in that way they might use occupation forces to counter recalcitrant peasants before reclaiming the estates and assets of which the peasantry had collectively dispossessed them. The vengeance of these “lords” was savage: thousands of peasants were flogged, imprisoned, shot or hanged. The whole country was ransacked; all food, consumer goods and material were shipped off to Germany with the blessing of the hetman and the local squirearchy. Let us look at the testimony of one John Xydias, a Russified Greek living in Odessa, a dyed-in-the-wool capitalist, and, liberal as he was, scarcely to be suspected of subversive views:

“German and Austrian troops having entered the Ukraine, their command had to decide upon the attitude it would adopt regarding the revolutionary restraint upon the estates of the *pomieschikis*. As the main concern of the central powers was to siphon off the Ukraine’s reserves for their own benefit, whereas the establishment of an equitable social peace left them wholly indifferent, they opted to side with the bourgeoisie and above all the big estate owners.

[...] Not only did the German occupation authorities show themselves conciliatory and well-intentioned towards the *pomieschikis*, bringing none of the weight of their rule to bear upon them, but they even went out of their way to do anything in their power to be agreeable to them. Above all else, the estate owners were to be restored in the property rights which revolution had stripped from them. This was one of the most shameful episodes in the entire history of the civil war. Let it be stated frankly: their conduct towards the peasants ensured that the infiltration of revolution, which had been interrupted for a time, came back with a vengeance once German troops evacuated Russian soil. Many landlords did not bother to re-install themselves on their former estates but, abetted by German and Austrian troops, set about divesting the peasants of their lands and their assets. In cruelty and cynicism, their reprisal raids outdid the famous expeditions of Tsarist times, especially as the Austrian and German officers who commanded these detachments claimed a percentage of the booty. Thus a detachment would arrive in a village; on the instructions of the *pomieschik*, a collective note was presented to the peasants, demanding the return of

given quantities of livestock, tools, chattels, etc.; the raid complete, the German or Austrian officer would pocket ten percent to twenty percent of the value of the 'restored' assets. It goes without saying that the German military, educated to the most profound contempt for the Russian people, were very appreciative of these sources of income and shrank from no measure, no matter how brutal, likely to generate them.

[...] The reprisal expeditions were marked by hangings and shootings. Executions dispensed with any sort of proceedings; the venom of the landlords cared not a jot for it, and the German officers gladly washed their hands of any show of a trial. They shot and hanged without any pretense of trial, often not even bothering to check the identity of the 'defendant.' The landowner or his agent had merely to declare that such and such a peasant had been involved in confiscation of his estates for the 'culprit' to be summarily executed.

One can readily appreciate the rancor that built up in the souls of Ukrainian peasants, and what hatred and revenge such barbarous executions engendered against landowners. Powerless against the armed might at the disposal of their oppressors, the peasants knuckled under and suffered, as they awaited their revenge."²

As an active revolutionary center, Gulyai-Polye merited special treatment; the members of the soviet, revolutionary committee and libertarian communist group were denounced by Ukrainian nationalists and the local bourgeois. Once arrested, they were tortured and shot, excepting those who had successfully gone to ground and who were living a clandestine existence. Among the anarchists to fall victim to this "White Terror" was the group's first secretary, Moshe Kalinichenko; shot but still alive after the opening salvo, he continued to berate his executioners before being finished off. Lioba Gorelik, a very active libertarian from the town's Jewish community, was beaten to death; Stefan Shepel and Korostelev (known as Khudai), courageous militants, also perished. Nestor's older brother, Emilian, almost blind following a wound sustained during the Russo-Japanese war in 1904, was shot in front of his wife and their five young children. Others were jailed in Alexandrovsk to await the same fate: Alexander Kalashnikov and Nestor's other brother, Savva.

Such was the picture of devastation uncovered by Makhno upon arrival here where, for nearly a year, he had made an intense contribution to the founding of a free community based on social justice. He reestablished contact with those close to him, his relatives and several members of the anarchist group, returned, like him, from Russia, as agreed at the Taganrog conference. Every one of them advised against showing his face again in Gulyai-Polye, for he would be instantly denounced by some nark in the pay of the occupation, arrested and speedily executed.

For some weeks, he hid in a neighboring village; then, unable to stand it any longer, he returned to his native town one night to seek out some reliable peasants

there. With them he evaluated the situation and briefed them on his travel experiences. The letters that he had written them had been reproduced for circulation in the area. In them he had advocated autonomous and organized action by the peasants and counseled against terrorist acts that would draw down foreseeable repression and hamper the overall organization of the insurrection. Above all, he was against acts of vengeance against members of the Jewish company who, intimidated or bamboozled by the Ukrainian nationalists' threats or promises, had assisted the arrest of Gulyai-Polye's revolutionaries. Such acts might be misinterpreted and give rise to a display of anti-Semitism, thereby compromising the region's revolutionary reputation. However, he was unable to prevent sentence being passed on Leon Schneider, the group's renegade, although Schneider had completely vanished. He also managed to set aside the cases of Vassili Sharovsky and Taranovsky who, caught up in the conspiracy in spite of themselves, had promptly dissociated themselves from it and had since bitterly regretted their passivity in not opposing it.³

Makhno reckoned that the political preparation of minds was the priority; he zealously peddled the idea of a general uprising against foreign and native-born oppressors. He did not rest from holding get-togethers and small meetings at which he advocated, in the light of this idea, mobilization of local detachments of insurgents.

His presence was reported to the authorities, and he was obliged to quit Gulyai-Polye. However, now that it was known that he was around and trying to organize armed bands, they did not dare execute the anarchists jailed in Alexandrovsk for fear of reprisals. A substantial price was placed on his head. The dragnets and searches were stepped up; he narrowly escaped one enemy patrol simply because, caught in the act of explaining the operation of some Colt and Mauser revolvers to some peasant friends, he was able to offer an immediate practical demonstration and thus extricate himself!

The first detachment calling itself Makhnovist was formed in a village near Gulyai-Polye, Voskressenska, and it mounted raids against the squires and the enemy's detachments.

Makhno also began to lead the same sort of attacks along with peasants from Ternovka village, but he nonetheless felt that the lead should come from Gulyai-Polye which enjoyed huge popularity throughout that part of the Ukraine. So he went back there and, with the agreement of his comrades, decided to blow up the Austro-German district command center in the township. Dressed as a woman, a comrade from the group, Isidor Lyuty, alias Petya, who was never far from Makhno's side and served as his bodyguard, went off to reconnoiter. As for Nestor, he dressed up as a young woman, making up his face and equipped with some powerful bombs, set off with Petya to carry out their mission. Only the presence of some women and children in the room where the targeted officers were altered their plans, but Nestor had trouble getting Petya to accept this. Indeed, it was at all times as a conscientious militant that he evaluated their operations and their consequences, and he

was very well aware that this instance, which would inevitably have cost the lives of innocents, would have been very badly received by the population.

Notes to Chapter 10: Back Home Again

1. The word “hetman” is a contraction of the German word *hauptmann*. It is characteristic to note that originally there were no Slav words to designate “chiefs” and that all terms employed since in Russian or in Ukrainian have been borrowed from a foreign language, e.g., tsar, from the Latin *caesar*, kniaz (prince) from the German *Koenig*, ataman (Cossack chief) from the Turkish word for a troop leader. We must therefore take it that the Slavs originally knew nothing of hierarchy and governed themselves by means of a direct democracy.
2. J. Xydias *L'Intervention française en Russie, 1918–1919*, Paris, 1927, pp. 56–59.
3. V. Sharovsky had nonetheless sabotaged weapons surrendered to the Germans and conveyed his support to Makhno. He was later to become responsible for all of the Makhnovist movement's artillery.

11. The Beginnings of Partisan Warfare

Having peddled the idea of a general insurrection throughout the district, Makhno and his companions resolved to strike and to make the first move by occupying Gulyai-Polye which they had designated as the insurgent center. On September 22, 1918, Nestor and his fellow members of the Gulyai-Polye anarchist group — Alexei Marchenko, Semyon Karetnik, Petya Lyuty, Andrei Semenyuta (the last brother of Prokop and Alexander, the founders of the group) and one Foma Riabko, from elsewhere — began their odyssey along with seven peasants from the villages of Ternovka and Vassilevka.

The group was some 90 kilometers from Gulyai-Polye and reckoned to cover that distance in nine hours. Nestor, disguised as a captain of the Varta, stood on a *tatchanka*,¹ atop which a Maxim gun had been mounted; his companions followed on horseback, armed with rifles. They quickly encountered a genuine Varta unit. Taken in by his splendid uniform, the hetman's guards let them get within 30 meters; whereupon Makhno stood up on the *tatchanka* and called upon them to drop their weapons; they made as if to rally but a burst of fire from the Maxim gun, aimed above their heads, forced them to reconsider.

Nestor proceeded to question them, passing himself off as a captain specially dispatched by the hetman to track down revolutionaries in the district. Reassured, the commander of the Varta detachment supplied him with full intelligence concerning Austro-German forces in the area, their quarters and their strength; moreover, he boasted of his own exploits in the repression against the recalcitrant peasants of the region.

Dropping the pretense, Makhno then disclosed his true identity, to the amazement of the hetman's soldiery. They fell on their knees before him to beg his mercy and tried to bribe him with promises of hefty sums of money. Having no proof of their misdeeds, Makhno decided merely to tie them up and to dump them out of sight like that off the road, until they might be freed by shepherds or might free themselves, this lest they give away his presence too soon. In so doing he revealed one of the characteristic features of his personality; outside of combat, he was always to abhor bloodshed and was to resort to it only when pushed to the limits by the atrocities of the enemy. But the Varta guards, panicking, took to their

heels. Whereupon the Makhnovists were obliged to cut them down. Not far from there they came upon a local police chief who called them to explain the meaning of the shots he had heard; in view of his insistence in citing the authority of the hetman, Makhno had him hanged from the highest cross in the nearby cemetery, displaying a placard bearing the inscription: "One should fight for the emancipation of the workers and not for executioners and oppressors."

This episode can serve as an archetype of all that were to ensue: Makhno and his companions were often to show up disguised as regular soldiers and, capitalizing upon the element of surprise in the stratagem, disarm and punish their enemies.

The next night, pressing on with its ride, Makhno's detachment passed without mishap through villages lying on the route to Gulyai-Polye, thanks to the uniforms they were wearing. They arrived in Gulyai-Polye in the early morning and at the last minute just avoided running smack into numerous German troops, having just enough time to scurry away and hold up in a nearby forest. There they came upon some shepherds who informed them that the German authorities and their native-born allies were everywhere spreading a rumor that Makhno had retreated to Moscow, after having robbed the peasants of Gulyai-Polye; he had supposedly bought himself a luxury home and was living high there. He was even shown a leaflet written in Russian and Ukrainian with words to that effect. The bigger the lie the better it works, professional liars sometimes tell themselves; this was the source of the Makhno "rumor" that was to spread just as the Makhnovists' struggle assumed larger dimensions.

A little later, when they were in Marfopol, a village adjacent to Gulyai-Polye, Makhno and his band encountered an Austrian detachment accompanied by a squadron of the hetman's police. Makhno threw them off the scent by starting to flee from the village; he did so the better to expose his pursuers, then cut them down with the machine gun. Among the survivors from the enemy band, the Gulyai-Polye police chief who had distinguished himself in the repression against the peasants was instantly executed. Among the other prisoners were two Ukrainians conscripted against their will into the Austrian army. Makhno dictated a letter to them for translation into German for distribution among the troops. He urged them to disobey their officers and cease all participation in the repression of the Ukrainian working people and to go home and carry out their own revolution. If they persisted in following their officers, they would then have to face the vengeance of insurgents who would make no distinction between them and the butchers of peasants. He released these soldiers with that message then — there being limits to his trust — he made off with his group first in one direction, and then, once out of sight, swung around and stopped in a nearby village, Shanzhorovka, some 17 kilometers from Gulyai-Polye.

The next day, the Austro-Germans took severe reprisals against the Marfopol peasants. The day after that, seizing upon the absence of the bulk of the enemy forces, Makhno entered Gulyai-Polye, scattered nearly all his men through the

district, charging them to raise the peasants and stayed behind in the town with just seven men. A local assembly was held the following night with 400 inhabitants attending. Discussion centered on the best way of launching the insurrection, where and how to direct it, how to seize hold of the bulk of the enemy troops and disarm all occupiers. The whole program was worked out for the next night. Meanwhile, Makhno wrote two proclamations for distribution just as soon as Gulyai-Polye would be under the complete control of the insurgents.

As scheduled, the following night the insurgents seized control of the area with great ease and no casualties on their side. They were in control of the post office, telephone exchange, railway station and the access routes to the town. Makhno's two appeals were printed — 7,000 and 20,000 copies respectively — and quickly distributed and followed up by insurrectionary acts throughout the whole region. A revolutionary committee was appointed forthwith and a telegram written by Makhno was dispatched all over the Ukraine:

"To everyone, everyone, everyone! The Gulyai-Polye district revolutionary committee announces the seizure of Gulyai-Polye by the insurgents: there the power of the soviets has been re-established. We declare a general insurrection of the workers and peasants against the butchers and stranglers of the Ukrainian revolution, the Austro-Germans and the hetman's guards."



The Austro-Germans recovered a few days later and marshaled significant forces around Gulyai-Polye. Makhno and his companions decided against digging in there and resolved to evacuate the town, letting it be believed that the populace had complied without actually supporting them, this in order to forestall reprisals such as had occurred at Marfopol. It was for this reason that the local assembly had been held at night and had attracted only the most dependable inhabitants, so as to avoid possible denunciations should the insurrection fail. Makhno handled things intelligently and with prudence, but not without mishap, for his suggestions were one by one challenged by other members of the group — who formed, as it were, the general staff of the movement. The facts, though, proved Makhno correct on several occasions and so his companions abided more and more scrupulously by his directives. He displayed remarkable gifts as a leader of men, gifts that never failed him thereafter.

On September 29, enemy troops attacked from all sides: the insurgents repulsed them and then, towards evening, when they saw the threat of encirclement looming, they peeled off in the direction of Mariupol, a port on the Sea of Azov.

En route, capitalizing upon the darkness and the suddenness of their appearance, they disarmed some squires and their guards, changed horses and recovered a machine-gun. Just as they had done before, they followed a false trail in order to shake off possible pursuers, and stopped over in the town of Bolshe-Mikhailovka

(or Dibrivka) on the edge of the Dibrivka forest some thirty-six kilometers from Gulyai-Polye. The next day, they met up with the sixty strong detachment of Fedor Shchuss, an anarchist sailor who had taken part in the Taganrog conference and since waged a bitter struggle against the occupation. Shchuss was content to harry, successfully it should be said, the occupation troops and the punitive expeditions of the squires and the Varta. Makhno suggested to him that they should join forces in order to conduct open, rather than guerrilla warfare. The amalgamation went ahead and a joint meeting was held in the town; at it Makhno delivered a long address that scared his friends, for he issued a summons to the struggle against all enemies, present and future, in the shape of the Russian White Guards who were beginning to invade the region. The populace rallied to his proposals and within two days there were nearly 1,500 volunteers, only one in four of them armed.

On the strength of mistaken intelligence, the insurgents took inadequate precautions in the belief that the enemy was not in the vicinity. Thus, one night they were taken by surprise and, knowing nothing of the exact strength of their assailants, Makhno ordered a withdrawal. Many insurgents had not had time to join him and were penned in Dibrivka while an ambush cut off the retreat of a small group of fugitives in the direction of the forest. It was at this point that Makhno revealed an extraordinary military talent; he, who had never done any soldiering, had his men move forward at right angles, skirting the enemy position and ensuring access to the forest. Shchuss intended to retreat into the impregnable blockhouse that he had built himself inside the forest and there await the enemy's evacuation of the region, so as to be able to tend his wounded and avert reprisals against the town.

Makhno's priority was to establish the numbers of enemy troops; they proved to be far superior numerically and in terms of armaments. Even so, Makhno proposed to attack; Shchuss resisted this for a long time on the grounds that it was madness to attack such superior forces. Whereupon Makhno gave a speech that enthused all present, and this was the occasion on which the Dibrivka peasants awarded him the title of Batko: "Henceforth, you are our Ukrainian Batko, and we shall perish together with you if need be. Lead us into town against the enemy!"²



In his memoirs, Makhno remarks that he really must have been an anarchist revolutionary not to succumb to this honor awarded in all naiveté by the mass of peasant toilers who had faith in him. He justifies this confidence by commenting: "It would appear that I was that revolutionary for all my subsequent actions have confirmed it."³

That night, September 30, 1918, saw the first great feat by arms of the insurgents. Indeed, Shchuss, Makhno, Semyon Karetnik and Marchenko, Lyuty and Petrenko (the latter a local insurgent of great promise) selected the most daring and determined of the partisans, split into two groups, one with Shchuss's men

armed with a Maxim and the other under Nestor's personal command, equipped with a Lewis submachine gun; in all about 30 men, attacking a battalion of the Austrian regular army — almost 500 soldiers — about 100 well-armed squires and 80 Varta guards, which is to say, odds of 25-to-one!

The enemy was bivouacked on the square in front of the town's church, awaiting reinforcements before moving out at dawn to pursue the insurgents into the forest. Well-briefed on the disposition of the enemy, Makhno and his companions skipped into the town and proceeded through the streets and the courtyards of the *khatas*. Before attacking and while waiting for Shchuss to get in position, Nestor spoke these last fiery words: "This is it, we are in the arms of death. So, friends, let us be dauntless to the point of madness, as our cause demands!"⁴

One final incident almost betrayed their presence; the local mistress of the commander of the Varta guards had made up her mind at all costs to warn her loved ones of any insurgent attack, and it was only on a tip-off from a peasant woman of the town that the insurgents managed to intercept the traitor at the last moment.

At a signal arranged with Shchuss, Makhno directed heavy and accurate gunfire at the enemy, sowing panic among the troops who had been calmly bivouacked with weapons stacked; a surprise attack was the furthest thing from their minds.

To hasten the enemy's rout, Makhno hurled himself into the attack. The soldiers and enemy guards fled for all they were worth, their officers setting the example while the Dibrivka peasants, brandishing pitchforks, clubs and axes, pursued them, adding to their panic. Makhno had great difficulty in extricating twenty-five Austrian soldiers from the hands of peasants eager to lynch them. The trophies of battle were great: four machine guns, two munitions trucks and eighty prisoners, mostly ordinary soldiers and Varta guards, the officer having scarpered or perished in the fighting.

The Varta members and members of the band of landowners were shot out of hand for, despite warnings, they had persisted in their repressive activities. As for the Austrian soldiers, they were fed then released on promising to fight no more against the revolutionary peasants; they were issued with provisions and a bottle of vodka but stripped of their kepis — this symbolic act indicated their "demilitarization."



From that day on, all his companions displayed great affection towards and every confidence in Nestor, his tactics and operational strategies. His renown, boosted by tales of his military prowess, grew without cease; he became "Batko Makhno," the people's avenger; reluctantly to begin with, then with his agreement once he realized that he was a rallying point.

He had occasion to wreak people's vengeance a short time later during an incident that was to remain the most famous of all. A band of insurgents had been smashed and several dozen prisoners treated cruelly and hanged near a village by the name of Mikhailovo-Lukashevo. A Varta captain by the name of Mazukhin

had especially distinguished himself in this repression. One evening, after having laid waste to an enemy German settlement, Makhno and his detachment ran across this same Mazukhin, along with a small escort. As ever, Makhno seized the initiative by calling out imperiously: "Halt!... Who are you? Where are you coming from?" He heard, by way of an answer: "Who commands your detachment? I am staff captain Mazukhin, Varta commander for the Alexandrovsk district." At this point the insurgents surrounded him and took him prisoner. This savage pacifier then begged them in vain to spare his life. From a letter found on him, it was discovered that he had been en route to a soiree organized by a local squire called Mirgorodsky. Makhno and Shchuss donned the clothing of Mazukhin and his adjutant before showing up in their place at Mirgorodsky's fortified farm. They announced themselves as Mazukhin's aides and outriders. They were made welcome to cries of "Hurrah for the Russian officers!" The company there was select: a retired general, a colonel, three Austrian officers and two local squires, as well as their womenfolk.

The assembly toasted their host, the renaissance of Russia, the landlords and the salvation of the Russian church from anarchists. When a fresh toast was offered to the success of the hunt for Makhno, Makhno drew a bomb from his pocket and hurled it towards his fellow guests, disclosing his true identity, before dashing outside with Shchuss! Frozen in their tracks with fright, the revelers did not have time to escape and perished in the explosion. It ought to be said that there was no quarter given on either side; during the entire period of the Austro-German occupation of the Ukraine almost 80,000 peasants paid with their lives for their resistance to oppression.

In this climate, a dramatic incident played a capital role in the movement's birth; this was the matter of reprisals taken by the Austro-Germans and the local squires (especially German settlers) against the township of Dibrivka. They put 608 khatas to the torch and beat, tortured and murdered the peasants, raping the women. All these actions left the peasants of the region thoroughly outraged. Makhno and his detachment acted as the executive arm of this thirst for vengeance, and they showed no pity this time in laying waste the homes of the squires.

But here again, it fell to Makhno to display his tactical intelligence; he opposed systematic massacre of all the squires and bourgeois in the region and did not want some blind *jacquerie* but rather a social war waged with discrimination. He preferred to hurt the privileged in their pockets, at least provided they had no criminal acts to answer for, and he exacted from them substantial fines in money, arms and material. He also sought to stoke up the social inferno in the whole region to a maximum. The slow patient preparation over weeks paid dividends; bands of insurgents were organized throughout the region, and they harried the occupiers and their allies.

This vast game of cat and mouse was to drag on for several weeks with the insurgents and their enemies taking the roles in turns; while the latter gave chase, the former would show up in their rear and smash their isolated units.

Let us note that Nestor Makhno had learnt well from Alexander Semenyuta when he used to carry out his daring acts of terrorism, but in addition, he displayed great organizational and military talents. He was methodical to the point of mania, a thoroughness without which he obviously could not have survived hundreds of battles and preserved the essential core of the movement. Whenever he occupied an area, he immediately set up outposts on every side, day and night, and this ensured that he would not be surprised and be in a position to react as he chose, according to enemy numbers and to stand and fight or slip away. Then he would lay false trails as to which direction he was taking, by frequently changing his course; he moved, preferably under the cover of night, into areas where no detail of the topography was unknown to him and while keeping himself permanently informed as to enemy movements. Finally, he missed no opportunity to address the peasants, whipping them up with his fiery, spirited diatribes against the oppressors, so much so that they soon came to consider him their natural defender. It was for this reason that they all loved to call him "Batko" and avidly told of his exploits. To these gifts, Makhno added the qualities of rare sangfroid and presence of mind; he scarcely ever was ruffled, would sum up the situation in a flash and devised the best possible solution, which would allow him to extricate himself yet again from the hornet's nest.



Yet at the beginning, this self-mastery was not always apparent; on one occasion, his negligence even had disastrous consequences for his detachment. Billited in the village of Temirovka on November 15, 1918, some insurgents picked up a suspect, a local kulak by the name of Tsapko. This Tsapko, although quite well known as an informer for the occupiers, claimed to have come to seek permission for a relative's bridal procession to pass through the village at dawn. Against the advice of his comrades, Makhno set Tsapko free, refused to vacate the area and took no special precautionary measures. A half hour later, the camp was violently attacked by a Hungarian detachment well briefed, thanks to Tsapko, regarding the disposition of the insurgents. A shambles ensued; Makhno quickly reacted, placing a Lewis automatic rifle on Petya Lyuty's shoulder and sweeping the attackers with gunfire, bringing their advance to a stop. Marchenko attempted a counterattack with a group of horsemen but to no avail and sustained heavy losses. The insurgents fell back and found themselves in the open; the Hungarian snipers seized the chance to pick them off one by one with accurate fire. Shchuss was hit by a bullet that pierced both his legs. Pinned down by Hungarian fire, the insurgents were decimated. At one point, Podgorny, an insurgent, attempted to salvage the situation by taking the assailants from the rear with a machine gun and about fifteen partisans. The Hungarians received reinforcements, and the situation became

hopeless for Makhno and his companions, who were in any case hampered by their wounded whom they doggedly refused to abandon. Semyon Karetnik was hit also. Out of ten men around Makhno, soon only two were left and one of these, losing control of his nerves, took his own life with a bullet to the head. The unarmed Makhno dashed forward to retrieve the revolver from the suicide and found himself suddenly hemmed in by silhouettes whom he thought enemies; rather than let himself be captured, he too prepared to blow his own brains out when he realized that in fact these were companions coming to his aid: Lyuty, Marchenko and Piotr Petrenko. They saved him by carrying him off at a gallop while he squatted on two rifles, crossed one over the other. Once safe, Makhno realized that he had been wounded in one hand and that the tops of his overcoat and of his papakha had been shot through in several places. The detachment managed to slip away, but its losses were dramatic — nearly half of its 350 fighters — although the Hungarians too had taken considerable casualties.



The lesson was a severe one; henceforth nothing would ever be left to chance, and they would be wary of the suspect. Despite this serious reverse, the insurgents went on ravaging the fortified farms of the German colonists and the squires of the region; not without difficulty, for they were quite numerous in that *chernozom* country and quite well-armed. Be that as it may, the insurgents were now chastened and highly motivated; in the space of a few weeks, the whole area surrounding Gulyai-Polye had been cleared of nests, units and punitive detachments of Germans, Austro-Hungarians, German colonists and the Varta.

The whole left bank of the Dniepr was aflame, as the general uprising spread like a trail of gunpowder. Towards the close of 1918, this initial front had been solidly established in the Alexandrovsk region and at its heart was Gulyai-Polye. Makhno then dispatched a menacing telegram to the German high command in Alexandrovsk; in it he insisted upon release of imprisoned members of the Gulyai-Polye anarchist group and held the German authorities answerable for their safety. This threat gave pause for thought; the reply from the German commander in Alexandrovsk to the insurgent high command was conciliatory and guaranteed the lives of the prisoners. The insurgent movement had become a viable and intimidating interlocutor.

An extraordinary conference drew all the delegates from all of the region's insurgent groups. At it Makhno blithely proposed opening up four fronts; against the hetman, the Germans and Austro-Hungarians, against the Don Cossacks of the ataman Krasnov, against the White Guard detachments of Colonel Drozdov which crisscrossed the Berdyansk district and against the White general Tillo and the detachments of Germans moving up from the Crimea to "pacify" the region.

His comrades thought he had taken leave of his senses, for they reckoned they did not have sufficient forces to hold such an extensive broad front. He countered by arguing that henceforth they had to move into a higher phase of the struggle

and, to that end, had to turn their detachments into mixed battalions of cavalry, infantry mounted on machine gun carrying tatchankas, plus an artillery section. Moreover, he wanted to capitalize on the fear that insurgents had struck into their enemies and give an added boost to the resolution of the peasants of the region. He ended up securing the backing of those present, who then proceeded to elect people to take charge of the fronts; Piotr Petrenko got the one stretching from Chaplino to Grishino; Tykhenko the younger and the sailor Kraskovsky got the one between Pologui and Tsarekonstantinovka. A third front around Orekhovo would be formed under the supervision of Batko Pravda, a highly pugnacious legless cripple and anarchist. From the assembly, these overseers received the following instruction:

“Every discretion is given them in order to introduce the revolution — any discipline that might abet the organization of the combat sector and the fielding of a single contingent of fighters — with the consent of the masses of the insurgents concerned, obviously. In operational terms, they are completely subordinate to the main high command of the insurgent units bearing the name of ‘Batko Makhno’ and directly answerable to the Batko himself.”⁵

This federative organization rendered possible a unity of action that was essential for operations on a large scale. Makhno, then, amassed the functions of general commander-in-chief and chief of the central command which included his two aides Shchuss and Petya Lyuty, as well as Semyon Karetnik and Alexei Marchenko. Furthermore, an intelligence source was established, made up essentially of peasant women volunteers whose task it was to keep the command *au fait* with all of the enemy’s movements and dispositions.

Yet there was still a huge gulf between intentions and realities and the insurgents had to go through many engagements, with varying fortunes, against all their enemies. Makhno, the movement’s command staff and his escort came within an ace of annihilation in an engagement near Sinelnikovo. They were encircled by German and Austrian troops, sustained heavy losses and were only rescued in extremis by the providential arrival of several detachments of partisans summoned to the rescue by the local population.

Among the reinforcements, the detachment from Ulyanovsk, made up exclusively of 250 peasant ex-soldiers, distinguished itself by successfully, and despite a hail of gunfire, putting the enemy to flight and pursuing him over a distance of more than ten kilometers.

Little by little, Makhno and his main detachment managed to structure all of the local groups to the extent where accesses to and exits from the region were locked up tight and all passage denied to German trains.

On November 20, 1918, during a routine check on a train, Makhno and the younger of the Karetnik brothers, Pantelei, were gravely negligent; they departed from the usual practice of stationing dynamiters in front of the train and of positioning barricades in front of and behind the checkpoint. Now this was an armored train in the hands of White Guards; these White Guards let fly with murderous gunfire at Makhno and his companions before making good their escape. Several elite outriders from Makhno's detachment, experienced former border guards, were killed. Seeing the grief of the insurgents, the White Guards reckoned they must have killed Makhno. The report of his death immediately swept the country to the great rejoicing of the Austro-Germans and the landowners. The White officers in charge of the raid were even decorated in Alexandrovsk and feted as heroes in the local press. Rumor had it that the Makhnovists were on the run everywhere; the squires and their guards who had sought refuge in the town began to drift back to their estates.

Now, Makhno stepped up his raids and took it upon himself to give the lie to the rumors of his death. If they showed any resistance, the squires were wiped out; otherwise, the insurgents made do with seizing all their weapons, horses and any equipment that might prove useful.



Meanwhile in Kiev, a coup d'état ousted hetman Skoropadsky and a new Ukrainian nationalist government seized power under the name of the Directory; the strong man in it was Simon Petliura, whence the name Petliurists given to its supporters. This new government sought to be independent of the Germans and Austrians who, in any event, no longer had any reason for fighting since the November 11, 1918 armistice concluded with the Western allies. The new authorities freed all political detainees; thus did the anarchists from Gulyai-Polye return home. Among them were Savva Makhno, Alexander Kalashnikov and Filip Krat.

A period of wait-and-see ensued; for several weeks a truce with the Directory held. The Directory had an interest in courting the insurgents, for it hoped to be able to deploy them in its nationalist cause while at the same time it was on the best of terms with the Russian White Guards and encouraged the formation of regiments destined to join up with the White general Denikin.



In a little over two-and-a-half months, Makhno and his anarchist comrades had succeeded in the gamble of liberating the greater part of the Eastern Ukraine from the grip of the German and Austro-Hungarian armies of occupation and of their local allies. The tiny detachment of a dozen men which had set out from Ternovka for Gulyai-Polye on September 22, 1918, had turned into an insurgent army manning several fronts connected by a central command. Henceforth, Makhno and his companions were battle-hardened, at the cost of heavy losses, it is true. They had become conversant with the strategy and tactics of partisan warfare, knew how to avoid the pitfalls of classic positional warfare, chose the

time and place for their engagements and always popped up where least expected. They knew how to dynamite and take over an armored train or a fortified farm. They knew too that above all they had to rely on their own devices in the defense of their interests and their freedom.

Their enemies had changed too; no longer were they occupation troops, demoralized by their defeat in the West and who thought of nothing else but getting home as peaceably as possible. A much more dangerous enemy loomed on the horizon: regiments of Cossack officers and troops, commanded by General Denikin.

Notes to Chapter 11: The Beginnings of Partisan Warfare

1. Tatchanka: a two-wheeled or four-wheeled open-backed *barouche* which Makhno put to ingenious use by installing a machine gun, machine gunner and assistant in the rear, with a driver and another fighter in the front of this horse-drawn vehicle, with its team of two or four horses. This innovation was to play a great part in the Makhnovists' military successes and was then to be taken up by every other army in the Ukraine.
2. N. Makhno, *The Ukrainian revolution* (in Russian), Paris, 1937, p. 84.
3. Ibid., p. 85.
4. Ibid., p. 86.
5. Ibid., p. 143.

12. The Civil War in Russia

Towards the close of 1918 the civil war in Russia crystallized on several fronts. For a start, in the south, in the Cossack territories of the Don, the Kuban and the Terek, several armies were making headway under the unified command of General Denikin. Let us briefly review the origins of this movement.

Nationalistic officers could not have remained indifferent in the face of the evolution of the country which they found catastrophic. Already under Kerensky, General Kornilov, appointed generalissimo (commander of the entire Russian army), had rebelled against the authorities, citing the absence of the necessary order and discipline required in his view to bring the war to a victorious conclusion. Contrary to what has often been claimed, Kornilov was a patriotic officer who had risen through the ranks, the son of a mere Cossack, with a Sart (Mongolian) for a mother, and while no inflammatory revolutionary, it had nonetheless been he who had ordered the arrest of the Tsar and his family; so he was no reactionary but was solidly anti-monarchy and wont to say to any who would listen that he would emigrate to the United States should the monarchy be restored in Russia. After the failure of his coup de force, he was placed under arrest under the supervision of his friend and successor, the generalissimo Alexeyev and of the latter's chief of staff, General Denikin. Following the Bolshevik coup d'état of October 1917, Kornilov and Alexeyev hurriedly decamped for the Don, which area they had assessed as suited to their patriotic activity. Word circulated among nationalistic officers and a tiny contingent of volunteers was formed in Novochoerkassk, the capital of the Don Cossacks.

The Volunteer army came formally into existence on December 25, 1917, under the military command of Kornilov and the administrative command of Alexeyev; its objective was to raise an "...armed force capable resisting the growing anarchy and the occupation, whether Bolshevik or German; an armed force whose duty it will be to afford Russian citizens a free choice of the government of their homeland through the summoning of the Constituent Assembly." This last item was further confirmed by the dissolution of the said Assembly by Lenin some days later. A small front was established on the basis of the three main Don cities: Taganrog, Novochoerkassk and Rostov. The Volunteers wore a small white ribbon to distinguish themselves from their enemies — their uniforms being for

the most part similar — and it was this that ensured that they were henceforth known as the “Whites.”



Routed by the Red Guards, they were obliged to fall back in the direction of Ekaterinodar, capital of the Kuban. The Don Cossack's ataman, Kaledin, strove in vain to raise his Cossacks against the Bolsheviks in the name of the territory's autonomy, but he went unheeded and committed suicide out of despair on January 29, 1918. The contingent of 4,000 Whites began its march on February 9th, in the depths of winter (for which reason this march is known as the “ice campaign”) and battled its way across 400 kilometers before collapsing outside Ekaterinodar at the beginning of April 1918. Kornilov, killed by a stray shell on March 31st — which suited the reactionaries in his camp just fine — was replaced by Denikin who was also of very modest origins (a father who had been born a serf before rising through the ranks as an officer) and whose mother and wife were Poles; this Denikin was a fanatical advocate of a “Russia one and indivisible.”

Despite early reverses, the band of Whites grew, boosted first of all by some officers who had managed to join up with it and then by the Cossacks of the Don and the Kuban. At first neutral, the latter had quickly been persuaded by events of the danger inherent in the Bolsheviks who abruptly abolished their traditional rights and, moreover, brutally commandeered their foodstuffs and belongings. Three White armies were formed; the army of the Volunteers, the army of the Don Cossacks commanded by the ataman Krasnov, and the army of the Kuban commanded by Colonel Pokrovsky who was subsequently promoted general by the *Rada* (government) of the Kuban. It was only several months on that they were to be brought under Denikin's overall command and not without friction.

These three armies had their work cut out with a Red Army of some 100,000 Cossacks and troops. In the end they occupied Ekaterinodar in August 1918 and then the northern Caucasus, barring the road from Moscow to their adversaries; then they cleansed the whole of the Caucasus of enemy units; finally, they occupied the Don territory and set themselves the goal of seizing the rich mining basin of the Donetz and the southern Ukraine to the southwest and Tsaritsyn to the north, thereby carving a path towards Moscow.



Conscious of the fact that their power was going to remain fragile unless they had solid armed backing to call upon, Lenin and Trotsky founded a new army, dubbed the “Red Army of workers and peasants” and this replaced the Red Guards and the partisan detachments which were deemed too independent. It was more than just a change of name; a complete change of outlook was involved here; this was no longer workers under arms, but a compliant armed force in the service, the *exclusive* service of the authorities.

However, this army was not created out of whole cloth; the former Red Guards and soldiers from the erstwhile Russian army were paid a wage and were

led by former Tsarist officers in the guise of *military experts* and the latter were themselves shadowed by political commissars — Bolshevik militants — charged with monitoring their loyalty to the new regime.¹ Entire regiments of Latvians from the old Russian army, with officers at their head, were absorbed whole into the Red Army. “Internationalist” regiments and battalions were made up by Poles, Chinese and Hungarian ex-POWs and their Serbian and German counterparts: While awaiting hypothetical repatriation, the latter became “fighting hostages.” All of these “mercenaries” did not waste much time in proving themselves. As for the Russian soldiery, they either signed on or were forcibly enlisted and, in the event of insubordination or desertion, they were liable to the death penalty. Trotsky, a lover of fine phrases, spelled out their alternative thus: “Probable death while advancing, certain death in retreat.”

In this way the strength of the Red Army reached 600,000 men by November 1918, rising to a million by February 1919. On March 12, 1918, Trotsky was appointed people’s commissar and president of the military council, which had been set up at his suggestion.

The most startling thing was the recruitment en masse of ex-tsarist officers, hitherto so much denounced. Most of them joined in all good faith, in the belief that they were placing themselves at the disposal of a “Russian” government intent upon the welfare of the people. The most ambitious of them spotted the chance of rapid advancement in a new army; others were forced into it, with their families held hostage against desertion on their part. These recruits included such bigwigs as Brussilov, erstwhile commander of the Front, plus instructors from the military academy, well-known ex-generals like Bonch-Bruevich and Sitin, a one-time minister of war like Polivanov and tens of thousands of officers and NCOs like Tukhachevsky, Shaposhnikov, Zhukov, Blucher, Sergei Kamenev, etc.

This being so, the Bolsheviks were to be ill-placed to take their White adversaries to task for being Tsarist ex-officers for they themselves had as many of those in their ranks as their adversaries did (some 30,000 in 1918 and more later). Of course, this whole new army and its composition represented grave injury to Lenin’s theorizing as spelled out in *The State and Revolution*, but as in religion, accommodations sit easy with doctrine, provided they be made in the name of the sacrosanct cause.



The presence of numerous foreigners in the contending military units — there were some 250,000 foreign combatants in the Russian civil war, and it may be said that the part they played was crucial to the course it took — was at its most spectacular in the case of the Czech Legion. Under compulsion and constraint, the Czechs had served with the Austrian troops against their fellow Slavs. At the first opportunity they had surrendered en masse to the Russian army. Having agreed, at the request of the Allies, to take up arms again against their former masters, they had been organized into an autonomous army corps some three divisions strong,

led by Russian officers — a force of about 45,000 men. They had distinguished themselves in the offensive ordered by Kerensky in June 1917 and which had come to an abrupt end. In light of the turn taken by developments in Russia, it had been decided that they would be evacuated to Siberia for re-deployment on the Western front alongside the Allies. They had taken the train for Vladivostok, when, en route, in Chelyabinsk, certain incidents brought them into conflict with local Bolsheviks. Trotsky attempted to ride roughshod over them by issuing an order for them to be disarmed and that they be incorporated into the Red Army, with any who refused dispatched to concentration camps. The upshot of this mishandling of the situation was not long in coming; the Czechs went on the offensive and at the end of May 1918 they seized the main stations on the Trans-Siberian railroad, coming formally into conflict with the Bolshevik authorities. In the whole of Siberia, this important armed force, well-equipped and officered, was to play the role of arbiter for upwards of two years.



The members of the Constituent Assembly dissolved by Lenin had not given up. They rose in revolt, and abetted by the Czechs, they seized Samara on the Volga and in June 1918 they formed a “Committee for the Constituent Assembly” (the *Komuch*) and then a provisional government initially made up exclusively of so-called center or right Social Revolutionaries. This government immediately promulgated several democratic decrees: some local organs of self-management — the peasant and urban committees — had their functions restored, the death penalty was abolished (even for Bolsheviks), restrictions on revictualling were rescinded, the eight-hour working day was introduced, the ban on strikes lifted, a ban placed on the lock-out, and fresh elections were to be held to the soviets, etc. The Mensheviks then joined this government which controlled a sizable part of central Russia and a population of some twelve million. At first it appealed to the inhabitants to enlist voluntarily in a Russian democratic army, but when the 10,000 volunteers proved inadequate, it ordered conscription of younger ones, which, to be sure, resulted in an army some 40,000 strong, but one badly led by officers of reactionary persuasions. The Committee for the Constituent Assembly enjoyed the support of the Czechs, all of them of democratic persuasions, who handed over to it the huge gold reserves captured from the Bolsheviks in Kazan. However, some ill-advised “bourgeois” measures were to alienate the bulk of the population from the committee; the banks and industry were de-nationalized and compensation had to be paid to landlords for properties seized from them by the peasants. Also, it was to meet with increasingly open hostility from the “Omsk bloc,” the Siberian government set up with the support of the bourgeoisie and all the monarchist reactionaries who had fled there — many of them officers disinclined to forget the treatment that the Social Revolutionaries had meted out to them at the front in 1917. The latter schemed every bit as much and more in order to secure the exclusive backing of the Czechs and the Allies, and they also

intended very obviously to seize the gold reserves, a substantial consideration in any diplomatic maneuvering.

The Committee for the Constituent Assembly found itself bolstered by the worker uprising in Izhevsk and Volzhinsk. Nearly 35,000 workers from the arms factories situated there rebelled against the Bolsheviks, drove them out and formed regular regiments which threw in their lot with the Russian democratic army.²

Samara's Social Revolutionaries found themselves between the Devil and the deep blue sea: the Bolsheviks and Omsk's reactionaries. Under pressure from the Allies, a gathering of 23 different Siberian governments and groupings — cooperative associations, political organizations, etc. — was held in Ufa in September 1918, and its protracted negotiations ended with the establishment of a common Directory made up of five members, including Admiral Kolchak (backed by the British) as Minister of War. The seat of the new government was switched to Omsk (and the gold shipped there also), Samara being, it was reckoned, too close to the front. In principle, the Constituent Assembly remained sovereign, but a new national assembly was due to be elected on February 1, 1919. In spite of everything and because of the Social Revolutionaries' presence, the Directory enjoyed the backing of the populace and the mobilization that it decreed is telling on this point; some 200,000 conscripts reported for induction. The big bourgeoisie and the toppled aristocrats could not bear, however, to be elbowed out of the direction of operations; so, with the support of the soldiery, they mounted a coup d'état on November 18, 1918 with the blessing of the British and hoisted Admiral Kolchak into power. Eliminated, the democrats found themselves hunted down, shot out of hand or treated as enemies; at first this drew from them resistance and protests, but those were followed by direct uprisings against those who had usurped popular legitimacy.

Urged on by the Allies, Denikin acknowledged Kolchak's suzerainty and both were openly abetted by the Anglo-French in terms of arms, munitions and equipment. These Allies placed formal conditions upon their support; Kolchak and Denikin had to acknowledge the authority of a future Russian government formed following the summoning of a freely elected constituent assembly, as well as the regulation of conflict caused by the prescription of the country's borders through the League of Nations to which the new Russia would be obliged to affiliate.



The whole business was complicated further by the direct intervention of the Allies. Up until the Brest-Litovsk treaty, they had been lost in speculation about the intentions of Lenin's government. But confronted with a fait accompli and discovering its perilous consequences in the shape of German offensives on the French front, Paris, London and Washington were forced to make a stand; however, they had not given up hope of turning the Russian situation around, for they knew that many leaders, including the Bolsheviks' allies the Left SRs hoped for a resumption of hostilities against the central empires. The assassination of Count Mirbach,

Germany's ambassador in Moscow, and the ensuing uprising of the Left SRs which met with some initial success before meeting defeat in the hands of the Letts and Hungarians in Lenin's service, dispelled their lingering hopes and then induced them to side openly with enemies of the Bolsheviks. The principle of a "barbed wire curtain," subsequently referred to as a "cordon sanitaire" was espoused with an eye to isolating Red Russia as an objective confederate of Germany. Henceforth, all anti-Bolshevik forces were given help in the shape of arms and munitions, the Czechs were encouraged to keep control of the 7,000 kilometer-long Trans-Siberian railroad, and French, British, American, Italian and Japanese troops landed in Vladivostok in August 1918.

The entry into the war of the U.S., with its vast potential, alongside the Anglo-French, tipped the scales once and for all in the latter's favor; moreover, disorders broke out in the German army, exhausted by upwards of four years of stressful combat; confronted with this threat of disintegration at home, the central empires' general staff concluded an armistice with the Allies. The implications for this situation inside Russia were enormous; first of all, the Bolshevik leaders *ipso facto* tore up the humiliating treaty of Brest-Litovsk and gained some elbow room in areas hitherto occupied by the Austro-Germans. Moreover, the Allies were no longer bothered about intervening and directly abetting the anti-Bolshevik movements. The most serious impact was felt by the 600,000 Austro-Germans tied down in the Ukraine and now caught in a trap. Those of them who found themselves furthest to the west still managed to quit the Ukraine without too much difficulty and to return home; the rest found themselves continually harassed by partisan detachments keen to avenge 80,000 peasant fatalities caused by the occupation. Frequently Austro-German evacuation convoys had to do battle in order to force a passage for themselves, and they did not always come off best; in which case their officers paid with their lives for their collective crimes and the ordinary soldiers were freed without further harm. Obviously, the loot and arms of intercepted units were confiscated and used to equip local insurgents. Another repercussion was that Poland and the Baltic countries — Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania — regained their independence completely.



The withdrawal of Austro-German troops left the arena open for all movements possessed of enough men and weapons to assert themselves. In the east, in Siberia, Admiral Kolchak's 130,000-strong army began to push towards Moscow from January 1919 on; one by one it seized the stations on the Trans-Siberian route and established itself on four fronts:

- the most important front was the central front — called the Western front — established in the Kazan area. The Kolchakists were commanded by two Czech generals, Jan Syrový and Gajda. There were 42,000 Russians and 20,000 Czechs there, well-armed and with 182 cannon at their disposal;

- the southwestern front stretched from Samara to Orenburg; essentially it was manned by Cossacks from the Orenburg, commanded by the ataman Dutov; about 28,000 men and 54 cannon;
- the Ural front, further to the south, was held by the Ural Cossacks led by General Akutin; about 5,500 averagely armed men; and,
- the northwestern front, which was to cover the vast regions lying to the north of the central deployment, was commanded by General Ivanov-Rinov who could call upon 36,000 poorly-equipped men.

Against these fronts, the Red Army, divided up into six armies commanded by Tsarist ex-generals, also numbered 130,000 men able to call upon 300 cannon. Conscripts under force have little stomach for fighting; so they were stiffened by the more readily manageable Hungarian, Latvian and Chinese units.

To these fronts let us add the front of the ataman Semenov in central Siberia; backed by the Japanese, he had at his disposal several thousand Buryats, Mongols and Ussuri Cossacks.

In the far north in Arkhangelsk an expeditionary corps of 15,000 British had been landed; a supreme government was founded up there under the leadership of the old populist socialist Tchaikovsky. A little later, in January 1918, the Russian general Miller was appointed governor of the province and had at his disposal an army of 7,000, against some 20,000 Red soldiers.

In the southwest, in December 1918, the French fleet anchored off Odessa. The troops of General Franchet d'Espérey (who subsequently became Marshal of France) were due to be deployed in a possible operation in the Ukraine to back up the oversight of central Europe. The French were joined by a contingent of Greeks and an inter-allied expeditionary force 50,000 strong and commanded by General Anselme was deployed between Odessa and its region, from Tiraspol to Kherson and Nikolayev, as well as in the Crimea where the French occupied Sebastopol and Simferopol. Their arrival encouraged the growth of groups of White officers answering to General Denikin.

Further west, the Poles benefited from French military assistance and were active on the borders of their huge northern neighbor. The Ukrainian nationalists at last held much of the Ukraine, but they were poorly-equipped and had to make a stand on every front, for they were recognized by no one; the Allies looked upon them as in cahoots with the Germans, the Poles disputed with them for Galicia, Denikin denied their right of secession, Moscow simply ignored them and only with Makhno (and then only initially) was a de facto neutrality feasible.

Thus towards the beginning of 1919 Lenin's Russia was encircled by several important fronts. It did, however, have at its disposal the vastness of the interior of the country — all these fronts being on the periphery — where the arms factories and

the bulk of the population were located; in addition, it was able to deploy the huge arms reserves of Tsarist Russia. All of these trump cards were far from insignificant; however, Lenin lacked the chief asset, popular support, for his regime was ill-served by its agrarian, and indeed its labor policy. On some it imposed massive requisition of foodstuffs and goods; in its dealings with the others it divested of all power the factory and workshop committees that they had elected.

Not that this occurred without popular resistance and popular revolts; according to the very statistics of the Bolshevik's people's commissariat for Internal Affairs, between July and the end of 1918, 129 anti-Bolshevik revolts erupted in just the sixteen provinces of European Russia³; in particular, 27 armed uprisings occurred in just the two provinces of Tambov and Voronezh over the same period. According to the same source, the chief cause of uprisings was the requisitioning of wheat and forcible recruitment of conscripts. Most were the handiwork of Social Revolutionaries, but often they were spontaneous. These clashes were bloody if one is to judge by the fact that in the months of July, August and September 1918 some 15,000 Bolsheviks and the like perished in some 22 provinces of European Russia.⁴ It is true that the backlash from the Leninist authorities must have been even more terrible.

It may readily be appreciated that peasants and workers mobilized under coercion had no stomach for the fight and had a tendency to surrender quickly when confronted by a determined enemy, even if it meant swelling his ranks instead.

Notes to Chapter 12: The Civil War in Russia

1. Soldier's pay was 150 rubles per month while officers and political commissars received some 3,000 rubles, or nearly 20 times as much! By comparison, the single rate of pay for all ranks in the democratic army of the Committee for the Constituent Assembly was to stand at 15 rubles as of July 1918.

2. L.M. Spirin *Classes and Parties During the Civil War in Russia* (in Russian), Moscow, 1968, pp. 261–266. The author indicates that during the two months of their insurrection, these two plants were to turn out 65,000 rifles as well as 50,000 cartridges and 500 shrapnel grenades per day! That despite the mobilization of the bulk of the workforce in the battle against the Bolsheviks. The author is obliged to comment upon this “social anomaly” by explaining that in history there have been comparable precedents where peasants and workers fought against their own interests; he cites the example of the peasants of the Vendée who fought against the French republic, and the workers in the armies of Cavaignac and Gallifet who crushed revolutionary movements. His argumentation is quite poor if one places these examples in their historical context, in no way comparable with that of 1917.

3. Ibid. p. 180.

4. Ibid. p. 185.

13. The Birth of the Makhnovist Insurgent Army

From November 1918, Makhnovist partisans were manning a front on the edge of the Don territory and the Donetsk basin. They confined to that area the movements of the Don Cossack army of the ataman Krasnov and the detachments of General Mai-Maievsky's Volunteer army. Given the length of the front, it looked as if it would be hard for them to establish another one to the west, in their rear, against the Petliurists. When the Petliurists allowed the formation of White Guard detachments on their territory, relations became strained; they became openly hostile when the Directory came out in favor of the petite and medium bourgeoisie, and they were virtually at war once it announced a general mobilization throughout the length and breadth of the Ukraine, including territory controlled by Makhno. Makhno did his best to obstruct it by every means; however, at a meeting in Ekaterinoslav between Korobets, the Petliurist commander in the town, and the insurgents' command led by Alexei Chubenko, a compromise was hammered out and there were even plans for a joint campaign against Denikin. Furthermore, the nationalists supplied the Makhnovists with weapons and munitions.

However, the natures of the two movements were too much at odds for any entente to last. Paradoxically, it was an incident involving a third party that brought about the split. The Petliurists broke up the workers' soviet of Ekaterinoslav, arrested six Bolsheviks and shot two Left SRs.

The members of the broken soviet and the Bolsheviks appealed to Makhno. Out of solidarity, he agreed to intervene; also because he wanted to get his hands on the enormous arsenal stored in that city.

That was the first mistake; he flew to the aid of political adversaries whom he had bitterly criticized a short time before. His second mistake was of a military nature; he overestimated the assistance promised by the Bolsheviks and Left SRs — a thousand workers and militants, when there was to be only half that number — and underestimated enemy strength (nearly 4,000 men) not counting the endlessly awaited reinforcements. It would appear that Makhno had been dragged along against his better judgment, at the insistence of his friend Alexei Marchenko.

At the head of 600 partisans, Makhno determined upon an attack on December 27, 1918, against the garrison of the regional capital. Everything started

well enough, thanks to an ingenious and daring stratagem; one band of partisans, led by Kalashnikov, shipped aboard a morning train normally crammed with workers, seized the railroad station without firing a shot while the remainder of the Makhnovists neutralized guard posts on the approaches. The booty was not to be dismissed: 20 machine guns, four cannon and ammunition. But the Petliurists dug in in the city where the street fighting, to which the partisans were hardly used, was to drag on for several days.

During the battle, the Bolsheviks “played politics” and passed to Makhno a dispatch from Lenin reminding him of their interview and confirming him as commander in chief of the “soviet” forces in Ekaterinoslav province. To which Makhno replied that there were no “soviet” forces, only the Makhnovist insurgent army. Undaunted, the Bolsheviks persisted with their rigmorale and appointed themselves to take charge of the town; as commanders of the town and the militia, as post office commissars and communications chiefs, as well as other bureaucratic officers. All this while Makhno was fighting day and night in the front lines and without rest.

When the fighting was over, all of the self-appointed bureaucrats showed up at Makhno’s headquarters on the second floor of the railway station in order to take “delivery of power.” As soon as he realized what was afoot, Makhno put them to flight with kicks and “slaps about the back of the head,” not merely from “that story but also from the station.” Driven out by the door, the Bolsheviks returned “via the windows,” again approaching him to get him to back their candidacy in the town’s revolutionary committee, for the Makhnovist partisans, anarchists and Left SRs had a majority on it and were unwilling to kowtow to them. Makhno paid a visit to see the location of this “politicking” and refused to have any truck with such connivance. Realizing that the situation was now beyond their control, the Bolsheviks began to shun the Makhnovists and, much more, ceased to perform the military guard duties allotted to their militants. So much so that a robust counterattack by the Petliurists, bolstered by Colonel Samokisch’s riflemen, completely surprised the partisans who, to avoid being pinned down in the station and wiped out, were forced to cross the bridge over the Dniepr connecting the station with the rest of the city. The bridge was utterly unprotected, for the Bolshevik unit charged with guarding access to it had split in two; one section, panicking, had taken to its heels without waiting to be relieved, while the other turned renegade and opened fire on the Makhnovists. Their retreat thus cut off, the Makhnovists then had to scurry across the ice of the frozen river; many of them were either mown down by enemy fire or drowned in the Dniepr.¹

The failure of the expedition was all but complete as the insurgents had been able to evacuate only part of their armaments since some Petliurist railroad workers had diverted several carriages. Once back in Gulyai-Polye, Makhno put his head together with his comrades; it was decided to convene a congress for reorganization of the Front, a task entrusted to Viktor Belash, an anarchist worker, and then a

general congress of the region's peasants, workers and fighters; the convening of this latter congress was entrusted to Golovko, a peasant from Mikhailovka township.

Belash hastily toured the front to spread the word that the congress had been scheduled for January 3rd. The decision, reached one month previously, to re-deploy all detachments of partisans as regiments had not as yet been put fully into effect. Each band of partisans was always raised locally, adopting the name of the nearest town, appointing a "batko" and liaising informally with "Batko" Makhno. The supply of weapons was very inadequate; barely half of the partisans had rifles and a few cartridges, and these were mostly sawn-off hunting rifles and shotguns; the rest were armed with pikes, pitchforks and cudgels; their best weapon was still their fierce determination to liberate or defend their villages from enemies of every hue who threatened them.

The congress of the Front was held on January 3 and 4, 1919 in the railway station at Pologui, a rail depot halfway between Gulyai-Polye and Mariupol. Some 40 delegates were present on the basis of one delegate per detachment. Makhno, busy at the Front, was not present.

The opening speeches disclosed the dire need for arms and unity of command. Belash suggested that all the detachments, big and small alike, should amalgamate into regiments to which a medical unit and supply section would be assigned. A resolution on radical reorganization of the front was passed unanimously; an operational command was set up to complement Makhno's main staff. This operational staff was to enjoy discretionary authority over the Front and its rearguard; the work of amalgamating the detachments into regiments, or allocating equipment, setting up new detachments and the various staff of the Front would fall to it, as would direction of military operations. All detachments refusing to acknowledge its authority were to be disarmed and their commanders brought before a general tribunal of the insurgents.

As the congress broke up, a six-man operational command was elected; Belash was to head this. He was given wide powers to co-opt further members. He drew up an order reorganizing the Front, and this was promptly circulated among all the detachments. Along the first front, some 160-plus kilometers in length, five regiments were formed, a total of 6,200 fighters, only half of them armed. Each regiment comprised three battalions, each battalion three companies and each company three platoons. Each battalion, company and platoon commander was to be elected, and each regiment would appoint its own staff.²

The insurgents faced enemies who were many and well-armed; to the north-west, towards the city of Alexandrovsk, there were 2,000 Petliurists; to the west, the Eger brigade and detachments of German settlers, about 5,000 men; to the south, a detachment of 4,500 Ukrainian White Volunteers and other units under the command of General Mai-Maievsky. Included among all these troops were local peasants who had been pressed into service, and it was taken for granted that they would seize the opportunity of the first engagements to come over with

weapons and baggage to the Makhnovist insurgents. That was the reason why the latter went on to the offensive on January 8th, in spite of their being outnumbered and of the inadequacy of their weaponry. Desertions gave a spectacular boost to insurgent numbers; by January 20, their southern front boasted 15,000 rifles, 1,000 horsemen, 40 machine guns and stretched over a distance of 250 kilometers. To the west, a 2,000-strong Makhnovist detachment led by Chaly tackled the Petliurists. To the north, the detachment commanded by Petrenko, assisted by anarchist, Left SR and Bolshevik partisans, numbered nearly 10,000 men. Many local partisan groups were as yet operating independently of the Front; in Gulyai-Polye and Pologui there were 5,000 men in reserve. So, not counting the autonomous local partisan bands, the insurgent Makhnovist army numbered, by January 19, 1919, nearly 29,000 front-line fighters and 20,000 men held in reserve for want of weapons. It manned a front line totaling more than 550 kilometers in length, against the Ukrainian nationalists and the Whites. The insurgent movement's strength grew on a daily basis, although the enemy offensives escalated. On January 20, at Henichesk, one of the two Crimean isthmuses, an expeditionary corps landed which had come from the Caucasus to beef up the Eger brigade and the straitened German settlers; it was made up of 2,000 infantry and 300 cavalry. On the same day, a further landing of 10,000 White infantry was made at Berdyansk. A third White contingent of 2,000 infantry and 800 cavalry, again from the Caucasus, marched on Gulyai-Polye. These were all elite troops, Don Cossacks and Chechens,³ placed under the command of General Mai-Maievsky whose intent was to mop up the region before pressing on to Moscow.

Savage fighting ensued; the populace fled into the fields and forests, when they could, especially the menfolk, so as to avoid being shot or forcibly enlisted; for the most part they tried to make it to Gulyai-Polye, the heart of the resistance. Their womenfolk, obliged to stay behind to look after the children, were often raped by the soldiery. Irresistibly, the Whites pressed forward and captured the approaches to Gulyai-Polye. At this point, on January 23, the first regional congress of peasants, workers and fighters opened, in Bolshe-Mikhailovka. One hundred delegates represented the rural districts and partisan units. In view of the critical situation, their agenda concerned itself solely with the strengthening of the front and the overtures to be made to the Petliurist Directory to secure the return of conscripted peasants. Makhno was not present, being in action on the front. Contrary to the preceding congress, where nearly all participants had been anarchists, this one comprised — as far as the post-holders, aside from Congress chairman Golovko, were concerned — solely of Left SRs and Maximalists.

The congress members decided upon mobilization of those who had served during the 1914–1917 war and who were thus conversant with weapons handling. This call-up was not obligatory, but it was morally imperative for the revolution's defense. In addition to promising to shrink from nothing to support the Makhnovist movement, congress assigned itself the task of claiming back all those forcibly

inducted into the Petliurist and White armies. To this end, a special delegation was appointed and accredited.

And this propaganda was not without impact; peasants deserted en masse from the Petliurist army once they grasped its chauvinistic, bourgeois character. So that the partisans liberated, almost without a shot's being fired, many of the places held by the Ukrainian nationalists. It was at this point that the first Red Army units arrived on the scene from Russia and ensconced themselves in the liberated or "open" villages. In Kharkov, which had been liberated by the detachment of the anarchist Cherednyak, a Ukrainian soviet government headed by the Bolshevik Christian Rakovsky was proclaimed in January 1919. Thus did Lenin secretly nullify the treaty of Brest-Litovsk.

On January 26, Ekaterinoslav, which the Petliurists had abandoned, was occupied by the Bolshevik Kronstadt sailor Pavel Dybenko at the head of a dozen armored trains and a detachment of infantry.

The Red Army's capture of Lugansk, a key port on the Black Sea, cut White expeditionary forces off from their base and forced them into withdrawing from their positions. On January 26, a joint assembly of Belash's operational staff and Makhno's main staff determined to dispatch Chubenko to meet with Dybenko and request arms and munitions. If need be, Alexei Chubenko was empowered to enter into a military agreement. Time was of the essence, for the Whites were regrouping their forces preparatory to a general onslaught. Chubenko did meet Dybenko and reached an agreement with him that he passed on by telephone to his comrades for their approval.

This purely military accord turned the insurgent army into No. 3 Dniepr Brigade bearing the name of Batko Makhno, making it an integral part of the Red Army; in return, the Red Army undertook to issue it with the requisite weaponry, supplies and funding.

The Makhnovists retained their internal structure based on the principles of volunteer service, self-discipline and election of all commanders.⁴ Dybenko promised to send 10,000 rifles, 20 machine guns, cartridges, an artillery battery, some money and so on, within two days. The insurgents were itching to get their hands on all this so that they might mount an offensive and liberate their districts; they decided to send a further delegation to Kharkov to sign another agreement with Rakovsky's government and to also secure arms as speedily as possible from that source.

While this was afoot, the enemy launched his offensive; the insurgents repulsed the attackers at bayonet point and forced them to stand off. The Makhnovist counter-attack was a success beyond all expectations. The environs of Gulyai-Polye were freed once again from the Chechens. Attacks followed counter-attacks, all at bayonet point. The insurgents, galvanized by the liberation of their loved ones, managed to force the enemy right back to his former positions.

In Kharkov, the Makhnovist delegation led by Belash was received by the staff of Antonov-Ovseenko, the commander of the Ukrainian front, who reassured it

concerning the agreement reached with Dybenko, whom he depicted as a formal representative of the Red Army and of the Ukrainian soviet government. It was desirable that the region should be liberated as early as possible so that it might be possible “to organize the economy and a communist society.”⁵

Belash called at the headquarters of the anarchist Confederation of the Ukraine, the *Nabat* (Tocsin), spelled out to those present just what the Makhnovschina was and asked their assistance in the form of anarchist literature and anarchist propaganda. A first team of anarchists left immediately for Gulyai-Polye carrying in four wagons the presses of the Confederation’s newspaper and some anarchist literature. A second group made ready to join them along with some other comrades from Moscow, who included Arshinov, who served time in prison with Makhno.

Notes to Chapter 13: The Birth of the Makhnovist Insurgent Army

1. N. Makhno, *The Makhnovschina and its Erstwhile Allies: the Bolsheviks* (in Russian) Paris, 1928, Makhnovist Library. All of the passages between quotation marks regarding this episode are drawn from the above publication wherein Makhno explains himself in length and refutes the Bolshevik versions of events, pp. 7–14. Although vetted and amended by Bolshevik censors, the memoirs of Viktor Belash as they appear in *Letopis revoliutsii* (Annals of the Revolution) No. 3, May–June 1928, pp. 191–229, bear out Makhno’s account.

2. See memoirs of Viktor Belash, op. cit.

3. A people of the Caucasus of the Islamic faith; they fought the Russians at great length during the 19th century before becoming mercenaries in the hire of tsarism and here, of the White generals.

4. See Belash, op. cit.

5. Idem.

14. Soviet Power and the Power of the Soviets

Capitalizing upon the confusion that followed withdrawal of the Austro-German troops from the Ukraine, the Bolsheviks wasted no time in occupying the cities of Kharkov and Kiev. There they set up a Ukrainian soviet government under Christian Rakovsky, whereupon the Red Army attempted at bayonet point to push southwards. The aid requested by the Makhnovist insurgents was grist to their mill; from now on they could purport to be acting on behalf of the local masses. As yet the latter had no knowledge of the reality lurking behind the whole alluring phraseology and official slogans of the Leninists; likewise, they knew nothing of the situation in Russia and particularly of Moscow's policy as applied to the problems of the peasantry there. Anyway what did that consist of exactly?

In keeping with their old catechism, the Bolsheviks regarded as proletarians only industrial workers, the only ones truly serviceable for a social revolution; peasants were essentially conservatives, their only ambition being to become small-holders and to work their plots of land themselves and that, argued Lenin and his fellows, was the open door to petit-bourgeois capitalist production.¹ The peasants were going to be genuinely revolutionaries only if they had no land and worked as wage-earners in large-scale production, be it capitalist or state-owned. Moreover, the difficulties in keeping the cities supplied had induced nearly eight million individuals to quit the city for the countryside where they became a malleable and disposable mass due to the very fact that they had no land. It was to these rootless persons that the Bolsheviks were going to award the great landed estates that had been confiscated, and this to the detriment of the local peasantry, keen to share out those estates so as to boost their meager holdings. The "townies" — landless peasants — were to be dubbed as "poor peasants" and organized into committees — the *Kombed* — thereby representing the new power-base in the countryside; they were to be encouraged to seize the holdings and produce of "kulak" peasantry (actually, of the great bulk of the peasantry since the real "kulaks" had either been eliminated as early as 1917–1918 or reduced to more modest circumstances).

In addition, in order to ease food shortages in the towns, the authorities set up mobile requisition squads which were dispatched straight out into the countryside to issue paper — currency or receipts — against the produce seized; some blatantly

pillaged the populace, if need be shooting resisters and torching their homes. As we have just seen was the case in Russia, such methods sparked off numerous peasant revolts and uprisings, drowned in blood by the regime's janissaries.

Indeed, the Leninist regime's sledgehammer argument was the argument of deliberate terror; the Cheka followed the Red Army everywhere and promptly indulged in a preventive "purge" which is to say that it shot individuals regarded as potential enemies of the authorities and did so on a grand scale. The chairman of the Kiev Cheka, Latsis, announced to his subordinates on this point:

"Do not try to speculate whether the accused have or have not conspired against the Soviet authorities, in arms or verbally. You ought to ask them first of all to what class they belong, of what social origin they are, to what degree have they been educated, and what is their profession. These questions should decide the fate of the suspects. That is the meaning and nature of Red Terror."²

In the Ukraine too, these methods were employed as we shall have occasion to note in the case of Ekaterinoslav which was captured for a few days by the Makhnovists, recaptured by the Ukrainian nationalists and then occupied at some length by the Red Army. One inhabitant of the city, G. Igrenyev, testifies: to begin with the Red troops made a good impression ... there were no excesses, attempts at looting by some Chinese soldiers were nipped in the bud, and some of them were even shot. Then things changed:

"All in all, the initial days were so calm that the population was beginning to bless the Soviet regime that was bringing a troubled time to an end. Soon, however, they were to get acquainted with the other side of the coin. On the fifth day, the Cheka arrived from Kharkov and set zealously to work. Endless arrests and firing squads without benefit of trial began to become routine. All who had been one-time supporters of the hetman, or even of Petliura, were arrested. Many were shot out of hand the moment questioning began and very often mistakenly. Soon there was not a family left from the city's intelligentsia which had not had one of its members placed under arrest. No information was released to those anxious for their nearest and dearest; the Cheka was guarded by a double cordon of troops who would let no one through ... Cheka activity so dominated local life that it ensured that the hastily organized authority of the presidium of the soviet of the city's workers went quite unnoticed.

Now, the inhabitants soon felt the impact of that authority also, especially where food supply was concerned. After the setting-up in Ekaterinoslav of a Supply Commissariat, stocks began to melt away discernibly. The market which hitherto had always been plentifully

stocked (even right after fighting) rapidly became deserted. Day by day prices escalated at a crazy rate. Within the space of three weeks they doubled and after that the progression was geometrical. The roots of this phenomenon were as straightforward as could be. The Supply Commissariat had vigorously campaigned against freedom of trade, after having issued the population with ration cards which, however, could not be traded for any product. Ekaterinoslav was ringed by audit detachments which ruthlessly confiscated all produce from peasants attempting to bring their produce into the city. Meanwhile, the city's huge stocks of foodstuffs were quickly bought up or purloined by all sorts of requisition detachments flooding in from cities to the north [i.e., from Russia — A.S.]. Assisted by such an arrangement, the city, hitherto so rich in food supplies thanks to the fertility of its region, was quickly turned into a starving wasteland. Given that the city had no cooperative organization of any sort, the situation became worse than it was in the north.”³

The new authorities introduced many other reforms; not the least original was the reform of educational provision: the eighth and final year of secondary schooling was simply dropped, teachers had to seek election and, in order to do so, to spell out their “educational and political credo,” all under the higher authority of a young student promoted to commissar for education. Communist cells were established in every educational site, their main object being to denounce “heretical” teachers.

Thus, this Soviet authority “imported” from Moscow fell a long way short of meeting the needs and aspirations of the populace; its bureaucratic methods soon created a situation of food shortages and complete arbitrariness in the life of society. The regime imposed its views and the Soviets worked in one direction only: as a transmission belt, from the top towards the bottom. Everything was dictated by a handful of members, higher-ups from the party's central committee.

As far as the Makhnovists were concerned, the power of the soviets was rather more than just another piece of cant; they saw them as free agencies emanating directly from the workers and expressing their wishes and aspirations without recourse to intermediaries of any sort.

The two social and political approaches were radically opposed to each other; communism built from above or from below, which is to say authoritarians versus libertarians. On this point, let us quote Piotr Arshinov, the chronicler of the Makhnovist movement:

“The Statists fear the free people. They assert that without authority, the latter will lose the anchor of sociability, will split asunder and turn wild. Naturally these are absurd arguments supported by idlers, who love power and the prospect of work for others, or by the blinkered

thinkers of bourgeois society. The emancipation of the people does indeed spell degeneracy and a savage life, not for the people, though, but for those who live off power and privilege, from the toil of the workers and from their heartsblood.”⁴

The peasants of the Gulyai-Polye region took it upon themselves to demonstrate the accuracy of this view. For upwards of six months between November 1918 and June 1919 and despite the state of war they lived without any political authorities and organized free soviets and libertarian communes for their work and their everyday affairs. According to one of the resolutions of a district peasant congress, it was affirmed that “... land belongs to no one, and only those who work it may use it” (this blunt rejection of the State aroused regret in the Soviet historian, Kubanin). The largest of these communes, named after Rosa Luxemburg as a tribute to that late revolutionary (tribute to *her*, not to her ideas) housed 40 families as of May 1919. By May 1st it was to boast a population of 285 (adults and children) and would have 125 hectares under crops.

Several dozens of anarchists showed up from the cities, as requested by Makhno; they included Arshinov and A. Baron who were to help get out the insurgent movement’s mouthpieces *The Road to Freedom* and later the *Makhnovist Voice*.⁵ The Ukrainian anarchist confederation, the Nabat, set up shop in Gulyai-Polye.



In his memoirs, Viktor Belash describes Gulyai-Polye as it was then. The building housing the insurgent army’s headquarters was topped by huge black banners bearing the slogans “War on the palaces, peace to the cottages,” “On the side of oppressed against oppressors, always!” and “The emancipation of the workers is the affair of the workers themselves!” In the adjoining building, the premises of the district soviet of peasant deputies, worker deputies and soldier deputies, two flags flew bearing the inscriptions: “Power generates parasites. Long live Anarchy!” and “All power to the soviets right now!”



As scheduled, the second regional congress of peasants, workers and fighters proceeded on February 12, 1919 in Gulyai-Polye. It drew 245 delegates representing 350 rural districts. On this occasion, Makhno was in attendance. He turned down a proposal to nominate him as chairman of the congress, as the tense situation on the front might call him away at any moment. All the same, he was elected honorary chairman. The delegation that had been dispatched to Kharkov reported on its negotiations with the secretary of the government (as it had not secured an interview with the people’s commissars/ministers). That official had stated that the government had no intention of opening hostilities against the Makhnovist movement, that their agreement had been as yet unconfirmed but that it probably would be. A lively debate then took place in congress on the idea of free soviets and their incompatibility with any party political authority:

"The Ukrainian provisional government stood by, first in Moscow and then in Kursk, until the workers and peasants of the Ukraine had liberated the territory of enemies. [...] Now that the enemy is beaten ... some government appears in our midst describing itself as Bolshevik and aiming to impose its party dictatorship upon us. Is that to be countenanced? ... We are non-party insurgents, and we have revolted against all our oppressors; we will not countenance a new enslavement, no matter the quarter whence it may come!" [Speech of Chernoknizhny, delegate of the Novopavlovsk district]

And the anarchist insurgent Boino declared:

"Whatever the cost, we must set up soviets which are beyond pressure from any and every party. Only non-party soviets of workers, freely elected are capable of affording us new liberties and rescuing the laboring people from enslavement and oppression. Long life to the freely elected, anti-authoritarian soviets!"

Makhno made a contribution to the same effect. The resolution passed by the congress is thus a fine expression of the participants' defiance of the political authorities installed by the Bolsheviks.⁶

The congress finally elected a regional Military Revolutionary Soviet which became its executive organ in the interval between its sittings. Even so, this was liable to disbandment at any time by an extraordinary congress. Its powers were all-embracing, covering the military, social, economic and political aspects of the region's insurgent movement. A central supply section was established in Gulyai-Polye; it marshaled supplies and forage for subsequent distribution throughout the Front; finally, "voluntary" and "egalitarian" mobilization was confirmed, appeal being made to the conscience and goodwill of every individual; this mobilization was meant to have a measured impact upon the villages, townships and districts, so that essential agricultural tasks could continue to be assured.

Despite the influx of volunteers, many had to be sent home temporarily due to the dearth of weapons. Already what weapons were available were not being deployed along the traditional lines. Kubanin deplores this departure from tradition also; infantry mounted on tachankis and thus highly mobile could cover 60-to-100 kilometers per day; and these tachankis were fitted with machine guns when available; rifles had their barrels sawed down, rendering them more readily manageable in close quarters or hand-to-hand fighting; moreover, the latter form of combat was the insurgents' preferred form; as often as they were able, they would pop up unexpectedly in the rear or on the flanks of the enemy and mount an all-out onslaught, first with rifle and machine gun, and then with sabers, in the use of which they excelled. Nor was artillery missed out; this was commanded by Vassili Sharovsky, gunnery expert.

According to Makhno, by February–April 1919, the insurgent movement numbered almost 30,000 fighters and 70,000 men in reserve, always for want of weapons but ever ready to move to the Front if the need arose.

Let it be noted that the insurgents identified with the workers in the large cities; the peasants of Gulyai-Polye devised the watchword: “Worker, join hands with us!” and acted upon this by making contact directly. The most telling instance was the case of the 100 wagon-loads of wheat seized from the Whites in February 1919 and which a delegation shipped to Moscow. However, this independent-minded move and such spontaneous acts were deeply frowned upon by the Bolshevik potentates in Moscow and their hostility was growing without restraint.

Notes to Chapter 14: Soviet Power and the Power of the Soviets

1. This attitude was all too obvious in the regime’s Constitution, adopted in July 1918, under which, in the event of elections, the vote of the city-dweller would be held to be the equivalent of the votes of five country-dwellers.
2. In the Cheka’s main organ, *Krasnij terror* (Red Terror), November 1, 1918.
3. G. Igrenyev, *Memories of Ekaterinoslav*, in *Archives of the Russian Revolution* (Russian language), Berlin, 1922, Tome III, pp. 238–239.
4. P. Arshinov, *History of the Makhnovist Movement 1918–1921* (in Russian) Berlin, 1923, p. 85.
5. In Russian, *Puts’ Ksvobodye* and *Golos makhnovtsa* respectively.
6. See the full text of the report on the congress in the appendices to this book.