

15. Alliance with the Red Army

Makhno and the staff of the insurgents allied themselves with the Red Army, for one thing, because they placed the “revolution’s interests above ideological differences” (Makhno) and, for another, because they were beset by a terrible shortage of arms and munitions, trophies taken from the enemy being insufficient to make up for the daily consumption of cartridges and insufficient to arm the many volunteers who showed up to fight in their ranks. As far as the Makhnovists were concerned, this was only a military and by no stretch of the imagination a political compact, for in political terms Bolsheviks were still, in their eyes, adversaries, as the second regional congress had confirmed. Moscow took a different view: from the moment that a military alliance exists, there is automatically political dependency, i.e., formal recognition of the authority of the Ukrainian Soviet government. These two very divergent outlooks were to lie at the root of a latent conflict. For the time being, the Bolsheviks had scarcely any option; they had scarcely any troops in the Ukraine and the danger of White offensives was looming.

Indeed, at the beginning of 1919 the Red Army in the Ukraine was made up almost exclusively of detachments of local partisans which had subordinated themselves for the very same reason as the Makhnovists. Such composition was not at all to the taste of the Red leadership who were preoccupied with hierarchical order and discipline. To begin with, their efforts were going to be devoted to overhauling the structure of the partisan groups and turning these into regiments, brigades and divisions. This is how Vitaly Primakov, one of the chief Bolshevik military officials of the times described this phase:

“Towards the end of January 1919, substantial reforms were introduced in the [Red] insurgent army. Divisions were organized on the Russian model; the quality of headquarters staff was noticeably improved. Certain regimental commanders were stood down for acts of banditry. The regiments were overseen by political commissars; political sections were introduced in the divisions. Some independent regimental commanders were removed or shot. The title of ‘regimental ataman’ was abolished and that of ‘commander’ replaced it. The finest regiments were turned

into brigades. [...] Some artillery divisions were set up. Based on the Dniepr, the army proceeded all that February with this reshuffle. Then it entered into contact with the atamans Grigoriev, Makhno and others. The government was now confronted with the task of preserving its army from contagion by the Makhnovschina and the Grigorievschina; this burden fell entirely upon the army's youthful political cadres, which simultaneously conducted a political agitation campaign and Cheka work, not only educating the troops but also shooting the most inflexible atamans. This tiresome duty was performed with honor by the young political cadres."¹

Thus the Bolsheviks' primary concern was to conduct a squalid police operation designed to turn free insurgents, revolutionary insurgents, into a slavish, obedient mass and to shoot honest revolutionaries if need be, whose only failing was their refusal to kowtow to the evangel of the Leninist State. What Primakov — who apparently played a leading part in this whole process — leaves unsaid is that during all this time the "atamans," from whom he feared contagion, held the front heroically against the White Guards.

According to the military agreement concluded, Bolshevik political commissars were to operate within the Makhnovist insurgent army ranks (this army was pompously re-christened brigade). Also the Cheka wanted to screen its members over. Both the commissars and the Cheka were chased out by the peasants or treated with contempt by the insurgents who were fighting for their land, their families and their freedom and who were well aware that these would be best guaranteed only through the success of the social revolution and who had no political lessons to learn from missionaries of the self-styled scientific socialist faith. Makhno himself, obliged to put up with them, treated them "with sarcasm," Bolshevik missionaries complained.

Moreover, the military compact was none too scrupulously observed by the Bolsheviks: aside from an initial delivery of 100,000 cartridges and 3,000 Italian special caliber rifles, each one accompanied by only a dozen shells, that was all the Makhnovists were to get, and none of the promised cannon or machine guns. Anyway, in some instances the cartridges were faulty, having been sabotaged by Denikin supporters who had infiltrated the ranks of the Red Army (some of them were later to be discovered and shot). This piecemeal delivery was deliberate, for the reasons set out by Primakov earlier and for some bizarre reason applied also to deliveries to Dybenko who, although a dyed-in-the-wool Bolshevik, was nonetheless suspected of playing along with the "atamans"; in his forces, every two fighters were entitled to a rifle between them, whereas among Grigoriev, the ratio was one between three with the worst ratio the one among four that prevailed among the Makhnovists.

The Bolsheviks also bemoaned the growing influence of anarchists over the insurgent movement, and more so, the presence of a rather sizable group of Left

SRs (who had been accepted by the insurgents only on the basis of the fight against the Whites and for the power of the free soviets). Especially since these Left SRs included Viktor Popov, a Black Sea sailor who had led the Left SR rising against Lenin in July 1918 and had come within an ace of success (he was subsequently to play a very active role in the Makhnovist movement, taking charge among other things of its intelligence branch).

Makhno was not content to quarantine the political commissars; he also arrested a detachment of Chekists who were beginning operations in Berdyansk and had them manhandled into the front lines. It was hardly surprising in these circumstances that relations became strained and that the red authorities were forever on the lookout for quibbles, inventing tales of uprisings where all that was going on was simple troop movements and units relieving one another.

Josef Dybets' evidence is very revealing of these frictions and of the Bolsheviks' bad faith. To make matters worse, Dybets was a former anarcho-syndicalist of some note, having been one of the founders of *Golos Truda* (The Voice of Labor), the great Russian anarcho-syndicalist organ published in the U.S., where he had spent ten years as an immigrant. According to Dybets, the fog shrouding his thinking had lifted after he read Lenin's *The State and Revolution*, whereupon he had ardently embraced this new pope's religion of realism and efficiency. In February 1919, he was in Berdyansk. The Makhnovists occupied the port and Dybets met Makhno, which gave rise to the following laconic exchange:

"Good day, Dybets. So, it seems you're a renegade now?"

"Good day. It would appear that I am a renegade."

"Which means you are completely Bolshevik?"

"Yes, completely."

"Yes, it's true that many have sold out to the Bolsheviks. Nothing to be done about it."

"That's right, they do sell out. I too have sold out."

"Take care lest you regret it."

"I will take care."

Dybets' wife, Rosa, had remained an anarchist and, what is more, had been an inmate in the same prison in Ekaterinoslav as Makhno ten years before. This was a significant point in Dybets's favor and afforded him a certain license in the tone of his conversation with Makhno. This is how their exchange went, as Dybets tells it at any rate:

[Dybets to Makhno] "What is your program?"

"To eliminate the Whites first and then the Bolsheviks."

"Well, what do you intend to do after that?"

"Afterwards, the people will govern themselves."

"And how will they be able to govern themselves? Let me have your views on that." [Makhno] spelled out, in vague fashion, the anarchist thinking about the absence of constraints upon peasant communes which would not be subordinated to the State, nor to any organizational center.

"Our activists," he said, "are confined solely to agitation and propaganda. The people themselves do everything. That is what we are doing also at the moment in military affairs. The army runs itself."

"That's absurd, Utterly absurd."

But Makhno was not to be put off.

"You will see. First we are going to rid ourselves of the Whites and then of the Bolsheviks."

Dybets tackled Makhno yet again, asking him what he intended to establish as a regime. The Ukrainian libertarian's answer was: "The people's Commune. The anarchist Republic," which was hardly surprising. Dybets reckoned that he had found a crushing argument when he countered that Makhno couldn't even run a factory and was surrounded only by bandits and anarchists on the run from the bullets of the Cheka! A contemptuous Makhno brought the exchange to a close by dismissing him several times as a "renegade!"

Belated and sudden though his conversion may have been, Dybets played a significant role among local Bolsheviks; he headed a revolutionary committee in Berdyansk, a committee representing nobody but the Bolsheviks but which nonetheless arrogated certain rights to itself. Dybets thus crowed about having put one over on the Makhnovists. At a time when, according to the testimony of Antonov-Ovseenko, half of the Makhnovists were virtually barefoot and when the Gulyai-Polye Military Revolutionary Soviet urgently requested a shipment of twelve wagon-loads of leather, produced by the tanneries of Berdyansk, Dybets arranged to have the shipment rerouted to Moscow, then indignantly accused the Makhnovists of having been behind its disappearance. He smugly recalled that in so doing he had furnished himself with a decisive comment for his discussions with the Makhnovists; at the first sign of a problem, he used to say to them: "And the leather, what have you done with it?"²

Makhno authorized the display of Bolshevik newspapers in Gulyai-Polye, Berdyansk and Mariupol. A certain Uralov, a Leninist militant, tells this tale: bearing a safe conduct pass from Makhno, he set out for Berdyansk, there to see to publication of a newspaper for his party. Right from the very first two issues, he railed violently against the Makhnovist insurgents while they at the time were busy containing a push by the enemy. Protests having had no effect, some insurgents turned up to smash the plates of the third issue of Uralov's provocative publication.³

For their part, the insurgents kept up their side of the bargain; they sent two of their tried and tested regiments to help Dybenko combat the White Guard and German settler detachments in the Crimea. For their own part, they went on the offensive in April and got within a few kilometers of Taganrog, the headquarters of Denikin's front. For want of arms and ammunition, they were unable to capitalize upon this success. Chance brought them into Mariupol with some Frenchmen who were unloading materials and arms for the Denikinists. The Frenchmen suggested to the insurgents that they swap the weapons for some coal stacked on the dockside and which they needed urgently, but the Frenchmen met with a categorical refusal and the whole episode ended with some artillery "exchanges."



The Kremlin's official mouthpiece, *Pravda*, acknowledged the merits of Makhno and wrote of him on April 3, 1919:

"The Ukrainians say of Makhno: 'Our Batko fears neither God nor Devil, yet he is a simple man like us.' [There followed a biographical sketch of Nestor.] The peasants, despite the threat of their being shot for having protected Makhno help him in all things. He has set up a detachment and turned down a proposal of union with the Directory, declaring to a villagers' congress in Alexandrovsk that '... the Petliurist movement is only an adventure distracting the masses from the revolution.' With 600 men, he took Ekaterinoslav, investing the city via the railway station but was forced to pull back to the Dniepr [...] Being under Dybenko's command, he has been incorporated into the Red Army of which he forms a brigade. He has been assigned the task of fighting the White Volunteers and of keeping the railroad clear up as far as Berdyansk, in which he has acquitted himself brilliantly. The White's finest regiments have been smashed!"

Things livened up, nonetheless, when the Military Revolutionary Soviet appointed by the second congress of peasants and insurgents summoned the Third Regional Congress for April 10 in Gulyai-Polye. Delegates from 72 districts, representing upwards of two million inhabitants, took part. All civil and military issues were dealt "with great gusto" (Arshinov). Towards the end of the proceedings, the congress received a telegram from Dybenko in which the latter pronounced the congress counter-revolutionary and outlawed its organizers whom he threatened with "... the most rigorous repressive measures." Addressing himself to Makhno, Dybenko ordered him to ensure that there was no repetition of the episode; a copy of the telegram was forwarded to the Gulyai-Polye Soviet. The Military Revolutionary Soviet was superciliously ignored. In its reply, which has become famous, the latter made it its business to enlighten Dybenko as to the situation:

“Before pronouncing the congress counter-revolutionary, ‘comrade’ Dybenko did not take the trouble to establish in whose name and for what purpose it had been summoned, right? [...] So allow us, ‘Your Excellency,’ to inform you by whom and for what this (according to you, patently counter-revolutionary) congress has been summoned and then, maybe, it will not strike you as quite so frightening as you describe it.

The congress, as stated above, was summoned by the executive committee of the Military Revolutionary Soviet of the Gulyai-Polye (that being the central township). It has described itself as the third regional congress. It was convened in order to lay down the future policy line for activities of the Military Revolutionary Soviet (you see, ‘comrade’ Dybenko, there had already been two previous ‘counter-revolutionary’ congresses of this sort). Now to the question that you might pose yourself; whence comes the Military Revolutionary Soviet and to what end was it established? If you are not au fait, ‘comrade’ Dybenko, then allow us to bring you up to date.

This Soviet was established in accordance with the resolution of the second congress, which took place on February 12 in Gulyai-Polye (you see how long ago that was, for you were not even around then?), in order to organize the front and proceed to a volunteer mobilization, given that we were ringed by Whites and that the first detachments of insurgent volunteers were insufficient to hold such an extensive front. So there were no soviet troops in our region and anyway the populace did not expect much assistance, being of the mind that it was their duty to look to their own defense!”

The authors of this reply then set out how and why the Military Revolutionary Soviet with its 32 members, one delegate from each district of the provinces of Ekaterinoslav and Tavrida, had come into being. Then they harked back to the origins of the convening of the second congress which had been summoned by a five-member commission appointed by the first congress on January 23 and who had not been outlawed in that the sort of “... hero who would venture to trespass against the people’s rights won in open battle at the cost of their own blood,” still was not around at that time. Then they went on to explain to Dybenko, whom they held was ignorant of all this, the basic reasons behind the insurgent movement and the progress of its fight against its enemies first of all, only to return to the appointment of the impugned soviet which had only executive powers, and to the sovereign role of the third congress apropos evaluation of and formulation of policy on the events in progress. In conclusion, “comrade” Dybenko was taken seriously to task:

“There now, comrade Dybenko, you have before you a picture that should be an eye-opener for you. Collect your wits! Reconsider! Have

you the right, you alone, to label as counter-revolutionaries upwards of one million workers who have, with their horny hands, cast off the shackles of slavery and henceforth look to themselves for the reshaping of their lives as they see fit.

No! If you be a genuine revolutionary, you must help them in their struggle against the oppressors and in the building of a new and free life. Can it be that laws laid down by a handful of individuals, describing themselves as revolutionaries, can afford them the right to declare outside of the law an entire people more revolutionary than themselves? (The soviet's executive committee embodies the whole mass of the people.) Is it tolerable or reasonable that laws of violence be thrust upon the lives of a people which has just rid itself of all lawmakers and all laws? Is there some law according to which a revolutionary is alleged to have the right to enforce the harshest punishment against the revolutionary mass on whose behalf he fights, and this because that same mass has secured for itself the benefits that the revolutionary promised them ... freedom and equality? Can that mass remain silent when the 'revolutionary' strips it of the freedom which it has just won? Does the law of revolution require the shooting of a delegate on the grounds that he is striving to achieve in life the task entrusted to him by the revolutionary mass which appointed him? What interests should the revolutionary defend? Those of the party? Or those of the people at the cost of whose blood the revolution has been set in motion?"

This mini-anthology on the revolutionary autonomy of the workers closed with an invitation — "should Dybenko and those like him persist in their 'dirty business'" — to declare counter-revolutionary and outlaws all who had participated in the foregoing congresses and the combatants who had fought and were fighting still for the people's emancipation without seeking anybody's leave to do so. The signatories to the document, members of the soviet, finally stated that they would carry on with their tasks and had neither the right nor the duty to default upon the responsibility which the people had delegated onto their shoulders.⁴

This text was countersigned by the chairman of the Military Revolutionary Soviet, Chernoknizhnik; by the vice-chairman, Leonid Kogan; by the secretary, Karbet; and by the members Koval, Petrenko, Dotzenko and others. Makhno was not among them, not having even attended this congress, having been caught up in fighting, and in any case, he had nothing to do with the supreme organ of the movement. Thus Dybenko discovered with whom he had to deal: the mass of the people. He himself came from the mass of the people and had quite good revolutionary credentials: all he needed was the requisite finesse to distinguish between the language of revolution and that of a party which had proclaimed itself repository of the revolutionary mass's historical and political interests. In

fact, he was a bumpkin who did not shrink from the most brutal and disgusting measures if they enforced respect; Dybets describes how he slew the commander of a Red Army cavalry regiment where he stood, without a word spoken, just to ensure readier obedience from the combatants. Although these were commonplace measures albeit generally used with greater discretion in that "army," Dybenko displayed great enthusiasm for them.



With Antonov-Ovseenko we have a completely different kettle of fish. He was an old Bolshevik militant, one of those "professional revolutionaries" who had kept the party afloat for years. In October 1917, he had led the Petrograd military soviet which organized the storming of the Winter Palace. At this time he was in command of the Ukrainian front. He was very well aware that the Makhnovist insurgents were "... supporters of local soviets, regarded as free soviets answerable to no central authority."⁵ He wanted to get a more exact notion of the whole commotion denounced by his party colleagues, and so he paid a visit to Gulyai-Polye on April 28 and has left us with a superb, objective account of the situation.

For a start he addressed a message to Makhno announcing that he would be passing through the region. By return he received a telegram from Makhno:

"I know you to be an upright and independent revolutionary. On behalf of the revolutionary insurgent units of the 3rd Dniepr brigade and all of the revolutionary organizations of the Gulyai-Polye region which proudly bear the banner of the insurrection, I am charged to invite you to call upon us to visit our own little 'Petrograd' — free, revolutionary Gulyai-Polye."

En route, Antonov-Ovseenko reviewed all recent developments on the Front, the fine conduct of the Makhnovists and the advice of one Bolshevik leader, Sokolov, and of Hittis, commander of the southern front, to the effect that Makhno be removed from command of his brigade, which struck him as uncalled for since, as the saying goes, "one does not change horses in mid-stream."

From the railway station, a troika brought him briskly to Gulyai-Polye. He was welcomed to the strains of the "Internationale," played by an orchestra. So let us now turn to his account:

"A group of bronzed partisans stepped forward to greet the Front commander; one man broke ranks, a man of small stature and quite youthful, with somber eyes and a high papakha perched on his head. He stopped two paces away and saluted: 'Brigade commander Batko Makhno. We are successful in holding the front. At present we are waging the battle for Mariupol. On behalf of the revolutionary insurgents of the Ekaterinoslav province, I salute the leader of the Ukraine's soviet troops.' Handshake. Makhno introduces the members of the Gulyai-Polye soviet's executive committee and of his staff. Also there

is the [Bolshevik — A.S.] political commissar of the bridge, my old acquaintance, Marussia Nikiforova.

We review the troops. The brigade's main units are on the front. Here there are only a reserve regiment undergoing training and two cavalry platoons. Dressed in a motley assortment of uniforms and clothing and brandishing all sorts of arms, the impression they give is nonetheless one full of verve and pugnaciousness. They 'devour me' with their eyes.

In silence they all listened to the front commander's speech about the import of our struggle, on the position on the different fronts, on the heavy responsibility entrusted to the Makhno Brigade, on the necessity for iron discipline, and they greeted his concluded words with 'hurrahs.'

Makhno replied to the front commander by wishing him welcome, alluded somewhat touchily to the 'unfair' charges laid against the insurgents, mentioned their successes and promised further successes '... if support in arms and equipment is forthcoming' (his voice is not very loud, there is a slight hiss to it, and his pronunciation is soft; all in all, he does not give the impression of being a great orator, but how attentively they all hear him out!). We step into the building housing the brigade's staff and quickly inspect its branches; the inspection is gratifying. One can discern the hand of a specialist [staff commander Ozerov] at work."

An exchange upon the situation of the Front ensued. The deployment of the brigade's units was reviewed; the results of the April 23rd offensive examined; while the conversation was in progress news arrived of the capture of Mariupol and of the capture of every last man of the enemy's first mixed regiment of infantry and cavalry. Makhno, though, stated that he did not have the wherewithal to follow up the offensive and that it "... would be feasible to form two whole divisions, but the arms and equipment just were not available." He added that the Red Army's 9th reserve division, deployed to the north of his brigade, was prone to panic and that its command's sympathies lay with the Whites. He cited the instance of the offensive against Taganrog when this "... 9th Division fell back abruptly, leading to the encirclement and extermination of a Makhnovist regiment which fought to the bitter end without surrendering." Then he bemoaned the shortage of armaments (in his report, Antonov-Ovseenko comments: "His complaint is well founded!"; there was "neither money nor weapons nor munitions nor equipment. Some time back Dybenko did supply 3,000 Italian rifles with a few cartridges each and now that the ammunition has run out, these rifles are useless."). The remainder of the arms and equipment was booty taken from the enemy. Half of the partisans went barefoot.

And what of the charges of banditry? Why here comes the “big bandit”: Batko Pravda, the legless cripple commander of a detachment shows up and salutes Antonov-Ovseenko. He is a dyed-in-the-wool libertarian communist and a first rate fighting man; in spite of this, all sorts of rumors are peddled about him, allegedly he cuts Bolshevik throats and fights against soviet power. He has personally slain bandits. “Persecution of political commissars? Not a bit of it. But we have need of fighters, not gossips. Nobody drove them out. They buggered off themselves. Of course we do have lots who are opposed to your way of thinking and, if you wish, we can discuss.” Everything that Makhno says is confirmed by the brigade’s Bolshevik political commissar.

As their conversations proceed, the insurgents and their guests share a meal washed down by some reddish liqueur: Makhno tells Antonov-Ovseenko that he is not a drinker and that he has banned alcohol. The members of the Gulyai-Polye soviet congratulate themselves on their work: the town boasts three magnificently appointed secondary schools and some children’s communes. Ten military hospitals house a thousand wounded but unfortunately there is no experienced doctor. Antonov-Ovseenko pays a visit to some of them, finding them to be very clean and spacious, having been set up in seigneurial homes. There is also a repair shop for artillery pieces.

Antonov-Ovseenko has a tête-à-tête discussion with Makhno about what help to afford to soviet Hungary,⁶ about “... the breakthrough in Europe, the danger of an offensive by Denikin and the need to erect a united, steely front of social revolution against that.”

In the end, the pair “shake hands firmly, looking each other in the eye. Makhno declares that ‘as long as he leads the insurgents, there will be no anti-soviet acts and that battle without quarter will be waged against the bourgeois generals.’ Without demur, he agrees to the conversion of his sector of the front into a division, under the command of one Chikvanaya, with Makhno remaining brigade commander. A great get-together brings the day to a close: everyone rallies around the watchword of ... ‘all out against the common foe, the bourgeois generals.’”

In 1927, in an appendix to this account, (quite startling for a Bolshevik at that time) Antonov-Ovseenko noted that, in the light of subsequent developments, his testimony might appear to “unduly idealize” the insurgents, but, he added “he had striven only to be objective”!



Summarizing his impressions, Antonov-Ovseenko telegraphed the following message to Rakovsky on April 29:

“I spent the entire day with Makhno. He, his brigade and the whole region represent a great fighting force. There is no conspiracy. Makhno himself would not allow it. It is possible to organize the region well, there is excellent material there, and we must keep it on our side and

not create yet another new front to fight on. If consistent work is followed through, this region will become an impregnable stronghold. The punitive measures contemplated are senseless. There must be an immediate end of the attacks against the Makhnovists that are beginning to appear in our newspapers.”

Without waiting for any reply, he also telegraphed to Bubnov and to the editions of the Kharkov *Izvestia*, the official mouthpiece of the Ukrainian soviet government:

“In your edition of April 5, you carried an article entitled ‘Down With The Makhnovschina’. That article is awash with mistruths and is blatantly provocative in tone. Such attacks damage our struggle against the counter-revolution. In that struggle, Makhno and his brigade have demonstrated and do demonstrate an extraordinary revolutionary valor, and are deserving, not of abuse from officials, but rather of the fraternal gratitude of all worker and peasant revolutionaries.”

On May 2, he confirmed his impressions in a more considered report to Lev Kamenev. At the same time, he ordered Skatchko, the commander of the 2nd Army, to waste no time in supplying artillery, four million rubles, equipment, field kitchens, a portable telephone, cartridges for those 3,000 Italian rifles, two surgeons, two physicians, medical supplies, pharmaceutical equipment and an armored train. All as a matter of urgency. The new front line, fixed by Trotsky along the Donetsk basin and under the care of the Russian command which thus stripped Makhno of the supervision of the front which was held by him, Antonov-Ovseenko also objected to. Trotsky’s reply was typical of him:

“Your comments, according to which the Ukrainian troops are capable of fighting only under a Ukrainian command, derive from a refusal to look truth in the face [...] The Makhnovists fall back from the Mariupol front, not because they are under the authority of Hittis and not yours, but because they faced an enemy more daunting than the Petliurists [...]. The main enemy is on the Donetsk basin and it is to there that we must switch our main forces [...]. Any delay in this operation would be the most awful crime against the Republic.”

Antonov-Ovseenko reacted with indignation and anger to this chastisement:

“It would not be hard to discover that (1) I had undertaken, and continue to do so, every step to convert the insurgent units into regular army; (2) neither Moscow nor the commissar for war in the Ukraine was of the slightest assistance to me in this organizational endeavor; (3) nonetheless, some excellent cadres have been formed in the Ukraine for

the army of the future; the allegation regarding easy victories obtained here is a fantastic concoction by people far removed from the military work in the Ukraine. Without bothering to examine all of these arguments properly, you have condemned my whole work in extreme terms. My outrage is great.”⁷

Obviously, the “Carnot” of the Russian revolution, at least as he imagined himself to be, could not countenance anyone’s contradicting him in his strategic evaluations: he banked on a push by Denikin in a northerly direction, the target of which would be the Donetsk basin and a link-up with Kolchak. What followed was to expose the idiocy of Trotsky’s calculations. As for Antonov-Ovseenko’s lobbying — that had scarcely any success: Makhno was outfitted with neither weapons nor equipment and the hostile press campaign against him carried on in the Bolshevik newspapers. In the wake of his lively retort to Trotsky’s sermonizing, Antonov-Ovseenko’s star seriously declined and on June 15 he was replaced by Vatsetis — a Lett and Tsarist ex-colonel — as commander of the Ukrainian front.

Intrigued by his impressions, several Soviet bigwigs paid a visit to Gulyai-Polye a week later: Lev Kamenev (a.k.a. Rosenfeld, Zinoviev’s brother-in-law), Voroshilov, Mezhlauk, the commissar for war in the Ukrainian soviet government, Muranov, Zorin, Sidersky and others.

Their armored train pulled into Gulyai-Polye station on May 7, 1919, in the morning. They were greeted by Marussia Nikiforova, Mikhailov-Pavlenko and Boris Veretelnikov, who proposed to escort them into town. Half reassured, Kamenev happened to issue instructions to the commander of the train to dispatch a patrol to fetch them, should they fail to return by 6:00 P.M. Meanwhile, Makhno showed up and was introduced to the new arrivals: he escorted them and along the way pointed out a tree from which he personally had hanged a White colonel. They were welcomed to the town to the sounds of the “Internationale” and visited the movement’s social achievements. They took refreshments and were introduced to a “pretty young Ukrainian,” Galina Kuzmenko, Nestor Makhno’s partner and secretary.⁸ Everything went swimmingly, except during an interview with Makhno and his staff, when Kamenev demanded abolition of the Military Revolutionary Soviet, a creation of the regional congress. The discussions foundered, for the insurgents explained to him that the aforesaid body had been created by the masses and on no account could it be disbanded by any authority at all. The reply displeased the Red officials: even so, they bade the Makhnovists fond farewells: Kamenev even embraced Makhno and assured him that the “...Bolsheviks will always find a common language with authentic revolutionaries like the Makhnovists and that they could and always should work hand in glove.”⁹

Upon arrival in Ekaterinoslav, Kamenev telegraphed Moscow to have reduced from one year to six months a conviction against Marussia Nikiforova which banned him from holding office. He also published an open letter to comrade Makhno, commander of the 3rd Brigade, wherein he stated that the rumors about separatist

or anti-soviet schemes on the part of the Makhnovist insurgents were utterly without foundation. Makhno he described as an "...upright and dauntless fighter" who fought with courage against the Whites and foreign invaders. However, he recalled that the front manned by the insurgents was only a "one-thousandth part" of the overall front, and alluded to differences of opinion, which would be smoothed over "...if they deliver coal and wheat from the region, the central authorities will then send them the armaments and everything they need."¹⁰

Piotr Arshinov — who was present at this encounter — later wondered if Kamenev's and even Antonov-Ovseenko's attitude had been sincere, or whether they had merely provided cover for a reconnaissance operation in advance of a general Bolshevik offensive against the Makhnovists, an offensive that had been long in the preparation. He based this hypothesis on the conspiracy devised a little later by one Padalka, commander of a regiment of insurgents: bribed by the Bolsheviks, Padalka was to have seized Makhno and his staff. This scheme was only foiled at the very last minute, thanks to Makhno's unexpected return to Gulyai-Polye from Berdyansk by airplane.

This was not impossible but it strikes us more likely that the initiative had been taken here by some Chekists rather than by political leaders: and the evidence for this is supplied by the telegram that was sent to Kamenev by Lenin on May 7:

"In that Rostov has not been taken, we need to be temporarily diplomatic with Makhno's army, dispatching Antonov [Ovseenko] and holding him personally accountable for Makhno's troops."¹¹

So — a double-cross was intended, but postponed to a more opportune time. Also, Makhno was warned by revolutionaries working inside soviet institutions never to "... go if summoned either to Ekaterinoslav or to Kharkov, for any official summons would be cover for a trap leading to his death."¹² All of which meant that the Leninists would not on any account tolerate the autonomous activity of the region's insurgent masses and would ultimately use force to curtail it.

Some days later, a grave problem confronted the Bolsheviks: their ally, Grigoriev, refused to go fight the Romanians by way of assisting soviet Hungary and turned against them. This Grigoriev had significant muscle at his disposal — 30,000 rifles, ten armored trains, 700 machine-guns, 50 cannon, tanks and trucks. He quickly seized a considerable portion of the western Ukraine. Fearing the worst, i.e., a revolt by the Makhnovists and their throwing in their lot with Grigoriev, which would oblige the Bolsheviks to evacuate the Ukraine, Lev Kamenev dispatched a telegram to Makhno on May 12, urging him to condemn Grigoriev's venture:

"The traitor Grigoriev has delivered the front to the enemy. Refusing to carry out the order to fight, he has turned his guns against us. The moment of decision has come: either you will go with the workers and peasants of the whole of Russia, or you will ipso facto open the front to the enemy. There is no margin for hesitation. Report to me immediately

the disposition of your troops and issue a proclamation against Grigoriev, sending a copy to me in Kharkov. A failure to reply on your part will be deemed a declaration of war. I believe in the honor of revolutionaries: yours, and that of Arshinov, Veretelnikov and others.”¹³



Grigoriev was a one-time captain of the Tsarist army who had been promiscuous in his allegiances: starting with Kerensky, he moved on to the Ukrainian Rada, the hetman Skoropadsky, Petliura and the Directory and latterly to the Bolsheviks. Each time he had turned savagely against his erstwhile allies and masters, making a decisive contribution to their defeat. On the Bolsheviks' behalf he had fought the French and the Greeks in Odessa. He had captured that great city by routing the Allied troops and giving the French command (which was in the future to fight shy of sending infantry units on to Ukrainian soil and was henceforth to make do with occasionally shelling the revolutionaries from its ships) something to think about.

Grigoriev was a redoubtable war chief, competent and courageous and always in the thick of the action, which galvanized his men. What is more, he was a sharpshooter: once he had brought down a marauder with a revolver shot in the head at fifty paces. He was very popular among the poor peasants who accounted for the bulk of his troops, for he readily issued free the foodstuffs and goods seized from the bourgeoisie. To the great relish of his men, he had a weakness for semi-poetic, semi-Ubu-esque proclamations. In November 1918, he issued a threat to the German generals to the effect that he would “swat them like flies, with a flick of his hand,” unless they quit the Ukraine within four days, taking their personal effects with them: otherwise he would send them home in their shirttails!

He had also threatened to blow out his own brains at the time of the fighting against the Greeks, if his cavalry, surrounded by Greek cavalry mounted on mules and donkeys (!) and outnumbering him three to one, managed to beat his men! Happily for him, his horse-riding cavalry had successfully overwhelmed their opponents.¹⁴ Following his entry into Odessa, he had issued Order Number One in which he declared that he had trounced the French, the Greeks, the Romanians and the White Volunteers and “thanks to one of his shells” might even have toppled Clemenceau from the presidency that he so coveted. (A claim that may not be completely devoid of substance.) When he turned against the Bolsheviks, he called upon the peasants to fight with whatever they could lay their hands on: “If you have no weapons, take up your pitchforks, axes and stakes and get stuck in!” He tried several times to link up with Makhno, but only one of his messages got through to the libertarian: “Batko! Why bother with the communists? Knock them on the head. Ataman Grigoriev.”¹⁵

His strategy was that of most of the partisan groups — he stuck doggedly to his native soil and refused to go off and fight as a mercenary in Hungary. It was enough for him to hold the Bessarabian front. Let us note at this point that the

Bolsheviks had a sizable Hungarian detachment, ex-prisoners from the Austrian army who had not gone home but had been organized as a Red Army unit: they too declined to be assigned to the Southern Ukrainian front and wanted to go home and fight. In this regard, the Bolshevik tactic was systematic (and persists to this day): they always used troops who had no links with the region or country in question. Thus into the Ukraine they were to dispatch Chinese, Letts and Germans.



The Makhnovists did not know why Grigoriev had become a renegade, so their primary concern was to circulate a general communiqué to affirm their own loyalty to the revolution:

“Mariupol. Campaign headquarters of the Makhnovist army. Copies to all combat sector commanders, all regimental, battalion, company and platoon commanders. Order to be read out to all Batko Makhno troop units, so-called. Copy to Kamenev the extraordinary plenipotentiary of the defense soviet.

Take most vigorous steps to sustain the Front. On no grounds tolerate weakening of the revolution's external front. Revolutionary honor and dignity oblige us to keep faith with the revolution and the people; Grigoriev's squabbles with the Bolsheviks over power cannot induce us to undermine the Front which the White Guards mean to smash in order to enslave the people. Until such time as we have vanquished our common enemy in the shape of the Whites from the Don, we will not firmly and fully appreciate the freedom won by our hands and our rifles, and we shall remain on the Front, fighting for the people's freedom and not in any circumstances for power, nor for the intrigues of political charlatans.

Brigade commander, Batko Makhno, Members of the Staff
[signatures added]”¹⁶

This initial reaction meant that the insurgents were keeping clear of all intrigues and sticking to their battle against the Whites on the Front. That one was destined for their fighters: Makhno and his staff at the same time sent this even more explicit reply to Kamenev himself:

“[...] As soon as your telegram was received, I immediately gave the order to hold the front with undiminished firmness, yielding not one inch of our positions to Denikin or to any other counter-revolutionary pack, thereby performing our revolutionary duty towards the workers and peasants of Russia and of the whole world. For your benefit, let me declare that the entire front and I will remain unshakably loyal to the worker and peasant revolution, but not to the institutions of violence in the persons of your commissars and Chekists who act

arbitrarily against the laboring population. [...] I do not know what he is doing nor what aims he pursues; for that very reason I am going to refrain from publication of a proclamation against him, until such time as I am in receipt of fuller details. As an anarchist revolutionary, let me declare that I cannot by any means support seizure of power by Grigoriev or by anyone; as hitherto, I am going to drive out, with my insurgent comrades, the bands of Denikin, while striving at the same time to let the liberated regions be networked by free unions of peasants and workers who would thus enjoy full powers in their areas. In this respect, agencies of constraint and violence such as Chekas and Commissariats, instituting a party dictatorship and exercising their violence even against the anarchist unions and their press, will find us determined adversaries.

Brigade commander, Batko Makhno, Members of the Staff
[signatures appended], Chairman of the cultural section, Arshinov”¹⁷

That answer, made in all objectivity and independence of outlook, is clear and unmistakable: the insurgents reaffirmed their loyalty to the revolutionary cause but had no wish to be the deaf, blind puppets of any party, no matter how revolutionary it professed to be. A passing swipe had been made at the Bolsheviks’ repressive organs; a word to the wise is enough. Perhaps it was their excesses that had prompted Grigoriev’s revolt. In order to shed some light on the matter, a panel of insurgents was set up to go and make an on-site investigation.

Meanwhile, the telegram from Grigoriev, mentioned earlier, arrived. The recommendation to “knock the Bolsheviks on the head” was a touch vague, and the message went unanswered by the insurgents. Their commission of inquiry made its report: it transpired that Grigoriev was nothing more than a “war lord” but one who trailed many poor peasants in his wake. This discovery led the staff and the insurgents’ Military Revolutionary Soviet to draw up a long proclamation headed “Who is Grigoriev?”, exposing the adventurer, his anti-Semitic tendencies when he vented his spleen on those who “crucified Christ” and even his anti-Russian mentality when he talked about those who “came from the dregs of Moscow!” Didn’t Grigoriev gladly crow that whenever he had captured Odessa — with its 630,000 inhabitants, 400,000 of them Jews — a revolutionary committee had immediately been formed, made up of 99 members, 97 Jews and two “Russian imbeciles”? The Makhnovists also denounced these contradictions when he claimed to be championing the real power of the Soviets yet simultaneously ordered everybody to “elect their commissars” and then to mobilize “carrying out his order while he would look after the rest”(!) Yet the Makhnovist proclamation made a distinction between the peasant mass that followed the ataman, a mass to be regarded not so much as counter-revolutionary as “the victim of deception,” and

it was to be hoped that the “healthy revolutionary intuition” of the peasants would “open their eyes and that they will leave Grigoriev and rally again to the banner of revolution.” However, the causes behind his revolt also had to be sought in the Bolsheviks’ coming to the Ukraine and the installation of their party dictatorship, accompanied by its sinister Chekas:

“... of which Grigoriev has made use in his adventure. He is a traitor to the revolution and an enemy of the people, but the party of the Bolshevik communists is every bit as much the workers’ enemy. Through its unaccountable dictatorship, it has created among the masses a hatred that currently benefits Grigoriev and tomorrow may benefit some other adventurer. [...] Let us again remind the laboring people that its deliverance from oppression, poverty and violence will be secured only by its own efforts. No change of authority will be able to help in that. It is only through their own free organizations of peasants and workers that toilers will arrive at the threshold of social revolution, complete freedom and authentic equality.”¹⁸

As may be seen, the Bolsheviks too were not spared and had no special grounds for congratulations on this score. The essential point, though, in their eyes was still that Makhno was not turning against them for the moment.

A huge number of copies of this proclamation was run off and these were distributed among the peasants and fighters. It was also included in the Makhnovist movement’s organ, *The Road to Freedom*, and in the mouthpiece of the Ukrainian anarchist confederation, *Nabat* (Tocsin).



Grigoriev became the *bête noire* of Moscow who dispatched against him all of the reinforcements meant for the southern front. Worse still, the First Red Cossack regiment (1,200 horsemen and eight cannon) and the assault regiment from the Crimea were pulled out of the front lines for use against him. Not everyone accepted the assignment; the Kiev-based Ninth Ukrainian Regiment refused at the beginning of May to march against him and was duly disarmed and then re-formed. Certain units fraternized with the ataman and defected to his side. He managed to capture Ekaterinoslav but was unable to hold on to it for more than two days.

On May 20, by which time Grigoriev’s failure was apparent, Antonov-Ovseenko asked Dybenko to transfer his divisions forthwith to the southern front. He met with a refusal, Dybenko claiming that the ataman’s revolt was still virulent and that the Red troops had taken heavy losses. This refusal frustrated Antonov-Ovseenko who was keen to marshal Dybenko’s divisions plus Pokus’s detachment as urgently as possible on the southern front, in order to amalgamate them with Makhno’s brigade before entrusting command of the division thus formed to Chikvanaya who was under orders from the party hierarchy. In this way the Batko would have been hemmed in by dependable Bolsheviks and there would have been

no further fear of a revolt from that quarter. The politico-strategic considerations of the Red Army's high command were about to confuse the situation to a singular extent and to poison relations with the Makhnovists.

Notes to Chapter 15: Alliance with the Red Army

1. V.M. Primakov "The struggle for soviet power in the Ukraine" in the anthology *Piat's Let Krasnoj armii (Five Years of the Red Army)*, Moscow 1923 pp. 171–195.
2. In Alexander Bek *Takova Doljnost*, Moscow 1973, pp. 35–140. Dybets had written his memoirs for the Civil War Memoirs Institute set up by Maxim Gorky in the 1930s: those memoirs never got beyond the manuscript stage on account of the writer's probable disappearance in the purges that followed which accounts for the belated and roundabout publication of testimony that is rather precious for our purposes.
3. *Krasnoarmeiskaya petchat'*, Moscow, February 1922, No. 3–4, pp. 8–9.
4. This reply appears in its entirety in Arshinov's book, op. cit. pp. 98–103 (Russian edition).
5. Antonov-Ovseenko *Notes of the Civil War* (in Russian), Moscow, 1924 Tome III, pp. 203–204; Tome IV, pp. 95–120 and pp. 302–308 (all of the quotations below are lifted from there).
6. At the time a council republic led by Tibor Szamuely and Hungarian imitators of Lenin was in place in Hungary.
7. Antonov-Ovseenko op. cit. p. 105.
8. V.S. "L. B. Kamenev's expedition to ensure the provisioning of Moscow in 1919" in *Proletarian Revolution* (in Russian), Moscow No. 6 (41), 1925, p. 132 et seq.
9. Arshinov (in Russian) op. cit. p. 105.
10. See V.S. op. cit. p. 139.
11. Lenin *Oeuvres Complètes*, Tome XXXVI, p. 523.
12. Arshinov op. cit. p. 110. As we have seen this ploy was much in use for eliminating certain less-than-compliant leaders of partisan detachments (Petrenko in April 1918 in Tsaritsyn and the instances cited by Primakov).
13. Arshinov (in Russian) op. cit. p. 107.
14. Yu. Tyutyunik "The struggle against the occupiers," in *The Black Book*, an anthology by A.G. Schlichter of articles and documents on the Entente intervention in the Ukraine in 1918–1919, Ekaterinoslav, 1925 (Russian Language).
15. "The Grigoriev adventure," in *Letopis revoliutsii*, 3, 1925, pp. 152–159. Grigoriev is described there sometimes as second captain, sometimes as a Tsarist colonel and finally as an ex-Tsarist general! The editor certainly had his problems telling all the different ranks apart.
16. Arshinov op. cit. p. 109.
17. Ibidem, p. 110 and Kubanin, op. cit. p. 75.
18. Arshinov op. cit. pp. 112–115.

16. The Breakdown of the Alliance and the Collapse of the Front

The whole burden of the Southern front fell upon the Makhnovists who were inadequately equipped with arms and ammunition by the Red Army in spite of the clauses of the alliance agreement. Facing them, the Whites had laid the groundwork for a big push in order to shake themselves loose of this front which threatened the left flank of their north-bound offensive. At the head of two Cossack divisions from the Kuban and the Terek, well-armed and well-appointed by the Anglo-French, General Shkuro was in charge of operations. The breach of the front came about almost fortuitously due to a gross error by the command of a red division. In his memoirs, Shkuro tells the story thus:

“Returning to Illovaisk I received a report on operations of the First Cavalry Division. It transpired that the first regiment of [White] partisans had, while advancing, clashed with a substantial force of Reds dug in on the banks of a river fordable only with difficulty. Sustaining heavy losses, the [White] partisans had begun to fall back. The Reds decided to give chase and cross the river. At this point, *essaul*² Solomakhin, commander of the 2nd regiment of the White partisans, using his initiative, fell upon the flanks of the Bolsheviks and drove them towards the river. Many Bolsheviks drowned there or were cut down by sabers.

We took nearly 1,500 prisoners, several cannon and a quantity of machine guns and munitions. The Reds’ front had been pierced. I hurled my two divisions into the breach, giving them as their objective Yuzovka, which the Caucasus division was to attack from the south and the Terek division from the north. On May 18 a division of tanks — a weapon hitherto not seen there — arrived with General Mai-Maievsky [Shkuro’s superior]. I entrusted custody of them to my squadron of ‘wolves.’ The next day, the Kornilovites [an elite division called after General Kornilov] went on the attack with these tanks and captured Yasinovata. That same day, my division took Yuzovka, taking numerous prisoners, Reds and Makhnovists alike. After having all the communists hanged, I sent all the rest home. Wasting no more

time there, we took the railway stations at Chaplino and Volnovakha without great losses.”³

This crucial engagement had not been taken seriously by the Red Army command and, rather than admit to incompetence, it chose instead to place the blame on Makhnovists. But for the time being, Shkuro failed to capitalize upon this breakthrough and the axis of the offensive remained fixed to the north, via Kursk and the road to Moscow. Thus it was not too late to save the southern front which played a vital role in pinning down numerous heavily armed enemy forces over a distance of more than 150 kilometers, forces that were using (for the first time in the civil war), numerous tanks and armored cars, giving them a technical superiority which accounts for Makhno's being forced back from the front.

What was afoot in the Bolshevik upper echelons at the time? The breakthrough by Shkuro was underestimated and minds were focused instead on the best way of eliminating Makhno. There was a breakdown in coordination: Skatchko, commander of the 2nd army and Makhno's direct superior, took the decision to deploy the Makhnovist brigade as a division. When Antonov-Ovseenko vigorously objected, he gave him this account of his rationale:

“The military revolutionary soviet [of the 2nd army — A.S.] is very well aware that Makhno's brigade represents a peasant mass awash with petit-bourgeois anarchist and Left SR tendencies, utterly opposed to state communism. Conflict between the Makhnovschina and communism is inevitable, sooner or later. Even at the time of the formation of Makhno's brigade, the commander of the 2nd army issued him with Italian rifles on the reckoning that if need be it would be possible to withhold cartridges from them. But the 2nd army's military revolutionary soviet is persuaded that, until such time as the common enemy of communism and of the revolutionary (albeit petit-bourgeois) peasantry, to wit, the reactionary monarchy, will be definitively beaten and until such time as the White Volunteer troops will be pushed back towards the Kuban, the Makhnovschina's leaders will not march under arms (and will not have that opportunity) against soviet power: it is for that reason that we have thus far been able to use Makhno's troops in the struggle against the Whites, while converting them internally and gradually into more regular troops better nourished with the spirit of communism. The deployment of Makhno's brigade as a division may be tremendously helpful to work within its ranks, for it affords us a pretext for dispatching a large number of our political militants and officers to it. The whole of Gulyai-Polye followed Makhno. That population supplies him with 20,000 armed partisans who make up his brigade and are now to form a division. Trotsky has interpreted the brigade's conversion into a division as an authentic deployment, but that is a mistake. It is only an organizational reshuffle that paves

the way for our political militants and military specialists to penetrate the mass of Makhno's troops. An abrupt change in our policy through cancellation of this conversion into a division (endorsed by war commissar Mezhlauk for all that) will put Makhno on his guard and may well induce him to cease his activities on the front against the Whites. Obviously, such a cessation will entail an increase of White pressures upon other parts of the southern front and there will be a worsening of the situation overall. Our command will insist upon more strenuous activities from Makhno. The latter will begin to allow combat orders to go unheeded and an open breach between him and us will be opened in short order. That would be negative, for the whole 2nd Ukrainian Army at present comprises solely of Makhno's brigade. Ukrainian units from other armies, all of them drawn from insurgent detachments, will not fight Makhno. So, if he is to be liquidated, it would be essential that we are able to call upon at least two complete and well-armed divisions."⁴

The shameful secret stands exposed: the under-arming of the Makhnovists had been premeditated and had had no purpose other than to bring them to heel! Moreover, all of this whole squabble about "deployment" or "conversion" of the Makhnovist brigade into a division — which would be laughable were it not for the dramatic civil war setting — had as its common denominator the aim of reducing Makhno's influence and then of divesting him utterly of his responsibilities. A prize example of the mentality incipient at this time in these tin-pot Bolshevik Macchiavellians.

Ultimately Antonov-Ovseenko carried the day and the redeployment of Makhno's brigade as a division was revoked. The Makhnovists, who were fighting desperately to contain the push by the Whites and who were in receipt of no assistance from the Reds, grew weary of all this "scheming" and decided to recover their autonomy and then to set themselves up as an independent insurgent army headed by Makhno, retaining only operational ties with the Red Army. This they communicated to the paper generalissimos:

"To the commander of the southern front, to Front commander Antonov-Ovseenko, to the chairman of the Soviet of people's commissars Rakovsky, to commissar for war Mezhlauk, to Lenin, to the Kremlin in Moscow, to Kamenev chairman of the defense soviet in Kharkov:

The staff of the 1st Insurgent Division, having examined the communiqué from the southern front ordering the 1st Ukrainian insurgent division to revert to the status of 3rd brigade, expresses its categorical disagreement on this point. It takes profound exception to the unfair treatment meted out to the insurgents' leader, comrade Makhno, and, furthermore, anticipates that this order will have harmful consequences,

perhaps involving countless catastrophes for the revolution at the front and in the rear alike. It is persuaded that it is entitled to spell out the following facts to the southern front command, and to the central authorities of the Ukraine and Russia: the insurgent movement in the Ukraine began with the desperate engagements of the peasants against exploiters of all sorts, beginning with the hetman and ending with Petliura. With time, it formed regular regiments and manned a broad front against Denikin's counter-revolution. From the earliest days of its existence, comrade Nestor Makhno has been the soul and the indefatigable moving force behind this insurgent movement: he has shown himself to be the natural commander of the brigade, and later of the Division, raised to that office by the general commander congress of insurgents. All of the eleven insurgent regiments making up the 1st Division of the Ukraine regard comrade Makhno as their closest and most natural guide, elevated to that position by all the difficulties on the long road of the revolution. It is absolutely certain that with Makhno eliminated from that position, entire brigades will not accept anyone else in his place. There can be no doubt but that that will also have a fatal impact upon the front and upon the rearguard. This is why the staff of the 1st Ukrainian Insurgent Division of the so-called 'Batko Makhno' units has determined: (1) to propose to and require of comrade Makhno that he remain in his position of responsibility, despite his attempting to quit it in the light of the situation created: (2) that all eleven infantry regiments, the two cavalry regiments, the two assault groups, the artillery brigade and the other technical units become one independent insurgent army, command thereof being entrusted to comrade Makhno. In operational matters this army will be subject to the command of the southern front, to the extent that the latter's operational orders correspond to real requirements of the revolutionary front. All operational decisions of the insurgent army are to be communicated directly to the Red Army command.

Furthermore, the attention of all central authorities of the Soviet Republics of the Ukraine and Russia is drawn to the following declaration: Comrade Makhno and we all are authentic revolutionaries, fighting for the ideals of social revolution. That is why we regard as offensive to us and intolerable on the part of a revolutionary, Dybenko's reservation-fraught words regarding comrade Makhno, as uttered in the presence of our delegation: "I've given one bandit a thrashing, one more won't be any problem," when the Grigoriev episode found in comrade Makhno a vigorous and inflexible enemy: three issues of *The Road to Freedom* and the special proclamation circulated throughout the Ukraine testify to that. Believing in the triumph of the social revolution, in absolute commitment to that from both the officers of the soviet republics in the

persons of Lenin, Lunacharsky and Kamenev, as well as from comrade Makhno and his men, sons of the revolution, the command of the 1st Ukrainian Insurgent Division issues a categorical assurance that all potential misunderstandings regularly generated by false information from agents of the authorities, can and must be thoroughly dispelled by fraternal means.

The staff of the 1st Ukrainian Insurgent Division of the troops known as Batko Makhno's troops ... May 29, 1919. In Gulyai-Polye."⁵



This was a clear and unambiguous stand on all the maneuvers designed to oust Makhno from his post. Apparently Makhno had wanted to step down lest the situation of the front be compromised, but the insurgents had talked him out of it. The tone of this address was still fraternal and it leaves the door open for any amicable negotiation or accommodation. Thus far the insurgents had scrupulously adhered to the military compact entered into: their view was that, even if the Bolsheviks were against their operating autonomously, this could only be at the level of ideas and that they would "discover some common language" (as Lev Kamenev had it) and that class solidarity would come into play in the contest against the Whites, the loftier interests of the social revolution being placed above the discrepancies of opinion. They were mistaken, and the "officers of the soviet republics" were about to take it upon themselves to demonstrate so. Seeing their plans frustrated, the leaders (political and military) of the southern front were first of all to threaten Makhno:

"The military revolutionary council of the southern front signals that Makhno's activities and pronouncements are deemed criminal. Bearing responsibility for a given sector of the 2nd army's southern front, Makhno has, by his pronouncements, introduced wholesale disorganization into the administration and the command and then by allowing units to act according to their lights, he betrays the front. Makhno must be arrested and brought before the revolutionary tribunal: on these grounds the military revolutionary council of the 2nd Army hereby takes the requisite steps to forestall any possibility of Makhno avoiding the merited sanction.

V. Hittis. A. Kolegaev"



On May 31, the Military Revolutionary Soviet of the Gulyai-Polye region, given the seriousness of the situation, resolved to convene a 4th regional congress of peasants, workers and fighters from the entire territory under Makhnovist control: 90 districts from the provinces of Ekaterinoslav, the Tavrida, Kherson, Kharkov and the Donetsk basin. The Summons stipulated that "... only the toiling masses will

be able to devise a way out of the situation created, and not parties or individuals.” The congress was scheduled for June 15 in Gulyai-Polye. The conventional representation was one delegate per 3000 workers or peasants, one representative per insurgent unit or Red Army unit (regiment, division, etc.), two delegates for the central staff of the Batko Makhno Division and one per brigade staff: the district executive committees were to send along one delegate per faction: organizations or parties accepting the basis of the soviet regime were entitled to one delegate per district branch. Elections would take place at general assemblies. The agenda centered on the following items:

“(a) Reports from the executive committee of the military revolutionary soviet and from delegates from the district executive committees (b) business in hand (c) purpose, meaning and tasks of the Gulyai-Polye regional soviet (d) reorganization of the regional Military Revolutionary Soviet (e) organization of military tasks in the region (f) the question of provisions (g) the agrarian issue (h) the financial question (i) the unions of peasant laborers and workers (j) public safety (k) the exercise of justice in the region (l) other business.”⁷

In this way the Gulyai-Polye region’s Military Revolutionary Soviet recalled that it was only the executive arm of the supreme authority of the region, namely the general congress. As was only normal for revolutionaries who believed that everything had to emanate from below, that the workers and fighters had to handle and regulate their affairs for themselves. That was not the view of Trotsky who had recently arrived in the area which he knew only through the tittle-tattle in party offices. He had already crossed swords with Antonov-Ovseenko over Makhno. He found the libertarian effervescence that prevailed in the region and the methods of direct democracy used by the insurgents deeply repugnant, he being so thoroughly imbued with omnipotence of the new State as well as being so full of himself of course. On June 2 he published this bilious diatribe against Makhno:

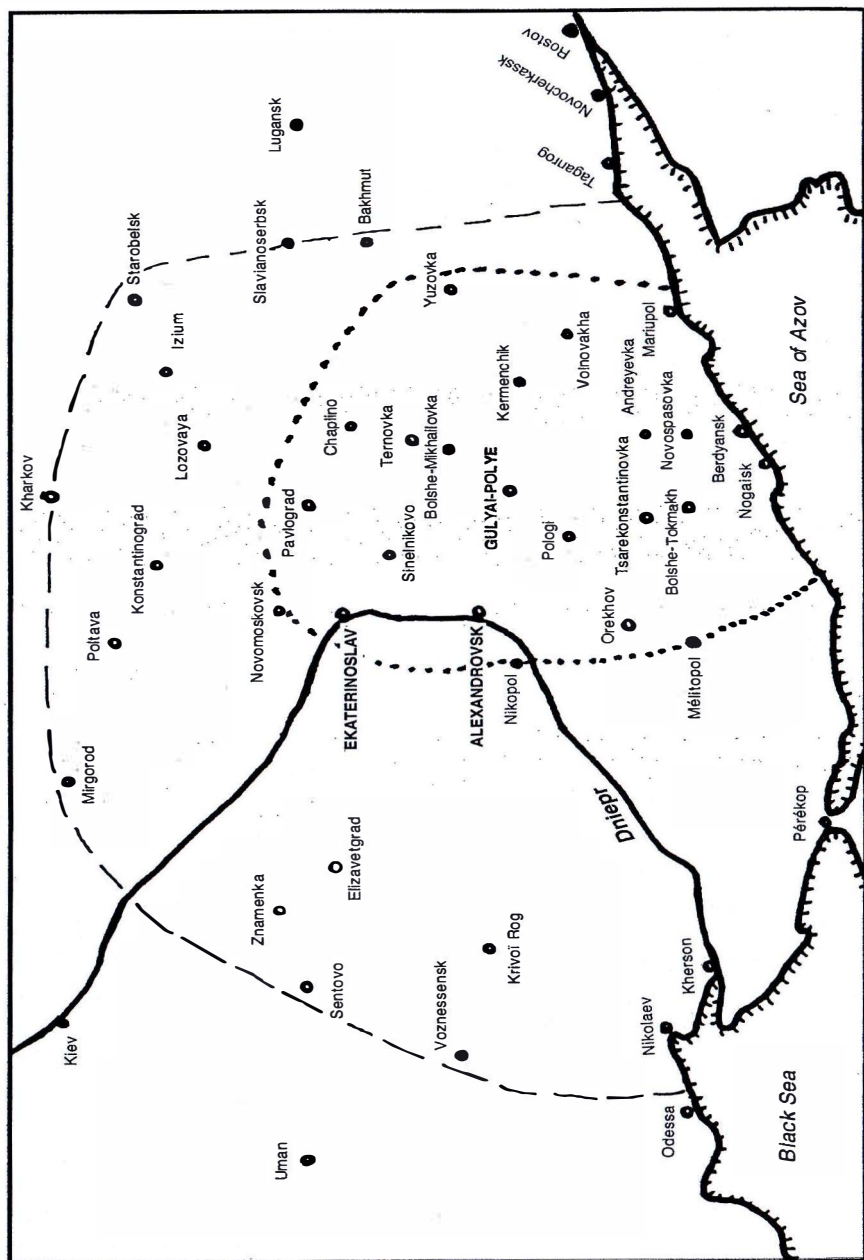
“There is Soviet Russia and there is Soviet Ukraine. And alongside, there is still a known state: Gulyai-Polye. There the staff of a certain Makhno reigns. First of all he commanded a detachment of irregulars and then a brigade and then — it would seem — a division: finally, today, everything is decked out in the colors of a special rebel “White” army. Against whom have Makhno’s rioters risen? That is a question to which a clear and precise answer must be given: an answer in words and an answer in deeds.

Makhno and his closest confederates consider themselves anarchists and on that basis “repudiate” all governmental power. Are they in consequence enemies of soviet power? — Apparently so, since soviet power is the governmental power of the toiling workers and peasants.

However, Makhno’s acolytes have decided not to declare openly that they are against soviet power. They play it shrewd and avoid the

issue: they claim to acknowledge local soviet authority and repudiate only the central authorities [...] Makhno's acolytes chant: "Down with the party, down with the communists, long live the non-party soviets!" And yet this is only a pitiable lie. Makhno and his henchmen are absolutely not non-partisan. They all belong to the anarchist school and issue circulars or letters to all their co-religionists, inviting them to Gulyai-Polye, there to organize power of their own. [...] Makhno's "army" is the ugliest face of guerrilla warfare, although it does include a number of good soldiers. It is impossible to discover the merest hint of discipline or order in this "army" [...] In this "army," commanders are elected. Makhno's acolytes chant: "Down with appointed commanders!" Thus, they mistakenly mislead only the most obtuse of their own troops. Only under the bourgeois regime when tsarist functionaries or bourgeois ministers appointed as they deemed fit commanders who kept the bulk of troops in a state of subjection to the bourgeois classes could one speak of "appointed commanders." Today we have no power other than that which is elected by the whole of the working class and toiling peasantry. As a result, commanders appointed by the central soviet authorities are installed by the will of millions of workers, whereas the commanders of Makhno's bands reflect the interests of a tiny anarchist clique dependant on kulaks and obscurantism."⁸

The radical change of tone, compared with that of Antonov-Ovseenko is all too obvious: yet it was Antonov-Ovseenko who was the Bolshevik militant of long standing whereas Trotsky was but a recent convert, in 1917, after the return of Lenin in whose nostrils he had not always had the odor of sainthood: hadn't Lenin called him a "little Judas, his forehead 'branded' with the crimson of shame"?⁹ Thus he felt himself compelled systematically to out-zealot the most zealous of his new party colleagues: he talked about "order and discipline," and railed against "election of commanders" by the ranks. But who was he trying to fool when he talked of Bolshevik power having been "elected by the whole of the working class and toiling peasantry"? Did he think he could erase the memory that, in the Constituent Assembly elections of November 1917, his party had taken barely a quarter of the votes? As for the "interests of a tiny clique," they were the interests of his party's central committee, a party which he defended by recourse to calumny. Even Kubanin, the official soviet historian of the Makhnovschina and not inclined to be considerate of its sensibilities, describes as ... "a typically prickly and venomous phrase" this passage from the fire-brand Trotsky: "Scratch the surface a little and one finds Grigoriev. And quite often there is no need to scratch: the rampant kulak baying for the blood of communists, or the small speculator were not long in showing their true colors."¹⁰ The amalgamation with Grigoriev just goes to demonstrate Trotsky's utter ignorance of the situation locally but on the other hand the epithet *kulak*, a flight of fancy here used for the first time against



--- Makhnovist sphere of influence
 "Makhnovia"

Map of "Makhnovia."

Makhno, was to enjoy a brilliant future in Bolshevik ideology. This was an original contribution by Trotsky to contemporary socio-political vocabulary.

He concluded this his first formal statement of position by stigmatizing the "atamans and straw commanders" with this menace "... It is high time to have an end of them once and for all so that none may be tempted to start up again!", and he promised a response in "... word and in deed." Two days later, on June 4, he was at it again in an interview with representatives of the press in Kharkov: he announced to them that a regeneration was crucial and that this would consist mainly of "... abolishing the independent anarchist republic of Gulyai-Polye," for "on the Donetsk front rampages the brigade or army division — I do not know how one would describe it — of a certain Makhno. This 'fighting unit' currently attracts to itself all of the elements of decomposition, decadence, revolt and putrefaction [!] [...] Makhno's bands are even now trying to convene a military-soviet congress of five provinces. It goes without saying that the command will neither accept nor authorize anything of the sort."¹¹ Meanwhile he discovered that the fourth regional congress had been summoned and he prepared his reply.

Asked by a journalist if Kharkov was not under threat from the White offensive, Trotsky expressed amazement at the posing of such a question, for he reckoned that Kharkov was no more under threat than Moscow, Tver or any other city of the Soviet Republic. He was utterly oblivious of the danger represented by Denikin and was concerned only with neutralizing Makhno!

That same day he issued his reply to the convening of the Gulyai-Polye congress, his celebrated order No. 1824: wherein he declared that this "... congress is wholly directed against soviet power in the Ukraine and against the organization of the southern front of which the Makhno brigade is a part." : its outcome could not but be the delivery of the

"... front to the Whites, in the face of whom Makhno's brigade does nothing but retreat due to his incompetence and the criminally treacherous tendencies of his commanders.

1) The aforementioned congress is hereby prohibited and cannot in any event be countenanced.

2) The entire peasant and worker population should be cautioned orally and in writing that participation in this congress will be deemed high treason against the soviet republic and the soviet front.

3) All delegates to the above-mentioned congress should immediately be placed under arrest and hauled before the revolutionary court martial of 14th (formerly 2nd) Army of the Ukraine.

4) All who circulate the appeals of Makhno and the Gulyai-Polye executive committee should be arrested."¹²

Trotsky signed this as president of the republic's military revolutionary soviet, which gave him full powers in the Ukraine. He had recalled Antonov-Ovseenko, and it was his replacement, Vatssetis, a Latvian tsarist ex-colonel who countersigned

this order as front commander. This document — which Arshinov regards as a classic, recommending that it be memorized by heart! — was followed up on June 6 by order of the day No. 107, which confirmed the foregoing order and specifically stipulated the punishment due: Firing squad. It is worth reprinting in its entirety:

“Gathered around the irregular Makhno, a band of individuals has set out on the same road as the traitor Grigoriev and has hatched a plot against soviet power. This gang from Gulyai-Polye has dared schedule for June 15th a congress of anarchist and kulak delegates in order to struggle against the Red Army and soviet authorities.

That congress is banned. Let me announce that any possible participant in this congress will be deemed a traitor, guilty of conspiring in the immediate rear of our troops and of opening the gates to the enemy. Makhno invites runaways from other armies and units to join him.

I hereby order:

All military authorities and blockade detachments deployed in accordance with my instructions to seize all such traitors who voluntarily quit their units to join Makhno and to produce them before the revolutionary tribunal as deserters so that they may stand trial in accordance with the laws in force in time of war.

Their punishment can only be the firing squad.

The Pan-Russian Central executive committee of Russia and the Ukraine has charged me to restore order on the front in the Donetsk basin and in its immediate rear. I hereby proclaim that order will be restored with a mailed fist. Enemies of the workers’ and peasants’ Red Army, profiteers, kulaks, rioters, henchmen of Makhno or of Grigoriev are to be eliminated without quarter by staunch reliable regular units.

Long live revolutionary order, discipline and struggle against the enemies of the people!

Long live Soviet Union and Soviet Russia!”¹³



Here Trotsky is using the language beloved of all fans of the strong arm, of defenders of the established order: “Plot,” “gangs,” “punishment,” “firing squad,” and “mailed fist.” There is, however, one novelty: This time the established order professes to be “revolutionary” and “proletarian” and addresses itself to the very people it professes to represent — the peasants and workers.

In short, it seeks to forbid them from taking their affairs into their own hands, banning revolutionaries from making revolution! An unappetizing mentality this, which unfortunately holds out the promise of an exemplary future. Here Trotsky was applying new psychological warfare methods in a revolutionary setting: Deliberate lying, misrepresentation, ideological dismissal, guilt by association — all these ingredients were henceforth to add spice to the cuisine of hegemonic power.

However, if Trotsky indulged himself in this sort of behavior and bayed at anyone daring to question his decisions, it was because he knew he had the support of Lenin who certainly had no desire to allow this region to organize itself autonomously and escape from his direct control, militarily as well as politically speaking. Otherwise, that example might prove unduly contagious.

The “answer in words” now completed, that only left the “answer in deeds” — and this was not long in coming. Three peasants, Kostin, Polunin and Dobrolyubov, taken in the very act of *discussing* the convening of the Gulyai-Polye regional congress, were hauled before the tribunal of the 14th Army and shot on the spot for just that!

And to cap it all, these famous orders were not even conveyed directly to the Makhnovist insurgents who in any case had their work cut out with the Whites.

Following the breakthrough achieved on May 17th, Shkuro returned to Debal'tsevo where he had to assist the Don Cossack general, Kalinin, who had also broken through the Red front and seized Lugansk. As a result, the front facing Makhno remained stationary. According to Antonov-Ovseenko, it was because he had “...received neither the military supplies nor reinforcements [which had been dispatched against Grigoriev] that Makhno was unable to withstand the attack by Shkuro's cavalry” at Yuzovka. Even Skatchko, the 2nd Army's commander, realized on May 21st that an infantry brigade was urgently needed to repair the breach, as well as artillery and cavalry. Makhno's division was in dire need of cartridges and artillery shells. It was obvious that under the new politico-military approach introduced by Trotsky, re-supplying of the insurgents was no longer on, indeed, quite the opposite.

So what was happening with the Makhnovists? Was it perhaps in order to demonstrate their revolutionary bona fides yet again, or maybe because they underestimated their adversaries? Whatever the case may have been, they mounted a counter-attack against Yuzovka and drove out General Mai-Maievsky's troops: The general called in Shkuro, this time assigning him the task of mopping up the Makhnovist front:

“At this point [probably the beginning of June] Makhno again went on the offensive against Mai-Maievsky's corps and forced it to quit Yuzovka. I was assigned the task of attacking the Makhnovists. Doubling back I wrested Yuzovka before marching on Mariupol which I attacked and captured along with General Vinogradov's mixed Volunteer Army detachment. Leaving the First Terek Division to support the Volunteer Army corps entrusted by Mai-Maievsky to General Kutypov who had already captured Bakhmut and was closing on Kharkov, I — along with the First Caucasus Division — undertook an attack upon the Makhnovists' capital and repository for their booty, the township of Gulyai-Polye. This I took after bitter fighting and the remainder of

the Makhnovists were wiped out or scattered; whereupon, I put the important railway junction of Sinelnikovo to the torch.”¹⁴

According to Arshinov, prior to Shkuro’s attack, the Bolsheviks had left the stretch of the front which they were holding at Grishino, north of Makhno’s front, unmanned, and it was precisely through there that Shkuro had poured in to take the whole Makhnovist division from the rear. However, several days previously the insurgents had warned the Red Army’s headquarters of this weak point; also, whether due to incompetence or deliberately the Bolshevik command had failed to make good the deficiency, leading to the front’s collapse. Again, according to Arshinov, Trotsky allegedly had declared that it “...was better that the whole Ukraine be surrendered to Denikin than that the Makhnovschina be allowed to develop further. Denikin’s movement, being openly counter-revolutionary, will still be susceptible to decomposition from within by means of class agitation, whereas the Makhnovschina is spreading into the depths of the masses and in turn raises the masses against us.”¹⁵ Such reasoning was not at all surprising; it was a pompous variation upon Lenin’s line about “whoever is not with us is against us.” The military alliance had lasted for four months and had been used only in a one-sided way by Moscow. Now that the Makhnovist front had buckled, it could be abjured at the earliest opportunity, in the most profitable manner available.

Shkuro’s offensive caught the insurgents by surprise and forced them to fall back 100 kilometers in a single day, abandoning Mariupol. Despite a desperate defense, Makhno even had to give up Gulyai-Polye, overwhelmed by the Cossack flood. It was at this juncture that he learned of Trotsky’s orders of some days before — an outright declaration of war. He put his head together with his staff and decided to focus on the most pressing task, i.e., containing the White onslaught as best he could. Seeing that he personally was the bugbear of the Bolshevik high command, he decided to resign his posts inside his division for the sake of the overriding interests of the revolution. He reckoned that this was the only way to avert the opening of a second front and being caught in a pincer movement that the insurgents had no way of withstanding. He dispatched a telegram to Trotsky to inform him of his decision. Trotsky’s reply was prompt, in the shape of an order of the day on June 8th:

“Have done with Makhno!

Who bears the responsibility for our latest reverses on the southern front, notably in the Donetsk basin?

Makhno and his gangs.

In words, this clique fights the whole world and annihilates all enemies; however, when it comes to the real fight, the commanders of these troops shamelessly abandon positions entrusted to them and quite simply fall back over several dozen versts.

[...] Makhno’s brigade contained a number of good and faithful fighters. Even with regular organization of supplies and leadership, and

above all in the absence of internal discipline or sensible command, Makhno's units have shown themselves incapable of weathering the slightest combat; the White cavalry drove them before it like a flock of sheep.

[...] The bigwigs of Gulyai-Polye went even further. For June 15th they scheduled a congress of the military and peasant units of five regions so as to give battle openly against soviet power and the established order in the Red Army.

We can no longer tolerate our continued humiliation at the hands of this gang which has lost all following. If we leave Makhno to pursue his plans, we will be faced with a fresh rebellion along the lines of Grigoriev's, which would spring from its nest in Gulyai-Polye. This is why the central military authorities have categorically banned the congress and dispatched trustworthy and loyal units to restore order in the region where Makhno is rampant.

Today that criminal outbreak is ended. *Makhno and his adjutants have been ousted. Makhno's rebellion is in the process of liquidation.*

It is true that many profiteers and bandits professing loyalty to Makhno still remain in different units and are trying to reach to Gulyai-Polye; there is no discipline there and no obligation to fight honestly against enemies of the toiling people and thus — a paradise on earth for cowards and good-for-nothings.”¹⁶

The balance of power being at this point tilted in his favor, Trotsky made maximum use of it; he accused Makhno and his companions of every sort of evil-doing, taking care to except “a number of good fighters,” for there was always a use for cannon-fodder. After having contrived to minimize and sabotage provisions and munitions to the insurgents, he laid the blame for shortages on the absence of “regular organization of supplies and leadership,” and above all of “internal discipline and sensible command” (by which is meant the absence of Chekist methods and Tsarist ex-officer military experts taken on in massive numbers by Moscow.) The resignation of Makhno and his staff was willfully misconstrued; they have been “ousted.” This was the apogee of Trotsky's whole campaign against Makhno and the Gulyai-Polye region. Had these been only the bombast of the salon or of some party meeting, no great harm would have been done, but in reality the fact was that his “answer-in-deeds” turned out to be the ransacking of the “Rosa Luxemburg” libertarian commune, the arrest and execution of several dozen insurgents, sordid police operations carried out by (according to Trotsky) “trustworthy and loyal units,” which is to say Chekists pressing on with the “liquidation of rebellion.” And all this behind Makhnovists who were standing up to the Cossack flood of Shkuro. The most cynical and ignominious part of this declaration related to Gulyai-Polye which it dubbed “paradise on earth for cowards and good-for-nothings,” when at that very moment the local peasants were hastily

putting together a detachment of several dozen men, armed with axes, pitchforks and shoddy rifles. Led by Veretelnikov (a worker from the great Putilov plant in Petrograd, albeit born in Gulyai-Polye), they went off in search of the Whites. They were cut down by sabers where they stood while defending their land and liberty, while seeking to avert violation of their wives, sisters or mothers, not that that counted for much with Trotsky. But such statements of position represent an indelible blemish for their author.

Skatcho was replaced as head of the Second Army — renamed the 14th — by Voroshilov, to whom was also entrusted the task of seizing Makhno and his staff. Alerted in time, Makhno sent a rather lengthy explanation to Trotsky, Lenin and Kamenev on June 9th. He repeated his request to relinquish his post to someone else; he protested against the press campaign unleashed against him and tarring him with the same brush as Grigoriev. He refuted the charges ventilated by Trotsky concerning the Makhnovists' hostile intent towards the Soviet republic; he reaffirmed his belief in the "inalienable right of workers and peasants, a right won by revolution, to themselves organize congresses to discuss and decide upon their private and general affairs. That is why the central authorities' proscription of such congresses, and the declaration pronouncing them unlawful [Order No. 1824] are a direct and shameless infringement of the workers' rights."¹⁷ Makhno realized that he himself was the target, and, given the overall situation, rather than set up an anti-Bolshevik front he preferred to step down. It is interesting here to look at the later explanation that he was to give of this evolution in the military alliance concluded with the Red Army:

"The Makhnovschina concluded an alliance with the Bolsheviks (in 1919) under which they were to supply it with arms and munitions; in return for which the Makhnovist movement was subordinated to the supreme command of the Red Army. That alliance was broken by the Bolsheviks on the one hand, through their police tactics towards the working population of the Makhnovist region which had set about freely constructing its social and economic life while dispensing with the oversight of the Bolshevik party and the Bolshevik state, and, on the other hand, through their sabotaging of arms and munitions supplies, which often led to Makhnovists throwing themselves into the attack against Denikin with only five cartridges per rifle, and, in the event of success against the enemy, to their seizing his munitions, or in the event of failure, to sustaining countless losses and beating a retreat, leaving behind thousands of wounded as hostages.

[...]The Makhnovschina opted to combat this Bolshevik cynicism by 1) temporarily withdrawing from the high command of its armed forces, beginning with myself, and 2) placing all its armed forces back under the supreme command of the Bolsheviks, 3) painstakingly

monitoring closely and from afar all their operational activities, the object being to verify that these are compatible with the great tasks of the revolution.”¹⁸

And so Makhno stepped down from his position of command and handed over to his successor (appointed by Trotsky) all divisional papers and documents and then, along with his closest colleagues, the ones most compromised in Bolsheviks’ eyes, as well as with personal escort, he quit the front while expressing his intention of harrying the Whites in their rear.

En route, an odd incident occurred:

“*Feldwebel*”¹⁹ Trotsky was so delighted during the first few days after my departure from the insurgent movement that he was at a loss to know what to do next. When he regained his composure, he ordered Voroshilov, commander of the 14th Army to seize Makhno, no matter what the cost, and to bring him alive to headquarters.

Unfortunately for Trotsky, in the Red Army there were some divisional commanders, Bolshevik ones who, as soon as they had read this order, reported the matter to me immediately. And so Voroshilov was unable to lay hands on me. Indeed, he and his gang of Chekists came within an ace of perishing themselves. Denikinists surrounded their armed train, the ‘Rudnev.’ It was I who had to dispatch four machine-gunners and a squad of cavalry to them in order to rescue my would-be ‘executioners,’ at a time when I had already resigned my command and was en route to the front along with a small detachment. And so Voroshilov’s armored train and his band of Chekists were extracted from that danger. I can remember just how happy Voroshilov was about this, and how he thanked me through my aide-de-camp. He also had delivered to me a message in which he expressed his esteem for me and insistently urged me to come and see him so that, together, we might look into a whole series of plans with an eye to the struggle ahead. My reply to him was,

‘I am aware of Trotsky’s order and the part assigned to you, comrade Voroshilov, but that order is a matter for your own conscience. Which is why I regard it as impossible that I should come and examine with you what you have suggested — plans for the future struggle. Let me tell you mine: It is my intention to strike deep into Denikin’s rear and cause havoc. This is extremely important now that he is engaged in a great general offensive....’

Your old friend in the struggle for the triumph of the revolution. June 15, 1919. Batko Makhno!’

The following night, this same Voroshilov issued orders for the arrest of the members of my staff, Mikhailov-Pavlenko and Burbyga, and had them shot the day after that.”²⁰



Some people may find Makhno's devotion to the revolution excessive, if it led him to rescue the killer squad dispatched to capture him. In his defense, it might be said that he did not then know Voroshilov and could not but doubt that Voroshilov would be capable of having Mikhailov-Pavlenko and Burbyga put to death. As he had said, he had had dealings with honest Bolsheviks who had tipped him off about what was being hatched against him and he was not yet in a position to generalize. Also, he was not the sort to make Olympian pronouncements like Trotsky; as a simple man, he was committed body and soul to the social revolution. For him no alternative was conceivable; Denikin's hordes had to be contained. Trotsky was unscrupulous; he had Ozerov, Makhno's official chief of staff and a one-time Cossack officer and non-party revolutionary appointed by Antonov-Ovseenko, arrested. (Ozerov was to be tried before a Chekist court on July 25th with the sinister Latsis presiding and was shot on August 2, 1919). An active member of Makhno's staff, Mikhailov-Pavlenko, an engineer and close friend of Makhno had, as we have seen, been arrested and shot on June 17th. On the same day the Kharkov extraordinary court martial sentenced six Gulyai-Polye peasants — Burbyga, Olezchnik, Korobko, Kostin, Polunin and Dobrolyubov — to the same fate on charges of having sought to convene a counter-revolutionary congress. The last three named had already been executed, so the sentence merely placed a formal seal upon the *fait accompli*.



Makhno's conduct had been improvised; in view of the circumstances, he had not had time to consult all insurgents. The latter, as soon as they learned of his having been outlawed and of Trotsky's attitude, insisted that their commanders take them to Makhno so that together they could determine what to do next: "To remain under the command of these 'Red' imbeciles, outright traitors to the revolution, or to wage against these criminal red cretins a struggle every whit as fierce as that against Denikin.”²¹

Even other front-line divisions and brigades, including the "Lenin" brigade, once they learned of the outlawing of Makhno demanded in resolutions passed at general assemblies to be placed under Makhno's command, for "around them they saw naught but traitors to the revolution." Trotsky, who was charged with treachery, could devise nothing better than to openly promise impunity and reward to whoever would kill Makhno. Throughout this whole campaign against the Makhnovists, he had overlooked one essential factor: The scale of the Denikinist threat. Soon it was too late to react, as the whole of the eastern Ukraine fell into the clutches of White generals. Ekaterinoslav fell on June 12th, Kharkov two weeks later. Thus was the front, so valiantly held for over six months by Makhnovist

insurgents at the cost of heroic sacrifices, sabotaged and delivered to the enemy by *Feldwebel* Trotsky and his cronies.

Notes to Chapter 16: The Breakdown of the Alliance and the Collapse of the Front

1. Town located on the edge of the Donetsk basin and the Ukraine.
2. A cossack rank corresponding to commander.
3. A.G. Shkuro, *The Tales of a White Partisan* (in Russian), Buenos Aires, 1961, p. 212. There are reasons for doubting the release of Makhnovist prisoners, given the implacable hatred which the Whites bore them. V. Belash and P. Arshinov both cite several instances of Makhnovist prisoners having been roasted alive by the Whites. Moreover, Denikin had placed a price on Makhno's head, a price of a half million gold rubles.
4. This amazing document is reproduced by Antonov-Ovseenko, op. cit. Tome IV, pp. 305–306.
5. Ibid, pp. 307–308.
6. Ibid, p. 308.
7. Arshinov, op. cit. pp. 117–119.
8. Trotsky, *Ecrits militaires*, L'Herne, 1967, pp. 668–671.
9. Lenin, *Oeuvres complètes*, Tome XVII, p. 39 (written 1911).
10. Trotsky, op.cit., p. 673.
11. Ibid, p. 674.
12. Reprinted by Arshinov, op. cit. (Russian edition) pp. 119–120.
13. Trotsky, op.cit., pp. 680–681. Trotsky was later to be ingenuously amazed when such methods were to be turned against him by Stalin.
14. Shkuro, op. cit. p. 213.
15. Arshinov, op. cit. p. 124.
16. Trotsky, op.cit., pp. 681–683.
17. Cf. The complete text in Arshinov, op. cit. pp. 126–127.
18. N. Makhno, *The Makhnouchina and its Erstwhile Allies: The Bolsheviks*, op. cit. pp. 53–54.
19. German for adjutant-in-chief.
20. Ibid, pp. 54–55.
21. Ibid, pp. 55–56.

17. Grigoriev, Dybets, Yakir, Slashev and the Rest

In the small detachment accompanying Makhno were his comrades from the early days, militants from the Gulyai-Polye anarchist group and founders, along with Makhno, of the insurrection in September 1918, men who never left his side — men such as Alexei Marchenko, Semyon Karetnik, Petya Lyuty, Fedor Shchuss and Nestor's brother, Grigori Makhno. There was also the "black sotnia," sometimes called the "Kropotkin guard" or the "devil's sotnia," comprising of between 100 and 150 intrepid horsemen and some expert machine-gunners mounted on some tachankas, all of them utterly dedicated to the cause.

When they reached the outskirts of Alexandrovsk which was threatened by Denikin's outriders, the local Bolshevik boss, although au fait with the breakdown between his party and the insurgents, besought them to defend the town and the sector of the front between there and Melitopol, so as to let Dybenko's Crimean Army extricate itself from the trap and take refuge on the right bank of the Dniepr. They refused, for on the one hand, they did not have enough men, and on the other, they wanted a formal request from the Bolshevik leadership, acknowledging their own stupidity in having outlawed the Makhnovists. Their refusal earned Makhno and his companions further denunciation as outlaws and enemies of the regime.



At this point Makhno's little band was joined by some groups of insurgents who had found themselves cut off following the capture of Mariupol and who had had to carve a passage for themselves across White-occupied territory. In this fashion, he put together a new insurgent contingent several thousand strong.

The Denikinists committed outrages, putting the Gulyai-Polye region to the torch and the knife, butchering recalcitrant peasants, violating the women (800 in Gulyai-Polye) and brought back the former estate owners and kulaks thirsting for revenge. Thus began the exodus of a huge number of peasants along with their families, with their meager belongings in tow. A vast cortege snaked across dozens of kilometers; runaways making towards their natural defenders, the Makhnovist insurgents.

Meanwhile, incapable of resisting the Denikinist onslaught, the Bolshevik leaders decided to give up on the Ukraine and concerned themselves solely with pulling

out their troops with as much of their supplies and equipment as possible, back to the right bank of the Dniepr. They seized the chance to carry out a purge among the Red troops; they hunted down Makhnovist units, disarming them, shooting certain individuals and then reassigning the rest to more dependable units.

Faced with this situation, Makhno gave up on his initial plan to infiltrate into the enemy's rear; he decided to retreat towards the west, to the Dniepr's right bank. This brought him into the territory controlled by the ataman Grigoriev. The ataman had been sorely tried by the battles with Dybenko but still retained several thousand men and successfully conducted harrying operations against the Bolsheviks for whom he thenceforth nourished an implacable hatred. He accused them of deceiving the people, to be sure, but arguing on the basis of the many Jews belonging to soviet bodies, he systematically equated Jews and Bolsheviks. His units were credited with several pogroms (massacres) against Jews and, to a lesser extent, against Russians, especially in the Elisavetgrad (population 76,000, a third of them Jewish) where 3,000 people perished. He was careful not to make any formal statement or to criticize such killings; he stood idly by. What made the thing even more complex was the fact that there were some Jews among his troops.

The Makhnovists tried to skirt this new reef; Grigoriev enjoyed the support of the poor peasants, which is to say, of the same social class as they did. Secretly they set up a commission of inquiry into the outrages and the contacts which they suspected he had with Denikinists. In July there was a meeting between representatives of the two movements; after a day's discussions, a draft agreement was reached: The two contingents would amalgamate. Grigoriev would assume military command whereas Makhno would see to the political leadership of the new army. On July 27th, a great meeting in Sentovo drew 20,000 partisans from both camps. Grigoriev was the first to speak; he called for all-out war against the Bolsheviks and hinted at possible alliance with the Whites. Alexei Chubenko, one of the members of the Makhnovist staff, spoke next and publicly damned contacts with the Whites, for the Makhnovists had meanwhile intercepted some Denikinist emissaries and thus had the proof. Next, Chubenko accused Grigoriev of responsibility for pogroms against Jews before closing his address by violently condemning the counter-revolutionary aspect of the activities of "this war lord."

Grigoriev demanded an explanation; the two staffs withdrew to the hall of the local soviet. There Grigoriev made to draw his revolver to shoot Makhno but was beaten to it by Chubenko who gunned him down with a "pocket" revolver concealed in the palm of his hand.¹

The Makhnovists then explained and justified what they had done before an assembly convulsed by this brutal denouement. Some of Grigoriev's partisans were recruited by Makhno. Grigoriev's death was reported by telegram to the Kremlin. Kubanin comments that with this act "...Makhno's political actions earned themselves very great prestige in the eyes of the Left Social Revolutionaries and anarchists. The revolutionary honor of Ukrainian petit-bourgeois circles was

satisfied.”² In any event, as far as the Bolsheviks were concerned, Makhno had removed a real thorn in their sides. Here again he had not had much option, for in the short term, Grigoriev would probably have betrayed him in favor of the Whites. Some of the ataman’s troops were later recruited by the Red Army and were to prove implacable adversaries of the Makhnovists, exacting revenge for the death of their former leader.

As for the Bolsheviks, they persisted in keeping a judicious distance between their positions on the right bank of the Dniepr and those of the Whites. Their main preoccupation was with “disciplining” former Makhnovist units renamed the 58th Division and comprising three brigades, which is to say nearly 15,000 well-armed men in all, representing a tremendous unused fighting force. The former anarcho-syndicalist Dybets had his work cut out as political commissar, then took it into his head to enforce order on the insurgent units, although he had absolutely no experience of combat against the Whites, having been content to watch the outcome of engagements from a distance. From then on he committed himself to his neo-Bolshevik activities. Finding the Melitopol regiment unduly “independent” and rather too “Zaporog” for his taste, he spent a week looking for troops to bring them to heel and disarm them! All the other regiments in the division refused, of course, to take on their brothers in arms. Finally in Kherson, Dybets located a detachment of sailors and Spartakist Germans, in all some 700 heavily armed (machine-guns and artillery) men whom he dragged along without actually explaining the aim of the expedition to them. Once they were in place, he gave them to understand that a mutinous regiment had quit the front and was refusing to fight. Whereupon the detachment fell upon the Melitopol insurgents who were in battle readiness but in the last analysis reluctant to shoot “their own.” As a result they were disarmed and redeployed, and some were shot. This “sensational action” stopped right there as far as Dybets was concerned, for the Red Army’s high command decided to cut its losses on the Ukrainian front and ordered the division to fall back to Kiev and central Russia. The Kremlin opted to recall these troops for redeployment in its own defenses, for Denikin’s push against Moscow was developing apace.

The ex-Makhnovists found this retreat unacceptable; they had no intention of abandoning their native districts to the Whites and indeed were itching to liberate them. According to the policy prescribed at the time when Makhno had resigned his command, several Makhnovist ex-commanders had remained at their posts — people like Kalashnikov, Dermendzhi, Budanov, Klein — and seeing that the Bolsheviks were not acting in the revolution’s interests, they reasserted the freedom of their movements, arresting the Bolshevik commanders and political commissars, including Dybets, before delivering nearly the whole division to Makhno at the railway station in Pomoshnaya. En route, the punitive detachment of sailors and Spartakists was routed, thus settling that particular score.



At the end of August, Makhno's 700 horsemen and 3,000 infantry joined up with dissident units from the Red Army in Pomoshnaya. The Makhnovist insurgent army was reconstituted into three infantry brigades mounted on tatchankis, one cavalry brigade (under Shchuss's command), an artillery division, a machine-gunner regiment and Makhno's "black guard," in all, some 20,000 fighters. Many of Grigoriev's former soldiers were discharged for insubordination, for they had been infected with anti-Semitism and were bereft of any revolutionary consciousness. Dybets was sentenced to be shot by the Makhnovist staff, but Makhno, under pressure from anarchists who had joined his movement, pardoned him and sent him packing along with his wife Rosa. Among the anarchists who had thrown their lot with the insurgents were members of the Nabat Confederation, including Voline who had been taken prisoner by the Petliurists and had been rescued by a Makhnovist detachment specially dispatched for the purpose.

A contingent of Whites put ashore at Odessa had put the Chekists and Bolsheviks to flight; the latter had so distinguished themselves by their sinister practices that they could expect no support from the populace. They linked up with the 45th Infantry Division commanded by Yakir who intended to fall back towards Kiev, over 500 kilometers away. However, many local insurgents joined Yakir who thus had considerable strength at his disposal: In the 45th Division's 7,500 infantry, 500 cavalry, 81 machine-guns and 34 cannon; the remnants of the 58th Division's and various units' 6,500 infantry, 48 machine-guns, 14 cannon and 400 cavalry — a total of nearly 17,500 well-armed and equipped men on the run before the 34th White Infantry Division which had just 1,500 infantry, 300 cavalry, 12 cannon and 43 machine-guns. In his memoirs, Yakir explains that he had to fight his way through, being surrounded by enemies on every side: Whites to the south and east, Petliurists to the west, and Makhno whose influence he feared might disintegrate his troops! It was primarily the proximity of Makhno that worried him, for he wanted at all costs to avoid the misadventure that had befallen the 58th Division. In fact there too most of the Red troops who came from the region could not understand this part of the Ukraine's being surrendered without a fight, and their sympathies were with Makhno. One of the Bolshevik leaders, Golubenko, called Makhno on the telephone and suggested that they fight alongside one another, but under the command of Red officers of course. Makhno answered him: "You have broken faith with the Ukraine, and more seriously, you shot my comrades in Gulyai-Polye. Your units will be defecting to me in any case, and then I will deal with all of you officials the same way that you dealt with my comrades."³ That being the situation, Bolshevik officials sought the best way of avoiding all truck with the Makhnovists, while saving themselves from their vengeance; especially since — quite apart from Chekists who had every reason to be fearful — their ranks included party militants and Red military chiefs of some renown, like Fedko, Kotovsky and Zatonsky. And there were several military "experts," tsarist ex-officers who had gone over to the

Leninist regime, like Rear-Admiral Nemitz, one-time commander of the Black Sea fleet, Kniagnitsky, Karkavy, V.V. Popov and many another. All had something to reproach themselves with in their dealings with the Makhnovist insurgents or the Whites; unable to rely upon their troops to fight Makhno, the only option left to them was flight. On Nemitz's advice, the decision was made to effect the retreat through open countryside, keeping clear of the railway tracks and usual routes. To this end, all of the divisions' armored trains were dynamited in Nikolaev and Birzula, in spite of the opposition from their crews who wanted to join Makhno. Military equipment and even spare shells were destroyed, not without difficulty as Yakir notes: "It required a campaign of explanation and agitation conducted intensively by the party organization and followed up by recourse to extreme repressive measures to ensure that every Red soldier clearly understood his task and applied all his will to the accomplishment of this duty."⁴ Oddest of all was the presence within this Red Army of the 3,000-strong partisan detachment of the anarchist A.V. Mokrousov who thus blithely accepted this shameful fact when it would have taken only an arrangement with the Makhnovists to mount a powerful joint counter-offensive against the Whites and to drive them far back again. One appreciates the extent to which Bolsheviks had already identified the interests of the revolution with their party's dominant and uncontested position in the conduct of operations; then they managed to attract to them anarchists and revolutionaries of other denominations by exploiting the bogeyman of reaction in order to contrive a closing of the ranks.



We have another telling illustration of this obnoxious policy in the mutiny by the commander of the army corps of the Red Don Cossacks, Mironov, at around the same time, in August 1919. Mironov could not stomach the fluctuations and dictates of Moscow and decided to take on both Denikin and the Red Army. In an order of the day he announced to his troops that he was assuming responsibility for the welfare of the nation in the battle against the Whites, a responsibility which the Soviet authorities were not in a position to assume, and then he concluded:

"In order to save the revolution's gains only one course remains now: Overthrow of the power of the Communist Party [...] For the causes of the country's ruination one has to look to the quite villainous actions of the government party, the party of the communists, who have aroused against them the indignation and general discontent of the toiling masses. All land to the peasants! All factories and workshops to the workers! All power to the toiling people, embodied by genuine Soviets of worker, peasant and cossack deputies! Down with the autocracy of leaders and the bureaucracy of commissars and communists!"⁵ *

Mironov was well aware that the Reds' military reverses were connected with their exactions against the masses of the people and could envisage no way out other than authentic representation of those masses through freely elected soviets.

His mutiny soon petered out; on the pretext of negotiations, the Cheka seized him and tossed him in jail, but the authorities freed him under an amnesty because of his military capability and deployed him against the Whites, eventually having him shot after Wrangel was defeated.



Yakir's retreat began in mid-August and was to last for 21 days before his army linked up with the 44th Red Division near Kiev. Along the way it fought some engagements against Petliura, against whom those regiments reputedly favorably disposed towards Makhno were deployed, while Chekist and other more dependable troops faced Makhno. Aside from a skirmish in Pomoshnaya, there was no armed clash with the Makhnovists. Mokrousov saved the expedition by capturing the entire staff of the strongest Petliurist division.

This flight by Bolshevik troops left the field to three adversaries: Makhno, Petliura and the Whites. The Whites, in view of the ease with which they had advanced thus far, made a gross strategical mistake: Instead of digging in along the line of the Odessa-Nikolaev-Elisavetgrad front thereby protecting the vast territories they had occupied in the eastern Ukraine, they took it into their heads to tackle Makhno and Petliura simultaneously. Yet they had only 15,000 men at their disposal, well-armed and equipped men constantly resupplied from their bases in the rear to be sure, but not enough, even so for a mission on this scale. The bulk of their forces — 150,000 men — were engaged around Kursk in the main thrust against Moscow. To begin with, the Petliurists ran from a fight, hoping to come to some accommodation on the basis of independence for the Ukraine; also, all the White Guard units converged on the Voznessensk-Elisavetgrad area held by Makhnovists. The Denikinist staff was inclined to be dismissive of the latter, given the collapse suffered by their Mariupol-Yuzovka front in May and June, the real reasons for which had thus far escaped the Whites. This is how General Slashev, in charge of operations, was later to sum up the situation:

“Petliura was playing it cool and sitting on the fence. That left just one typical [sic!] bandit — Makhno — who kowtowed to no power and fought them all in turns. The only thing that could be said in his credit was his ability quickly to raise and to keep his troops well under control, even enforcing a quite severe discipline on them. It was for this reason that engagements against him always took a serious turn; his mobility, his energy, and his flair in mounting operations brought him a whole series of victories over the armies he confronted.

This expertise in conducting operations did not reflect the education that he had received, and it was for this reason that a legend was created about a colonel of the German general staff, who even had a name, Kleist, who helped him and directed operations; according to

this tale, Makhno complemented Kleist's military expertise with his indomitable will and his perfect knowledge of the local population. It is hard to tell to what extent any of this is true, but the incontrovertible fact is that Makhno did know how to run operations, displayed uncommon organizational capabilities, and was able to influence a significant portion of the local population which backed him and enlisted in his ranks. As a result, Makhno appeared as a very redoubtable adversary and was deserving of quite special attention on the part of the Whites, especially if one considers their comparatively small numbers and the scale of the tasks facing them.

The White staffs, however, regarded his liquidation as a secondary matter in spite of all indications from leaders of the units directly engaged against him, and at first they devoted all of their attention only to Petliura. This blind spot on the part of the main staff in Taganrog and the one in Odessa was cruelly endorsed several times over.⁷⁶

For the record we may note this legend of the "German colonel Kleist" which goes to show just how incapable graduates of the military academy, caught up in their "military art," were of suspecting that such gifts could be discovered in a mere peasant — and one devoid of army training at that. All the same, let us take note of the especial regard in which he was held by a brilliant staff general like Slashev who subsequently defected to the Reds and became an instructor at the Red Army's higher military academy!



The first engagement came on August 20 in the vicinity of the Pomoshnaya railway station, when the Fifth Infantry Division sent in pursuit of Yakir's contingent which had decamped at all speed, ran into Makhno. For the Whites this meant an initial disagreeable surprise: They were beaten back with serious losses, losing a number of armored trains including the famous "Invincible." Over the days that followed the front line settled across a distance of about 80 kilometers, ranging from Elisavetgrad to the outskirts of Pomoshnaya. Frequent incursions by Makhnovist cavalry wrought havoc in the enemy rear. The Whites regrouped their forces; the Fifth Division, put to the test and demoralized, dug in around Elisavetgrad along with the Fourth Division and the 34th Division's mixed brigade, or a total of 5,000 men, 2,000 of them cavalry, with 50 cannon and numerous machine-guns at their disposal. Slashev planned to bypass Makhno on his left flank at Olviopol so as to cut off possible supplies of munitions from Petliura, and then on his right flank in order to break the cordon around Elisavetgrad, head off any breach in the front through there and drive Makhno back towards the north and west. As his spearhead he used the officers' regiments from Simferopol and Labinsk.

The Whites' push began on September 5th; they occupied Arbuzinka and Konstantinovka (see Figure One for Operational Plan) without a shot being fired.

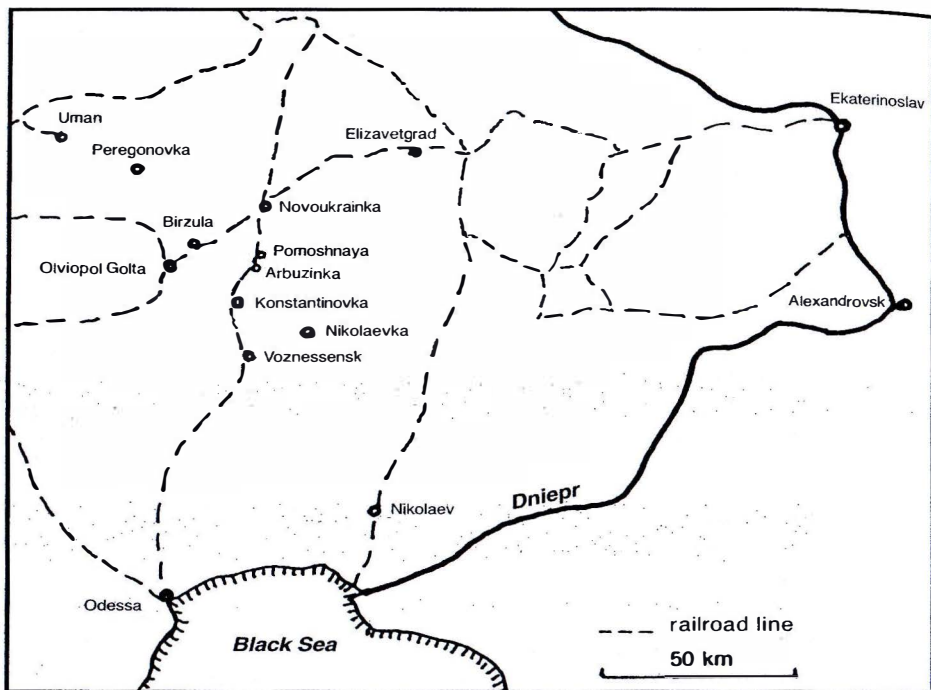
Makhno recaptured them in a counter-offensive. In the days that followed the Whites ensconced themselves in Arbuzinka again and took 300 prisoners. The Makhnovists surrendered when they ran out of bullets, rightly despairing for they knew to expect no mercy from their conquerors; the general rule at the time was not to encumber oneself with prisoners. The dearth of ammunition and shells in these engagements accounts for the success of the Whites, for they were assured of a continual flow of supplies from their base in Voznessensk. Arshinov writes that at this time two out of every three Makhnovist attacks were mounted for the purpose of capturing enemy munitions. This was all too obvious on September 6th when Makhnovist infantry attacked Pomoshnaya with the support of several armored trains, while Makhno himself at the head of his cavalry attacked the Whites in their rear at Nikolaevka and carried off their ammunition wagons. The Whites dug in at Pomoshnaya. In the days that followed the Makhnovist cavalry repeated its incursions behind enemy lines and inflicted considerable losses. In this way, it pinned them down to their positions, threatening to cut them off from their rear at every attack; it was during these clashes that Petya Lyuty and Nestor's brother, Grigori Makhno, lost their lives.



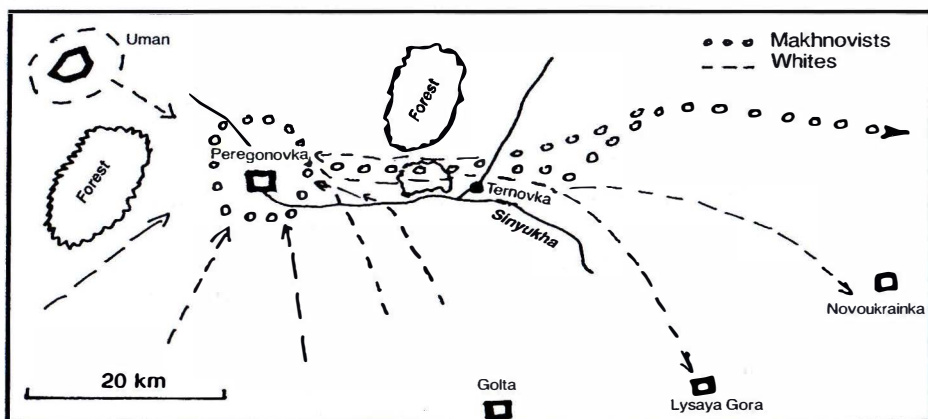
Then the fighting shifted eastwards; the other Makhnovist contingent attacked and scattered the Fifth Division, taking prisoners and carrying off artillery. The White staff then appointed Slashev to assume sole command of all troops engaged against Makhno and ordered him to hold Elisavetgrad at any price. Simultaneously, he launched a two pronged offensive against the rear of the second Makhnovist contingent, thereby rescuing what remained of the Fifth Division and against the first contingent at Novoukrainka. There a Makhnovist counter attack pushed the Whites back as far as their starting positions in Pomoshnaya; the battle cost 300 dead and wounded, all Whites. Slashev writes that at this point the

“...Makhnovists’ incursions behind White lines were being mounted with increasing frequency and were sowing panic. The situation became such that attack was extremely onerous; however, the slightest delay in attacking might be fatal, for then Makhno would have attacked himself and the White troops, put to the test, would not have been able to hold with the partisans’ cavalry in their rear [...] We had either to fall back immediately in order to capture the Makhnovists’ forces by night, and thus regain complete freedom of maneuver, or else attack at daybreak.”⁷

It was the latter solution that carried the day. Indeed, had the Whites fallen back, Makhno would have taken Elisavetgrad and in so doing would have opened up the route back to the left bank of the Dniepr. The next day the Whites attacked at daybreak, their officers leading the way. The startled Makhnovists fell back, losing 400 prisoners and three cannon, still short of ammunition. Cognizant of the



1. Engagements with the Whites in August-September 1919



2. The battle of Peregonovka on September 26, 1919
and the Makhnovist break-through.

seriousness of the situation, the Makhnovists decided to fall back towards Uman, to the west, and had their armored trains dynamited.

For their brilliant service, men of the First Simferopol Officers' Regiment received 109 St. George crosses and seven military medals; their commanding officer, Colonel Gvosdakov, was promoted to major-general. Makhno himself acknowledged the courage of his White enemies:

"The Denikinist cavalry was a real cavalry, well deserving of the name. The very numerous cavalry of the Red Army was cavalry in name only. It has never been capable of fighting at close quarters and went into action only when the enemy had been broken up by cannon fire and machine-guns. Throughout the civil war, the Red cavalry did not once accept an engagement at saber point against the Makhnovist cavalry, although it outnumbered it at all times. Denikin's Caucasian cavalry regiments and Cossacks were quite a different matter. They were always ready for a saber fight and always swooped hell for leather upon the enemy, not waiting for cannon fire and machine-gunfire to scatter them first."⁸

About this assessment, Arshinov comments: "Nevertheless, that cavalry came a cropper more than once in its battles against the Makhnovists. In their notebooks, captured by the Makhnovists, the leaders of the Denikinist regiments repeatedly noted that the war against the cavalry and artillery of the Makhnovists was the most horrific and daunting of their whole campaign."⁹ According to Arshinov, Makhno was particularly impressed by the bravado and contempt for death displayed by the Simferopol and Labinsk officers' regiments, who fought hardest against him.



The Makhnovists' retreat continued for nearly two weeks; step by step they staggered back, hampered by 8,000 wounded and sick, amid a daily round of fierce fighting. They arrived in the vicinity of the town of Uman, which was held by Petliurists who had hitherto remained neutral towards both belligerents. The Makhnovists were caught in the middle; so it was with relief that they welcomed the Ukrainian nationalists' offer of neutrality. They evacuated 3,000 of their wounded to Uman, turned away small partisan groups that lacked any or a sufficiency of weapons, and then dug in in an area 12 kilometers long by 10 kilometers deep, some 30 kilometers outside Uman. By now the contingent was down to no more than 8,000 men. In order to avoid any equivocation, the Makhnovists' Military Revolutionary Soviet issued an appeal entitled *Who is Petliura?* Meant for Petliurist troops and denouncing the nationalist leader as a champion of the bourgeois classes. The Petliurists, who knew of what had befallen Grigoriev, took care not to allow their troops to mix with the insurgents.



The Whites had stalked the insurgents and resolved to finish them off; they marched on Uman and denied access to the Makhnovists. Thus the latter found themselves hemmed in on three sides, caught in a formidable noose; their retreat had lasted four months and taken them 600 kilometers from their Gulyai-Polye base. This was a critical moment; they were worn down by the incessant battles fought for over a month, were severely short of ammunition, and were outnumbered by a well-armed and supplied enemy who boasted elite troops full of self confidence and just itching to annihilate them. It was at this point that Makhno yet again displayed the measure of his extraordinary gifts as a leader of men; he announced to the insurgents that the retreat carried out thus far had been only a necessary stratagem and that it was now up to them to call the tune. This announcement was a great fillip to the insurgents' lust for battle.

On September 22nd, hostilities resumed. Slashev used his best troops, including the Simferopol officers' regiment, as a battering ram to force the insurgents towards Uman where he intended to crush them once and for all. This time he was under formal instructions to prosecute the annihilation operation to the finish, no matter the cost. He played all his trump cards, for he was assured of no interference from Petliura; he knew too that Makhno was seriously low on ammunition and had been obliged to turn men away for that very reason. He moved in for the kill, urging his troops to set about the enemy with vigor. Over several days there had been skirmishing around Peregonovka (see Figure Two, p. 132) on the very fringes of the Makhnovists. The village was taken and retaken by both sides. Makhno must have made a thorough study of the battlefield for he had deployed his units in the woods and on the heights around Peregonovka which itself served, as it were, as bait; he waited until the Whites had committed themselves before routing them from behind. The topography lent itself readily to his design; in this part of the Ukraine, the steppe is corrugated by rather deep ravines not visible at a distance.

The final battle began on the morning of September 26th: Waves of Makhnovist infantry attacked enemy positions to the east, while insurgent cavalry destroyed the Litovsk regiment to the west, before tackling the First Simferopol officers' regiment from behind, as planned, routing it.¹⁰

Arshinov, an eyewitness and party to the scene, relates how the battle peaked at 8 A.M. in a veritable hail of gunfire; Makhnovist foot soldiers began to give ground and fell back as far as Peregonovka, pursued by the Whites who poured in from everywhere. Every member of the insurgent staff, the cultural section and the women from the medical services, took up rifles and began to shoot their way through the village streets; it looked like the end. Suddenly there was a falling-off of the enemy gunfire and charges before they petered out altogether. What was going on? It was as if the enemy had been swept away by a hurricane.

It was Makhno and his black sotnia who had vanished at nightfall the previous day, outflanked the enemy positions, and, just at the crucial moment, had thrown themselves into an irresistible charge. "The Batko is in front! ... Batko wielding his saber!" cried the insurgents, hurling themselves upon the enemy with the energy of ten times their numbers. This was close quarter combat of incredible violence, a "hacking" as the Makhnovists would say. The Whites were stunned, made an orderly retreat for some minutes and then broke up in disarray, setting the pattern for other regiments and units. Panicking, they all took to their heels — hunters suddenly become quarry — as they tried to reach the river Sinyukha some 15 kilometers from Peregonovka. The regimental commander, the recently promoted Major General Gvosdakov, and the staff of the Sirnferopol regiment plus one company were the first to reach the river, and they raced on without looking back as if stricken with terror, so that by evening they were in Lyshaya Gora, some 40 kilometers away, but without the rest of the regiment. One of the escapees, Colonel Almendinger, second in command of the regiment's Second Battalion, testifies:

"The regimental staff, the Second Company, some of the regiment's machine-gunners and the battery set out ahead and managed to ford the river at Ternovka, but the regiment's commander did not await the arrival of other companies, but rather made off again with all haste and that evening was in Lyshaya Gora minus his regiment. The other companies retreated under heavy pressure from the Makhnovist infantry coming from the right and from straight ahead and from incessant cavalry attacks upon the left flank. As we entered the woods, we signaled our people to come to our aid, but there was no response. It was learned subsequently that the regimental commander had indeed seen the signals but had nonetheless decided to move on from the ford without waiting for his companies. The latter marched to their deaths, for they all knew that no quarter would be given. We stuck to the ploughed fields, avoiding the paths. The sun was beginning to grow warm. The Makhnovist infantry was hot on our heels but was not shooting at us because, apparently, they had no cartridges left as we immediately sensed. We too had exhausted our cartridge reserves. The enemy cavalry assailed us on our flanks, attempting to panic us with a hail of grenades prior to employing cold steel. We continually had to stop and fire shots behind us in order to fend him off. Some of us fell, wounded and they put a bullet into their own brains lest they be taken alive by the enemy. The lightly wounded strove to march with the able-bodied. We reached the Sinyukha River but did not know the whereabouts of the ford. The river was deep and quite broad. In the end, some of our number threw themselves into the water; some drowned, others made it back to the bank. The Makhnovist infantry halted quite near to us. Still sniping at the cavalry, we went on walk-

ing along the river bank, in the hope of discovering a ford. Luckily some inhabitants indicated a spot where it was feasible to swim across. We crossed. Out of our six companies, no more than 100 men were left. Columns came to meet us, we thinking that they were our side; suddenly they fanned out and began to bombard us. The wounded hoisted themselves on to farm teams and fled into the distance in the direction of Novoukrainka where they arrived late in the night. The last 60 men, under the command of Captain Gattenberger, commandant of the Second Battalion, formed a line and tried to reach the nearby forest. It was said that they would not make it. With their last cartridges they again repulsed the cavalry but were mown down by enemy machine-gun fire. The last survivors were sabered. The captain shot himself. No prisoners were taken.”¹¹

Almendinger’s account corresponds pretty much with Makhno’s, entitled “The Crushing of the Denikinists,” as it appeared in the fourth issue of *The Road to Freedom* on October 30, except that other regiments apart from his were sabered; hundreds of corpses littered the road for kilometers, as Voline describes. Voline also passed this world-weary remark: “That is what would have become of us by this time, had they won. Fate? Chance? Justice?”¹²

Makhno made maximum capital out of the situation; hunter now and no longer quarry, he sent his entire cavalry and artillery at full gallop in pursuit of the Whites, then raced off himself along with his black sotnia along some shortcuts in pursuit of the Denikinists, managing to capture the divisional staff and a reserve regiment. Only a few hundred Whites managed to get away.

The captured booty was enormous: Twenty-three cannon, over 100 machine-guns, 120 officers and 500 soldiers taken prisoner. Many of the Denikinist generals and officers opted for suicide rather than be taken alive by the insurgents. The fields were blanketed in epaulettes and braid, the owners of which had fled into the woods. The farmers were to be startled by this mighty odd crop the next day.¹³ The Denikinist expeditionary corps had been routed.



The outcome of the battle of Peregonovka was beyond reckoning; in point of fact, it determined the outcome of the civil war. That was appreciated by another Denikinist who got away, the officer Sakovitch; he was quite near to the battlefield, but his unit did not intervene, clinging to the belief that the Makhnovists were still on their way east where the trap laid by Slashev awaited. For a moment, he heard intense cannon fire, followed by silence; he sensed that something crucial had just occurred:

“In a sky blanketed in autumn cloud, the last puffs of artillery smoke exploded then ... all was silent. All of us ranking officers sensed that something tragic had just occurred although nobody could have had

any inkling of the enormity of the disaster which had struck. None of us knew that at that precise moment nationalist Russia had lost the war. 'It's over,' I said, I know not why, to Lieutenant Rozov who was standing alongside me. 'It's over,' he confirmed somberly."¹⁴

Why was it over? How could fighting that pitted two dozen thousands of men against one another have any influence over a war involving hundreds of thousands?

To be sure, Makhno had smashed the best troops of Slashev, who nonetheless had taken 1,000 Makhnovists prisoner — wounded and stragglers — but the White general was in no position any longer to organize a pursuit of the insurgents and was to make do with warring against Petliura's yellows and blues. Now, Makhno did not rest upon his laurels; he dispatched the 7,000 men remaining to him in three directions simultaneously: One group headed off towards their homeland on the left bank of the Dniepr; the main contingent of 3,500 galloped off to the most strategic points, while he himself at the head of his black sotnia was over 100 kilometers away by the morrow of his startling victory. Capitalizing upon the element of surprise, with lightning speed, insurgents occupied all the settlements and towns in their path, defended only by insignificant garrisons, with the exception of Nikopol where they crushed three regiments from Kornilov's divisions, taking 300 prisoners. Within ten days, a huge swath of territory that included the cities of Krivoi Rog, Elisavetgrad, Nikopol, Melitopol, Alexandrovsk, Gulyai-Polye, Berdyansk and Mariupol had been liberated at a gallop.

On October 20th, an outrider detachment occupied Ekaterinoslav for the first time only to be dislodged before Makhno arrived in person with more substantial units to take the capital of the southern Ukraine. Even more serious for the Whites was the Makhnovist control of the region's entire rail network, with the important rail junctions at Pologui, Sinelnikovo and Losovo, as well as their grip upon the ports of Mariupol and Berdyansk where the Anglo-French had been putting ashore material needed by Denikin. All of the nerve centers of Denikin's thrust against Moscow foundered under the hammer blows of the Makhnovists. The Whites were cut off from their food and provision bases. The insurgents even reached the very gates of Taganrog, headquarters for Denikin's staff and were only just contained. As a matter of urgency, Denikin was forced to recall his best Cossack troops — led by Shkuro and Mamontov — who had been making ready to take Moscow. Indeed, the Red Army was in grave disarray, the spearhead of the Denikinist offensive lying just then only 200 kilometers outside Moscow, with White generals disputing the honors of being the first to enter the city. As for Lenin and the leadership of the Bolsheviks, they had been on the point of cutting and running for Finland, congratulating themselves for having held out longer than the Paris Commune. Thus Makhno had broken the back of the great Denikinist offensive that the Red Army had failed to halt. Seen in this light, the battle of Peregonovka had been the

crucial feat of arms in the civil war. The Makhnovschina's own chronicler thus asserts with some reason that:

“...keeping to the historical facts, the honor of having smashed the Denikinist counter-revolution in the autumn of 1919 belongs mainly to the Makhnovists. Had the latter not made their breakthrough at Uman and followed up with the destruction, behind the lines, of the Denikinists' artillery and supply bases, the Whites would probably have entered Moscow around the month of December 1919.”¹⁵

Notes to Chapter 17: Grigoriev, Dybets, Yakir, Slashev and the Rest

1. Kubanin, op. cit. pp. 82–83 quotes the description of the scene by Chubenko himself in a memorandum drawn up when he was a prisoner of the Cheka.
2. Ibid. p. 83.
3. A. Krivosheyev, *Everyday Life in the Red Army: Memoirs of the XIIth Army*, in *The Civil War* (Russian language publication), Moscow, 1923, Tome II, p. 197.
4. Yakir, *On the History of the 45th Division* (Russian), Kiev, 1929, pp. 234–236.
5. D. Kin, “The peasantry and the civil war,” in the magazine *Na agrarom fronte* (*On the Agrarian Front*), Moscow, No. 11–12, 1925, p. 123.
6. Slashev, “The operations of the Whites, Petliura and Makhno in the southern Ukraine in 1919” (in Russian), in the Red Army review *The Military Messenger*, Moscow, 9–10, 1922, pp. 38–43.
7. Idem.
8. Quoted by Arshinov, op.cit. p.136.
9. Idem.
10. The Seventh Company of this officers' regiment was made up wholly of German settlers especially keen to get in grips with their sworn enemies, the “land-grabbing” Makhnovists.
11. Almendinger, *Short History of the First Simferopol Officers' Regiment* (in Russian) Los Angeles, 1963, pp. 16–24.
12. Voline, *La révolution inconnue*, Paris, 1947, p. 588.
13. *The Road to Freedom* No. 4, October 3, 1919, as quoted by Kubanin, op. cit. p. 86.
14. Sakovitch, “Makhno's breakthrough,” in *Pereklychka*, Munich, 1961, No. 116, pp. 11–14.
15. Arshinov, op. cit. p. 144.

18. The Whites' Failures

Autumn 1919 was the apogee of the anti-Bolshevik offensives. Increasingly the territory under Bolshevik control was shrinking until it covered little more than the borders of the former Grand Duchy of Muscovy in the 16th century. Moscow was the primary target of the Whites, for seizure of this rail center would enable them to control the whole of European Russia.

In the West, from the Baltic lands General Yudenich's 25,000-strong army was on the march against Petrograd, sweeping aside the Seventh Red Army to reach the outskirts of the city by October 2nd. The former capital was directly threatened; the Bolshevik loss of nerve was at its worst, and Lenin was talking about abandoning Petrograd. Trotsky salvaged the situation by resolving to hold it at all costs. On October 16, Yudenich captured the Tsar's former residence at Tsarskoye-Selo and then Gachina, and his troops could see the "gilded dome of St. Isaac's cathedral" on the banks of the Neva, right in the center of the city. Trotsky hastily assembled some loyal units and issued appeals to the workers, sailors, women and the *Kursants* — Red officer cadets. Barricades and trenches were made ready; fighting broke out in the city suburbs. For several days, it could have gone either way. In this way Trotsky had gained a crucial respite, for the Red Army now had time to approach and tackle Yudenich from behind, obliging him to retreat.

Yudenich had lacked two elements: The help promised by the British squadron lying off the coast and reinforcements from Bermont-Avalov's army corps and from the German army corps — caught up, paradoxically, in fighting the troops of an independent, bourgeois Latvia. Yudenich was obliged to withdraw to Estonia where his army was disarmed.

To the north, the British ran up against the same problems as the French had encountered in Odessa, and they called off their support of General Miller and brought their troops back on board on September 26, 1919. So, left to their own devices and bereft of logistical support, the White supporters were defeated after several months with Archangelsk being captured in March 1920.

To the east, Kolchak — acknowledged as supreme commander by all the White generals — had begun his march on Moscow at the start of the year. Essentially his advance proceeded along the railroad lines. In terms of numbers, this was the strongest White offensive; the mobilization had produced unexpected results and 200,000

young recruits (preferred over the experienced soldiery of 1914–1917, having in the eyes of the White generals the advantage of never having sampled the disintegration of the revolutionary army) came forward; officers regained their omnipotent status and their old “patriarchal” methods surfaced once more.

Admiral Kolchak, “supreme regent of Russia,” was, according to his entourage, “a constantly simmering cauldron in which the stew is never cooked!” He had at his disposal a staff of some 900 officers, 58 of whom dealt with censorship alone! His provisional capital, Omsk, had become a great hive of shirkers; 5,000 other officers there indulged themselves in the most unbridled debauchery and blithely held down lucrative quarter-master positions. All of this wheeling and dealing and corrupt practice worked against his under-equipped troops who were obliged to conduct operations in the height of a winter with the temperature 45 degrees below, leading to many soldiers’ suffering frostbitten limbs and amputations.

Luckily for Kolchak there was the Czech Legion, placed under the (national) command of the French general Janin; thanks to it, the offensive spread in March 1919 beyond Ufa and Orenburg across a 300 kilometer front. Towards the end of April, its inmost advanced point was in Kazan or nearly 600 kilometers from Moscow. In May the tables turned completely; three regiments mutinied, killing 200 officers and defecting to the Reds. Other mass desertions followed. The front line troops were worn out and suffering from supply shortages, for the simple reason that supplies were at all times prey to grasping corrupt practices behind the lines. The democratically-minded Czechs had nothing but distaste for Kolchak’s soldiery which had distinguished itself at the time of the admiral’s *coup d’état* by butchering several thousand Social Revolutionary supporters of the “Committee for the Constituent Assembly.” Their many atrocities against the populace inspired countless partisan detachments that continually harassed Kolchak’s army’s trains and bases. The Czechs refused to pursue the offensive any further and concentrated exclusively on the smooth running of the Trans-Siberian railroad.

The upshot of all this ineptitude, incompetence and intrigue was not long in making itself known; the initial offensive turned into a complete debacle. Staffs deserted their units which themselves defected to the enemy or else vanished into the countryside. Soon, by October 1919, the Siberian army that was to have liberated Moscow and Russia was no more than a memory. According to General Janin, this “melting away of the army has been largely due to progressive alienation of the populace from Kolchak’s government, an alienation triggered by its police methods following the murders of the Constituent’s supporters in Ufa in December 1918.”¹ So much so that the Bolsheviks who had themselves blithely murdered thousands a short time before in Siberia were now welcomed there as liberators.

The Red Army, itself prone to serious internal disagreements and blatant under-equipment, was unable however to draw the fullest benefit from the Whites’ Siberian debacle; it made do with following the enemy’s retreat at a distance, capitalizing upon its disintegration and regarding the slightest consolidation as

a counter-offensive. The lead in the fighting was taken primarily by the tens of thousands of Siberian partisans, most of them Social Revolutionaries who bore the brunt of the fighting and hastened the Admiral's downfall.

Having started off pompously, the adventure of the "savior of the homeland" came to a Shakespearean grief: for several weeks he wandered around the Trans-Siberian railway, escorted by a train laden with gold captured from the supporters of the Constituent Assembly in Samara. Shunned by one and all, he was finally taken prisoner by the Social Revolutionaries of Irkutsk, brought to trial and shot on February 7, 1920.



The most powerful, most dangerous of the White offensives against the Bolsheviks was incontrovertibly that of General Denikin who rallied to his cause the Cossack armies of the Don, the Kuban and the Terek. Henceforth known as the Armed Forces of Southern Russia, Denikin's new army was made up of 150,000 experienced and combat-ready men and seized the whole of the Caucasus and Don territory before marching on Tsaritsyn and Astrakhan, the two key cities of the lower Volga, intent upon joining up with Kolchak. In June 1919, General Baron Wrangel forced Tsaritsyn's defenses and ousted the Red Army commanded by one-time sergeant Voroshilov who was himself attended by political commissar Josef Djugashvili (subsequently better known under the name of Stalin). The captured booty was immense: Two armored trains, 131 locomotives, 10,000 carriages — 2,085 of them laden with munitions — 70 cannon, 300 machine-guns, and 40,000 prisoners taken. To be sure, the losses sustained by the Don Cossacks and the Caucasian cavalry corps were enormous, but the officers were no longer the opera bouffe generals of Kolchak; here they had to march at the head of their troops and often perished in the fighting.



To the west, as we have seen, the Ukrainian front held by Makhno had buckled in June; also on June 20th, Denikin set himself the ultimate goal of capturing Moscow. The offensive was to be mounted from three separate directions: The army commanded by Wrangel was to march on Saratov and then via Nizhny-Novgorod upon the capital; the army of the Don Cossacks, commanded by General Sidorin, was to take the Voronezh-Riazan route while the Volunteer Army under Mai-Maievsky's command was to close in via Kharkov, Kursk, Orel and Tula — all in all, a front some 800 kilometers wide. This was a grievous strategical error made in expectation of easy victories albeit ones that would be politically and militarily insignificant. Wrangel made a report on military matters to Denikin, wherein he pointed to the:

"...[P]erils of extending the front overmuch in the absence of the necessary reserves and a well-organized rearguard. [He suggested] digging in for the moment on the Tsaritsyn-Ekaterinoslav front with our flanks protected by the Volga and the Dniepr, and then levying the necessary troops for operations in the southeast, in the vicinity of Astrakhan, while

simultaneously marshalling at our center three or four cavalry corps in the environs of Kharkov. These troops, when the time comes, might strike in the direction of Moscow. At the same time the rearguard needed organizing, as did the building-up of regimental numbers, enlargement of the reserve, and the establishment of operational bases."

The only reaction this drew from General Denikin was a derisory comment of: "I see, you wish to be the first to enter Moscow!"² For an "honest subordinate, born second-rater become standard-bearer" like Denikin,³ the suggestions from the general — a cavalryman who had won his spurs earlier during the Russo-German war — could not but appear far-fetched, being at once too bold and too cautious, when he came down on the side of the view that such a wide front could not be held militarily by only 150,000 men. Moreover, a direct thrust towards the capital by an important cavalry corps might indeed have brought about the collapse of the Red Armies. The best demonstration of that was provided by the raid by General Mamontov, a one-time hussar turned Don Cossack.

Charged with easing enemy pressure on the army of the Don, Mamontov thrust deep behind Red Army lines on July 22 with a contingent of 6,000 Cossacks, 3,000 infantry, three tanks and seven armored trains. Within six weeks he had mounted a fabulous incursion some 2,200 kilometers deep, sweeping aside all infantry and cavalry divisions dispatched to head him off. During this raid, which was reminiscent of the confederate General Lee's raid at the time of the war of secession in the United States, the communications and supply lines of several Red Army corps were destroyed. Several tens of thousands of troops in the process of being forcibly mobilized by the Red Army were sent home again; important cities like Tambov, Kozlov and Tula — the latter lying only 200 kilometers from Moscow — were captured. The Soviet high command had this to say about the raid: "The enemy has seized upon the absence from our camp of an adequate number of cavalry and the poor quality of communications to move with absolute impunity throughout our entire rear, seizing numerous troops, destroying railroad lines everywhere, shooting all our officials who fall into his clutches, arming the population and urging it to wage a partisan war against us."

In the course of his raid, Mamontov — at all times in the front rank of his men — distributed all foodstuffs at no charge to the populace, armed volunteers and brought back with him a division made up of the inhabitants of Tula, which was promptly incorporated into the White army. He also brought back nearly all his men but only half their mounts, which had been decimated by the daily sorties of 60 to 70 kilometers. His cavalry formed a column some eight-to-ten kilometers long, with a seven-to-eight kilometer long convoy of 2,300 cartloads of booty in tow. Several Red divisions sought to cut off his route home; he feigned a breakthrough at one point, waited until enemy troops had concentrated there and then mounted an attack further away, wreaking havoc behind the lines of another Red Army corps. He turned up on the other side of the front lines so unexpectedly

that Shkuro's Cossack army corps, taken unawares itself, made ready to engage him before they realized their mistake.

Not wanting to be idle, General Shkuro in turn forced a passage through enemy lines and seized Voronezh; finding himself now no more than 350 kilometers from Moscow, he sought permission to launch a thrust designed to capture the capital. Such a venture was formally forbidden to him, on pain of court martial. The White staff was so confident of the imminence of victory that it steadfastly opposed the kudos of victory's going to Cossacks rather than to some unit of Volunteer officers. This crass blunder was to prove fatal to the offensive, for several factors, negligible in the short term but consequential over a longer period, were to overturn the situation completely.

At a time when they had all but been able to hear "the Kremlin bells ringing," the White Generals were to be induced to beat a speedy retreat. Wrangel had had a foreboding of this situation, against the run of general enthusiasm prevailing in the White camp, which at that point ruled over a considerable area — 820,000 square kilometers with a population of 42 million inhabitants:

"General Denikin's armies continued to march with giant strides towards Moscow. Kiev, Kursk, and Orel were captured. Our cavalry was at the gates of Voronezh. The whole of South Russia, rich in provisions of every sort, was in the hands of General Denikin, and every day brought us news of fresh successes. But to me it had been long clear as I did not conceal from the general-in-chief, that we were building upon sand, that we were taking on too much so as to be able to seize everything. Our opponent, however, adhered firmly to the principles of strategy. After I fell back to Tsaritsyn, my army weakened by three months of bloody fighting, the Red command realized that it would be a long time before I could take the offensive again, and it marshaled its forces at the point where the Volunteer army and the army of the Don met. The general-in-chief had nothing to deploy against this new enemy force."⁴

The Red Army had indeed been overhauled, well-supplied, and endlessly reinforced by fresh recruits (its total numbers rose at this time to three million); little by little it turned back the Don army and that of Wrangel. In charge of directing its operations was a former Tsarist staff colonel, Sergei Kamenev. The Red Cossack Budyenny's cavalry corps began to show its mettle and played a crucial role. But it was behind the Whites' lines and on their flanks that the difficulties were greatest; to turn again to Wrangel's comments:

"Revolts erupted behind the lines; insurgents under the command of the bandit Makhno wrecked cities and looted trains and quartermaster depots. In the countryside, disorder was rampant. The local authorities were unable to command respect. Abuses of power were the order of the day. The agrarian issue was as confused as ever. The very govern-

ment was none-to-clear about what its intentions were on this score. Its poorly paid agents were all too often not honest.”⁵

Concerned with a situation that he assessed as grave, Wrangel traveled to Rostov to the Whites’ main headquarters. There he met with Denikin; according to Denikin, “everything was going for the best” and “the capture of Moscow can only be a question of time,” as “...the enemy, utterly demoralized and weakened, cannot resist us.” Wrangel strove to call Denikin’s attention to the “bandit Makhno’s insurgent movement which threatens our rear” only to come up against the general-in-chief’s complete thoughtlessness: “It is not serious. We shall have done with him with a flick of the wrist.”⁶ In political matters too, Denikin was equally a cipher; he did not “want to yield one inch of Russian territory” to the Poles and Georgians. What was immediately more serious was that he took the same line towards the Kuban Cossacks who were eager to recover their autonomy. The Rada (government) of the Kuban was in fact becoming increasingly hostile to the Whites; its chairman, P. L. Makarenko, even became a target for the White officers because he sympathized with the Makhnovist movement. According to the Soviet historian, Kubanin, Cossacks generally sought to set up democratic, autonomous, and independent republics in the Don, Kuban, and Terek, and these would be linked federatively to Petliura’s national Ukraine, to Menshevist Georgia, and later, once the Bolsheviks had been overthrown, to a democratic Russia. Kubanin readily acknowledges that the Cossacks were certainly not in favor of restoration of the monarchy; only a handful of Cossack bigwigs had that in mind, but under pressure from the mass, they had had to drop the idea.⁷

Denikin opted for strong-arm methods and ordered the hanging of Kalabukhov, a leader of the Rada; this led to alienation of and increasing desertions by the Kuban Cossacks. By this action he had also shown that he was fighting, not against Bolshevism but against every one of the gains of democracy in every single area of social life and aspired only to plain and simple restoration of tsarism and the absolute rule of the landowners, clergy, and police. And that despite his promise that the Constituent Assembly — which became increasingly hypothetical as his successes grew — would settle the land question, the land was meanwhile restored to its former owners or, at best, the peasants who worked it were compelled to hand over one-third of the harvest to the landowners.

Now, even if they indicated the best will in the world, White officers, helpless because of their reverence for hierarchy, proved powerless to alter the course of events. One of them, one of the bravest servicemen in the Russo-German war, Andrei Grigorievitch Shkuro, did indeed try to moderate the ruthless, anti-democratic conduct of his superiors. Shkuro was a small, stocky man with a raucous voice, and some of his rivals had nicknamed him “Max Linder in general’s epaulettes.” In fact, he had begun to fight the Bolsheviks as early as the beginning of 1918, having tasted their summary methods of justice (only the similarity between his name and another’s had saved him from the firing squad); then, along with his detachment of partisans, he

had joined the Volunteer armies. From the beginning of 1919, when the order of the pomieschikis was restored, his wife was pessimistic about subsequent events, and her views probably reflected those of her husband. He was outraged by the mass executions of Pokrovsky; indeed the latter was nicknamed “the Hangman,” a nickname amply justified when he had hundreds of peasants hanged for the simple reason that they wore no Orthodox crucifix about their necks. Shkuro interceded with Pokrovsky, his superior in rank, to get him to spare the life of the anarchist Alexander Ge, in Kislovodsk, but to no effect. On another occasion, though, he did manage at the last minute to rescue a Jew arbitrarily sentenced to be hanged.⁸ Again to no avail, he tried to snatch Kalabukhov, the leader from the Kuban, from the clutches of Pokrovsky, Pokrovsky being decidedly the doer of Denikin’s dirty work. All of these interventions only succeeded in putting him in bad odor with the Denikinist staff; a shadow that he made up for with brilliant feats of service. Before carrying out his incursion through the front against Makhno, he had tried to come to an accommodation with Makhno by sending emissaries to put proposals for a joint struggle against the Bolsheviks. Being himself of Zaporog descent, he wanted to be near his distant cousins from the left bank of the Dniepr who according to him, were proud of their “Cossack” name and hoped to re-establish a Zaporog republic. He acknowledged that the sympathies of most of them lay with Batko Makhno: “He does not want pomieschikis and nor do we,” they used to say, “for the land is ours; let each one take what he needs, that suits us.”⁹ However, Shkuro had mistakenly believed that Makhno was fighting the Bolsheviks and the Jews, and it was on that basis that he had suggested a joint fight. When Makhno declined, Shkuro had launched his lightning offensive of June 1919 against him. He relates how, at the time of this offensive, his men were initially welcomed when they reached Ekaterinoslav:

“Battered by the horrors of Bolshevism, the populace begged us not to hand the town over to the Reds (the Whites’ vanguard had occupied it almost fortuitously, and their high command regarded this occupation as premature); the high command then allowed us to hold on to the town. I will never forget my entry into the city. People were on their knees singing ‘Christ is risen’ and were blessing us and weeping. The Cossacks and their mounts were blanketed in flowers. Dressed in their finest priestly garments, the clergy were celebrating ‘*Te Deum*’ everywhere. The workers resolved to work as hard as they could for the (White) Volunteer Army. They repaired trains and armored platforms, cannon and rifles. The inhabitants enlisted en masse in our forces. Their enthusiasm was tremendous. How come that all changed later, once gentlemen of the caliber of the governor Schetin¹⁰ had done their work? [...] The joy of the early days after the region’s liberation from the Bolsheviks gave way to incredulity or even hate when the arrival of the White administration and the return of the pack of landlords thirsting for revenge made them-

selves felt. Certain White volunteers said that at first they were greeted with the greatest goodwill only to meet with curses later.”¹¹

He also noted the unbelievable vacuousness of the Denikinist movement:

“Mobilized by force, the workers and peasants were primarily interested in the Volunteer Army’s program. The masses of the people who had had firsthand experience of the crass falsehood of Bolshevik promises and who had woken up politically, wished to see in the Volunteer Army a progressive anti-Bolshevik force rather than a counter-revolutionary one. Kornilov’s program was clear and readily understood; as the successes of the Volunteer Army grew, so its program became increasingly vague and hazy. The notion of the people’s rights of self-direction was whittled away to nothing. Even we commanding officers could not now answer the question: What were the essential lines of the Volunteer Army’s program? What was to be said, for instance, regarding the details of that program, in answer to the questions put frequently by the Donetsk miners: How did the leaders of the Volunteer army see the labor question? It is amusing to say so, but we had to *seek the White ideology in the conversations and table talk of General Denikin*¹² on this or that occasion; mere comparison of two or three of those “sources” could persuade one of the instability of the political notions of their author who, by his subsequent skepticism and caution, progressively whittled his initial promises down to nothing. There were no draft laws; rumors were current about plans drafted in shadowy offices, but no one ever asked us, who were operating on the ground and constantly confronted with the populace’s puzzlement and its disappointments, and they even flew into a rage with us if we raised such issues.”¹³

How implausible! The ideology of the Whites, of those who would have freed the Russian people of the Bolshevik yoke, depended upon the stomach ulcers or whims of their supreme leader, the son of one-time serfs, Denikin! One can appreciate why Trotsky feared Makhno more than he did the Whites.



To return to matters military: When Shkuro was in Voronezh and making ready, in defiance of the prohibition placed on him, to swoop upon Moscow, his superior, Staff general Plyushevsky-Plyuschik warned him that the “possibility of just such a move on your part has already been examined at headquarters, and in that event, you will be immediately proclaimed a traitor to the State and then, even in the event of complete success, produced before a field court martial.”¹⁴ Shkuro comments that he had had to submit to this, but that if he had not, maybe then Russia’s history might have been different. He adds that, regardless of the many voices which alleged so thereafter, he refused to credit that the general staff had

mistrusted the Cossacks and had not wanted the essential role in the liberation of Moscow to fall to Cossack troops.

Subsequently the intervention of Budyenny's cavalry and the Makhnovist threat behind the lines compromised any further advance by the Whites once and for all and preempted any fresh advance on Moscow. Let us note too that it was one of the best regiments in Shkuro's army corps, the Labinsk regiment, which the Makhnovists had crushed at Pomoshnaya and Uman; thereafter, a savage fight to the death set these Zaporog "cousins" against one another.



Another typical view of the Whites, this time held by some engineers from Alexandrovsk, is reported by V. Pavlov, Lieutenant-colonel of the elite Markov Division. Asked for what the Volunteer Army fought, the interrogated officer replied:

"For Russia, one, great and indivisible."

'That is a cliché without meaning,' protested the engineers. The Bolsheviks are fighting for the same. Except that at the same time they resolve, one way or another, political, social and economic issues in order to better the people's existence. So how would the Volunteer Army resolve those issues say?

The officer was stuck for a reply. He could have voiced his own view, but of the Volunteer Army's policies he knew nothing. He had to extricate himself from his difficulty with some trite and quite offhand formula, but one that could not satisfy anyone:

'We wage war in order to free Russia. All the rest is none of our concern. The army is above politics!'

The engineers smiled indulgently, and the conversation moved on to something else."



Later, Pavlov cites the case of an officer serving in the Denikinist propaganda branch, who was called upon to explain to the peasants and workers that it was all the fault of a Masonic conspiracy and of the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion." As Pavlov himself concedes,¹⁵ such a justification of the White's army struggle was nonetheless a scanty explanation of the origins of Bolshevism.

His Russian nationalist mysticism impelled Denikin to open hostilities against Petliura's Ukrainian nationalists who wanted nothing better than to come to some accommodation with him on the basis of recognition of their independence. He dismissed Petliura as a "bandit," threatened to hang him and ipso facto yet another front was opened up. The commander of the Volunteer Army, General Mai-Maievsky, even banned the teaching of the Ukrainian language in July 1919, in parts of the Ukraine under occupation of his troops.



Another aspect of the power of the Whites did them a disservice as far as the populace was concerned: This was the looting and the atrocities carried out by officers endowed with full powers and representing a caste above all suspicion, one whose criminal activities escaped punishment — in which regard they were the worthy successors of the Chekist butchers. We have already seen as much in Gulyai-Polye in June 1919, but it was repeated elsewhere in the region too. Here we have the testimony of the Soviet dissident, General Grigorenko, a native of Borissovka, a township in the vicinity of Mariupol. Grigorenko — whose older brother was in fact a Makhnovist — tells how the municipal soviet of Nogaisk (another small town in the region), made up of peaceable notables elected after February 1917, was labeled “red” and then all its members shot by White Guards on the basis of that “charge” alone. Worse still, a certain Novitsky who escaped this execution, donned his uniform of an ex-captain of the Tsarist army, pinned on his highest military decorations and set off in search of the local commanding officer to demand an explanation for this act of barbarism. He received, by way of a reply, this: “Bolshevik swine — I’ll teach you by what right!” Dragged outside, he was dispatched with a shot to the back of his head.¹⁶ One officer from Shkuro’s corps made a name for himself with his savage repression and boasted of having had 4,000 completely unarmed Makhnovist captives executed when Mariupol was taken in June 1919. Another White officer had an intellectual tortured just because the latter had absentmindedly called him “comrade.” The unfortunate wretch was garroted in the head; the rope was increasingly tightened with the aid of a rod until his skull exploded. A young girl stepped up to the officer and spat in his face; he slew her on the spot with his saber. The crowd was obliged to remain there to contemplate the spectacle under the threat of the knout*.¹⁷

Shkuro himself, for all his democratic impulses, recommended his men (according to the British journalist Williams) systematically to rape the insurgents’ women-folk¹⁸ and Jewish women (a thousand of the latter were raped thus in Ekaterinoslav), something that had not been seen in the region since the Polovtsian invasions of the middle ages.

Such excesses went hand in hand with looting of the “liberated regions.” General Mai-Maievsky set the pattern by turning his residence in Kharkov into a sale room for costly furniture and precious objects, and later earned a name for his orgies. Wrangel was well aware of all such speculation, excesses and abuses of this power; he drew up a blunt report for Denikin’s eyes on December 9, 1919:

“[The troops] had to find what was needed, distribute it and turn the tide of war to use. The war was becoming a way of enriching oneself and living off the land degenerated into pillage and speculation.

Each unit strove to grab as much as it could for itself. Everything was taken; what could not be put to use on the spot was dispatched to the rear for sale and conversion into cash. The troops’ baggage reached

* a whip used for flogging

exorbitant proportions; there were some regiments towing 200 wagons behind them. A considerable number of troops served behind the lines. Lots of officers were away on prolonged missions, concerned with the sale and barter of war booty. The army became demoralized and turned into a ragbag of hawkers and profiteers. All who were involved in 'living off the land' — and that was virtually all officers — found themselves in possession of vast sums of money: The upshot of this was debauchery, gambling, orgies. Unfortunately, some officers themselves set a dismal example by their revelries, spending money recklessly while the whole army looked on. [...] The populace — which on its arrival had greeted our army with transport of enthusiasm, after having suffered so much at Bolshevik hands and wishing now only to live in peace — was soon to know again the horrors of looting, violence and arbitrary acts.

Outcome: Disarray at the front and revolts behind our lines.”¹⁹



For himself, Wrangel did try to clamp down and had a captain shot who had committed exactions, and he did restore a semblance of discipline in his army — to no avail, for it was already too late.

Denikin, who had meanwhile been appointed successor by Kolchak, tried to reverse the trend by dismissing Mai-Maievsky and then by publishing a program on December 15, 1919:

“1. Russia, one and indivisible. Protection of religion. Restoration of order. Reconstruction of the country’s productive forces and of the national economy. Improvement of labor productivity.

2. A fight to the death against Bolshevism.

3. Military dictatorship. The government will ignore the demands of all political parties. All resistance to authority — whether from right or left — is to be smashed. Only thereafter can the form of government be chosen. The people itself will determine it. We must march in step with the people.

4. Foreign policy is to be national and above all Russian. Despite prevarication among the Allies, we must continue to march with them. Any other collusion is morally objectionable and impracticable. Slav solidarity. In return for aid, not an inch of Russian soil.”²⁰

In this vague, ambiguous hotchpotch of patriotism, there was not a single concrete proposal, nor any response to the aspirations of the toiling masses. How kind of him still to be inclined to “continue to march” with the Allies, when it was the Anglo-French who were keeping the White troops up in arms and equipment! As for hostility towards Georgia, Armenia and Daghestan — Transcaucasia — it denied the Whites assistance, or a fallback area which they were soon to need ... and how!

A paper government was established on December 17; its ministers were named "managers" but were puppets of the general staff. Denikin had fallen into the same bad habits as Kolchak as a French diplomat then on secondment in Russia concluded; Fernand Grenard states:

"What goes for Kolchak goes many times over for Denikin around whom the generals, officers, civil servants and landowners most attached to the old regime had gathered. In this entourage, Denikin was suspected of liberalism, and himself looked upon the "Political Center," a gathering of the most respectable props of a moribund society as a revolutionary. Just as Kolchak had the Czechoslovaks, so he alienated the Cossacks, his essential resource, closed down their Rada and executed one of their deputies. On both sides the most absolute arbitrariness, unknown under the tsars, reigned supreme. Rights and freedom were no more. Disturbances and revolts erupted all over. Repression struck out blindly; people known to all as enemies of the Bolsheviks were hunted down, arrested, banished. There was burning, hanging, shooting, looting. Not only was the agrarian question left unresolved, but landlords trailed in the wake of the advancing armies, snatched back their belongings *manu militari* and wrought vengeance on "their" peasants. Small wonder that the populace, in occupied areas and in areas yet to be retaken, turned against those who sought to deliver them and who taught them to see in the Bolsheviks the only true defenders of the cherished gains of the revolution."²¹

Noting everywhere they showed up the unpopularity which the Bolsheviks had left behind, the Whites had a tendency to believe that the road to success would lead them right to Moscow; on the one hand, they did not even bother to synchronize their offensives, and on the other, they promptly set about settling old scores with democracy and reviving a bygone age — the return of which was sought by none among the population. An underlying democratic tendency was attested by John Xydias, an objective witness if ever there was one:

"Neither Kolchak's entourage nor Denikin's included representatives from democratic circles, nor from the socialist parties, however moderate. Now, although a resolute opponent of socialism, I am nonetheless obliged to concede that in 1918–1919, when the Russian people were still under the spell of revolutionary maxims, no government desirous of speaking, not in the name of some caste but rather on behalf of the whole nation, could dispense with the contribution of the socialists, in that the latter still enjoyed — rightly or wrongly — the confidence of the populace who feared, above all else, the return of the ancient regime and the social counter-revolution.

Now, as we said, Kolchak's and Denikin's entourage comprised precisely only of people to whom one French general who had spent some time in Russia vocally applied the old Napoleonic saying: 'They have learned nothing and forgotten nothing.'²²

So, in a sense, the Whites had counted their chickens before they were hatched, having prepared everything for the succession to Lenin, everything that is, except the people's support for their cause. Therein lay the essential cause of their defeat.

Thus the Bolsheviks were to triumph, not so much on their own merits as due to the shortcomings of their White opponents. Also, it was this widespread popular resistance and the countless bands of partisans — the Greens²³ — who, like Makhno (whose crucial role is universally acknowledged) were to harry and ravage the rear of all White offensives, thereby rescuing Lenin and his party. A large proportion of these partisans were to be incorporated into the Red Army, for whom, all in all, the Whites were to prove the best recruiting sergeants.

Notes to Chapter 18: The Whites' Failures

1. General Janin, *Ma mission en Sibirie 1918–1920*, Paris, 1933, p. 173.
2. *Mémoires du général Wrangel*, Paris, 1930, pp. 94–95.
3. A. de Monzie, op. cit. p. 131.
4. Wrangel, op. cit. pp. 104–105.
5. Idem.
6. Ibid. p. 107.
7. M. Kubanin, "The anti-soviet peasant movement during the civil war years (war communism)" in *On the Agrarian Front* (in Russian), No. 1, January 1926, pp. 84–94.
8. Ivan Kahnin, *Russia's Vendée* (in Russian), Moscow, 1926, p. 114.
9. Shkuro, op. cit. p. 220.
10. An especially obtuse and reactionary individual.
11. Shkuro, op. cit. p. 215 and 231.
12. Our emphasis — translator's (A.S) note.
13. Shkuro, op. cit. pp. 209–210.
14. Ibid. p. 223.
15. V.E. Pavlov, *The Markov Division* (in Russian), Paris, 1964, Tome II, pp. 83 and 203.
16. Piotr Grigonenko, *Mémoires*, Paris, 1980, pp. 70–71.
17. G. Williams, *The Defeated in The Archives of the Revolution* (in Russian), Berlin, 1922, Tome VII, pp. 229–230.
18. Idem.
19. Wrangel, op. cit. pp. 119–120.
20. Ibid. pp. 127–128.
21. F. Grenard *La révolution Russe*, Paris, 1933, p. 328.
22. J. Xydias, op. cit. p. 110.
23. Greens, so called after their usual place of residence — in the forests and woods.

19. The Fortunes and Misfortunes of Freedom Regained

In the wake of the June 1919 buckling of the Front, the eastern Ukraine had thus found itself for four months under the jackboots of the White soldiery and in strict subjection to all the stalwarts of the old established order who returned to reclaim their properties and station: the medium and big landowners — kulaks and pomieschiki — the squires, police, magistrates and other officials from Tsarist days. All of these, snugly ensconced and believing that their privileges had been restored permanently, had taken pitiless revenge on the peasants and other miscreants for the trials and tribulations through which they themselves had been put at the time of the revolutionary upheavals that had followed the withdrawal of the Austro-German troops.

Now the shoe was on the other foot. Like a whirlwind, the Makhnovists swept aside all resistance, punishing those behind repression (informers and judges) and destroying all remnants and symbols of slavery: prisons, police and gendarmerie posts were blown up with dynamite or put to the torch. The social heat was turned up again; the peasants rallied en masse to Makhno who by October had a reconstituted insurgent army of some 28,000 infantry and cavalry, with 200 machine-guns and 50 cannons. These insurgents crushed several enemy regiments, completely blockading Volnovakha, the main railway junction servicing the Denikinist front, obliging White headquarters to recall the best Cossack troops from the front against the Bolsheviks as a matter of urgency. These troops — the Don Cossack brigade led by Mamontov, the Terek division, Chechens and other assault regiments, in all about 25,000 men — were to be sorely missed when Budyenny's Red cavalry in turn fell upon Voronezh and drove the Whites back. These substantial White reinforcements obliged the Makhnovists by the end of October to give up the shores of the Sea of Azov — the ports of Berdyansk and Mariupol among others — as well as the Gulyai-Polye region. Instead they captured Pavlograd, Sinelnikovo, Chaplino and above all Ekaterinoslav, while retaining control of the lower Dniepr (Melitopol, Nikopol and Alexandrovsk).



In every district, town-land or city taken over by insurgents, the local residents recovered all social and political rights; they were invited to proceed with the election of delegates from their trade associations and local Soviets and then to call a regional congress to determine what policy to follow in the business in hand. And that without interference from the insurgents.

On the eve of the occupation of Alexandrovsk and Berdyansk, the central organ of the Makhnovist insurgent army, the Military Revolutionary Soviet, issued an appeal addressed to all insurgents and specifying their role in great detail:

“Comrade insurgents! Day by day the insurgent army expands the theater of its revolutionary actions. Soon we shall go liberate such and such a city from Denikin. It will be a city liberated from all authority by the Makhnovist insurgents. It will be a city where free life ought to begin to bubble under the protection of revolutionary insurgents and the free organization of workers built up in full-blooded union with the peasants and insurgents!”

This appeal stressed that there should be no “violence or looting, nor questionable searches,” for the whole success of the building of free communes essentially depended on the Makhnovists: “The matter of how we conduct ourselves in the areas that we shall occupy is a life or death issue for our movement as a whole.”¹

The insurgents made do with appointing one of their own to command of the town, albeit without any civil or military authority, and for the sole purpose of liaising between themselves and the agencies freely elected by the working population. The contrast between the backward-looking conduct of the Whites could not have been starker. Yet the Bolsheviks did not take this view. Thus, scarcely had Alexandrovsk and Ekaterinoslav been liberated than they created ready-made “revolutionary committees” — comprised exclusively of their own supporters, whom they tried to pass off as representative of everybody — then sought out Makhno and proposed to him a carving-up of spheres of activity; he would look to the purely military while they would see to the administration and running of the cities. Even then, in their befuddled mentality, they mistook him for the movement as a whole, and, what is more, coldly proposed that he be, as it were, the arms of a body of which they would furnish the head. This was a complete repetition of what had gone before. This time his response was even more violent against these “parasites upon the workers’ lives”; he forcibly ejected them and forbade them to commit any authoritarian act vis-à-vis the working population, on pain of being shot, and he strenuously recommended that they “take up a more honest trade.”²



Two workers’ conferences were held in Alexandrovsk; these elected representatives for the regional congress that met on October 27–November 2, 1919. It drew nearly 300 participants, 180 of them peasant delegates (in the proportion of one delegate per 3000 peasants), about 20 worker delegates, and the rest were

delegates from left-wing revolutionary organizations and insurgent units. The agenda included the following items: 1) Organization of the insurgent army; 2) reorganization of supply arrangements; 3) organization of a commission to convene a subsequent congress and conferences on the questions of social and economic construction; and, 4) business in hand.

The congress took the most urgent military steps; it determined upon “voluntary” mobilization of 20 classes — between the ages of 19 and 39 — with those under 25 to be dispatched directly to the front while the rest would take care of local self-defense.

This call for a “voluntary” mobilization seems contradictory, and Soviet historians have not been slow to stress that; in fact, it meant that an appeal was issued to the revolutionary consciences of all concerned so that they might defend their rights and freedom by force of arms, without their being obliged to do so, as was the systematic practice among the Bolsheviks, Whites and Petliurists.

The congress also decided that provisioning of the insurgent army was to be ensured on the basis of war booty, requisitions from the bourgeoisie, and, above all, through contributions from the peasants, for the insurgent army was still an essentially peasant army. A panel of peasants, workers and insurgents was appointed to prepare further conferences and congresses bearing on the region’s social and economic reconstruction. That left, finally, any other business the delegates wished to raise. Everything went swimmingly up until November 30th when the anarchist Voline — who chaired the congress — expatiated upon the Makhnovists’ theses regarding free soviets, as drafted jointly by Makhno and the movement’s cultural branch at a general congress of insurgents. On October 20th, these theses had been issued in pamphlet form and distributed throughout the liberated zone as a draft theoretic declaration by the insurgents.³

Makhno, who was present, took over and spelled out the theses. The assembly decided to vote on the following resolution: “To support this view by every means while calling for the universal and speediest possible creation of free local social and economic organizations in coordination with one another.” At this point, several worker delegates — actually, Menshevik and Social Revolutionary militants — spoke up against this idea; in its place they cited the legitimacy of the Constituent Assembly elected in November 1917 and dissolved by the Bolsheviks in January 1918. Makhno lit into them in no uncertain terms, even labeling them counter-revolutionaries in cahoots with Denikin. Outraged, 11 delegates from the soviet of trade unions, from the union of restaurant staff, printers, bank and commercial employees walked out of the hall, and made a public protest at Makhno’s charges, insisting in the name of the city’s working class that these be withdrawn! The congress saw no point in replying to this, for had Makhno not spelled out to them a few home truths, then unquestionably, he reckoned, the assembly “would have done the job a day or two later.”⁴

One Bolshevik official, Levko, participating in the congress also spoke out against the Makhnovist view while caricaturing it crudely:

“You tell us’ — he said — ‘that the soviets can organize anarchy — the absence of authority — and that we will be able to live with such soviets, but you yourselves do not implement this (pointing to the presidium of the congress). And anyway, who are you? Are you not an authority? You preside, you call speakers, call for silence, and, if you so desire, deny some the right to speak. How will it be under Anarchy? If there is a bridge linking two villages, and it is destroyed, who will see to its repair? Given that neither village will want to do so, nobody will do it, and so we shall find ourselves bridgeless, and unable to go to town.’”⁵

The argument was too puerile to cut much ice, especially among peasants for whom solidarity is a natural law, but it is illustrative of this ongoing tendency among supporters of authority to take people for children incapable of assuming control of themselves without lapsing into “idiocies.” By way of contrast to the lines above, Pavlov, whom we have already cited, reproduces the peasants’ profession of faith: “We are not Bolsheviks. They promised us much, but already we have everything (the land). What about power? We live very well doing without it completely.”⁶

In any event the Bolsheviks at the congress did not insist, and they even designated one of their number, Novitsky, to join the insurgents’ Military Revolutionary Soviet elected by the congress. Unity was the theme of the day, and it was enough for them to follow events, well-placed and awaiting their chance to intervene.

Makhno responded to the Mensheviks’ protest by specifying that his accusations were addressed solely to them and not to the workers; this he explained at some length in an open letter published by the Makhnovist organ, *The Road to Freedom*:

“Can it possibly be that the workers of Alexandrovsk and its environs, through their Menshevik and Right Social Revolutionary delegates, support the idea of the Denikinist Constituent Assembly as against any free congress of workers, peasants and insurgents? When they fled from the congress like craven vulgar thieves when confronted by the justice of my charges, is it possible that you decided to protest alongside them? Is it true that these puppets of the bourgeoisie are charged with representing you so as to hide behind your proletarian honor and call for support for the old ideal of the Constituent Assembly?

I think not, that the workers of Alexandrovsk cannot possibly have awarded full powers to these people for that purpose. These impudent individuals who betrayed your interests by addressing congress in the language of Denikin. I am certain that you will keep faith with the ideas of the proletariat and peasants, with the idea of social revolution. Death

to all Constituent Assemblies and other snares of the bourgeoisie! Long live the freedom, equality and justice of the toilers!"⁷

Such a posture could not help but gratify the Bolsheviks; it was grist to their mill in their politicking against the "legitimatist" Social Revolutionaries and Mensheviks. Makhno's violence of language is understandable, especially in light of the vicious battles he had just fought on behalf of his cause; nonetheless, it needs to be noted that he was mistaken in lumping the Constituent Assembly with Denikin's goals. Denikin was as far removed from that as he was from the free soviets advocated by Makhnovists, as we have just seen. Also, if the (so-called Right) Social Revolutionary and Menshevik delegates were really representative of Alexandrovsk's workers, and there is every chance that that was the case, that merely signified that the working class was less radical than the poor peasantry. Makhno grasped that well enough when he occupied Ekaterinoslav for one-and-one-half months from November 9, 1919; the railway workers had turned to him, taking him for an authority — in short, a "boss," as it were — to ask him to pay the wages that they had not had for the past two months! He answered them along the same lines as what he had published in the Makhnovist paper, *The Road to Freedom*, on this very subject a short time before:

"With the object of restoring normal rail traffic in the region liberated by us, on the basis of the principle of the free self-organization of workers' associations and peasant unions in respect of their existence and activities, let me propose to railway worker comrades that they organize themselves vigorously and **themselves** arrange the traffic, levying a suitable sum for passengers and cargoes transported (aside from military convoys and transports) by way of payment for their labors and then organize their budget on the basis of fair principles of comradeship, and finally enter into close relations with other worker and peasant associations as well as insurgent detachments.

Commander of the revolutionary insurgent army of the Ukraine,
Alexandrovsk, October 15, 1919. Batko Makhno."⁸

This the region's railway workers did do, insofar as they were able in the light of the military situation. There was another characteristic incident with workers from the Berdyansk workshops; they prepared some artillery pieces captured by the Makhnovists from the Denikinists, then demanded payment for their trouble when payment was not always the practice among Reds or Whites. The insurgents were shocked at this attitude since they themselves did not shrink from sacrificing their lives for the common cause. One cannot generalize, for it is probable if not certain that with time all these frictions and misunderstandings would have been dispelled, but these examples are, all the same, illustrative of the revolutionary minimalism of certain workers. It was on these grounds and in order to avoid

any mistakes that Makhno was never thereafter to cease emphasizing the fact that the insurgent movement that bore his name was essentially the emanation of the impoverished peasantry.



On November 2nd, a district congress met in Nikopol. It unanimously sided with the Makhnovist movement, and it too called for "voluntary" mobilization of men aged between 18 and 25 for immediate dispatch to the front; those between 25 and 45 were to form a local self-defense regiment. The congress set up a commission to aid the families of those mobilized and then delegated three representatives to Ekaterinoslav in order to liaise with the insurgent army's staff. At that time the insurgency was at its highest point, numbering almost 80,000 fighters and controlling nearly the whole southern Ukraine.

Let us note also that at the Alexandrovsk congress a stringent resolution was passed on the question of drunkenness: Any who thus weakened or contributed to the decomposition of the army of the proletariat now risked the firing squad. By contrast the Bolshevik militant Konyevets testifies that he had heard Makhno arrange with the head of the insurgent army's intelligence branch, Lev Zadovsky-Zinkovsky to have 30 barrels of alcohol (pure alcohol) supplied to Shkuro's Cossacks for the obvious purpose of sapping their fighting spirit.⁹

The Alexandrovsk congress also passed a resolution on the sum to be levied from the bourgeoisie and banks. Alexandrovsk's bourgeoisie was hit with a levy of 50 million rubles but was to cough up only ten million; a levy of the same size was imposed on Ekaterinoslav but raised only seven million. Only 15 of the 25 million levied against Berdyansk was collected; Nikopol's contribution, set at 15 million rubles, was in fact to amount to eight million.

One hundred million rubles were seized from the Ekaterinoslav banks; of these 45 million were made available to the insurgents, three million were distributed to the needy, to combatants' families, and to ex-prisoners. All this was done through the good offices of a social assistance office which, initially, sat twice a week and then on a daily basis. According to the evidence of one city resident, published in an official soviet magazine, such assistance was starkly at odds with the behavior of the Whites, and, it is implied, of the Reds:

"This distribution of monies to the population was fairly extensive. It was announced in advance that the poorest could apply to the headquarters of Batko Makhno's insurgent army for material assistance. All that anyone was required to bring with him was his passport so that the social situation of the applicants could be authenticated. There were lots of unemployed and needy in the town, and despite the comparatively moderate cost of living (a pound of white bread then cost five or six rubles, compared with three or four under the Whites), thousands waited every morning outside the headquarters. Applicants filed one at

a time into the social assistance office. There, one of the members of the Military Revolutionary Soviet, an anarchist intellectual (apparently a school teacher), scrutinized the applicant's passport, put a few questions to him to establish the measure of need, prescribed the amount of aid, and entered this and the name of the beneficiary in a ledger. A cashier seated at another table dipped into bags strewn on the ground for bills and handed over the money without asking for a receipt. Sometimes, if the applicant (male or female, in the latter case only the wives or widows of working men) made a convincing case, the amount allocated could add up to a considerable sum for those days, up to thousands of rubles which could keep a whole family in comfort for upwards of a month. This distribution of help to the poorest of the population was kept up by the Makhnovists right up until their very last day there. Help was similarly afforded to the town's children's homes; nearly one million rubles were allotted to them, plus many products: flour, lard and sausage. One has to give credit to the Makhnovists; the children's homes were kept supplied for over a month.... However, while handing over money for the children's homes, the Military Revolutionary Soviet declared that the insurgent army was not a charitable organization, and that it would give out no more money. 'We're only an insurgent army,' said the Military Revolutionary Soviet's secretary, the anarchist intellectual, to the agent of the children's homes, 'We only came to defend you against violence from any authorities, be they Bolshevik or Denikinist. The rest is up to yourselves, up to your own actions. Organize yourselves as you wish!'

The Military Revolutionary Soviet expressed the same viewpoint in an appeal to the populace to summon a conference that would take charge of the running of the city. A conference that would assemble the working personnel of the city, excluding their exploiters."¹⁰



This practice on the part of the insurgents is a good illustration of their approach; they took the lead in eliminating state power used by Whites, Reds or any other hegemony-seeking faction, before inviting workers to get on with self-organization. To begin with, using money levied from the bourgeoisie, they made do with getting the machinery of solidarity underway before stepping back into their purely defensive military function. They handed over another million rubles to the city's hospital which had not been able to function up until then for lack of funds. In fact, the financial issue was secondary for them; they had a clear preference for a natural economy, i.e., direct exchange of goods and services between different worker and peasant associations, insofar as their needs allowed. That said, the townsfolk were not yet up to that; as far as they were concerned,

they had to get hold of some money. Here too the Makhnovists found a very simple solution; all currencies were — to the great annoyance of Soviet historians — taken as equally valid, whether they were nikolaevkis (rubles from the days of Nicholas II), kerenskis (rubles issued under Kerensky), Petliura's "Karbovantsy" or any other coupons or vouchers — all were welcome!

Another remarkable achievement of their occupation of Ekaterinoslav: Complete freedom of association and expression for leftist organizations and mouthpieces. The Makhnovists announced this the moment they arrived in the city:

"1. Complete freedom to express their beliefs, ideas, teachings, and opinions, both orally and in writing, is offered to all socialist political organizations without exception. No restriction on social freedom of speech or publication can be tolerated, and no persecution along such lines should have any place in the life of the city.

Note: Communications of a military nature may only be published provided they have been supplied by the editors of the revolutionary insurgents' main organ, *The Road to Freedom*.

2. In offering total freedom of expression to political parties and organizations, the army of the Makhnovist insurgents warns them at the same time that the cultivation, organization, and erection by constraints on their part of any political authority hostile to the laboring people — which has nothing to do with freedom in expression of ideas — will in no ways be tolerated by the revolutionary insurgents.

The Military Revolutionary Soviet of the Army of the Makhnovist Insurgents. Ekaterinoslav, November 5, 1919."¹¹



And so, for the first time since February 1917, great freedom of speech, association, and press were introduced in the capital of the eastern Ukraine. During the Makhnovists' six week sojourn, the following publications appeared, unmo-
lest: The (so-called Right) Social Revolutionaries' *People's Power*; the Left Social Revolutionaries' *Banner of Revolt*; the Bolshevik *Star*; the Mensheviks' bulletin; the anarchist confederation of the Ukraine's *Nabat*; and the two editions (in Russian and in Ukrainian) of the Makhnovist insurgents' organ, *The Road to Freedom*.

In their publications the insurgents spelled out the meaning of all these achievements: "The meaning of the events in progress fits in with the third great insurgent revolution, bringing to the toiling masses emancipation from the yoke of all power in all its forms and manifestations," *Nabat* wrote in its December 1, 1919 edition. On October 16th, *The Road to Freedom* asserted that:

"...the difference between Bolsheviks' economic policy and the economic construction proposed by the new course lies in the fact that

the Bolsheviks, like all authorities, connect that building closely with the policy of state power, adapting it to the existing battery of State machinery [...] for its part, the new course, which rejects all State power calls for free organization of this economic construction by anti-authoritarian groups of peasants and workers, unaided.”¹²

It should be stressed that this new life was trying to establish itself against a backdrop of continual war. The city was under constant bombardment from Denikinists dug in on the opposite bank of the Dniepr, a factor that accounts for certain restrictions on the rights on the local bourgeoisie. Likewise, the whole region was prey to raids by Mamontov's and Shkuro's Cossacks, whose invasion undid nearly all of the decisions and resolutions reached in Alexandrovsk; delegates had barely returned to their villages and townships before these were reoccupied by White troops.

The situation became even more tense in Ekaterinoslav when a Bolshevik plot was uncovered. For several months past a number of Bolsheviks had been sharing in the Makhnovists' struggle; some of them had capitalized on this in order to establish clandestine liaison with one another and to pack the command positions of given regiments. Then they decided to act, which is to say mount a *coup d'Etat* against the insurgent staff; to that end, their primary aim was to do away with Makhno. On some pretext, they invited him to a *soirée*, where the plan was to offer him a poisoned drink. Tipped off by one of its members, the Makhnovist intelligence service quickly seized the plotters (the informant had wormed his way into the clandestine Bolshevik liaison), arrested them, and after a speedy trial, had the five main conspirators shot on December 5. These five were Polonsky, commander of insurgents' "Iron" regiment; his second-in-command, Semchenko; his mistress — an actress who was to have "played" the role of poisoner; Vainer, a former president of a Red Army court martial of sinister repute; plus another confederate.

Another regimental commander, Lashkevitch, who had been later the first man to enter Ekaterinoslav, was also shot for embezzlement and that in spite of his tremendous popularity among the insurgents. Some Denikinist agents, most of them ex-officers, met the same fate.

On December 22, Ekaterinoslav was attacked by Slashev at the head of fresh and heavily armed troops. After several days of bitter fighting in an effort to cover the evacuation of several thousand sick and wounded insurgents left behind in the city, the Makhnovists were finally obliged to give the place up. As a result, the fourth regional congress scheduled to be held in Ekaterinoslav at the end of December 1919 was unable to proceed.

There was a single and principal reason for the weakening of the insurgent army: an epidemic of typhus, an enemy worse than any faced thus far.¹³ The whole force and gains of the insurgent movement's struggle were thus to evaporate in just

a few weeks. By late October many Makhnovists had succumbed; on December 11, the insurgent army was already down to 25,000 men, with more than 10,000 wounded or sick. Many were sent home in order to reduce risks of infection; others were hospitalized and perished by the thousands for want of appropriate treatment. Makhno and several members of his staff also contracted this ghastly disease. By the end of December, only about 10,000 insurgents were left, and these had fallen back in the direction of the Gulyai-Polye, Melitopol, and Nikopol area. It was at this juncture that the third party, the Red Army, showed up to reap the benefits of the Makhnovists' successes. Especially as the Whites too had been decimated by typhus and, following the failure of their push against Moscow, the Whites were beating a slow retreat towards their bases in the Caucasus.

Notes to Chapter 19: The Fortunes and Misfortunes of Freedom Regained

1. Kubanin, op. cit. pp. 88–89.
2. Arshinov, op. cit. p. 151.
3. Reprinted in full as an appendix to this book.
4. B. Kolesnikov, *The Trades Movement and the Counter-revolution* (in Russian), Kharkov, 1923, p. 320.
5. Kubanin, op. cit. p. 94.
6. Pavlov, op. cit. p. 75.
7. B. Kolesnikov, op. cit. p. 321.
8. *The Road to Freedom* No. 9, quoted by V. Miroshevsky in “Free Ekaterinoslav” in *The Proletarian Revolution*, (in Russian), Moscow, 1922, No. 9, p. 203.
9. Konyevets (Grishuta) in *Letopis revoliutsii* op. cit. No. 4 (13), 1925, p. 83.
10. M. Gutman “Under the power of the anarchists: Ekaterinoslav in 1919” in *Russkoye proshlozhe*, St. Petersburg, No. 5, 1923, pp. 65–66.
11. Arshinov, op. cit. pp. 151–152.
12. Quoted by V. Miroshevsky, op. cit. pp. 202–203.
13. The lice that carried this awful disease were dubbed the “tanks of death.”

20. The New Enemy: The Bolshevik Party-State

The disintegration of Denikin's rear beneath the concerted blows of Makhno and the Greens singularly simplified the Red Army's task; it made do with shadowing the Whites as they retreated step by step in an orderly withdrawal under the command of Wrangel and Shkuro. The latter "beat all records for slowness" as he retreated the 80 kilometers from Voronezh to Kastornaya over a three week period.¹ On the other hand the Red Army made all haste in occupying the terrain cleared by local partisans and in establishing "Soviet" authority there. Thus came true the allegation by the Makhnovists (as reported by Dybets) to the effect that: "When there is fighting to be done, the Bolsheviks are nowhere around, and there is no point in looking for them on the front, but as soon as a town is taken by partisans, up they pop and immediately proclaim themselves the new authorities. Their sole aim is to ride to power on the backs of the insurgents."²

Despite the widespread typhus epidemic and its heavy losses on the field of battle, the Red Army's numbers had constantly grown; by autumn 1919 they had reached the considerable figure of three million men. These were reinforced even further by incorporation of partisan bands and White captives. To be sure, only a tiny number of these troops, about one in ten, actually saw front-line service and that on different fronts. Confronting Denikin it had only 150,000 troops, regularly relieved as the casualty rate or falling morale of the fighters dictated. Indeed, the whole army represented a rather flabby military potential, the men having been forcibly conscripted; also the Red Army's command had been concerned above all with training them and with "grooming" them ideologically, then held them in reserve or else used them as occupation troops in the less dependable areas of the country in order to stabilize the Bolshevik order there.

The Makhnovists made the serious mistake of underestimating this new peril. According to Arshinov, the movement ought to have been strengthened militarily and every area of the Ukraine — as far as Orel and Poltava — liberated by insurgents under Makhnovist influence ought to have been directly occupied in order to forestall the Bolsheviks' intentions. Instead, it was insurgent detachments (like those of Bibik and Ogarkin which occupied Poltava and Orel) that sought out the Makhnovists as the Red Army forced them into retreat. Arshinov accounts for this oversight by citing on the one hand ravages caused by typhus, and on the

other, the exaggeratedly optimistic outlook of the Makhnovists, convinced that the Red Army would never dare come and lay down the law to them, in view of their crucial contribution to Denikin's defeat.

The insurgents reckoned that as they had borne the brunt of the fighting and liberated the whole of the Ukraine by their own unaided efforts, Moscow simply had to take that into account. The Makhnovist high command had given consideration to whether priority should be given to military reinforcement of the region or to the positive ventures in social and economic construction by the workers. It had come out in favor of the second option, on the basis that through their revolutionary work, the toiling masses would easily see of any attempted interference by any party. There was another consideration also; the Makhnovists had no wish to end up as the new authorities but wished to leave things up to the self-organizational ability and foresight of the workers themselves, and were content merely to let them know how the Makhnovists saw things. The following handbill which was circulated at this time is a good encapsulation of this intention:

“Declaration of the insurgent revolutionary army of the Ukraine
(Makhnovist).

To all Peasants and Workers of the Ukraine!

For transmission by telegraph, telephone or courier to all villages, all rural districts, all cantons and provinces of the Ukraine. For reading at all gatherings of peasants and workers of factory and workshops.

Brother toilers! The revolutionary insurgent army of the Ukraine (Makhnovist) was set up as a reaction against the oppression of workers and peasants by the power of the bourgeoisie and of big estate owners and by the Communist-Bolshevik dictatorship.

Setting itself the goal of fighting for the utter emancipation of the toilers of the Ukraine from the yoke of those two powers and the creation of a genuinely socialist soviet order, the army of the Makhnovist insurgents has fought doggedly on several fronts to achieve that objective. At this very moment it is bringing to a victorious conclusion its fight against Denikin's army, liberating region after region and eliminating all power and all organization rooted in violence.

Many peasants and workers ask the question: What is to be done now and how? What attitude should we adopt vis-à-vis dispositions taken by the authorities which have been eliminated? — and so on. The Pan-Ukrainian congress of workers and peasants will furnish a precise and full answer to these questions, a congress that will have to meet immediately just as soon as it is feasible for the workers and peasants to get together. That congress will indicate and resolve all the fundamental questions of the life of workers and peasants.

But given that this congress will not be able to proceed for some time, the army of Makhnovist insurgents regards it as indispensable that the following statement be made on the fundamental issues of the life of workers and peasants:

1. All dispositions taken by Denikinist authorities are rescinded. Dispositions of the communist authorities which conflicted with the interests of the workers and peasants are likewise rescinded.

Note: As regards those dispositions of the communist authorities injurious to the workers, it is incumbent upon the latter themselves to identify these and to take decisions at peasants' and workers' assemblies in villages and factories.

2. All the landholdings of great estate owners, monasteries, kulaks and all other enemies of the toilers pass, along with all their livestock, into the hands of peasants who work for their living. This whole transfer should be effected in an organized fashion, by decision of general assemblies of peasants who should be cognizant not only of their personal interest but also keep in mind the general interests of the entire toiling and oppressed peasantry.

3. The workshops, factories, coal and mineral mines as well as other instruments and means of production become the property of the entire working class as a whole which, through its trades unions, takes all enterprises in hand in a concerted way, organizes production there, and moves towards uniting the whole industry of the country into one all-embracing organism.

4. It is proposed to all peasant and worker organizations that they make a start on construction of free soviets of workers and peasants. Only workers participating in work vital to the people's economy should be elected on to these soviets. The representatives of political organizations have no place in the soviets of workers and peasants, given that their participation in a soviet could turn it into a soviet of party political deputies, thereby leading the soviet order to perdition.

5. The existence of Chekas, party political revolutionary committees, and other institutions of constraint, power, or discipline will not be tolerated among free peasants and workers.

6. Freedom of speech, press, association, organization, etc., is the inalienable right of every worker and all limitations upon that right would appear as a counter-revolutionary act.

7. The State's police (guards, police, militia) are abolished. In their place the population will organize its self-defense. This self-defense cannot be organized other than by the workers and toilers themselves.

8. The workers' and peasants' soviets, the self-defense of the workers and peasants, as well as each individual peasant and worker,

will not allow any counter-revolutionary action by the bourgeoisie and officers.

9. Soviet and Ukrainian currencies are to have the same value as other currencies. Those who violate this disposition are to be liable to revolutionary sanction.

10. The exchange of the products of labor and trade remains free until such time as the workers' and peasants' organizations shall take charge of that themselves. But it is proposed at the same time that the exchange of the products of labor take place only between toilers.

11. All who shall intentionally obstruct circulation of the present declaration are to be regarded as counter-revolutionaries.

January 7, 1920

The Military Revolutionary Soviet and Staff of the Insurgent
Revolutionary Army of the Ukraine (Makhnovist).³

This proclamation is of high revolutionary tenor but is suggestive of an over-estimation of the potential of a population at that time bled dry and bereft of everything. And the only language that Bolsheviks understood was the language of the balance of military might. Just as they had done a year earlier, they entered the Ukraine from the north, and in the absence of power, at least as they saw it, for a free and spontaneous organizing of workers through their grassroots organs — free soviets federated from the bottom up — could not in their estimation be deemed a power worthy of the name, they imposed their own. At the close of a meeting held in Ekaterinoslav on January 1, 1920 following their occupation of the city, they pushed through a resolution that was eloquent and closed with these words: "Long live the worldwide Bolshevik Communist Party! Long live the Third International! Down with anarchy!"⁴

The first encounter between units from the two camps, at the beginning of January 1920, was amicable if not fraternal. Kubanin, the Soviet historian of the Makhnovschina reckons that: "...for the Red Army, Makhnovists seemed like allies who had conducted a ferocious struggle behind the lines of the common foe, helping to disorganize him and thereby hastening the shared victory. It went without saying that Makhnovist units had to subordinate themselves to the overall command of the Red Army."⁵ And so the Red Army began to conduct itself as the master thereabouts, intercepting bands of Makhnovists then absorbing them into its ranks while dispersing them through its regiments or disarming them and dispatching them home to their hearths.

For the reasons indicated earlier, Makhno and his staff had fallen back towards the Gulyai-Polye region and Alexandrovsk; i.e., they had in fact abdicated all control over the region. Makhno, beset by an acute form of exanthematic typhus, was at that moment deep in a coma and would not emerge from that for a good ten days.

This was the moment chosen by the 14th Red Army's command to order the Makhnovists on January 8th to surrender on the Polish front where the Bolsheviks were preparing to launch a war of conquest with the aim of achieving a common frontier with Germany — the fatherland of proletarian revolution, according to Lenin — prior to "bolshevizing" the whole of Europe. Kubanin notes this order while explaining that it was "dictated by the need to oust the Makhnovist insurgent army from its [home] territory and thus convert it into a regular army unit."⁶ What Kubanin did not know when he came to pen those lines was that the object of the order was to contrive a rift with Makhno. Indeed, in an article published some months after Kubanin's work, Levenson, a Ukrainian Bolshevik military official, offered a quite different explanation of the order by reporting the conversation between Uborevitch, commander of the 14th Red Army, and Yakir, commanding the 45th Division. Uborevitch stated that "Makhno's attitude towards that order will furnish us with definite grounds for our subsequent treatment of him..." while Yakir replied that: "Knowing Makhno personally, I know that there is no way he will accept it." Uborevitch acquiesced and concluded: "This order is quite patently a political gambit and only that. We do not even expect a positive response from Makhno."⁷ Further to this individual's cynicism, let us note that several days previously on January 4th, he had issued a top secret instruction: "for all steps to be taken to disarm the population and wipe out Makhno's bands."⁸

The most sizable Makhnovist detachment, some six regiments strong — that is, about 9000 infantry and cavalry — and stationed in Alexandrovsk at first objected indignantly that there was no way that it was answerable to the Red Army and that it had not needed it to liberate the Ukraine and then that Makhno and most of their fighting men were still bed-ridden typhus victims, and finally that it did not feel that war against Poland was any of its concern. Such a response was music to Bolshevik ears in that it furnished them with an excuse to declare Makhno and the insurgents outlawed yet again on January 9, 1920 and openly to fight them. The Red Army high command sought in this way to avenge its discomfiture of August 1919 at Pomoshnaya when its troops had gone over to Makhno. The communiqué declaring Makhno outlawed developed this fallacious line of argument:

"Decree from the Pan-Ukrainian revolutionary committee on the outlawing of Makhno and the Makhnovists. January 9, 1920.

To all workers, Red soldiers and peasants of the Ukraine.

Comrades! At last, after incredible losses, our valiant Red Army has been able to crush the capitalists, the pomieschikis and their confederate, Denikin.

But the Ukrainian people's chief enemy — the Polish lords — have not yet been defeated. Coming to Denikin's rescue, they have occupied a whole succession of towns and districts in this country of ours and in

Russia alike. The military command is trying everything to achieve a union of all forces fighting against the common foe of the toiling people — pomieschikis and capitalists — and to that end has proposed to the Makhnovists that they join the fight against the Poles, thereby assisting the Red Army to liberate our villages and towns from the yoke of the Polish lords and spare workers the enslavement of capitalism.

Makhno has been unwilling to bow to the will of the Red Army; he has refused to fight the Poles, declaring war instead on our peasant and worker army of liberation.

In this way, Makhno and his band have sold the Ukrainian people to the Polish lords, as Petliura, Grigoriev and other traitors have done. Which is why the Pan-Ukrainian Revolutionary Committee now decrees:

Makhno and his band are hereby outlawed as deserters and traitors.

All who support and assist in the concealment of these traitors from the Ukrainian people are to be ruthlessly annihilated.

The toiling populace of the Ukraine has an obligation to support the Red Army by every means in its pursuit of the annihilation of Makhnovist traitors.

This decree is to be read compulsorily by all of the Ukraine's revolutionary committees in front of workshops, factory and mine-works assemblies and everywhere else.

*The Pan-Ukrainian Revolutionary Committee:
Chairman, G.I. Petrovsky; Members: D.Z. Manuilsky, V. Zatonsky, G.
Grinko, Kachinsky, Kharkov*"⁹



Not the least startling aspect of this document is the revelation that the main enemy of the people of the Ukraine was the Polish lords absent from the area for centuries past! Furthermore, the Polish government was headed by the socialist Pilsudski! Finally, the Bolshevik satraps did not call a halt at such "trifles." Any pretext would do, just as long as it justified outlawing the Makhnovists. The Makhnovists' naiveté was all too obvious; they reckoned that they had fulfilled their role as revolutionaries so well that the Bolsheviks surely would not dare use calumny against them. But that was to reckon without the hegemonic logic of the Leninist cliques.

The decree signaled the beginning of the hunt for Makhno; he, unconscious and on the brink of death, was saved only by the devotion of the peasants of the Gulyai-Polye region who took him in and, when his hiding place was discovered, bought time for the ailing Makhno to be removed to somewhere safer. The members of the Makhnovist staff and the insurgents' main commanders managed to slip through the net and strove to contain the Reds' attacks. The insurgents' Military

Revolutionary Soviet disbanded, its members going underground or, like Voline, were picked up by the Bolsheviks.

A secret operational report from the 13th Red Army, dated January 31, 1920, notes that the "remnants" of the Makhnovists had been liquidated in the Gulyai-Polye region. The captured booty was enlightening: Thirteen cannon, eight machine-guns, 120 rifles, 300 prisoners, 60 horses, 50 saddles (!), one field telephone, four typewriters (!), 100 sabers, 50 machine-gun ammunition belts, 500 cartridges, and three sackfuls of sundry silver items.¹⁰ In fact this operation was a surprise attack directed against the Makhnovist staff, during which Nestor's second and last brother, Saveli, a quartermaster, was shot merely for his relationship to his leader brother. When this punitive expedition was thought not to have been exemplary enough, the 13th Red Army's commander, Yegorov, ordered the commander of the Estonian Division on February 6th to crush the Makhnovists from the Gulyai-Polye region once and for all, as well as "pitilessly repressing the Makhnovists and the population harboring them." He even stipulated that "in the event of resistance in Gulyai-Polye, it will be necessary to proceed in the most severe fashion, should circumstances so require." [!]¹¹

It seems that not all of these efforts were crowned with success, for on February 9th, another urgent and secret operational report from the 12th, 13th, and 14th Red Armies reported the capture of the black banner of the Makhnovist staff, of three machine-guns, 38 rifles, 14 horses, and the recapture of the 42nd Division's heavy battery (seized a short time before by the Makhnovists!)¹²

For added security, the Red Army command used Latvian, Estonian, and Chinese riflemen, most of whom spoke neither Russian nor Ukrainian; having no local ties, they were easier to manipulate. What successes were registered in the Gulyai-Polye region led the Red Army command to believe that the Makhnovist movement had been, as they would say, "liquidated"; it decided thereafter to turn its attention to controlling the territory. They began by having each home painstakingly searched with a view to confiscating all weapons still at the disposal of the population which was, consequently, regarded as potentially hostile. The dissident soviet general Grigorenko, who has already offered us a description of the abuses of the Whites, this time turns his attentions to those of the Reds:

"Thus, we hated the Whites because they had gunned down the first Soviets in 1918. That hate was well justified. Now, it was in 1920 that troikas of the Cheka began to raid villages to confiscate weapons remaining in the hands of the populace. We too earned our 'visit.' The president of the Cheka, dressed entirely in leather and armed to the teeth, addressed the village assembly; his address could not have been more laconic; he read out a list of hostages (comprising seven 'notables' from the village) and announced that they would be shot unless the population had handed over to the Cheka all weapons in their possession

by noon the next day. On the following morning, a few hunting pieces, revolvers, and daggers were found outside the premises of the village soviet. After the mid-day meal, troops from the military detachment accompanying the three Chekists conducted a search of all homes. In a vegetable garden — indeed, it seems, in the meadow beyond the vegetable garden — they ‘discovered’ an old blunderbuss. The hostages were shot, and the troika selected seven more.”

Oddly enough, these hostages were to be spared, to the amazement of the populace, as the president of this particular ‘troika’ had the reputation of never shooting fewer than three batches of hostages. Grigorenko continues:

“For a long time there was a lot of curiosity and talk about the massacres that the Cheka was committing in other villages in the region. There was no end of bloodshed. In one of these villages — Novospassovka — the Chekists had even, so it was said, carried out mass shootings. Witnesses claimed to have seen the blood run in spates, forming rivulets, down the slopes of the ravine atop which the executions had been carried out.

I did not believe these tales. In 1918, Novospassovka had revolted against the Whites and had held out heroically against them for eight months until Makhno’s army broke the encirclement. And the village, in an expression of gratitude to the Batko, had supplied him with two regiments of well-armed and battle-hardened infantry. I could not bring myself to believe that the revolutionary authorities could have wiped out the sort of people who had fought for them so well. Now, as I learned subsequently, those witnesses had told the truth. In Novospassovka, the Cheka had shot down one in every two able-bodied men. Men who had been capable of insurrection against the Whites might very well have rebelled some day against the Reds; that, at least, was the thinking of our leaders, and through the massacre, they had cynically preempted that possibility.”¹³

This amounted to outright genocide against descendants of the Zaporogs, a genocide mounted knowingly by the Bolshevik leadership. Piotr Arshinov, chronicler of the Makhnovschina and eyewitness to this war of extermination, reckons, at the most cautious estimate, that for 1920 the number of peasants shot or mutilated by the Bolshevik authorities stood at nearly 200,000! — and a similar figure for those deported to Siberia and elsewhere. The Whites’ sinister record had been beaten out of sight!

Let us also quote the testimony of an anonymous old Bolshevik, published recently, which places on record another aspect of this terror, with the Cheka abetted this time by army commander Zhloba, a Donetsk miner who had become a party stalwart. Faced with resurgent Makhnovist activities in the spring of 1920,

in the Sinelnikovo region, 100 hostages were taken from among the well-to-do — kulaks, priests, businessmen, etc. (of which in fact none too many could have been left by then) — and they were handed over to the Cheka:

“After questioning, they were led out into the prison yard, and it was demanded of them that they should reveal who the band leaders were who were hiding out somewhere: In their homes, in their barns, and elsewhere? The hostages were warned that, should they refuse, 25 of them would be shot on the spot as responsible for murders and looting. The hostages said nothing. The first 25 in alphabetical order were led 20 paces away and gunned down as the others looked on. Their next of kin were immediately informed, and the corpses handed over to them.”¹⁴

On the second and third days, the scene was re-enacted with the same result each time. The last 25 hostages remaining were exhorted to betray Makhnovist agents. After consideration, the hostages gave the names of Makhnovists who had wormed their way into the “organs of Soviet power and into the local party leadership. In particular, the chairman of the town soviet and the secretary of the town’s party committee who had gathered around them enemies of Soviet power.” These “agents” were promptly shot. The author of these *Memoirs*, though, never poses the question of how these allegedly well-to-do hostages could have been so well informed about Makhnovist infiltration of the Soviet apparatus. It is more than likely the first of them had said nothing because they knew no real Makhnovists, and that these last hostages had sought to save their lives and also to work a cruel revenge on the authorities by singling out genuine Leninist supporters whom they misrepresented for the occasion as “Makhnovists!” What bears out this thesis is the insurgents’ absolute opposition to having any involvement at all in any State authority as the following address testifies:

“Address to the Peasants and Workers of the Ukraine:

Peasant and worker brethren! For upwards of three years you have been fighting against capitalism and thanks to your efforts, your staunchness and your energy, you have now all but concluded that struggle. The enemies of the revolution wore themselves out under pressure from you, and you, sensing the imminence of victory, were nearing success.

You thought that your constant and often unequal struggle against the revolution’s enemies would afford you the chance to make a reality of that free soviet order to which we have all aspired. But, brethren, you can see who triumphs in our place. They are undesirable masters, these communist hangmen who triumph, they who showed up here when it was all over, treading soil liberated with your blood, by the blood of your brothers and sons who made up the revolution-

ary insurgent movement. These new lordlings have grabbed all of the wealth of the country. It is not you, but they who do with it what they will. And you peasants and workers have become their shield, without which they cannot call themselves a worker and peasant government, in which name they are the assassins and hangmen of the people and which allows them through their party rule to tyrannize the people. The people's name allows them all that, and it is for that alone that they have need of you workers and peasants.

In every other instance you are nothing to them, and they pay you absolutely no heed. They exploit you, draft you, command and administer you. They destroy everything about you. And you, being oppressed, patiently bear all the horrors of the repression, violence and arbitrariness perpetrated by the communist hangmen, things that can be eliminated only by your widespread protest, only by your revolutionary justice — by a revolutionary insurrection. It is to that you are summoned by your brethren, workers and peasants even as you are, who perish under the gunfire of the Red assassins who, by force of arms, carry off your wheat, livestock, and every other foodstuff for a shipment to Russia.

It is your own brothers who, taking their leave of life and of the whole radiant future to which we all aspire, call upon you to rescue the revolution, independence and freedom. Think, peasant and worker brethren, that now if you no longer feel freedom and complete independence in your hearts, you will be all the more powerless in the future to determine your fate, and you will not be the shapers of your own happiness and will not yourselves be the masters of your country's riches, of the fruits of your very own labor.

All that will be done in your stead by new masters invited in by no one — the Bolshevik-communist intruders. In order to rid themselves of these undesirable masters, every peasant and all of their best efforts have to be applied to the summoning of clandestine peasant congresses at district and regional levels, at which they should debate and decide upon all of the vital problems of the day, brought about through the unaccountability and dictatorship of these bandits. The interests of the country and of the very toilers of the Ukraine require that these new, unwanted lords and masters not be allowed to devastate the country completely; in the Ukraine there ought to be no place either for them or for their Red killers who tyrannize the people. Without wasting a single day, all peasants should organize themselves through clandestine congresses. Organize clandestine combat units in every village and township, and organize a combat agency to lead them. All peasants should once and for all deny all aid to the communist hangmen and

their craven mercenaries, denying them horses and grain and crust of bread alike. The workers in turn should, in town as in countryside, refuse to join the Communist Party on the supply detachments or in the Cheka; withhold all participation from communist institutions. The people of the Ukraine should declare to the world at large and translate into action: Away with White and Red killers and hangmen! We pursue the common weal, light and truth and will not tolerate your acts of violence. Long live the international social revolution of workers and peasants! Death to all White Guards and all commissars! Death to all hangmen! Long live the regime of free soviets!

(March–April 1920)

The Staff of the Insurgent Army of the Ukraine (Makhnovist).¹⁵

The insurgents set about putting these vengeful intentions into effect on the ground. At the end of February, the division of the Estonian “mercenaries” which had been so impudent as to ensconce itself in Gulyai-Polye no less, was suddenly attacked and crushed; all of its military and political officials were executed by firing squads; as for the ordinary soldiers, those who indicated a wish to do so were incorporated into the insurgent units, whereas the rest were stripped of their army uniforms and sent packing.

In the months that followed, there were ongoing and scattered clashes on the left bank of the Dniepr. The Red Army’s strategy was to track down insurgents, encircle them and if possible, wipe them out, for it took no prisoners. It forgot that the Makhnovists were on home ground and moved like the fish in the water; well-informed as to the movements of the opposition, they wove between the different enemy units, attacking and scattering the smallest while swooping out of the blue upon the rear of the others. In short, they waged a war of harassment without let-up. A high-ranking Red official, Yefimov, in March 1921 when the fight against Makhno was still at its height, narrated his whole experience of the war against the insurgents in 1920. First of all, he explains the Red Army’s failure to come up with resounding victory by reference to its social composition: Essentially peasants, the soldiers and even the officers had little heart for the fight against the Makhnovists, implicitly on grounds of class solidarity, for the Makhnovists stood for, at best, the local population’s aspirations of “dispensing with all power, the State being regarded as a burden, a restrictive supervisor.”¹⁶ He reckons that the insurgents had learned how to fight against a regular army thanks to Denikinist troops — which of itself speaks volumes about his ignorance of their earlier fighting against Austro-German troops — and divines an analogy of sorts between the Whites’ strategy and the Reds’ strategy against Makhno, even in terms of results, which is to say the lack of success by both. He makes out that the main Makhnovist detachment relied on numerous small local detachments which from time to time supplied its reserves and which enjoyed every latitude in striking at Chekists and

the authorities' requisition squads. According to him the Makhnovist movement's cohesion could be put down to its "soviet" structure, provided soviet meant "free soviets" which is to say initiatives emanating from the local grassroots. According to Yefimov, all of these reasons lay behind the reverses and lack of success of the Red Army during the first half of 1920 in its dealings with Makhno.



With the way ahead apparently open, the Bolsheviks introduced into the countryside what Lenin was emphatic in describing as "war communism." This innovation was directly inspired by the "war socialism" of the capitalist States' economies during the 1914 war when a measure of rationing and a degree of "socialization" had been introduced into the populace's consumption and into industrial production. In Lenin's case, it was concerned only with rationing of consumption; since industrial output was negligible, there could be no barter with the countryside and so it was a question of commandeering all produce and foodstuffs for the benefit, first, of the regime's new class of privileged and of the armed forces, and bottom of the list, the starving city dwellers. Of necessity everything was to be channeled through the State apparatus. The absurdity of this whole system can be grasped if one knows, say, that private individuals were forbidden to fish or hunt, for on pain of punishment, they would then have been required to surrender the product of their endeavors to the State. The same held true for wood; even if everybody was shivering in the winter cold, nobody could go out and chop wood in the forests — for the forests were State property and thus untouchable — without risking a charge of stealing State property!

In the countryside, what was euphemistically termed "requisitioning" was in fact nothing more than systematic pillaging of the peasants; they were stripped of everything — wheat, seed, pigs, livestock — and were generously issued with a receipt. If they demurred and rebelled, they were shot down and their homes put to the torch. Whole villages went up in flames. Such was the practice of communism from "above," contemptuous of the most elementary rights of peasants who were labeled "kulaks" for the occasion.

What exactly did these famous kulaks amount to in 1920? Official statistics offer the following figures for the distribution of land among the peasantry: In 1917, 71 percent of peasants worked less than four hectares, while 25 percent had between four and ten hectares, and just 3.7 percent owned more than ten hectares; by 1920, these same categories of peasants amounted respectively to 85 percent, 15 percent, and 0.5 percent of the whole.¹⁷ So it is quite obvious that even in 1917 the number of well-off peasants — and that only comparatively and according to Bolshevik definitions — was quite small, while by 1920 it had become quite negligible. Let us bring into the picture another, even more eloquent criterion: ownership of horses. According to the selfsame source, in 1917, 29 percent of peasants owned no horse, 49 percent had one, and 17 percent had two horses while 4.8 percent used over three horses; by 1920 the respective

figures stood at 27.6 percent, 63.6 percent, 7.9 percent, and 0.9 percent! To conclude, the circumstances of peasants had leveled out, and there were so to speak no more kulaks, which is to say well-to-do peasants, save in the Leninists' fertile imaginings! Also, for all their ideological baggage, the latter had always been incapable of coming up with a precise definition of what a kulak was; in fact, as far as they were concerned, the word was merely an incantation applied to any peasant independent of the Bolshevik state and thus, according to their paranoid reasoning, hostile to their all-embracing powers — an interpretation that might even be applied to nearly the whole of the peasantry.

The worst thing was that strictly speaking, this systematic looting and all of the ghastliness it involved served no purpose at all; Kubanin himself quotes instances when half of the forage collected rotted where it stood and where livestock, seized and dispatched in wagons, perished along the way for want of water and food.¹⁸

All the same, the regime did modify its agrarian policy a little; the number of sovkhozes hastily set up in 1919 and which, for the most part, were promptly on course for collapse, fell in 1920 from 1,185 to 640; their size shrank even more, from 1,105 thousand hectares to 341 by 1920.¹⁹ The authorities preferred creating "clients" for themselves to redistributing these lands among their supporters. As for the diehards, their land was also seized land, wrested from the former *pomieschik* at great cost. Kubanin concedes that for the "bulk of the peasantry, the Soviet economy was a new and abhorrent form of rule after the fashion of the Polish lords and one which in reality had merely set the State in the place of the former big landowner."²⁰

The Ukrainian peasantry did not remain passive in the face of this bloody counter-revolution; during the first nine months of 1920, upwards of 1,000 plunderers and Bolshevik agents paid with their lives for their misdeeds.²¹ The Makhnovists showed them no mercy, so much so that soon there were scarcely any more volunteers ready to venture into these areas. Let us note here that out of 10,576 agents mobilized by this regime to carry out these plundering raids, there were only 323 communists, most being dubious elements, members of the criminal fraternity or other parasites attracted by the prospect of easy pickings and the lure of a few grams of power. The regime was later to have its work cut out offloading on to the latter all of the excesses committed in its name.²² Let us also note one subtle ploy on the part of Moscow; the death penalty had supposedly been abolished on February 2, 1920 in Russia, but not in the Ukraine where the main conflicts took place. Up to now this fine distinction has escaped the bulk of Western historians of this period.

Notes to Chapter 20: The New Enemy: The Bolshevik Party-State

1. Shkuro, op. cit. p. 241.
2. Dybet, op. cit. p. 52.
3. The original of this handbill is preserved at the International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam. It has been published along with ten other Makhnovist handbills (donated by Ugo Fedeli) by the Institute's review, the *International Review of Social History*, Vol. XIII (1968), part 2. We offer our thanks to the Institute in Amsterdam.
4. *The Civil War in Ekaterinoslav Province (1918–1920), Documents and Materials*, Dnepropetrovsk, 1968, p.210.
5. Kubanin, op. cit. p. 123.
6. Idem.
7. Quoted by F. Ya. Levenson, "Against Makhno, on the Denikin front," in *Litopis revoliutsii* (in Ukrainian) Kharkov, 1929, No. 4, p. 275.
8. *The Civil War in Ukraine* (in Russian), Kiev, 1967, Tome II, p. 624.
9. *The Civil War in Ekaterinoslav Province*, op. cit. pp. 210–211.
10. *The Civil War in Ukraine*, op. cit. p. 692.
11. *The Command Directives from the Red Army Fronts (1917–1922)*, Moscow, 1978, Tome II, p. 403.
12. *The Civil War in Ukraine*, op. cit. p. 738.
13. Grigorenko, op. cit. pp. 89–91.
14. *Mémoires d'un vieux bolshévique-Léniniste*, Paris, Ed. Maspéro, 1970, p. 38.
15. International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam, op. cit.
16. Yefimov, "The operations against Makhno, from January 1920 to January 1921" in the *Collection of Works from the Military and Scientific Association in the Military Academy* (in Russian), Moscow, 1921, Book One, pp. 192–212. The quotation is from p. 195.
17. L. Kritsman, *The Heroic Period of the Great Russian Revolution (War Communism)* (in Russian), Moscow, 1926, p. 67.
18. Kubanin, op. cit. pp. 126 and 129.
19. Ibid. p. 132.
20. Ibid. pp. 133–134.
21. Ibid. p. 130.
22. Idem.

21. Between Whites and Reds

What had become of the Whites while all of this was going on? Following the failure of Denikin's great offensive against Moscow, their retreat had been made in three directions: The army corps of General Bredov and Martynov withdrew in a westerly direction; when the Romanians refused to let them cross the border, they followed the Dniestr and crossed into Poland where their troops were interned. General Slashev's units withdrew towards the Crimea and dug in behind the Perekop and Henichesk isthmuses. But the bulk of the anti-Bolshevik forces retreated behind the Caucasus, closely pursued by the Red Cossacks of Dumenko and Budyenny. In view of the collapse of the Denikinist venture, 150 representatives of the Don, Kuban and Terek Cossacks assembled on January 2, 1920, as the Supreme *Circle* of Cossacks to draft the constitution of a federative Cossack State. So the break had finally come between the Cossack "Gironde" and the Denikinist command; the Cossacks were no longer willing to serve as cannon-fodder of the ambitions of reactionary White soldiery but were content merely to hold their territories against the Reds while hoping to agree to a de facto neutrality with them; but the Reds did not want to know and brought heavy pressure to bear on the front. The incoherence of the White high command and the increasingly blatant incompetence of Denikin who contrived to have Mamontov and Wrangel removed from their posts (they were his most able generals), plus the internal dissensions and the Cossacks unwillingness to fight, quickly turned this withdrawal into a rout. Taganrog, Rostov, and Novocherkassk, the main cities on the Don, fell to Red Cossacks. Denikin then decided to fall back into the Crimea; the army of the Volunteers and a few thousand Cossacks scurried aboard some Russian and British ships at Novorossisk in February 1920, abandoning the Cossack armies to their fate. One hundred thousand Cossacks were taken prisoner by the Reds at Novorossisk and 22,000 others at Kabardin, on the borders of Georgia, which had denied them asylum. It was a shambles; without really having been defeated militarily, the Whites — thanks above all to the Denikinist high command — had beaten themselves through insistence upon their political contradictions and their discriminatory conduct towards the Cossacks. What remained of their troops were thus in the Crimea, which became the last bastion of the White movement.

The bulk of captured Cossacks were re-deployed by the Red command on the Polish front or elsewhere in the country in order to give them the chance to make amends for what Bolsheviks saw as their "straying from the righteous path." No longer willing to be the Whites' cannon fodder, the Cossacks now found themselves between the Devil and the deep blue sea, becoming the blind instruments of Moscow's expansionist designs.

Shortly after, Denikin was forced to step down; he left pathetically for exile in Constantinople where his chief confederate and *éminence grise*, General Romanovsky, was murdered as soon as he arrived by a White officer. Sensing the same fate stalking him, Denikin quickly moved on to England.

On March 22, 1920, a general assembly of the White high command appointed Baron General Wrangel head of the White movement. Wrangel, a German squire of Baltic origins, "...consented to accept the position of commander-in-chief"¹ and set about the task with vigor. Although profoundly imbued with a sense of his own importance and with rather monarchistic views, he was a lot more competent and intelligent than his predecessor. He strove to break out of the isolation of the movement by attempting a *rapprochement* with the Poles, Romanians and Serbs, with some success as far as the latter were concerned. The Serbs handed over to him huge consignments of Russian arms deposited with them during the 1914 war. He renamed the Volunteer Army the Russian Army, restoring its discipline and unified command, and court-martialed General Sidorin, commander of the army of the Don, and his chief of staff, General Keltchevsky, for irredentism and banished them. Yet he had scarcely any illusions about the likelihood of his enterprise succeeding and prudently paid attention to his rear, making every provision for a speedy evacuation of his entire army from the Crimea, if need be. A sharp customer, he also appreciated that economic and political measures were necessary if his national venture was to have even the merest prospect of success. To that end he announced to press representatives in April that he was "...working on measures that will allow him who works the land to secure the largest possible tract of land as his personal property. In the future the small peasant proprietor is to be the master of Russian agriculture; landowning on a large scale has had its day. Betterment of the material well-being of the workers and satisfaction of their professional needs represent one of our prime concerns."² Unlike Denikin, Wrangel also grasped that one should not pursue several quarries at once; he decided to make overtures to all who were fighting against the Bolsheviks with an eye to union with them. On May 13th, he issued the following secret order to all commanders of his units:

"Should we take the offensive along the way towards achievement of our dearest goal — the eradication of communism — we may come into contact with Makhno's insurgent bands, Ukrainian troops [i.e., Petliura's troops] and all the other anti-communist units. In the struggle against the chief foe of Holy Russia — the communists — we are on the same path as all other Russians who aspire as we do honestly to

overthrow the gang of Bolshevik aggressors who have seized power through trickery.

I hereby order all commanders in touch with all of the above-mentioned groups to coordinate their actions with those of the troops belonging to said groups, with an eye to our basic mission: To topple communism and help the Russian people rebuild its great motherland.”³

The ulterior motive in this is clear: Come what may, the intention was to make use of all anti-Bolshevik forces. Just as the Bolsheviks on their side promised as much and more, “once the war is finished,” that is, so Wrangel proposed to “drive them out and then we shall see.” The populace placed little credence in blandishments from either side and when unable to take up the fight itself for its own interests, remained, insofar as it was able, indifferent and passive in the face of these “power lovers’ quarrels.”

For his part, Makhno was not as yet *au fait* with these speculations; as soon as he was back on his feet, he personally led an implacable fight against the Chekists while simultaneously tackling the plunderers and the Red Army units sent to track him down. Also, he adopted an approach that varied, according to whether he was dealing with officials, Red Army commanders and political commissars (these being cut down immediately) or rank and file soldiers enlisted by force. For the benefit of the latter, the Makhnovists organized meetings setting out the motives behind their struggle, before inviting them either to join their ranks or to make their way home, as we can gauge from the following handbill:

“To the Comrades from the Red Army of the Front and Rearguard.

The Ukrainian people which is oppressed by your commanders and your commissars and sometimes directly by yourselves under the direction of those commanders and commissars, protests at such oppression; you were awaited as the toiling masses’ liberators from the yoke of the packs of Denikinist executioners, but after your arrival in the Ukraine, the groans, weeping and cries of the poor sounded even louder. On every side there were executions, burning of peasant homes or even of whole villages: Everywhere plunder and violence.

The people are exhausted and cannot put up any longer with the arbitrary; they exhort you all while giving you notice: Are you going to pause before this nightmare and realize whom you are shooting, whom you are tossing into the Cheka’s dungeons, with whom you are filling the prisons by obeying your commanders and commissars? Are they not your brothers, fathers, sons? Apparently so!

And you subject them to all this, without noticing how the bourgeoisie stands back and rejoices, how the officers and generals of the old regime⁴ manipulate your freedom and your blindness, comfortably

ensconced in their armchairs as they order you to oppress poor folk. And you, comrades, without a second thought, blindly carry out those orders. Has it escaped your attention that they have you persecute poor folk whom they dub counter-revolutionaries because of their protests against the dictatorship of Trotsky's gentlemen and the pack of communists in his entourage, a dictatorship exercised in the name of the authority of a party which is strangling the revolution?

Can it be that you cannot see that the Ukrainian muzhik will not bear that yoke and, in spite of worse repressions, that he straightens his bowed back destroying every obstacle and aims to see the task of emancipation through to its term? And it is his belief that there is among you, in the very ranks of the Red Army, a majority of his brothers, themselves peasants, who are oppressed as he is oppressed and who will ultimately understand his protestations and will march with him against the common foe: Equally against the Denikinist pack on the right as against the commissarocracy decked out in the people's name on the left.

Comrades, examine for yourself what the Cheka and the punitive detachments are doing in Russia and particularly in the Ukraine. And who abets them? You Red soldiers, you and only you. Can your heart remain insensible to the complaints and wailing of your brothers, your fathers, your mothers and your children? Are you so deceived by the spectral political freedoms they have promised you as to be prevented from ridding yourself of the commissar, that new master, so as to liberate the whole people in this way, in close concert with the workers and peasants, from every yoke and all oppression? Can you possibly be blind to those in your ranks who have at the price of your blood, your lives, hoisted themselves above you and seized power and the right to tyrannize the people so disgracefully? Does your heart not contract when you go into the villages and countryside at the direction of these oppressors to repress toilers who protest against the arbitrariness and oppression to which they are subjected by your leaders? We believe that you must come to your senses and realize that your shame is in remaining silent. That you will protest against the oppression and the yoke visited upon these poor folks. That you will not let your commanders and commissars torch villages and shoot peasants who rise up in defense of their rights. Let the peasants organize themselves as they see fit, and as for you, let you continue to wipe out the Denikinist pack and, along with them, the new master, the commissar.

Do not quit the front: Carry on the fight against the wearers of gold braid and exterminate your commissars where they stand. The revolutionary peasantry and the workers will in turn wipe out, behind

the lines, the parasites about their necks who exploit them. The revolutionary peasantry and workers will not forget you, and the day will come when you all close ranks together and then let all the parasites and their accomplices watch out!

Remember, comrades, that the people have seen through the falsehood of the government that you support. The people are in revolt against it, and no army will be able to contain the open-eyed insurgent masses who are fighting for their complete emancipation. Join them; they will welcome you as brothers. Remember that among the insurgents there are your peasant and worker brothers, and if you should encounter them, do not take the initiative of a bloody clash.

Let the commanders and commissars march out themselves to do battle with the insurgents. Let them cover themselves in the blood of the workers and peasants, then all of the blame will fall on them, and they will pay dearly for it.

Down with the pack of gold braid wearers! Down with those who draw their inspiration from them, the autocratic commissars! Down with artificial laws and man's power over his fellow man!

Long live the union of all workers — Red soldiers and the insurgent peasant and worker. Death to all braid wearers! Death to the commissars and hangmen!

Long live the social revolution! Long live the authentically free regime of the soviets!

May 9, 1920

The Staff of the Insurgent Army of the Ukraine (Makhnovist).⁵



The Bolshevik press regularly carried reports of Makhno's death as well as of the "final" liquidation of the remnants of Makhnovist detachments; all the same, their readership was dumbfounded in the long run at the continual reappearance of the Makhnovist phoenix. As for the Makhnovist prisoners, their fate was settled immediately; they were shot out of hand before the assembled Red troops, probably with the intention of deterring potential defectors.

In the spring of 1920, Admiral Kolchak's venture petered out, and the foreign expeditionary forces, as well as the Czech Legion, gradually took ship from Vladivostok. With every White front smashed, Lenin decided to concentrate his best troops against Poland as the first step in a Bolshevik crusade in Europe. The Polish military commander, General Pilsudski, anticipated invasion so he launched a preemptive strike in the Ukraine himself at the end of April. He quickly scored some successes and seized Kiev. On May 14th, the Red Army under Tukhachevsky attacked from the north and drove the Poles back some 100 kilometers, whereupon the Poles brought up their reserve army, seizing back the initiative, and their former

positions. The situation remained like that up until the beginning of July 1920. It is worth noting that the Ukrainian nationalists who had been driven into Poland at the end of 1919 fought on the side of the Poles.

For their part, the Makhnovists mounted some large-scale operations; there were 4,000 insurgents split into two contingents — one of 500 cavalry, 1,000 infantry on tatchankis and with eight cannon; and another of 700 insurgents, i.e., 200 infantry, four cannon and a large array of machine-guns. They pressed forward in a highly mobile way, mounting two extraordinary raids through the Red Army's lines. In the first they covered over 1,200 kilometers between May 20 and July 10, setting out from and returning to Gulyai-Polye through the provinces of Kharkov and Poltava in the north of the Ukraine. The second raid lasted a month, from July 10 to August 9, and this time was launched over a distance of 1,520 kilometers, through the very same regions. The outcome was impressive; 13,400 Red soldiers taken prisoner, 26,000–30,000 rendered *hors de combat*, 2,000 of whom were political and military officials who were executed. And the booty recovered was significant too: Five cannon complete with 2,300 shells, 93 machine-guns, 2,400,000 cartridges, 3,600 rifles, 25,000 military uniforms and greatcoats, the 13th Army's field hospital, the 46th Division's entire transport, as well as a ship and an airplane where were set on fire since they could not be put to use. And to this must be added the systematic destruction of bridges, railroad lines, and two armored trains.⁶

These large-scale raids were complemented by numerous commando raids against sundry nerve centers, towns or rail junctions which were sometimes attacked several days at a time, leading to panic in Red Army ranks. For instance, on June 21, 1920, a band of 140 Makhnovist horsemen launched a surprise attack on the garrison in Gulyai-Polye and carried off 24 cartloads of cartridges. The next day, another band of 200 cavalry and mounted infantry again attacked Gulyai-Polye with the support of six artillery pieces, routing a unit of 300 Red soldiers and capturing the 46th Division's transport in its entirety. On June 24, the Makhnovists again attacked Red units in the vicinity of Gulyai-Polye. Such harrying operations took place simultaneously in different locations, often with significant impact and made the whole region insecure as far as the Red Army was concerned.⁷

By this point the Makhnovist insurgent army consisted of a core of 3,000 to 4,000 partisans, divided up into 700–800 cavalry under Shchuss's command, 1,500–2,000 infantry mounted on tatchankis, a regiment of machine-gunners under the command of Tomas Kozhin, an artillery unit commanded by the indefatigable Vladimir Sharovsky, and Makhno's black guard of some 200 elite cavalry and swordsmen along with a few virtuoso machine-gunners. There were also a hundred medical tatchankis, a doctor, and a cultural section whose task it was to publish handbills, appeals and the movement's new mouthpiece, *The Voice of the Free Insurgent* from a mobile press. This section also, when the contingent halted, laid on entertainment, conferences and meetings. At these, there would be intense

propaganda in favor of free soviets. All of the property and foodstuffs seized from the Chekists' and plundering agents' depots were distributed free of charge. Flour, sugar, cloth, wire, leather, iron, furniture, and even gramophones and pianos were distributed in this way to the population.⁸

Local insurgent bands sometimes arrived to bolster the core group, but normally they appeared independently so that by September and according to a Petliurist estimate, the Makhnovist army had been able to muster upwards of 35,000 men.⁹ Let us conclude this examination of the manpower by noting that the seriously wounded were left behind under the protection of the populace.

Scrupulous about explaining to Red troops just what their struggle was about, the Makhnovists circulated appeals designed for their perusal:

"Comrade Red Soldiers!

Your commanders and your commissars deceive you by persuading you that we Makhnovists kill captured Red soldiers.

Comrades! Your chiefs have invented an unspeakable lie in order to have you slavishly protect the interests of the commissars lest you surrender to us Makhnovists and discover the truth about our worker and peasant Makhnovist movement.

Comrades, we are in revolt against the yoke of all oppressors. For three years now our blood has flowed on all fronts. We have driven off the Austro-German aggressors, we have crushed the Denikinist hangmen, we have fought Petliura, and now we are fighting against the rule of the commissars' power, against the Bolshevik Communist Party's dictatorship. It holds in its steely grip the whole life of the toiling people; the peasants and workers of the Ukraine groan beneath its yoke. In the same ruthless way we shall exterminate the Polish lords who come to stifle our revolution and deny us its gains.

We fight against all power and all enslavement, regardless of the quarter whence they come.

Our most sworn enemies are the big landowners and capitalists of every land, the Denikinist generals and officers, the Polish lords and the Bolshevik commissars. We chastise them all ruthlessly, executing them as enemies of the toiling people's revolution.

But you, comrade Red soldiers, we regard as our blood-brothers with whom we should like to wage, together, the fight for real emancipation, for a genuine soviet regime free of the oversight of parties or of any authorities at all.

Those Red soldiers whom we take prisoner we release immediately to go where they will, or else we welcome them into our ranks if they indicate any such desire. Already we have freed thousands of Red soldiers whom we had taken prisoner in countless engagements,

and many captured Red soldiers are currently and selflessly fighting in our ranks. So do not believe, comrade Red soldiers, the tall tales of your commissars to the effect that Makhnovists kill Red soldiers. It is a sordid falsehood.

When they dispatch you against the Makhnovists, do not, comrade Red soldiers, stain your hands with brothers' blood. When the fighting begins, kill your commanders yourselves and without turning your arms against us, come over to our side. We will receive you as our very own brothers, and together we will create for the workers and peasants a free and equitable life, and together we will fight against all who attack and oppress the toiling people.

Long live the fraternal union of the Makhnovist revolutionary insurgents with the peasants and workers, Red soldiers!

June 1920
The Makhnovist Insurgents."¹⁰

Such active counter-propaganda on the Makhnovists' part sometimes brought spectacular results: The 522nd Red Regiment defected to them in its entirety, which fact Kubanin disguises by speaking of their capture, for it was not seemly to acknowledge such a dismal failure of Bolshevik indoctrination. Happily, we have here irrefutable proof in the shape of the appeal issued at the time by the Red soldiers of the 522nd Regiment themselves:

"Appeal!"

On June 25, 1920, we, the Red soldiers of the 522nd regiment, defected without a shot fired and with all our equipment and arms to the Makhnovist insurgents! The communists have harassed us and ascribed our defection to the Makhnovist insurgents to a brainstorm and a tendency towards banditry — all of which is merely a squalid craven lie on the part of commissars who had hitherto used us as cannon fodder. During our two years' service with the Red Army, we reached the conclusion that the whole social regime of our lives relied wholly upon the rule of commissars and that in the last analysis it would lead us to a slavery without precedent in history.

Because they conduct an implacable fight against the wealthy and the lords; because they stand for free union and soviets among the workers and peasants, without the dictatorship of any party; because they fight so that the workshops, factories, and land may pass into the hands of the workers and peasants; because the Makhnovists fight for all these goals, we also find ourselves at their side because of these very same aspirations, we, yesterday's Red soldiers and today's free revolutionaries.

Comrade Red soldiers! Follow your comrades' example! We reckon that the spirit of revolutionary struggle for the self-determination of toilers has not yet died in you. We hope that the commissars have not yet extinguished once and for all your determination to fight all plunder and oppression.

Heed us and let not your brothers' blood be shed in vain! Stand firm! Be heroes and follow our example! Our fraternal embrace awaits you.

The Red soldiers of the 522nd Regiment, now Makhnovists.”¹¹



Other Red soldiers deserted or defected to the Makhnovists, and this created increasing anxiety among the Bolshevik leadership. The Ukrainian Cheka complained of being unable to find any more competent (!) Chekists and volunteers to serve on requisition squads or even to work in local Soviet organs; even more characteristic was a report from the Donetsk Cheka which acknowledged that to the populace the Makhnovists appeared as natural defenders against “commissars and communists.”¹² So much so that the supreme head of the Cheka, Dzherzinsky, arrived to supervise the campaign against “Makhnovia” personally and drafted an address in a very special tone, aimed at the peasants of Ekaterinoslav province:

“[...] Baron Wrangel makes no secret of his being an enemy of the people. Makhno is a thousand times more criminal and cowardly. He styles himself defender of the workers and peasants. This upstart has the effrontery to charge the worker-peasant government of the Ukraine with failing to adequately defend the workers and peasants and to offer himself as their sole genuine defender [...] while he lives in luxury off his booty [...], he does not hesitate to have railway bridges blown up and supply trains to the Donetsk miners sabotaged. It is true that decent, conscientious peasants have long since turned away from him, but there are still some who lack conscience and let themselves be misled by him. To these we declare that he has openly allied himself with counter-revolutionaries and pomieschikis. We say that, not as a hypothesis but as a proven fact, as shown by recently seized documents.”

Dzherzinsky noted Makhno's liaisons with the Petliurists, which is to say, according to him, with the “Polish lords”; from this he deduced that “Makhno is an agent of Petliura and the Polish government.” This allowed him to lump Makhno with Wrangel, Pilsudski and Petliura, thus making him a supporter of restoration of the “power of the accursed pomieschikis, tsarist generals and the hetman's Varta.” This sinister, deadpan comic suffered from an all too visible surfeit of information and in this regard was well behind his party colleagues who were nothing of the sort. However, he did not shrink from closing his text with an incredible call

for the "tracking down and extermination of the Makhnovists like savage beasts. All assistance to these bandits is to be regarded as the greatest crime against the revolution"; any found guilty of that would deserve the severest punishment by the "worker-peasant government." These "Makhnovist bandits must be deprived of all assistance in manpower and supplies. They must be driven from the peasant khatas. The village that allows any of its residents to collaborate with Makhno is to be *leveled*¹³ and will incur the severest punishment measures." This latter appeal to people to turn informer was nonetheless followed up with a promise of clemency for repentant Makhnovists who "would go and expiate their *sin*¹⁴ against the revolution on the Polish front."¹⁵ All the usual police ploys were there, with just a touch of religious inquisition in "expiating sin." That would be worthy of any church father of a bygone age, were it not that Dzherzinsky was the son of a Polish squire, a convert some 20 years previously to the cause of social democracy — a man whose bloodthirsty fanaticism inspired the greatest fear even in his own party colleagues. After his death in 1926 following a stroke during an angry speech, Radek, one of the stars of the party, was to declare that Dzherzinsky had "died just in time. He was a methodical sort and would not have hesitated to redden his hands with our blood."¹⁶ Unfortunately, "methodical types" of that sort were plentiful in the Cheka and had no hesitation in "tracking down and exterminating the Makhnovists like savage beasts" or in "leveling" Makhnovist villages.

The insurgents preferred to urge the Red soldiers, used as the doers of this dirty work, to reflect upon what it signified:

"Stop! Read! Reflect!

Comrade Red soldier! You have been sent by your commissar and commander to persecute Makhnovist insurgents. At the instigation of your leaders, you are going to bring peace-loving people to ruination, to search, arrest and kill folk whom you do not know personally but who will be pointed out to you as enemies of the people. They will tell you that Makhnovists are bandits and counter-revolutionaries.

Without consultation with you, they will tell you, will order you, and will send you like a slave subject to your officers, to search and destroy. Who? Why? To what end?

Think on it, comrade Red soldier! Think on it, peasants and workers as our Red soldier brethren. We have rebelled against enslavement and constraints, and we fight for a radiant better future. Our ultimate ideal is to arrive at a non-authoritarian community of toilers, free of parasites and commissar officials.

Our immediate goal is to install a free soviet regime without the power of the Bolsheviks, without the predominance of any party.

Because of that, the government of Bolshevik-communists dispatches punitive expeditionary corps against us. It hastens to reach a reconciliation with Denikin, with the Polish lords and other White Guard

scum, the better to crush the popular movement of the revolutionary insurgents who have risen up against the yoke of all authority.

We do not fear the threats of the White-Red leaders. We shall return violence for violence.

When necessary, we put any Red Army division to fight at top speed merely by applying some slight pressure; for we are free revolutionary insurgents, and the cause we defend is a just cause.

Comrades! Think, whom are you with and whom against?

Do not be a slave, be a man!

June 1920.

The Makhnovist Insurgents.”¹⁷

This appeal did not address itself to the base instinct as Dzherzinsky did but rather to the genuine revolutionary consciousness of the individual Red soldier who had been swept willy-nilly into a fratricidal combat.

During this period of raids, in June–July 1920, a Soviet of Revolutionary Insurgents of the Ukraine (Makhnovists) saw the light of day; it was made up of seven members, elected by the partisans. This was the leadership body of the movement, and its decisions had at all times to seek endorsement from the rank and file. Essentially, it had oversight of three branches of the insurgent army: The branch in charge of “military affairs and operations, the branch in charge of organization and control, and finally the educational and cultural branch.”¹⁸

The fight against the Bolsheviks was conducted in the name of the Third Revolution, namely the one that came after the first one (directed against tsarism) and after the second (whose target was Kerensky’s bourgeois revolution) and which was now targeting the Bolshevik autocracy and party dictatorship. Henceforth, this was to be the banner that was to rally all revolutionary supporters of free soviets.

This dogged and, above all, successful struggle against the Red Army aroused Wrangel’s attention. The Baron-General had himself scored some notable successes with the seizure of the northern Tavrida in June 1920; he had, in particular, literally “pulverized” the 30,000 men of Zhloba’s army corps — the very same Zhloba who had been so at ease in repressing the unarmed populace.

An initial emissary, a captain, reached Makhno near Mariupol on July 9th and passed on a message bearing the signature of General Shatilov, Wrangel’s chief of staff. It proposed that “Ataman Makhno” cooperate in the fight against the communists and “fight them even more energetically, ravaging behind their lines and destroying their transport so as to crush Trotsky’s army once and for all.” Wrangel’s high command proposed, in pursuit of this goal, “to supply material, the requisite munitions and send him specialists.”¹⁹ Kubanin notes this proposition, stating that “the proof of the pudding was in the eating” and noting that the Whites

based this military cooperation on a remarkable evolution in their political and economic principles which they strove to effect in territories occupied by them, while acknowledging their past errors:

“Land was transferred to the peasants without buy-back from former landlords and through the regional peasant congresses’ good offices, all local self-management agencies were afforded the widest democratic autonomy, and regions of specific ethnic culture were declared autonomous of Russia, while remaining federated with her.”²⁰

The Makhnovists had no truck with military advice, nor with laws and decrees running their lives as they had never looked to anyone but themselves for resolution of their own affairs. Outraged, they had the unfortunate emissary shot out of hand. A little later, a second envoy from Wrangel, a colonel this time, arrived among them to repeat the offer of collaboration between their two camps. He was hanged with a placard reading: “No agreement between Makhno and White Guards has been or ever will be feasible, and all White emissaries will share this one’s fate.”²¹ Whether because this had not been reported to him, or deliberately, Wrangel went on conducting an intensive campaign of misrepresentation, inside Russia as well as abroad, concerning his alleged alliance with the Makhnovist insurgents and the Ukrainian peasantry. Truth to tell, he was greatly abetted by the floods of calumnies gushing forth from the Bolshevik press.

For their part the Bolsheviks’ leaders were conspiring at several levels; incapable of bringing the insurgents to heel, they resorted to more subterranean methods. Some anarchists (or individuals reputed to be such) and common criminals, ready to tackle anything if the price was right, infiltrated Ukrainian libertarian organizations and then, having picked out the most active militants, lured them into the clutches of the Cheka. Brandishing the threat of execution, the Cheka then did its best to force them to work for it. One of the latter, Fedya Glouschenko, a member of the insurgent movement’s intelligence branch, was thus commissioned by the Kharkov Cheka to assassinate Makhno. Joining Makhno on June 20th, he repented at the last minute and aborted the assassination plan. Despite his having reneged, Glouschenko was shot the next day, along with a Chekist killer, on the grounds that “a revolutionary may not, no matter what the reasons, serve in the secret police,” as was announced by the Soviet of the Revolutionary Insurgents (Makhnovists) in a tract disclosing the details of the whole affair.²² That attempt having foundered, the Bolsheviks resorted to another “destabilization” plan; they “remotely controlled” a member of a minority in the Social Revolutionary party²³ into persuading insurgents to interrupt their struggle against the Bolsheviks and instead to join forces with them against Wrangel, who was portrayed as the greatest danger, as the minutes of the June 23, 1920 meeting between this curious delegate and the insurgents’ soviet testifies:

“Comrade Mikh (reporting on behalf of the [minority] Social Revolutionary Party of Alexandrovsk) states that, in view of the Whites’ terrifying offensive, it is crucial that all revolutionary forces unite in order to make a concerted effort to halt the Whites’ progress. The [minority] Left Social Revolutionary party’s committee has delegated him to Makhno, with the agreement of the Bolsheviks who suggested that he act as a go-between in arriving at a general compact against the Whites. He calls upon the assembly to cease all conflict with the Bolsheviks until such time as the enemy has been beaten. All political differences and hostilities against the Red Army must cease until victory is assured against Wrangel and the Poles, the quarter masters of a monstrous counter-revolution. In his view, a libertarian society is not practicable in the short term, and he proposes that support be given to the idea of a workers’ power. He points out the differences of opinion to be found existing within the Bolshevik party and the Social Revolutionary party.

Comrade Polevoy: Responds directly and clearly to him regarding his propaganda in favor of a worker power. He states that we Makhnovists have experienced all sorts of authorities on our backs and will not let ourselves be snared by a change in the name of the authority. The nature of all authority — whether it be Wrangel or the Bolsheviks — is essentially identical. He puts two questions to comrade Mikh: 1) Is he delegated solely by his organization, or is he also delegated by the Bolsheviks who, on several grounds, are unable to send their own delegates? 2) Is he aware that the Bolsheviks who do not aim to annihilate Wrangel ‘alone,’ have just sent us a special delegation? One that was armed and was supposed to assassinate comrade Makhno, is he aware of that?

Comrade Mikh: Apologizes for his propaganda on behalf of a workers’ power. His organization has decided to have no truck with the unlawful communists [to wit, the Cheka] who harm their party’s cause. His present mission has the full endorsement of the Bolsheviks; he gives assurances that [our] [Makhnovist] delegation, sent to a general assembly involving all organizations in Alexandrovsk, would have every necessary assurance from the Bolsheviks relative to its security.

Comrade Viktor Popov: By whom and to what end comrade Mikh has been sent, I do not know. But on one point only there can be no doubt; thus far the Bolsheviks have set no traps, without quite furnishing proof of their good faith, when they have sought to use us for their purposes. Moreover, can we have anything at all in common with communists who dispatch punitive detachments into our villages and savagely gun

down our parents? Of course we are going to fight Wrangel and, if need be, we will take them all on simultaneously. Alliance with the Bolsheviks would do great prejudice to the cause of revolution.

Comrade Makhno: I insist that the greatest attention be paid to comrade Mikh's mission. It has been wholly Bolshevik inspired and without question they have set him very specific objectives.

Comrade Kurilenko: Proposes that a clear and unequivocal answer be given to the delegation [i.e., to the Social Revolutionary Mikh — A.S.]. Already there are rumors circulating in the region regarding the arrival of a Bolshevik delegation, which may have serious consequences for our fronts' combat capabilities.

Comrade Belash: In spite of the talks with Bolsheviks, proposed that our fight against them be carried on.

Comrade Popov: Remember how the Bolsheviks presented an amiable face whenever they were in dire straits and what blackguards they turned into again once they had regained power. He offers to look thoroughly into the proposition and to devise a speedy answer to it.

Comrade Taranovksy: The soviet should give an answer to the Social Revolutionary party's request.

Comrade Marchenko: Comes out against any alliance with the Bolsheviks who merely seek to use us.

Comrades Dermendzhi, Belash, and Ogarkin are of the same opinion.

Comrade Budanov: We shall provide a written reply wherein we shall declare that as revolutionaries we are going to fight Wrangel but wholly independently."²⁴



The object of the exercise was plain; either way the Bolsheviks would come off best. In the event of a refusal, Makhnovists were to be depicted as the objective allies of the Whites and adversaries of a "sacred" revolutionary unity in the face of the reaction. In the event of an acceptance and since the proposal had not emanated directly from the Leninist authorities, the insurgents would then be presented as having sued for it, acknowledging the Bolsheviks as the rallying-point for revolutionary forces and thus as the workers' legitimate defenders. In any event, availing of the formal services of a "satellite" organization, they retained a free hand to pursue their war of extermination against insurgents. But the latter instantly grasped what this gambit was about; even so, it did manage to sow confusion in the minds of some.

Notes to Chapter 21: Between Whites and Reds

1. Wrangel, op. cit. p. 155.
2. Ibid, p. 173.
3. *The Civil War in the Ukraine*, op. cit. Tome III, pp. 115–116.
4. And now serving the Red Army [A.S.].
5. International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam, op. cit.
6. *Volnyi povstanyets* (The Free Insurgent), the Makhnovist organ, No. 44, quoted by D. Lebed, *The Consequences and Lessons of Three Years of the Anarcho-Makhnovschina*, Kharkov, 1923, pp. 26–27.
7. Kubanin, op. cit. p. 152.
8. V. V. Rudnev, *The Makhnovschina* (in Russian), Kharkov, 1928, p. 72.
9. *The Civil War in the Ukraine*, op. cit. Tome III, p. 480.
10. International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam, op. cit.
11. A tract published in the Russian libertarian review *Volna* (The Wave) appearing in the United States, 1920–1924, Detroit, December 1921, No. 24, pp. 15–16.
12. For the revolution's defense. *On the History of the Pan-Ukrainian Cheka, 1917–1922*, an anthology of documents and materials, Kiev, 1971, p. 158.
13. and 14. The emphasis is ours.
15. *On the History of the Pan-Ukrainian Cheka, 1917–1922*, op. cit. p. 158.
16. G. Haupt and J.-J. Marie, *Les Bolchéviks par eux-mêmes*, Paris, 1969, pp. 304–306.
17. International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam, op. cit.
18. Arshinov, op. cit. p. 166.
19. Ibid, p. 168.
20. Kubanin, op. cit. p. 152.
21. Ibid, p. 151.
22. Arshinov, op. cit. pp. 163–164.
23. The Left Social Revolutionaries tendency which collaborated with the Bolsheviks [A.S.].
24. *Volna*, op. cit. pp. 16–17.

22. The Second Alliance with the Red Army

In the summer of 1920 the main focus of the Moscow leadership's attention was the position on the Polish front. On July 4, having marshaled 600,000 men — a third of them in the front line — the Red Army commander in chief on that front, Tukhachevsky, launched a fresh and powerful offensive from Russia. Attacked on their left flank, the Polish troops who had ventured into the Ukraine and far from their bases, were forced to effect a spectacular, 600 kilometer withdrawal which brought them to the banks of the Vistula within 40 days. The chancelleries of Europe became alarmed, for the professed aim of this thrust was to "export the Bolshevik revolution" to the old world. So much so that at the end of July, France dispatched a military mission headed by General Weygand, Foch's chief of staff to lend a hand to the Poles. (The membership of this mission included a certain Captain De Gaulle). Warsaw prepared for its own "battle of the Marne." The Red Army chiefs were confident of the success of their undertaking and comforted by their previous victories over Kolchak and Denikin. However, they had not properly analyzed the roots of those successes: in particular, they had neglected to take account of the decisive contribution made by Greens and local partisans, as well as of the loss of stomach for the fight on the part of the Cossacks and simple soldiery of the White armies. The Poles were a quite different kettle of fish: their country had been under the heel of Russian tsarism for over a century and a half; as far as the populace was concerned, the Red Army and the Bolsheviks were the worthy successors of tsarist expansionism and were perceived as invaders not as the liberators the Leninists, blinkered by their formal proletarian dialectic, imagined themselves to be. Quite the contrary: Poland's working people lined up with their national socialist leaders. This nationalistic factor played a crucial role.

Inferior in numbers and indeed militarily, dressed and armed in makeshift fashion, but galvanized by extraordinary patriotic zeal, 100,000 Poles with Pilsudski at their head embarked on August 16 upon a fantastic push: they drove the invaders right back and in less than 6 days covered 200 kilometers, smashing every Red division in their path. Under this tremendous battering the Red Army disintegrated, with its units fleeing in unbelievable disarray: some were decimated or wiped out, others surrendered in their tens of thousands while still others were forced to seek

refuge in eastern Poland where they were relieved of their weaponry and interned. It was the greatest military disaster of these war years: 250,000 Red soldiers taken prisoner and 100,000 of those interned in Poland. The panicking Kremlin authorities scurried to open peace talks with Warsaw, regardless of conditions.

Meanwhile, Wrangel had dispatched Piotr Struve — the man who had introduced Marxism into Russia and who was now a disenchanted liberal — to Paris to sue for French backing, or, failing that, support from the British. Indeed, in view of the collapse of Kolchak and Denikin whom they had assisted on a huge scale, the British prime minister, Lloyd George, saw fit to wash his hands of the whole business, the consideration at the back of his mind assuredly being preservation of Britain's Asian possessions — India included — from possible revolutionary contagion. As for the French, what prompted them to help Wrangel was, first of all the desire to support those who had never recognized the "shameful" treaty of Brest-Litovsk and also the urge to ease pressures on the warring Poles as far as possible. The French believed themselves bound to the Poles by long-standing affinities and also by the prospect of being able to lock their sworn enemy — Germany — in a Vice of which Poland would be the other pincer. As for Struve, in a letter to prime minister Millerand on June 20, 1920, he spelled out General Wrangel's underlying motives:

"[Wrangel] is far from believing that the reestablishment of order and liberty in Russia can be secured through a merely military effort. He appreciates the necessity of a protracted pacification campaign designed above all to meet the needs of the peasants who account for the vast majority of the Russian people. That population seeks neither restoration of the old order of things, nor communist tyranny. To cater for the interests of the peasant population, to cleanse the moral life of the country, to rebuild its economic life, to unite all orderly factors, these are the goals that the commander in chief of the armed forces of Southern Russia has set himself, and which should, he reckons, lift Russia out of the condition of anarchy into which she has been plunged by the communist régime which has turned her into a test-bed for monstrous social experiments without precedent in history."¹

Having thus received assurances regarding the Baron-General's "democratic" intent, the French government afforded de facto recognition on August 10 to the government which he had formed. This was help of a quite platonic sort, but it was useful, for it allowed Wrangel to recover the arms stocks stored in Romania and in countries under Allied influence.

Stimulated by this support, Wrangel launched a sweeping offensive along the left bank of the Dniepr that August. Despite heavy losses — every one of the officers commanding battalions and companies of the Whites' First Army Corps was rendered hors de combat — Wrangel's troops pushed the 13th Red Army

back on to the right bank of the Dniepr and drove the front back as far as the Alexandrovsk-Berdyansk line. For the Reds, this was "Black August," as all their counter-offensives were smashed one by one. However, the balance of numbers was still tilted in their favor: they lined up 250,000 men, a third of them in the front line, against 125,000 Whites of whom 25,000–30,000 were in the front line. The latter made up for numerical inferiority with the courage of their fighting men and above all with the inspired deployment of some 25 aircraft, 100 tanks and the armored trains at their disposal. Their greatest problem was the question of reserves: they were desperately short of the manpower needed if they were to develop their offensive further. True, there were the thousands of captured Red troops and officers — upwards of 30,000 captured during August — who voluntarily enlisted in their ranks until, towards the end, they accounted for nearly 90 percent of the Whites' manpower². But whereas they fought their former colleagues in arms with a good heart, these defectors were not sufficiently battle-hardened nor politically reliable enough in the long term, this despite Wrangel's recourse to a certain equivocation about his campaign's ultimate objectives and his adoption of a language with "democratic" overtones. Thus on July 5 in an interview with the newspaper *Velikaya Rossiya* (Great Russia) he declared:

"Why we fight.

To that question, General Wrangel declared, there can be but one answer: we fight for freedom. On the other side of the front, to the north, arbitrariness, oppression and slavery prevail. One may entertain the most diverse notions as to the suitability of this or that system: one may be a Republican, a Radical, a Socialist, a Marxist even — and yet recognize that the Soviet republic is merely the expression of an unspeakable, sinister despotism which is eating away at Russia and indeed its self-styled ruling class — the proletariat which is oppressed just like the rest of the population. By now this an open secret to Europe. The veil has been snatched away from soviet Russia. It is in Moscow that the reaction has its nest. It is there that tyrants who treat the people like livestock reside. As for ourselves, one would have to be blind or malicious to call us reactionaries. We are fighting to release our people from a servitude the like of which even the darkest days of their history knew not. For a long time there has been no understanding in Europe — though it seems that such understanding has begun to develop — of what we so clearly appreciate: the universal significance of our domestic struggle."³

Such soothing words and the socio-economic reforms introduced in the occupied territories came too late, however. The impression prevailing among the laboring population was that, in spite of everything, the Whites would sooner or

later bring back the old order, at any rate in the Ukraine, for Wrangel's posturing and campaign would certainly have enjoyed greater success in Russia where the populace had not sampled the executions of the Denikinist occupation. This psycho-social-political factor is an essential one but was quite redundant after 1919, since when sides had been chosen once and for all.



Wrangel's strategic plan consisted of attempting to develop his offensive in two directions: in the West, towards Poland, so as to ease the pressure from the Red Army — this at the beginning of August — and reach the 45,000 men of the Third Russian army of General Bredov in internment in Poland: and in the East, to reach the Don territory to join up with remnants of the Cossack armies of the Caucasus who were fighting on against the Bolsheviks. He also made provision for disembarkation in the Kuban of a 5000-strong Cossack contingent commanded by General Ulagai. Mounted at the start of August, this landing at first took the enemy unawares: Ulagai met with success after success as he marched towards Ekaterinodar, but made the mistake of dallying somewhat along the way, affording the Red Army time to regroup its forces and halt his offensive. Three weeks later Ulagai boarded ship again for the Crimea along with his reinforced army of 10,000, which had grown to that size despite the heavy losses sustained. On the other hand, the thrust eastwards was making headway and by September the Whites had reached Ekaterinoslav, Mariupol and the borders of the Don.



White propaganda about peasant support and regarding their alleged alliance with Makhno was continually taken up by the Bolshevik press. This crossfire of misrepresentation eventually led to belief that this was indeed the case: some fell into the trap, including some insurgent detachments cut off in the region under occupation by Wrangel. Some of these did indeed join the White Army and formed a division bearing the Batko Makhno name, curiously flying a black flag bearing the Makhnovist device: "With the oppressed, always against the oppressors!" — alongside Wrangel's "For Russia one and indivisible!"

The Makhnovists tried to give the lie to this rumored alliance by going off to fight the Whites, but every time they tried to move up to the front, they were attacked from behind by Red troops. Also, they were aware of the rout inflicted on the Reds by the Poles and believed a complete collapse of the Red front against Wrangel to be imminent, and were induced to wonder about a suspension of hostilities with Moscow. A bitter argument raged inside the movement's Soviet of Revolutionary Insurgents; a narrow majority emerged in favor of a military alliance with Moscow. According to Kubanin, Kurilenko and Belash were for this, while Viktor Popov and Semyon Karetnik were against and Makhno was torn both ways. A general assembly of insurgents was called and after lengthy deliberations came out in favor of a compact. Telegrams to this effect were sent off to the Kremlin. Not that the fighting ceased, though; on August 24 and 25 there was a serious

clash with the Red Army: early in September, two Red regiments of Don Cossacks were routed: the Makhnovists then captured the town of Starobelsk, north of Ekaterinoslav and not far from Kharkov. There they seized four machine guns, 40,000 cartridges, 180 horses and dispatched home some 1000 deserters who had been "confined to barracks" by the Red Army.⁴

One piquant detail is that according to an article in the Moscow *Izvestia* in 1962, the Makhnovists were allegedly indirectly responsible for the death of the journalist John Reed, the Victor Serge of America. On the return trip from Baku where he had attended an oriental congress of sympathizers with the Communist International, he was forced to fire on insurgents who attacked his train. After "the bandits had fled, he greedily drank water from a spring near an embankment [and most likely polluted], being shaken and parched. Upon arrival in Moscow, John Reed was stricken by a severe bout of typhoid fever and died on October 17."⁵

Having initially feigned lack of interest in talks between the Makhnovists and its emissaries, Moscow now determined to intervene directly and on September 20 selected as plenipotentiary the one-time seminarian V. Ivanov who had embraced the new Leninist doctrine.

The military leaders were not yet au fait with the volte-face of their political "head," for the commander of the Ukrainian front, Sergei Kamenev, an ex-colonel of the tsarist army's staff who had transferred his loyalty to the new authorities, ordered his troops on September 21 to "liquidate Makhno's bands once and for all." That same day, a secret political directive from N. Gorbunov, chairman of the 13th Army's revolutionary soviet explained that:

"... victory over Wrangel will free Red Army units presently operating in the south, for deployment in the speedy and complete eradication of the banditry of the Makhnovschina and other groups, and will install a solid revolutionary order throughout the whole Ukraine. Banditry and the Makhnovschina are extensions of the civil war and are deliberately organized by Wrangel's White Guards. Let but Wrangel vanish and Makhno will vanish along with him."⁶

For the time being such bellicose intent was put on the back burner by the political leadership. The Ukrainian Communist Party's politburo meeting on September 29, 1920 with Rakovsky, Kossior, Chubar, Ivanov, Drobnis, Yakovlev, Teplevsky and Blakitny in attendance, decided to direct the party's clandestine organization in the Wrangel-occupied zone to assist the Makhnovists while centering its intention on the strengthening among these Makhnovists of discipline and the spirit of revolutionary unity: to bring Red units into contact with the Makhnovists in operational terms if the need arose, without seeking to amalgamate with them: and finally not to oppose the release of anarchists and Makhnovists from Cheka custody.

The pact was concluded on September 30: Frunze, the new commander of the Southern front, formalized it on October 2, announcing that a cessation of hostilities had been decided at the request of the Makhnovist army, on the basis of its acknowledgment of Soviet power and of its subordination to the Red high command, whilst retaining its own internal organization.⁷

A Makhnovist delegation of Kurilenko and Popov journeyed to Kharkov to thrash out the fine print of the clauses of the agreement. This was completed, not without problems, towards the middle of October and published shortly afterwards in the Soviet press in two parts, the military and the political, with the overall implications being thus obscured from the view of the readership. This agreement was widely reproduced in Soviet works as well as by Arshinov: so, we shall quote only the essential passages:

"I. Political Part.

1. Immediate release and cessation of all future persecution in the territories of the Soviet Republics of all Makhnovists and anarchists, excluding those who might wage armed struggle against the soviet government.

2. Complete freedom of agitation and propaganda, both oral and written, of their ideas and conceptions for the Makhnovists and anarchists, exclusive of calls for the overthrow of the soviet government and with military censorship being observed. For their publications, the anarchists and Makhnovists, as revolutionary organizations recognized by the soviet authorities, may use the whole technical apparatus of the soviet state, while submitting to the regulations on the publishing technique.

3. Free participation in elections to the soviet, with Makhnovists and anarchists being entitled to run for election and freedom of participation in the preparations for the convening of the forthcoming Fifth Pan-Ukrainian congress of soviets due to take place in December of this year.

By order of the soviet government of the Ukraine Ya. Yakovlev. Plenipotentiaries of the soviet and command of the insurgent revolutionary army of the Ukraine (Makhnovist): Kurilenko, Popov.

II. Military Part.

1. The revolutionary insurgent army of Makhnovists becomes part of the composition of the armed forces of the Republic: as a partisan army it is subject in operational matters to the supreme command of the Red Army and retains its internal structure, free of the intrusion of the foundations and principles of the Red Army's regular units.

2. The Makhnovists' insurgent revolutionary army, in moving through soviet territory in the direction of the front and across fronts, under-

takes not to accept into its ranks any Red Army unit or any deserter from the latter [...]”⁸



Other, additional points concerned the obligation upon the insurgents to brief all of their supporters about this agreement so as to secure cessation of all actions hostile to soviet authorities: finally, the insurgents' families were awarded the same rights as those of Red Army troops.

This second part bore the signatures of the commander in chief of the southern front, Frunze, of the members of the front's revolutionary soviet, Bela Kun and Gusev, and of the Makhnovist plenipotentiaries themselves.

Point Four of the political part was, for the moment, left in suspension, for it related to the unhindered organization, in territories controlled by the Makhnovist army, of economic and political self-managerial agencies. While autonomous, these were to liaise with the organs of the soviet republic.

Kubanin assesses this agreement as “crucial for both sides. The regime of free Soviets could not [in his view] but be wholly unacceptable to the dictatorship of the proletariat. Thus, the accord could function only as long as a common enemy existed.”⁹

In a report on the domestic and foreign situation which came to light only after publication in 1959, Lenin declared on October 9, 1920, that, “according to comrade Trotsky, the Makhno question has been very seriously discussed in military circles and it has emerged that there were only advantages to be expected of it. This can be explained by the fact that the elements grouped around Makhno have already sampled the Wrangel regime and what it has to offer does not satisfy them. By concluding an agreement with Makhno, we have secured a guarantee that he would not march against us.”¹⁰

This declaration fairly encapsulates the Bolshevik's intention of “neutralizing” the threat that Makhno posed behind their lines, especially as, after 9 months of all-out warfare against him and despite communiqués regularly announcing its “liquidation” (actual or in prospect), the Makhnovist movement, which was still strong and active, was able, according to Yakovlev's estimates, to field a core detachment of between 10,000 and 12,000 partisans. Also, since the turn taken by the war on the Polish front, where they had been so sure of victory, the Bolsheviks no longer underestimated Wrangel's offensive: thus back-up from insurgents who were familiar with the region and had already been broken in to the fight against the Whites was very precious to them. They knew too that this agreement was going to reconcile the local populace to them and that this would have a knock-on effect upon Red Army morale which had plummeted since the Warsaw disaster. They had everything to gain from this very fortuitous windfall and agreed to nearly all the Makhnovists' conditions, granting an amnesty for past acts of war and freeing imprisoned insurgents and anarchists. At the instigation of the Makhnovists, they

went so far as to carry in their newspapers a scathing refutation of all the calumnies which they themselves had been peddling up until then:

“Communiqué from the People’s Commissariat for Military Affairs of the soviet republic of Russia, on the conclusion of a politico-military compact with Makhno. October 20, 1920.

As we know, the French press has often spoken of an alliance between Wrangel and Makhno. The soviet press in its turn has also published documents testifying to a formal alliance between Makhno and Wrangel. This information has now been shown to be false. Without any doubt, Makhno did, objectively, abet Wrangel and the Poles by fighting the Red Army simultaneously with them. But there was never any formal alliance between them. All of the documents recording that had been forged by Wrangel. A certain bandit from the Crimea, going under the name of Ataman Volodin, operated under orders from the White command as if he were an Ataman subordinate to Makhno, but in fact had no connections with him. This whole campaign of misrepresentation was mounted with the intention of misleading Makhno’s possible protectors, the French and other foreign imperialists.

Some weeks ago, Wrangel made a genuine attempt to reach an alliance with Makhno and sent him two emissaries. As the delegates from the Red Army of the southern front were able to confirm, the Makhnovists not only did not enter into negotiations with Wrangel’s agents, but had them hanged publicly a short time after their arrival at their headquarters. It was precisely this — Wrangel’s attempt to court them — that showed the Makhnovists how perilous it was to fight against the soviet authorities. Shortly after, they approached the command of the southern front [with a proposal] to wage a common struggle against Wrangel. This proposal was accepted on the basis of certain conditions.

At present, the Makhnovist detachment is performing its military assignment under the immediate direction of comrade Frunze, commander of the southern front.”¹¹



What could have brought the Makhnovists to this, with the image of the massacres and destruction carried out by the Red Army and Chekists still fresh in their memories? Hundreds, if not thousands of their colleagues had perished either in the fighting or as a result of the repression: for the most part, captured Makhnovists had been executed by the Reds: they were well aware, too, that Moscow’s ambition was simply to wipe them out. In their mouthpiece *The Road to Freedom* they wrote around this time that the “Bolshevik-communist counter-revolutionaries are, objectively, a greater danger than Wrangel.”¹² Furthermore,

they had already had the experiences of June 1919 and January 1920, when the Red Army had declared them outlaws, disarmed some of their units and shot a number of their colleagues.

One may wonder to what extent the ploy of June 23, 1920, with the pseudo-delegate from the soviet republic as go-between, come to admonish the insurgents about their fight against the Red Army and to exhort them to join forces against Wrangel, could have inspired a belief that there were differences of opinion inside the Communist Party regarding them. In their newspaper, they scrutinized the "diplomatic" actions of the Social Revolutionaries, preceded by "talks between representatives of these latter and those of the so-called soviet power, in the shape of Zatonsky [a Ukrainian Bolshevik leader — A.S.] as well as with members of the Bolshevik-Communist Party's central committee"¹³. From this they deduced that the latter would never have allowed anybody to conduct negotiations with them unless the Communist Party had been directly involved itself." In conclusion, the insurgents stated that they stood ready to come to an accommodation "with all who place the interests of the revolution above all else. If the Communist Party's desire to reach agreement with us is this time quite sincere, in the name of the interests of the revolution, we shall meet them provided we are given serious assurances."¹⁴ Thus, contrary to what soviet historians say, the ones who sued were not the insurgents: these in fact had only acceded to formal overtures from the Bolsheviks.

Arshinov subsequently accounted for this pact by arguing that even if the Bolsheviks were enemies of the toilers, they nonetheless had great masses of the toilers on their side:

"The communists' dictatorship is quite as hostile to labor's freedom as that of Wrangel. However, the difference between them consisted of the fact that alongside the former stood the masses who believed in the revolution. It is true that the communists cynically misled these masses and exploited the revolutionary enthusiasm of the toilers for the advantage of their own power. But the masses who opposed Wrangel believed in revolution and that counted for a lot."¹⁵

There are also several other possible explanations for this "unnatural" agreement. The Makhnovists must have been misinformed as to the true situation on the Polish front and the real threat posed by Wrangel. Their sources of information were quite limited: Bolshevik newspapers, the local population and the alarmists statements of the SR "delegates." They should not, for instance, have been abreast of the well-advanced negotiations that the Bolsheviks were conducting with the Poles, in the wake of which a temporary peace had been signed at Riga on October 1. Something about which the Bolshevik leaders were unable to crow due, on the one hand to the requirements of secret diplomacy and above all to the punishing conditions imposed by the Poles on the other: Lenin justified these concessions as

"necessary to induce the Polish political parties and their allies to understand [his] bona fides, and to realize [that he] did not seek war."¹⁶

For the same reason, the Makhnovists overstated the drama of the situation in the southern Ukraine just a little: they should not have known about the failure of the disembarkation of Ulagai's contingent in the Kuban and they probably thought that the Red Army could not stand up effectively to Wrangel, like the previous year against Denikin. This time, they were convinced that it might be a lot more serious and that with the Bolsheviks collapsing those meager revolutionary gains not yet extinguished would be extinguished beyond all recovery by Wrangel. They were also greatly concerned with getting back to their home ground which was presently under occupation by the Whites, with resting up and having their wounded tended, and then with having the Red Army restock them with arms and munitions. Another far from negligible factor which may have had a part in what they did was the enormous campaign of misrepresentation jointly waged by Moscow and Wrangel concerning an alleged alliance between Wrangel and them. That rumor had not been without impact upon the morale of many isolated insurgent groups: it called seriously into question the ideal on whose behalf the insurgent army was fighting, and played into the hands of the reaction in Russia and internationally.

It is also certain that the Makhnovists hoped to win over a lot of Red troops to their way of thinking as had happened several times, by demonstrating their absolute fidelity to the revolutionary cause. The item in the agreement relating to possible deserters or Red Army soldiers desirous of joining the Makhnovists and whom the latter undertook to send back to their Red Army units, was illustrative of the scale and substance of this phenomenon. As they saw it too, showing themselves to all and sundry as the best defenders of the social and political gains of the populace would also forestall any backlash against them by the Bolsheviks in that their loyalty would have been thoroughly acknowledged. If need be, they were also probably counting upon being strong enough to successfully resist the Red Army militarily, just as they had done over the previous months. All of these considerations together prompted their decision. An editorial by Makhno in the movement's mouthpiece *The Road to Freedom* of October 13, 1920 spelled out the limits of the government:

"Military hostilities between the Makhnovist revolutionary insurgents and the Red Army have ceased. Misunderstandings, vagueness and inaccuracies have grown up around this truce: it is said that Makhno has repented of his anti-Bolshevik acts, that he has recognized the soviet authorities, etc. How are we to understand, what construction are we to place upon this peace agreement? What is very clear already is that no intercourse of ideas, and no collaboration with the soviet authorities and no formal recognition of these has been or can

be possible. We have always been irreconcilable enemies, at the level of ideas, of the party of the Bolshevik-communists. We have never acknowledged any authorities and in the present instance we cannot acknowledge the soviet authorities. So again we remind and yet again we emphasize that, whether deliberately or through misapprehension, there must be no confusion of military intercourse in the wake of the danger threatening the revolution with any crossing-over, 'fusion' or recognition of the soviet authorities, which cannot have been and cannot ever be the case."¹⁷

In objective, historical terms, this agreement might have looked favorable to the Makhnovists, for it blatantly enshrined the existence of their movement: they dealt as equals: even if they were integrated into the Red Army and regarded as answerable to the soviet republic of the Ukraine, they nonetheless retained a certain autonomy. This was an unprecedented agreement and one never repeated in the whole history of the Leninist regime from its origins up to our own day. That the Bolsheviks should have conceded such conditions is ample proof of how badly they needed the Makhnovists, as well as the relationship which the latter had been able to force on them. It goes without saying that it was also a fundamental concession on the Makhnovists' part for, despite all their explanations, by this accord they were acknowledging the indubitable legitimacy of the soviet government and its Red Army. Let us say, in conclusion, that, like many members of the Bolshevik party itself, or of the Red Army, the insurgents were gambling that, once the White counter-revolution had been swept completely from the national stage, the Bolsheviks would be obliged to honor a measure of democracy and tolerate the rights of all who would have fought for the revolution, albeit not wholly sharing their own views. In a subsequent piece of writing, Makhno was to mention that this had been a "grave error."¹⁸

One initial and not negligible outcome was the release of Makhnovists held in Chekist jails: Piotr Gavrilenko, a gifted insurgent, Alexei Chubenko, the man behind the insurgent army's ethos, and Voline, the former chairman of the Military Revolutionary Soviet in 1919. Another positive result was that the Makhnovist movement wounded received treatment from the Red Army's medical corps: Makhno in particular, whose ankle had been torn by a dum-dum bullet, was entitled to the care of the finest physicians and surgeons sent by Moscow.

Bizarrely, the Red Army's high command, which was in the throes of marshaling 500,000 men to face Wrangel, was none too pleased with this agreement with Makhno, arguing that it was too advantageous for him:

"After the signing of the agreement, Makhno acquired citizenship rights *de facto*. The peasants who sympathized with him by virtue of their social class and who were afraid to say so, could now do so openly. The Makhnovists' lifestyle beguiled the Red soldier: he thought that among

them there was more freedom, diversion and food and whereas hitherto the Red soldier had not joined Makhno, aware that he was the enemy of the workers and peasants, he henceforth began to have his doubts and instances of voluntary defection by Red soldiers to Makhno's side became more and more frequent."¹⁹

The same author adds that the presence of many women among the insurgents was a not inconsiderable factor in the Red soldiers' choice!

Notes to Chapter 22: The Second Alliance with the Red Army

1. Wrangel, op. cit. p. 212.
2. V. E. Pavlov, op. cit. p. 376.
3. Wrangel op. cit. pp. 222–223.
4. Kubanin, op. cit. p. 152.
5. *Izvestia* October 21, 1962.
6. *The Civil War in the Ukraine* op. cit. Tome II pp. 480 and 526.
7. Ibid. p. 580
8. Ibid. pp. 571–572. The text of the agreement was published at the time in the newspaper *Kommunist* No 236, October 22, 1920.
9. Kubanin, op. cit. pp. 158–159.
10. Lenin, *Oeuvres complètes*, Paris-Moscow, 1969, Tome XLII, p. 217
11. *The Civil War in the Ukraine*, op. cit. p. 642.
12. Quoted by Lebedev, op. cit. p. 37
13. Idem.
14. Idem.
15. Arshinov, op. cit. p. 170
16. Lenin, op. cit. p. 215
17. Lebedev, op. cit. p. 39
18. N. Makhno, "On the tenth anniversary of the revolutionary insurgent movement of the Ukraine: the Makhnovschina" (in Russian) in *Dyelo Truda*, Paris, 1929, No. 44–45, p. 7.
19. Yefimov, op. cit. p. 209.