

23. Victory over Wrangel

Following the agreement with the Red Army, relations between the Makhnovists and the Bolshevik leadership became more friendly; Bela Kun and other Red dignitaries came to visit Makhno and offered him more than 100 photographs and postcards showing the members of the Third International's executive committee! This curious gift was accompanied by a splendid declaration made out to "...fighter of the worker and peasant revolution, comrade Batko Makhno!"¹ It was a question of gaining the insurgents' confidence and convincing them of Moscow's sincerity. Bela Kun especially distinguished himself in this and upon his return to base was to brag about having really put one over on Makhno.² It is true that he already had a well-established reputation as a treacherous rogue and that he had not finished with exploits of this sort, for, according to Victor Serge, he had to make up for his pitiful showing at the time of the Hungarian Soviet revolution, as well as for his continual "idiocies" which led to Lenin's referring to him upwards of a dozen times at a single meeting as an "imbecile." Victor Serge's wife, who was the official stenographer there, had her work cut out to minimize this in her minutes!³

Be that as it may, the impact of the agreement was soon being felt. The Makhnovists were assigned their own, White-occupied, home ground of Sinelnikovo, Alexandrovsk, Gulyai-Polye, and Berdyansk as their theater of operations. Once they had engaged with the enemy along that stretch of front, they had to tackle the problem of alleged or genuine Makhnovist insurgents who had gone over to Wrangel. In particular, they would be looking out for "ataman" Volodin and his 6,000 partisans who were ensconced near the waterfalls on the Dniepr, not far from Alexandrovsk. Volodin was an anarchist who had indeed been a member of the Makhnovist movement and especially been involved in the battle of Peregonovka; then, cut off from the main insurgent body and disgusted by the abuses of the Bolsheviks, he had established operational liaison with Wrangel on the basis of the notorious rumors of a joint alliance. Immediately on learning of the agreement concluded with the Red Army against Wrangel, he prepared to turn on them, but the Whites — tipped off by their "listening posts" — were one jump ahead of him and seized him and his staff, executing them and relieving his partisans of their weapons.⁴



After two attacks the Makhnovists liberated Gulyai-Polye, then forced the enemy front at Orekhov where they smashed an elite Wrangelian regiment, capturing an entire battalion. Makhno gave this account of the circumstances peculiar to this victory:

“Nikita Chaly, a Makhnovist from a poor family from the Mirgorod region, was a fine partisan and accomplished with brilliance all of the tasks allotted to him behind the White lines by the insurgent army’s staff — both in Denikin’s day and in Wrangel’s. However, he went astray and ended up in Wrangel’s camp as commander of the 10th brigade called after Batko Makhno but organized by the Wrangelian command in the wake of the provocation mounted by the Bolsheviks and by Wrangel himself regarding a supposed alliance between Makhnovists and Whites. We straightened that out, for whenever he was present at an engagement between us and White troops in October 1920, he realized his mistake and immediately came to see me, to die like a Makhnovist at the hands of another Makhnovist by way of paying for the offense that had taken him into Wrangel’s camp. Well aware of the interests of the revolution and being above all else a military leader, I could not shoot him and instead assigned him the task of returning to Wrangel’s people and bringing back to me every one of the officers commanding the brigade; these had been appointed by Wrangel’s staff.

And so Chaly rejoined the White camp and then, on the night of October 17–18, he fetched all of the White officers to my headquarters: A colonel, some captains and some lieutenants. These were all interrogated by my aide Semyon Karetnik in front of me and in the presence of Bolshevik representatives from the Red staff of the front, Vassiliev among them. These officers briefed us on the disposition of the White forces, especially that of the “invincible” Drozdov Division and, without waiting for any joint offensive with the Red Army, I ordered the units from Petrenko’s band, made up of mixed units of infantry, machine-gunners and artillery, as well as Marchenko’s cavalry, to attack these famous Drozdovians who had thus far never failed to put to flight the 23rd and 42nd Red Divisions, even though outnumbered by them two to one.

The insurgents attacked this division — Wrangel’s pride and joy — with the help of Chaly to guide them through the enemy deployment. They smashed this elite White unit as the Red Army had never managed to do. The Red Army command, the Drozdovians and Kutyepov and Wrangel most of all, are very well aware of this.”⁵

A communiqué from Frunze dated October 24th bears out Makhno’s account since it acknowledges that on October 22nd the insurgent army had smashed the

enemy's flanks not far from the Dniepr and Alexandrovsk, taking 4,000 prisoners from the Drozdov division.⁶

The Makhnovists now retreated towards Gulyai-Polye in order to snatch some rest, but the Red command ordered them to carry their offensive behind the enemy's lines. Makhno requested a three-day rest period, but a second categorical order, complete with the threat to tear up the agreement, forced him to comply with this directive. He himself, wounded and unable to mount his horse, stayed in Gulyai-Polye along with his black guard; he dispatched some of his men home to rest and then marshaled a strong expeditionary corps made up of the insurgent army's finest units, namely, the famous undefeated cavalry commanded by Marchenko, and the no less famed machine-gunner regiment led by Tomas Kozhin. This expeditionary force was placed under the command of Semyon Karetnik, assisted by Piotr Gavrilenko — the very same Gavrilenko just freed from Bolshevik jails — as his chief of staff.

On October 23rd, the insurgents took Alexandrovsk. On October 29th, a military dispatch for the attention of Frunze, originating with a certain Karatygin and countersigned by political commissar Andreyev, both of them on secondment to Karetnik, reported the capture of Bolshe-Tokmak. The insurgents had skirted the town on the western side, near the Heidelberg German settlement, then stormed the enemy trenches, virtually wiped out the Sixth White Infantry Regiment from Samursk and taken 200 prisoners and captured four cannon and machine-guns.⁷ Then they seized the town of Melitopol and the strategically important railway station at Akimovka, again taking great booty.⁸ Karetnik's detachment continued on its way — Frunze having intimated to him that he should seize the Crimean isthmuses — and smashed another enemy cavalry regiment, cutting a path as far as the Sivash, near Perekop.

Wrangel's attempt to force a passage along the right bank of Dniepr had failed, and now it was the Red Armies that crossed the Dniepr and, capitalizing on the Makhnovists' victories, stepped up the pressure on Wrangel's army, albeit extremely slowly and cautiously, for they were afraid of being lured into a trap and meeting the same fate as Zhloba's corps which the Whites had pulverized a few months before. This was the motive behind Frunze's using the Makhnovists as the spearhead of his offensive. Forced eastwards, the Whites were afraid of being cut off from their rear in the Crimea, and gradually they fell back towards the isthmuses of Perekop, Salkovo, and Henichesk which commanded access to the Crimea.



The Whites had lost the decisive battle of the Northern Tavrida; they had been forced to quit all of the territory wrested from the Reds over the summer of 1920. In addition they had lost a very high number of armaments and especially wheat-carrying trains which they had been planning to sell or barter in return for weapons and munitions supplies abroad since France's aid was for the moment quite platonic. The fighting in the second fortnight of October took place in temperatures

of minus 20 degrees (Celsius); the water in the reservoirs along the railroad lines had frozen and thus the trains could not be got moving in time. Wrangel gave this estimate of the booty and gains taken by the Reds:

“Five armored trains, 18 cannon, nearly 100 wagonloads of shells, 10 million cartridges, 25 locomotives, trains loaded with food and munitions, nearly two million poods of wheat⁹ in Melitopol and Henichesk. Our troops had sustained heavy losses in terms of killed, wounded and frostbitten. A huge number of prisoners and stragglers were still in enemy hands; for the most part, these were Red Army soldiers whom we had incorporated into our units in several installments. There were some instances of mass capitulations. Thus an entire battalion of the Drozdov Division surrendered to the enemy.¹⁰ But the army as a whole had been salvaged, and our own troops had taken 15 cannon, nearly 2,000 prisoners, lots of arms and machine-guns. But if the army had been salvaged, its combat potential was no longer what it had been.”¹¹

Indeed, the Wrangelian Russian army’s psychological buoyancy had been broken by the successive defeats; it had lost its reputation for invincibility, built up over several months!

Thus, in two weeks the Makhnovists had done what the Red Army had failed to achieve over six months! This assertion would be untenable were it not endorsed by the most official documents of the Red Army recording the engagements. Already, nearly all of the published break-downs and maps relating to the subject indicate the Makhnovist army’s situation (in this instance Karetnik’s expeditionary force, flanked by the 23rd and 42nd Red infantry Divisions) and testify to its being positioned in the front lines.¹² Then there are the orders and official dispatches to which we have just referred, but in addition there are the allusions to its major role. For instance, we have the editorial in the first edition of the very official Red Army review *Military Science and the Revolution* which appeared in July–August 1921 (at which point the Makhnovist movement had not yet been dismembered in the Ukraine) which reckons that Wrangel lost his campaign in the Nikopol region, which is to say, in the Makhnovists’ theater of operations. Furthermore, it is specified that the “chief characteristic” of these encounters was the fact that they “...were not at all part of the projections and plans of the Red Army, which is why they had not even been anticipated by the high command.”¹³ In the huge work on the Russian civil war published in 1930 by a team of the most high-ranking Red Army officers from the period, namely, S. Kamenev, Bubnov, Uritsky, Eidemann and others, the article devoted to the “liquidation of Wrangel” is even more revealing. It explains first of all that the pact with Makhno was justified, self-evidently in the view of any historian, by its “operational and strategical import”; the strength of Karetnik’s detachment was estimated at 4,000 infantry, 1,000 cavalry, and 1,000 machine-gunners and other

fighting men, giving a total of 6,000,¹⁴ with access to 250 machine-guns and 12 cannon, as against the Red Army's total strength of 188,771 (or more than 500,000 including the reserves and rearguard) fighting men against the Whites' 44,000. Mention is made of the crucial role played by the front around Pologui — the very place whence the Makhnovists were coming — and of the fact that Wrangel had to cut his western defenses — the ones preventing the bulk of the Red troops, positioned on the Dniepr's right bank, from crossing on to the left bank — by three divisions of Don Cossack cavalry (Wrangel's best troops, claim the authors) which were thus deployed in the direction of Pologui. What is more, the fortified town of Melitopol was regarded by the Whites as the securest possible bulwark, and we have just seen what became of it. Obviously, the authors took care not to call by its right name the mysterious unit which had overturned all the plans of the Whites; they prefer to allude vaguely to "the Red Army," the "13th Army" (to which Karetnik's detachment was seconded), or, if pressed, speak of a mixed cavalry and infantry division, avoiding further detail! One can appreciate their annoyance at having to explain how a few thousand resolute insurgents had done more to defeat Wrangel on the left bank of the Dniepr than the 500,000 Red soldiers massed in the region, whose fighting ability obviously left something to be desired. So let us re-establish the exact truth of the matter: It was the hammer-blows of the Makhnovists against Orekhov, Bolshe-Tokmak and their capture of Melitopol which forced Wrangel's troops to retreat towards the Crimea.



On October 28, Frunze denied Karetnik a respite of four or five days' rest and reorganization, and let him know that, if he failed to abide by instructions, this would be tantamount to a refusal to participate in the liquidation of Wrangel.¹⁵ One can appreciate that, quite logically, he was keen, on one hand, to make maximum use of such an effective unit, even at the cost of letting it be used up or destroyed in battle, while on the other hand he had to keep it ahead of him rather than behind him, and above all, as one Bolshevik leader, Kossior, has spelled out in detail,¹⁶ it had at all costs to be kept isolated from other Red Army units lest any contamination occur! As a result, the detachment, initially seconded to the 13th Army, was suddenly placed under the command of the Fourth Army on November 4, of the Sixth Cavalry on November 5, of the Second Cavalry on November 11, and again of the Fourth Army on November 17. The detachment was either regarded as the Red Army's dogsbody or (likely) this merry-go-round is indicative of the Red high command's panicky fear at leaving the Makhnovists in contact with other Red Army units, lest these be unduly infected by their revolutionary ardor. The memory of Pomoshnaya in August 1919 must still have been haunting the Red military leaders.

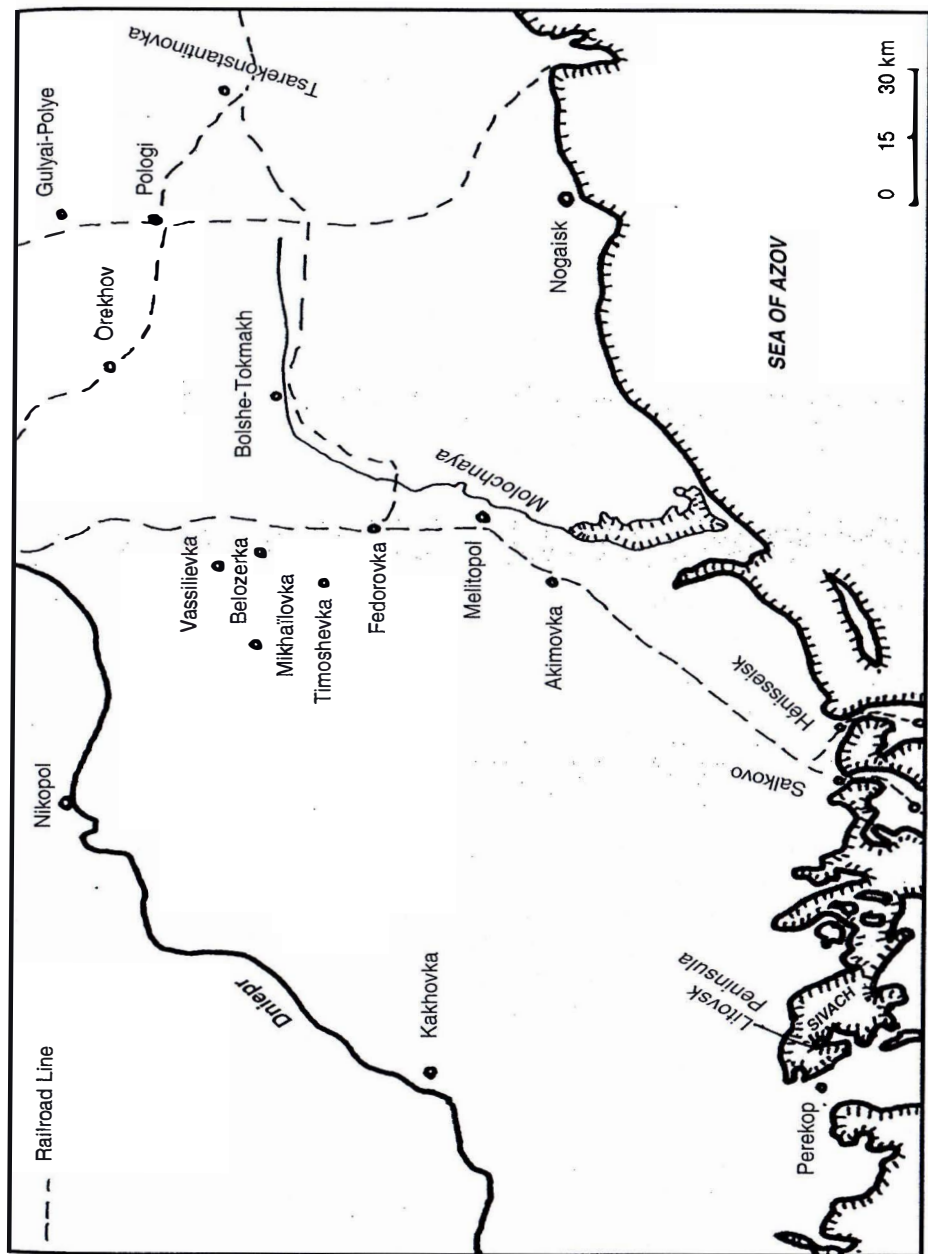
On November 3, in a direct line conversation with S. Kamenev, Frunze declared that the Makhnovists had arrived by evening November 2 near the Sivash strait, which it was their mission to force in order to take the White fortifications

at Perekop from behind. On November 5, he issued them with formal instructions to attack by that route. He was well aware that in so doing he was dispatching them to slaughter, for they would have to cross the open ground of the stagnant marshes of the Sivash. Also, S. Kamenev, commander-in-chief on the front, had no illusions about the outcome of this attack upon the fortified White positions. In a telegram to Lenin, he estimated that there was one chance in a hundred of capturing the Perekop isthmus.¹⁷

The Sixth Red Army's commander, A.I. Kork, gave this account of what ensued at a military science conference on November 11, 1921:

"The attitude of the Makhnovists to the Red Army was none too dependable, and it might have seemed inadvisable to leave Karetnik's detachment in our rear, which is why the front commander set himself the task of moving Karetnik's detachment up into the front line. As the Sivash seemed traversable, the chance arose to throw this detachment ahead to establish a bridgehead on the Litovsk peninsula. This order was passed on directly by the commander of the Sixth Army [i.e., by Kork himself — A.S.] to Karetnik who was to have carried it out on the night of the 5th–6th (November), since the launching of the general offensive was scheduled for the 7th (November). Karetnik's detachment moved forward into the Sivash, but turned back before reaching the Sivash peninsula, Karetnik declaring that there was nothing but marshes that way and that traversing the Sivash was out of the question. On the sixth (November), a further reconnaissance revealed that Karetnik's report was false and that the Sivash was quite passable. However, the ground reconnaissance had not yet been completed, and the offensive was to begin on the morning of the seventh (November) due in part to the belatedness of the 52nd Division which was scheduled to take part in the operation. [...] It was obvious that the crossing of such flat and open ground covering a distance of nearly 10 kilometers could not be made in daylight without very heavy losses; so it seemed more appropriate to make it on the night of the 7th–8th (November) after 22:00 hours. An order to this effect was issued to Karetnik's detachment and to the 15th and 52nd Divisions."¹⁸

Kork estimates the strength of Karetnik's detachment at this point at 1,000 infantry and 700 cavalry, with 191 machine-guns and six cannon.¹⁹ Nevertheless, he is very discreet as to the circumstances of the Sivash crossing. In fact, some local peasants pointed out the best crossing-point. The Makhnovists led the way across under heavy fire from the Whites and sustained some losses but managed to reach the Litovsk peninsula by driving back General Fostikov's Kuban Cossacks. Whereupon they were followed up by the two divisions mentioned, one of them made up of Latvian infantrymen. This maneuver was an historical reenactment of the maneuver



Military Operations in the Crimea (October–November 1920)

by Field Marshall Lassi of the Russian army that had also crossed the Sivash in 1737 to take the Crimean Tartars from behind. In fact, the Perekop isthmus had always been reputed impregnable; and so Kamenev's pessimism had been understandable, especially since Perekop was now defended by 750 machine-guns, 180 cannon and 48 tanks, as well as by some armored trains standing off some distance behind the lines. Also, several thousand elite White troops were dug in behind three lines of trenches and barbed wire.

Over a period of several days, some 22 attacks were mounted by Red units to no avail but incurring very heavy losses. Thus the perilous maneuver carried off by Karetnik was decisive, for it enabled a solid bridgehead to be established so that other Red troops might be brought across to tackle the White fortifications from behind. The Whites were cognizant of this danger and put up a ferocious fight to push the assailants back towards the Sivash. They managed to shove them back into the northern extremity of the peninsula by November 9th. Let us return to Kork's narrative:

"At 15:00 hours on November 9th, on the narrow isthmus located between the Sivash and Lake Bezymianny, Barbovich's White cavalry went on to the attack. The 15th Red Division began to back up. At this point, Karetnik's detachment helped out by deploying to meet the enemy cavalry with lethal gunfire from its machine-gunner regiment. Barbovich's cavalry were hurled back. Thanks to the help supplied by the machine-gunner regiment from Karetnik's detachment, the 15th Division's left flank was quickly repaired."²⁰

Another more recent soviet source provides further detail about this crucial engagement; Barbovich and his Kuban Cossack cavalry attacked the left flank of the 15th Division (Latvians) which began to scatter, and it was Karetnik's detachment which salvaged the situation. Marchenko's cavalry then counterattacked only to fan out at the last moment to leave the enemy cavalry facing the tatchankis of Tomas Kohin's machine-gunner regiment; a hail of gunfire from the latter soon dampened the ardor of Barbovich's Cossacks. The author of this description, which has been lifted from a book on the history of the Latvian infantry, stresses the major role which the Makhnovists also played in the crossing of the Sivash under enemy fire and testifies that they were the first to set foot upon the Litovsk peninsula.²¹

Another Red Army bigwig, Kakurin, a former tsarist colonel, writes in a classic work on the civil war, that "...On the night of November 8, units of the Sixth Army assigned to the capture of the Litovsk peninsula crossed the Sivash, smashed the White General Fostikov's detachment and dug in on the peninsula. Enemy counterattacks met with no success; so the 15th Infantry division and then the 52nd also arrived to dig in on the northernmost part of the peninsula. Then, come the morning, the 153rd Brigade of the 51st Division showed up, along with Krylenko's cavalry brigade."²² Let us note the discretion about naming

the Makhnovist detachment which is described only as "...units ... assigned to the capture of the Litovsk peninsula," whereas every other unit is given a specific name!

Meanwhile the Red military commanders' obsession with the notorious "contamination" by Makhnovists led them, in a bizarre move, to subordinate them on November 11th to the Second Cavalry Army! They were assuredly still afraid of a comradeship of arms growing up between them and Red Army soldiers.

Caught from behind and seeing that their cause was lost, the Whites scurried in a forced march towards the Crimean ports where the Russian fleet, which Wrangel had chartered some time before against the eventuality of evacuation, took them on board in orderly fashion. On November 11, Frunze put it to them that they should surrender, and he guaranteed the lives of them all and assured them of a complete amnesty. Any who wished might stay and work in Socialist Russia; as for the others, they could leave the country if they gave their word of honor not to fight against Russia and the Soviet authorities!²³ Lenin immediately amended this, reproaching Frunze for having been too generous in his concessions which could stand only if the enemy agreed that all the ships would be handed back; he ordered him to make no more such offers and to crush the Whites unmercifully if they rejected this proposition.²⁴ In fact, a large number of White soldiers and officers, who were above all else patriots, decided — to their great misfortune — to believe these fine promises and stayed behind.

As for the Red Army, stunned by this quick success and by the even quicker flight of the Whites and perhaps still wary of a trap, its progress was painfully slow. Again it was Makhnovists who were first to strike deep into the Crimea and who captured Simferopol on November 13. The Whites went blithely on boarding the ships, and when the first Red units reached Sebastopol, Feodosiya, Kerch, and Yalta, the Crimean ports, they found only a few stragglers and a host of distraught civilian refugees. Nearly 100,000 soldiers, 50,000 civilians (3,000 of them women and 7,000 children) had thus fled this last corner of their homeland aboard 126 Russian ships. Wrangel had successfully averted his army's being overtaken by disaster and saved its honor, but it was the end for the whole White movement right across Russia, aside from ataman Semenov and the crazed Baron Ungern-Sternberg who were to hold out for some months more in Siberia on the borders of Manchuria.

Frunze ordered Karetnik's detachment to camp at the mouth of the Kacha river, at Saki, on the western shores of the Crimea. The author of the *History of the Latvian Infantry* bluntly admits that this was in order to isolate the Makhnovists and prevent them from leaving the Crimea. To that end, they were further cordoned off by the 52nd Division, the Third Corps of cavalry and the Second Latvian Brigade.²⁵ On November 13, Frunze informed Kamenev by telephone that he had "...left the 42nd Division in the Gulyai-Polye area with an eye to possible complications from that quarter." Asked by Kamenev how the Makhnovists had

acquitted themselves, Frunze replied that they had acquitted themselves reasonably well during the most recent fighting and had noticeably avoided missions involving the risk of heavy losses.²⁶ Here Frunze was displaying a touch too much presumption, probably regretting that the Makhnovists had not taken heavier losses, although it was not for want of his exposing them as much as he was able to the most perilous positions!

When they do not gloss over in silence the Makhnovists' decisive action in the operations that determined the outcome of the war against Wrangel,²⁷ Soviet historians acknowledge their brilliant performance. Rudnev, for instance, author of an 1928 monograph on the Makhnovschina, writes that the "...Makhnovist units took part in the Red Army's celebrated offensive on the Crimean front. They pulled off a highly important action by striking (and this was of capital importance in strategic terms) behind the lines of Wrangel's army and then, on November 13, 1920, occupied the town of Simferopol, shortly after the capture of Perekop."²⁸ Kork, the commander of the Sixth Red Army, also stresses the important part played by Kozhin's machine-gunner regiment at the time of Barbovich's assault. He adds that one of the consequences of this victory over Wrangel relates to the Soviet government's becoming the sole legitimate representative of Russia and able, as such, to negotiate peace and trade(!) treaties with the capitalist countries.²⁹

At the time, as far as the Bolshevik leaders and their soldiery were concerned, the priority was to settle the question of the thousands, tens of thousands of White soldiers and officers who had swallowed the promise of an amnesty and surrendered to the new authorities with every confidence. Lenin's order to "crush them unmercifully" now took effect in the most barbarous fashion. Bela Kun arrived on the scene after the battle to display his expertise: "Woe to the vanquished!" the dictum goes; well, he was going to put it into full effect here. Drawing their inspiration no doubt from the French Terror of 1793, Bela Kun, the Chekists and the other doers of dirty work mowed down the prisoners — like Fouché had in Lyons — or sank barges (fully laden with officers bound hand and foot) in the Black Sea — like Carrier's drownings in Nantes. According to Victor Serge, these massacres took a toll of 13,000 victims.³⁰ According to Grenard, a French diplomat well informed on the question, the real figure would have been upwards of 50,000 victims!³¹ And this butchery was all the more horrific because the Whites who had naively stayed behind in the Crimea were probably the ones least involved in the abuses and excesses of their movement. Just as the Bolsheviks had promised them they might, they had hoped to make reparation for their offenses by taking a hand in the peaceful, socialist reconstruction of their country. Ill fortune denied them the opportunity.



While all this was going on, Makhno was tending his wounded in Gulyai-Polye. Most insurgent units had been sent home to their native villages and districts, there to rest up and make up their numbers again. Other units were stationed in Melitopol, Bolshe-Tokmak, Malaya-Tokmachka and Pologui. In the belief that

the agreement concluded with the Bolsheviks was a guarantee against any surprise attack, Makhno turned his attention to constructive endeavors along with the local anarchist militants. Between the first and 25th of November, the inhabitants of Gulyai-Polye came together seven times to determine the program for the reorganization of social and economic life which had been completely hobbled over the past year by the dozens of successive occupations of the town. Around mid-November, a soviet had been set up, and in concert with the insurgents' revolutionary soviet, a draft of the basic ground rules of the "free soviets of toilers" had been worked out. He had also proceeded to organize schools independent of both Church and State and involving supporters of the libertarian school founded by Francisco Ferrer. Literacy classes were laid on for illiterate adults, followed by courses in politics and economics given by insurgent peasants and workers who had some grounding in the subjects. Here it is interesting to look at their syllabus: a) Political economy, b) history, c) the theory and practice of socialism and anarchism, d) the history of the French Revolution according to Kropotkin's book, *The Great French Revolution*, e) the history of the revolutionary insurgent movement in the Russian revolution.³²

Not that cultural activities were neglected; daily there were shows staged in the local theater. The insurgents and their womenfolk took part in these, not only as spectators and actors, but also as dramatists narrating episodes from recent local events and from the insurgents' struggle. For all too short a time, alas, a free and creative existence sprang again from the ashes of civil war!

A Polish libertarian, Casimir Teslar, who was staying in Gulyai-Polye at the time, offers this description of the place:

"The exemplary order and cleanliness which reign everywhere are striking. I have been in Gulyai-Polye in winter. The countryside and town were covered with a deep blanket of snow. In every courtyard stood the famous "tatchanka"; this was a sign that each home harbored some Makhnovist insurgents [...] Upon entering the town, I was struck by the sight of the abandoned trenches which ringed it. When I pressed on into the center, I was impressed by the horror of the war which had passed that way, leaving deep traces. The finest houses had been destroyed while others, a large number of others, were half demolished. In one such, I found the premises of the Gulyai-Polye toilers' trade union. The walls were marked with dark cracks and holes. Everywhere the traces of projectiles and fire could be seen. If you go to Gulyai-Polye, children will escort you to the spot where the Austrians burned down the little wooden house where Nestor Makhno was born and where his poor old mother was living when the Austro-German troops entered the town. They will also show you other burned-out homes, burned by the Whites or the Reds: the homes of anarcho-Makhnovist insurgents.

[...] On one of the main streets a black flag fluttered in the breeze. On it one could read: 'Staff of the Makhnovist Insurgent Army of the Ukraine.'"33



During his stay, Teslar often saw horsemen, tatchankis and bands of insurgents gallop past, noisily making for the steppes for maneuvers and to accustom their young mounts to the noise of their weapons. He had difficulty imagining that this apparently so peaceable town was "freedom's stronghold" and that the "people under arms" lived there. He noted that the street games of the children aping battle scenes recalled recent and unfortunately all too real events.

Notes to Chapter 23: Victory over Wrangel

1. N. Makhno, "Open letter to the Russian Communist Party and to its central committee" (in Russian) in *Dyelo Truda* No. 37-38, pp. 10-12.

2. Idem.

3. Victor Serge, op. cit. pp. 154-155.

4. Pavlov, op. cit. pp. 309-311.

5. N. Makhno, "*The Makhnovschina and its erstwhile allies: The Bolsheviks*" (in Russian), op. cit. pp. 51-52.

6. *The Civil War in the Ukraine* (in Russian), op. cit. Tome III, p. 651, and *The Directives from the Command of the Fronts of the Red Army* (1917-1922) (in Russian), Moscow 1978, Tome IV, pp. 481-482.

7. *The Civil War in the Ukraine*, op. cit. p. 670.

8. Ibid. p. 697.

9. Or 327,600 quintals! A colossal amount for those famine times!

10. Wrangel refers to the Orekhov encounter when the Makhnovists took 4,000 soldiers from that division prisoner; apparently, he could not know with whom they had been dealing there; as far as he was concerned, everyone on the other side was a "red."

11. Wrangel, op. cit. p. 286.

12. *Voyna i revolyutsia*, Moscow, 1930, 8 (August), N. Gapitch, "The operations of the Fourth and 13th Armies in the Northern Tavrida in October-November 1920, pp. 81-82.

13. *Voyennazha hauka i revolyutsia*, No. 1, July-August 1921, Moscow, p. 17. Editorial signed S. Varin.

14. *The Russian Civil War* (in Russian). Editorial team headed by S. Kamenev, Bubnov, and Uritsky, Moscow, 1930, Tome III, pp. 510-541. Arshinov (op. cit.) estimates the strength of Karetnik's detachment at 2,000 fighters. See below for other estimates.

15. *The Directives from the Command of the Red Army Fronts* (1917-1922), op. cit. p. 482.

16. *The Civil War in the Ukraine*, op. cit. p. 637.

17. *On the History of the Civil War in the USSR* (in Russian), Moscow, 1961, Tome III, p. 418.
18. A.I. Kork, "The capture of the Perekop fortifications," in *The Revolutionary Army* (in Russian) Ekaterinoslav, 1921, No. 1, pp. 17–31. The article is reprinted in *The Stages of a Great March* (in Russian) Moscow, 1963, pp. 436–454. The quotation appears on p. 443.
19. Ibid. p. 440.
20. Idem.
21. *Istoria Latyskikh strelkov* (History of the Latvian Infantry) Riga, 1972, published under the editorship of Ya. Krastinia, pp. 668–679. The entire account is lifted from the archives of the Latvian Communist Party.
22. N. Kakurin, *Kak srazhala revoliutsia*, Moscow, 1926, Tome II, pp. 388–389.
23. *On the History of the Civil War in the USSR*, op. cit. pp. 432–433.
24. Ibid. p. 433.
25. *History of the Latvian Infantry*, op. cit. p. 678.
26. *The Directives from the Command of the Red Army Fronts (1917–1922)* op. cit. p. 513.
27. Triandafilov, author of the article, "The Red Army's Perekop Operation" in the anthology on the civil war published by Kamenev, Bubnov, Uritsky, and others (op. cit. pp. 339–356) does not, for example, shrink from avoiding all mention of the Karetnik detachment in his description of this operation. This is all the more incoherent and contradictory in that the article in the same anthology concerning "Wrangel's liquidation," which we have quoted, does mention this participation in the appropriate place. One possible explanation for this "cock-up" might be the internecine struggles raging in 1930 among the Soviet politico-military leadership and the curious revisions that ensued regarding the role of each faction during the civil war.
28. Rudnev, op. cit. p. 91.
29. Kork, op. cit. p. 454.
30. Victor Serge, op. cit. pp. 154–155.
31. F. Grenard, op. cit., p. 338.
32. Arshinov, op. cit. pp. 176–179.
33. Casimir Teslar "Gulyai-Polye" in *La Revue Anarchiste*, Paris, March–April 1922, No. 15, pp. 19–20.

24. Bolshevik Treachery

Thus, there were certain signs which hinted that, in the reckoning of Lenin and others of the regime's dignitaries, the agreement concluded with the Makhnovists had been mere opportunism and could not endure beyond the time it would take to finish off Wrangel. The relative concessions granted to the insurgents had been designed only to put them at ease, in spite of the famous item four of the political part of the agreement, which in principle made provision for autonomy for "Makhnovia" (to borrow the expression of Soviet historians). This matter was left hanging and had to be worked out directly with the Kremlin. In his (it is true, posthumously published) memoirs, Trotsky is clear that Lenin and he ...

"had at one time seriously envisaged allocating certain territories to the anarchists, with the consent of the local population of course and allowing them to conduct their experiment with a stateless society there. This plan was aborted at the discussion stage though the fault was not ours. The anarchist movement failed itself when it underwent the test of the events that followed one upon another in the course of the Russian Revolution."¹

Victor Serge also mentions such a plan by Lenin and Trotsky, but indirectly, borrowing from the text by Trotsky that we have just quoted. Victor Serge opines that ... "it might have been equitable and advisable and perhaps such a broad mindedness might have spared the revolution the tragedy towards which we were all drifting."² It must be obvious that for Lenin and his side tolerance of any such experiment was absolutely out of the question; it would have been tantamount to admitting the shortcomings of their own ability to resolve the country's problems and that was inconceivable for anyone familiar with Lenin's trajectory ever since the break with the Mensheviks in 1903 and right through the squabbles, polemics, splits and other exercises which had carried him into power. A regime of free soviets in the eastern Ukraine! The contagion would immediately have consumed the whole country and the house of cards known as "worker-peasant government" — maintained only by bayonet and the bullet in the back of the head — would have evaporated in a trice and lingered in the memories of workers only as some ghastly nightmare.

Let us look at the explanation offered by Gusev and Yakovlev, the two signatories to the agreement on the Bolshevik side. Gusev reckoned that:

“...Makhno’s proposition of an alliance with the Red Army was accepted, not in order to secure a complementary force on the front — none was needed — but in order to rid ourselves for a time of an enemy behind our lines. As soon as Wrangel was defeated, this “alliance” was quite naturally broken, for the proletarian revolution can fellow-travel with the Kulak only in the struggle against the pomieschik, but further along their paths diverge radically.”³

One can spot the misrepresentations of the facts immediately: the “proposition” was Makhno’s, the backup on the front was “not needed” and there is the utter cynicism of the explanation of the “quite natural breakdown” of the alliance; so we know what was to be expected from that quarter right from the start. In 1920, for the First Congress of the Red International of Labour Unions (to which some anarcho-syndicalists had been invited) Yakovlev, the second signatory, wrote a pamphlet simply overflowing with poisonous attacks directed against the Russian anarchists and, above all, against Makhno. He skims over his own part in the arranging of the agreement and cites Frunze’s explanations regarding the breakdown which is attributed wholly to faults on the part of Makhno, on the basis of a number of acts perpetrated in various locations around the Ukraine against the Red Army. He rails against the solidarity displayed by the remainder of the anarchists towards Makhno whom he depicts as a bandit deserving of no regard.⁴ Sure — wasn’t he for the Whites in the Crimea? and Bolsheviks had not been great ones for the Christian virtue of forgiving trespasses against them, but even so! Thereby demonstrating that the agreement which they had initially had been, as far as they were concerned, a mere scrap of paper. This was on a par with the practices of Bismarck and other exponents of *realpolitik* and negotiated something quite new in Russian revolutionary circles. Soon it was to become the stock in trade of the State system.

As far as the Makhnovists were concerned, without harboring any illusions “... either about the durability or solidity of the agreement” (Arshinov) the view was that, in spite of everything, the agreement would hold up for three or four months, and they were counting on this interval to enable them to make the libertarian option known to the Ukraine’s laboring population and to demonstrate, by contrast, the inadequacies of the Bolsheviks’ options. If there was to be conflict, the insurgents at first anticipated that it would be confined to the realm of ideas.

Makhnovists also had high hopes of the general congress of anarchists due to take place at the end of November in Kharkov. It was for this reason that a part of their delegation had stayed behind in the city and availed of the opportunity to participate in meetings and debates which drew sizable audiences and at which the delegation’s members — especially Victor Popov — were blunt about the necessity of power’s being restored to local soviets and about implementation of the famous Item Four of the agreement, which had been shelved twice thus far. The delegation put out a newspaper, *The Makhnovist Voice*, in which they spelled out their

views and their complaints regarding the Leninist authorities. In its third issue — which was also to be its last — dated November 21st, the editorial announced that having “... done their duty by the social revolution, the Makhnovists delivered a whole series of lethal blows against Wrangel. Also, of the soviet government of the Ukraine and Russia we require honest implementation of Item One of our agreement: immediate release of all Makhnovists and anarchists still languishing in the prisons and camps of the soviet republics.”

According to Arshinov, Makhno's then aide-de-camp Grigori Vassilevsky, upon hearing on November 15 or 16 of Karetnik's breaching of Wrangel's defenses in Perekop, had cried out: “That's the end for the agreement! Take my word for it, within one week the Bolsheviks are going to come down on us like a ton of bricks!”⁵ And, even more telling, in Gulyai-Polye and Pologui on November 23 the Makhnovists arrested nine spies from the 42nd Red Army Division which was stationed nearby. These confessed to having been sent in by their intelligence branch to discover the precise whereabouts of Makhno, members of the Staff and of the insurgents' soviet, as well as those of Makhnovist unit commanders. They were to have remained on the spot until the Red Army showed up and pointed out the domiciles or shadow the Makhnovist officials who might not be at home. According to what they claimed, an attack on Gulyai-Polye was to be expected around November 24 or 25. The insurgents promptly tackled Rakovsky and the Red Army Officials in Kharkov to press for the arrest and punishment of the officials of the 42nd Division, and then for a veto upon any Red Army units passing through the Gulyai-Polye region, so as to forestall any incidents. Kharkov replied on November 25, claiming that the whole thing was just a misunderstanding and that a joint commission would look into it.⁶ In fact, finding their plot “blown,” the Bolsheviks decided to unleash their onslaught the very next night.

On the morning of November 26, Piotr Rybin, secretary of the Soviet of Makhnovist Revolutionary Insurgents, telephoned Rakovsky to find out what this proposed commission was all about. Rakovsky replied that everything was going to be smoothed out peaceably along with the controversial Item Four, when in fact he knew that the attack on the Makhnovists and anarchists had been launched that very night. The entire Makhnovist delegation — Viktor Popov, Budanov and Khokhorva — was placed under arrest, shipped to Moscow and shot. Apropos of their execution, Kubanin writes that “...Moscow was not joking with the Makhnovschina and acted without losing any time.”⁷ In all, 346 anarchists and Makhnovists were rounded up in Kharkov in this operation. Forty were sent on to the Moscow Cheka. Among them were Sereda, one of Makhno's closest associates, Zinchenko, commander of the 2nd Cavalry Regiment, Kolesnichenko, commander of an insurgent detachment, Kuzenko, commander of one of the infantry regiments ... all seized by treachery. Learning of this outrageous behavior, Rybin again telephoned Rakovsky and told him of his feelings of indignation. Thanks to this phone call, the Cheka managed to track him down, arrested him and shot him shortly afterwards. Nearly

all of the membership of the Ukrainian anarchist confederation, Nabat, were also arrested and jailed: Voline, Mratchny, Baron, David Kogan, Josef Gotman, Bogush and others. Kubanin records this round-up of anarchists by noting tersely: "The Nabat was liquidated by organs of the Cheka."⁸

That very same day, the 42nd Division with its five infantry brigades and cavalry brigades attacked Gulyai-Polye. A second cordon around the town was thrown up by the 2nd Cavalry Corps, Volga Brigade and two special regiments. In spite of certain precautionary measures taken the evening before, Makhno was wrong-footed by the suddenness of the attack; in Gulyai-Polye all he had to call upon was his personal escort, the Black Guard, some 150 strong. Caught in a vice, he was encircled on every side; the end looked near when, all of a sudden, in the afternoon, one Red unit hurriedly withdrew. Fearful of a trap, Makhno hesitated and then, spotting that the way was clear, broke out of the cordon through this unexpected gap. Soviet historians ascribe this miraculous escape to treachery on the part of the commander of one of the Red units. It is likely then that once they saw what was expected of them, some of the Red troops showed solidarity with the Makhnovists and whereas the officers spoke of treachery, the fact is that some of these Red troops and especially their commanders were to pay with their lives for this gesture of revolutionary solidarity.

The 3rd Makhnovist Regiment, stationed at Malaya-Tokmachka, was less fortunate; it was almost entirely rounded up by the 126th Division brigade and a regiment of Red cavalry. Makhno counter-attacked and beat the enemy back as far as Novo-Uspenovka. Confusion set in among the many Red units; the International Cavalry Brigade which had occupied Gulyai-Polye was attacked on November 27 by other brigades from the 42nd Division who thought that they were tackling insurgents. It was only after a day's fighting that this misunderstanding was cleared up!⁹ Makhno promptly regrouped various insurgent units. Some Red soldiers, sickened by the conduct of their officers, came to join him or surrendered to him at the earliest opportunity. In this way a contingent of 1,500 infantry and 1,000 cavalry was mustered. Gulyai-Polye was recaptured after a week, and the troops of the 42nd Division chased out, for now realizing the dirty work that had been entrusted to them, the Red soldiers had no stomach left for the fight or fought with very little enthusiasm. In this way — of the 6,000 Red soldiers stripped of their weapons on the day that the town captured — one in three joined the Makhnovists. Gulyai-Polye was recaptured in a few hours, too late unfortunately to save 300 local peasants who were cut down by the henchmen of Bolsheviks.



In the Crimea too, Moscow's instructions were enthusiastically implemented. As early as November 17, the strong partisan detachment of the anarchist Mokrousov, which had carried out significant harrying operations behind Wrangel's lines, had been placed under the direct command of the Fourth Army and been absorbed into regular units. On the same date, a secret order stipulated that Makhno's army, i.e. Karetnik's detachment, also be placed under the author-

ity of the Fourth Army and that it was also to be transferred without delay to the Caucasus to take on insurgent Cossacks¹⁰ — and that, of course, without the principals concerned being informed of what was going on. Karetnik and his staff, cut off from their detachment, were summoned on November 25 to a supposed meeting in Gulyai-Polye, arrested en route and shot out of hand. Gavrilenko, Karetnik's chief of staff, was "killed," meaning probably that he was liquidated after having defended himself. The following night, at 1:35 A.M. an attack was launched against the contingent itself. It would appear that a band of insurgents had been encircled by some Chekist units and wiped out by crossfire from several hundred machine-guns,¹¹ but the bulk of the contingent managed to break out of the circle shortly before this attack in circumstances related to us by Yefimov, the Red military expert on the anti-Makhnovist campaign:

"One way or another, it became apparent to us that Makhno was building up to something and that in any event a break with him was inevitable and indispensable. On that basis, a plan was drawn up to encircle his two bands: the Crimean band and the one in the rear [the Gulyai-Polye one — A.S.]. Karetnik's band was ordered to occupy the Crimean coastline at the village of Zamruk near Saki, which it did. Then the Red Army troops were to encircle it; to this end the following units were redeployed for November 26 ... three cavalry divisions, three infantry divisions of three brigades each, and one brigade of artillery. On November 27, all these divisions received the order to attack the Makhnovist contingent and wipe it out. [...] Of course the encirclement plan could only have succeeded if there was the element of surprise and immediate, resolute action by the Red Army which could be ensured only after painstaking political groundwork. A good explanation needed to be devised to explain why, after an agreement had been concluded, the Red Army nonetheless had to wipe out the Makhnovists. This political groundwork reduced the element of surprise to zero which is in effect what happened. The Makhnovists were alerted several hours in advance of our attack and were partly able to avoid it. It was also obvious they knew well enough why Red units had been deploying around them. On the evening of November 26, Karetnik's band struck out for the road leading from Simferopol to Perekop. Along the way they defeated the 7th Cavalry Division. As soon as the Makhnovists' breakout had been discovered, the entire 3rd Cavalry Corps and the 52nd Division were dispatched in pursuit. However, these units acted in a half-hearted and hesitant fashion. Thus the Makhnovists were able to reach the outskirts of Perekop on the evening of the 27th; there they split into two groups, one crossing the Sivash the other traveling through the Perekop isthmus facing the 1st Infantry Division's small and nonpugnacious units. The two groups

rejoined at Stroganovka on the mainland, on the morning of November 28th. Thus were the Makhnovists able to escape from the Crimea by covering 130 kilometers in two days while fighting a rearguard action. Our own units displayed no initiative. They all waited for orders to act and would not budge unless issued with specific orders.”¹²

Yefimov was not afraid to contradict himself in the matter of the exact date of attack; he mentions the 27th so that this fits in with the justification of the formal order from Frunze, allegedly issued on the 26th (the date mentioned in every other Soviet source), then explains that the Makhnovists took two days to cross the Crimea before arriving on the mainland on the morning of the 28th. The military precision that he was required to display was not so easily reconciled with overriding political motives. Let us also note the exceptional deployment of forces on the Bolshevik side to confront this tiny Makhnovist phalanx; this was probably indicative of the relative fear on the part of the Red leadership who still recalled the insurgents’ exceptional feats against the Whites. Also, Yefimov cannot stop himself from acknowledging the Red units’ lackadaisical approach to the carrying out of this sordid assignment. All of the Red soldiers were well aware with whom they were dealing and believed not one single treacherous word of their commanders’ “cock-and-bull stories” about Makhno’s alleged treachery and other nonsense; so it was much against their will that they had to contemplate taking on their comrades in arms now. That is why, despite the tremendous fighting abilities of the Makhnovists, it is hard to conceive of their having been able to penetrate a dense cordon of more than 200,000 Red troops between them and the Perekop isthmus unless one considers the latter’s reluctance to engage them. Moreover, Yefimov acknowledges that the Makhnovists had been tipped off several hours in advance by Red soldiers about what was being plotted against them and had acted accordingly. This mentality had not gone unnoticed by the Red high command which had to act ruthlessly; as the *Red Soldier’s Army Journal* reports, 2,300 Red troops had been shot in the Crimea at this time on charges of having “... undermined the just endeavors of the soviet authorities and of their valiant Red Army.”¹³ A significant figure that, if compared with losses suffered in the capture of Perekop — 8,000 killed and 1,200 wounded. Further on, Yefimov estimates the strength of the Makhnovist contingent upon leaving the Crimea at 4,000 men — which may bear out the thesis that a thousand insurgents were massacred on the night of November 25–26, having been cut off from their comrades and not having had time to escape the Cheka’s machine-guns.

By way of justifying this act of treachery, Frunze first issued an order dated November 24 and intended for the Red Army. It spoke of a communiqué of November 23 urging the Makhnovists to be assimilated into the Red Army’s regular units. What is more, he drew up a veritable list of charges against them; they were accused of undermining the Red Army’s rear, of distracting Red soldiers from their duties, of having committed criminal acts against Bolshevik officials or Red Army

personnel, and of having refused to carry out the order given to them on November 20th to march on the Caucasus. In passing he claimed all the glory of the victory over the Whites for himself and his troops. He gave Makhnovists two days in which to comply with his instructions. What is at once disturbing and revealing and what proves that this was unquestionably a lie cobbled together after the event to meet the requirements of circumstances is that at the same time he ordered his troops "... to have done with the Makhnovschina in a trice[!] (...) All Red units must act boldly, decisively and ruthlessly. The bandit gangs must be eliminated as quickly as possible; the entire armament of the kulaks must be seized also."¹⁴

This crass falsehood was followed up by a second order dated November 26 and issuing from Kharkov at 1:35 A.M., alleging that the November 23 order had not been carried out by the Makhnovists and that, instead, Makhno had begun to take action against soviet authorities, as a result of which he and his units were being declared "... enemies of the revolution and of soviet power."¹⁵ This latter order seems less of a formality than the first but was not made official on the day in question, for it was to appear in the Bolshevik press only on December 15; it had been backdated as is readily understandable. The element of surprise had to be preserved, as Yefimov admitted earlier. Not until much later and then quite by chance did the Makhnovists find out about it while reading the Bolshevik papers. Now, these ultimatums with their provocative style had been drafted under the supervision of Lenin himself; the general in command of the front, Sergei Kamenev, attests to that in his memoirs.¹⁶ Be it the anti-Wrangel compact or the order from Frunze, the whole effort had been mounted with Lenin's consent and in accordance with his directives. So the responsibility lay at the highest levels, in the highest echelons of the party and with Lenin himself. Not that that was any impediment to Frunze's breaking his word and reneging upon his signature. In his mind, these were peccadilloes, and he was above all else anxiously courting the praises of the supreme guide, preparatory to winning some medals with view to climbing up the party hierarchy. The wheel was soon to turn, and he would in turn come be ensnared by someone who out-betrayed him.

The authorities' tactics, then, consisted of shifting blame for the breakdown of the alliance onto the Makhnovist insurgents although as we have seen the latter had observed the strictest loyalty in implementation of the agreement concluded. Now, we have unpublished, first hand — and we might add, weighty evidence — its author, Marcel Ollivier, was one of the French founders of the Third International, Rosa Luxemburg's chief translator into French, and an active member of the French Communist Party for many a long year before he broke with it abruptly in the 1930s. At this time Ollivier was in Russia and had been invited, along with other French representatives including Alfred Rosmer, Jacques Sadoul and Henri Barbusse, to come to the Ukraine to witness the defeat of Wrangel. Upon arriving, he traveled on separately by truck; thus it was that at one stopover in the open countryside he saw...

“... a troop of horsemen loom all of a sudden from behind an outcrop. [They] swooped down on us so quickly that they were upon us before we could lift a finger to scramble back on board the truck and seize the rifles inside. Mounted on small, highly strung horses and armed to the teeth — carbines slung across the shoulder, saber by their side and daggers at their belts, their chests crisscrossed by leather ammunition belts, and their heads topped by enormous fur chapkas ... they had an appearance that was unsettling, I might even say unnerving.”¹⁷

It transpired that these new arrivals were Makhnovists; Marcel Ollivier and his fellow travelers reckoned that their time had come, not knowing that a compact had been concluded between Bolsheviks and insurgents, but the latter treated them in friendly fashion and they were able to continue on their way unmolested. They reached Melitopol and at headquarters attended a *soirée* during which Ollivier noticed a ...

“... group of officers immersed in animated discussion. In their midst stood a fellow of about 25 years of age whom the others appeared to be besieging and who was replying with passion and ardor to the queries and arguments of his interlocutors. I asked Viktor Taratuta [who spoke fluent French — A.S.] what the discussion was all about. He explained that this officer was from the Makhno Division recently incorporated into the Red Army, and that he was defending his libertarian viewpoint against the others. As I remarked upon the impassioned tone in which he was doing so, Taratuta told me, literally: ‘Once we have done with Wrangel, we will shoot him’ [...] This model revolutionary [Taratuta], this 100 percent Bolshevik whom Bogdanov and Lunacharsky had accused of being an Okhrana agent — and whom Lenin himself, in conversation with Professor Rozhkov, had referred to as a ‘con man’ — told me that, in as many words. It will be readily understood that it came as a shock to me. But, to be honest, I did not take it seriously. A throwaway remark, I thought. Shooting a man who was fighting alongside you and with whom one had just signed an alliance open and above board, merely because his beliefs did not square with one’s own, would have been an act of infamy of which I did not then think the Bolsheviks capable. In which belief, I was mistaken, as we shall see.”¹⁸

Shortly after this, Marcel Ollivier crossed the Perekop isthmus and was amazed to see no signs of the fight which the Whites had put up in these entrenched positions which at first sight looked impregnable. It was only when he discovered that the Whites had been attacked from behind following the Makhnovists’ and other Red units’ crossing of the Sivash straits that he was able to comprehend, and he then found “even more scandalous the treatment to which the Makhnovists were subjected shortly after.” Then he learned of the breakdown of the agreement and

upon arrival in Melitopol, was informed of the fate of the young Makhnovist officer whom he had seen in discussions with Red Army officers:

"The day before, before the garrison assembled in the square, he had found himself 1) mentioned in army dispatches for his brilliant conduct under fire and 2) sentenced to death for rebellion against the soviet authorities — sentence followed by immediate execution. So Taratuta had been farsighted — or, to be more precise — well-informed. As for the deed itself: I leave it to the reader to reach his or her own opinion of shooting a man only moments after having commended him in army dispatches for his brilliant conduct under fire. As for myself, let me say that I regard it as infamous."¹⁹

On the same occasion, Ollivier learned of the failure of the push against Warsaw which had been covered up for five months! This is precious testimony for Marcel Ollivier simply cannot be suspected of entertaining any sympathy at all for libertarians or Makhnovists, being at this time of rigidly orthodox views and outraged only by specific infamous methods rather than querying the very principle of the nature of power. John Xydias, from whom we have already quoted, a bourgeois liberal with little time for ideology, speaks very prosaically of an immense "thirst for power" in explaining the conduct of the Bolsheviks:

"Power of itself, power as the goal, such was the Bolsheviks' ruling notion. Their doctrine set them free of all restraints. Morality, law, justice were so many 'bourgeois prejudices.' Hence the total indifference in the selection of means; hence the monstrous amorality of the soviet regime which shows itself in all the minutiae of Bolshevik life and Bolshevik politics; hence their recourse, during the war and before the revolution, to the most sordid methods: treachery, perfidy."²⁰

Without dwelling too long at this point on possible explanations for the conduct of the Bolshevik leadership, let us recall their essential justification, namely, that they were invested with an historic social mission of capital significance to mankind's future and in order to achieve this mission "...all seemed licit to them." This formula left them free to resort to all of the methods of rule known thus far, concentrating on the best of them — which is to say the worst — in order to maintain themselves in power. However, they were not fully conversant with the mechanism for, further down the road, it was going to mangle them too just as tragically, as we shall see anon. What was at stake was neither more nor less than the basic ethical connection between the chosen end and the means used to achieve it.

Arshinov also demonstrates the undeniable premeditation behind this Bolshevik treachery; on this point he cites two assassination bids against Makhno in the months of October and November, then two handbills found on the first

captured Red soldiers on November 27 headed: “Death to the Makhnovschina!” and “Forward against Makhno!” These were undated but had been issued to the troops on November 15 or 16, 1920.

Thus, to their great misfortune, the Makhnovists had yet again snatched chestnuts from the fire only to see the Bolsheviks alone reap the benefits and they were paying dearly for the lesson. Now they needed to fight desperately — in the direst of circumstances — for their very survival.

Notes to Chapter 24: Bolshevik Treachery

1. Trotsky *Stalin*, New York and London, 1941. p. 337. Oddly, this passage does not figure in the French edition of the book. It must be assumed that the publisher or the translator censored this posthumous “boldness” on the part of the master.
2. Victor Serge, op. cit. pp. 135–136.
3. S.I. Gusev, “Lessons of the Civil War” in *The Civil War and the Red Army* (in Russian) Moscow, 1958. p. 88.
4. Ya. Yakovlev, *Anarchism in the Great Russian Revolution* (in Russian), Moscow, 1921, pp. 15–36.
5. Arshinov op. cit. p. 180.
6. Ibid, p. 181.
7. Kubanin op. cit. p. 212.
8. Idem.
9. Yefimov op. cit. p. 215.
10. *The Civil War in the Ukraine* op. cit. p. 771.
11. As suggested by Alexei Nikolaev, author of three factional works on Makhno and the Makhnovschina: *Batko Makhno*, Riga, 1928; *Nestor Makhno*, Riga, 1929; and *First Among Equals*, Detroit, 1947. The author had lived in the area at the time and had also met Makhnovists and Makhno’s wife, after Makhno’s death. The only other reference to this alleged killing is in Rudnev, who mentions that “machine-guns were to be used” to defeat the Makhnovists in the Crimea, op. cit. p. 93.
12. Yefimov op. cit. pp. 213–214.
13. *Gazeta Krasnoarmeitsa*, quoted by G. Rimsky in *The Last Days of the Crimea*, Constantinople, 1920. p. 21.
14. M.V. Frunze *Selected Works* (in Russian), Moscow, 1957, Tome 1, pp. 427–429.
15. Ibid. p. 430.
16. *Memoirs on Vladimir Ilyich Lenin*, Tome II, p. 314 and *M. V. Frunze on the Civil War Fronts*, Moscow 1941, pp. 460 and 463.
17. Marcel Ollivier, *Un bolchévick dangereux*, typewritten manuscript, second part, pp. 142–143. We thank the author for having so kindly allowed us to publish these excerpts.
18. Ibid. p. 153.
19. Ibid. p. 160.
20. J. Xydias *French Intervention in Russia 1918–1919* op. cit. p. 74.

25. The Last Year of Fighting and the Death Throes of Libertarian Revolution in the Ukraine

The Red Army high command took it ill that Karetnik's detachment, penned up at the other end of the Crimean peninsula, managed to pierce the dense cordon and escape from the rat-trap. The troops dispatched in pursuit of him, who included Latvians, displayed little urgency about catching him up, probably because of the still fresh recollection of their brotherhood in arms; so the Red Army leaders called up troops stationed in the rear, on the continent itself. They, having played no part in the capture of Perekop did not know it was the victors over the Whites that they were now under orders to confront.

A sea of Red troops was deployed to forestall the Makhnovists' return to Gulyai-Polye. Traced to Mikhailovka, they were encircled by a division of Kur-santys — Lenin's Junkers — the 42nd Infantry division, the International Cavalry Brigade, and the Fourth Red Cavalry divisions commanded by Timoshenko.¹ The Insurgents were still a daunting force: One thousand horsemen, 300 tatchankis, 250 machine-guns and six cannon. However, they were heavily outnumbered — by 20 to one! — though that was not the most serious thing: above all, they were short of ammunition, for the Red Army had taken care not to restock them after the capture of Perekop and Simferopol. On November 30, they evaded a first enemy unit and then, the following day, December 1st, in the town of Timoshevka, they engaged the 42nd Red Division all day long, inflicting heavy losses. The following night, they seized Timoshevka, capturing an enemy regiment down to the last man and stocking up on arms and ammunition again. At this point they made a grave mistake — which Makhno himself would assuredly have avoided — by not moving on immediately and allowing enemy forces to regroup and flood towards Timoshevka from every direction. In the early hours of the morning, they repulsed every enemy attack wave and even counter-attacked but — running short of ammunition — were obliged to cut and run for Mikhailovka that afternoon. There they found themselves pinned down by enemy cavalry and artillery. Six hundred insurgents died heroes' deaths while others broke up into small groups and tried to slip through the net thrown up around them. Two hundred insurgents were

again intercepted and cut down by the International Cavalry Brigade's sabers (this brigade was made up of Germans, Hungarians and other ex-POWs enlisted by Moscow). Over half of this valiant body — undoubtedly the strongest fighting unit of all those which saw action in the civil war — perished in this unequal confrontation. Some escapees did manage to slip through the Reds' ring of steel in several places. The last remaining compact body of some 250–300 horsemen linked up with Makhno on December 7th in the Greek village of Kermenchik, some 80 kilometers east of Gulyai-Polye.

The meeting was a dramatic one. Marchenko and Taranovsky who were leading the contingent announced with pained irony that it was their "honor to announce the return of the Crimean army." Marchenko added: "Yes, brothers, now we know what these communists are."² Makhno remained somber, the sight of this tiny band of survivors from his 1,500 elite cavalry who had set off a month before having shaken him to the core. He held his tongue and strove to control his emotions. The insurgents came together in general assembly. The escapees told how Karetnik and his staff had been treacherously arrested and shot out of hand. Outraged and infuriated by this monstrous treachery, the Makhnovists were henceforth to fight spurred on by a terrible thirst for revenge.



Against the insurgents, the Red Army marshaled two-thirds of the total manpower massed against Wrangel, that is, around 150,000 front line fighters drawn from five armies: The Sixth Army (59,404 men complete with staff and other services), the Fourth (81,339 men), the 13th (26,356), the First (21,089) and the Second Cavalry (15,257).³ At this point the Red Army had a total of five-and-a-half million men in service, 130,000 of them ex-tsarist officers. On December 5th, it was decided that this sizable force would be cut by two million so as to facilitate a return to normal life, but this was a formality, for as we have seen, this army was all in all without any real appetite for battle and was only a crushing burden upon the population whose task it was to keep it supplied and billeted. It is noteworthy that, of the demobilized Latvians who had served as the regime's all-purpose troops, over half decided to make their way home to bourgeois Latvia in 1921; the rest, probably too compromised to go home, opted to remain in Leninist territory.⁴

The strategy laid down by Frunze vis-a-vis the Makhnovists tended to provide for three concentric lines of encirclement around their chief base — the Gulyai-Polye region — for pushing them towards the shores of the Sea of Azov and for wiping them out there. However, there was many a slip 'twixt cup and lip, and Frunze was forced to draft order after order, in great detail on some points, between December 5 and 15 in order to hone his maneuver further. On December 5, he "ordered a concentric offensive from the northwest, north and east, in order to beat the remnants of the Makhnovist detachments back towards the Sea of Azov and ruthlessly exterminate them"; the insurgents of the Pavlograd and Novomoskovsk

region were forced back towards the Dniepr, there to be exterminated also. On December 11, all Red troops were ordered to "carry out overlapping movements" to forestall any one breakthrough by the Makhnovists and to carry out a sweep of the entire area.⁵ The order of December 6 urged careful sweeps of all occupied settlements, with anybody found in possession of weapons to be shot. On that very day the "liquidation of the Makhnovschina and of banditry in the Ukraine was acknowledged as a government target of the first importance," by the military revolutionary soviet of the soviet republic. All signs of "insubordination, questioning and foot-dragging must be ruthlessly punished."⁶ The terms "ruthless" and "annihilation" endlessly recurred in all Frunze's orders. He himself was under continual pressure from Lenin who, on December 17, issued an unequivocal resolution: "That it be demanded of Comrade Frunze in the name of the central committee that he redouble his efforts to liquidate Makhno," and shortly afterwards: "The commander in chief [S. Kamenev] and Frunze must be nagged and hounded every day into *completing* the annihilation and capture of Antonov and Makhno."⁷ "Nagged" and "hounded" in their turn, the Red Army troops did what they could but without much success — the very opposite, indeed; according to one Red Army officer, M. Rybakov, "Makhno sauntered throughout the region as the fancy took him, picking his targets and suddenly popping up wherever he chose, capturing a regiment or a whole brigade, seizing transports, munitions and artillery pieces then bursting out of the encirclement as he chose." And this, according to Rybakov, thanks to the support of the populace and his intelligence service, composed of the most unlikely looking types: "Vagabonds, Red soldiers looking to rejoin their units, miners allegedly arriving to barter coal against bread, repentant deserters, ex-members of the Communist Party even, victimized women, widows, orphans, etc."⁸ Superbly briefed on the enemy's deployment, Makhno struck where and when he wished. Brova, commanding a detachment of 600 Makhnovists operating around Pavlograd, defeated a brigade of Red hussars at Komar on December 2; on December 3 and again in Komar, Makhno himself, at the head of 4,000 insurgents, crushed a brigade of Red Kirghiz; Rybakov specifies there was:

"...the impression that Makhno was striking everywhere, that he was irresistible, that he was beyond capture and that, with the forces at hand, a struggle against him was not feasible. The rout of the Kirghiz Brigade had so demoralized the combatants as to rob them of their absolute faith in their strength, in their expertise; so great was their fear that they did not dare wander far to carry out reconnaissance, in broad daylight, no more than a kilometer from their base and that in flat country, such was their terror of the Makhnovists' 'saber work.'"

On December 12, Makhno linked up with Vdovichenko's detachment and captured Berdyansk, where 86 Chekists and communists were sabered. On the 14th, he encountered numerous enemy troops at Andreyevka and captured two

whole divisions, i.e., 20,000 men! For their benefit a meeting was laid on, the meaning of the insurgents' struggle was explained to them and any who so wished were invited to join the Makhnovist ranks; the rest were sent packing. These new recruits were not always very dependable; some wasted no time in deserting, scampering away to brief the Red command on the Makhnovist positions. Thanks to such briefings, the insurgents were more readily located and on December 16 a great battle brought the two sides together at Fedorovka. All of the Red divisions converged on Fedorovka amid the greatest confusion with some even firing upon others! The fact is that everybody, Makhnovists included, was wearing the same uniform! One Red regiment was first taken prisoner by the insurgents, then rescued in a counter-attack by their own side. The engagement — which occurred in a temperature of 17 degrees below zero — ended in a stalemate, but, since the insurgents escaped and left behind in enemy hands the black standard bearing their slogan "With the oppressed against the oppressors always!", the Red command counted the outcome as a victory for its side. Frunze sent off a telegram to this effect to Lenin on December 17: the "...contingent of 7,000 Makhnovists which had managed to breach the triple encirclement, clashed with the fourth cordon; following a lengthy engagement, its infantry has been wiped out and only Makhno and 300-to-400 horsemen managed to get away." He reckoned this a fatal blow to the Makhnovschina.⁹ That was not the opinion of Rybakov who gives a detailed account of the battle and estimates Makhnovist losses at only 500 men! Frunze knowingly misrepresented the outcome in order to play down his complete failure and thereby to avoid being unduly "nagged" and "hounded" by his master.



At the start Makhno believed that by defeating a few divisions he might stop the enemy offensive in its tracks; the facts tempered his optimism, and he came to appreciate that he faced a host of Red troops whose aim was to encircle him and overwhelm him with their numbers. He was very quick to react and his strategical genius came to the rescue again; he split his contingent up into several detachments, scattering them throughout the region before setting off himself along with 2,000 partisans, in a northerly direction to begin with. He smashed some more enemy units along the way, derailing a trainload of Chekists and Bolsheviks near Alexandrovsk, before crossing the Dniepr and thrusting deep into the provinces of Kiev and Kherson, with a mob of Red divisions on his heels. Through severe frost and blizzards, the detachment covered 80 kilometers daily, swooping unexpectedly on enemy units, who had no inkling that it was so close. On every side the Makhnovists hit out at the oppression of people, coming to symbolize popular revenge: Chekists, militiamen, punitive detachments, looters on behalf of the State, Bolsheviks ... all were fair game. On December 19, the staff of the Petrograd Kursanty brigade was taken unawares and wiped out. Among the victims of this whirlwind assault, they were startled to find an ex-general of the tsarist army, Martynov, an ex-colonel, Drezhevinsky and a high-ranking officer,

Matveyev of similar background, along with several Bolshevik political commissars.¹⁰ A prominent Bolshevik leader, A. Parkhomenko, close to Budyenny and Voroshilov, perished with his staff on January 3, 1921, when they too were taken by surprise.¹¹ A Red Army commander, Pavel Ashakhmanov, a survivor of the Petrograd Kursanty Brigade, while bemoaning the loss of his comrades could not disguise his admiration for Makhno and his tactics:

"The aphorism to the effect that the art of warfare is not all book-learning and that a well-made head is often to be preferred could not be more apt than when applied to the insurgent army's commander, Nestor Makhno. Of course one cannot believe that he has followed in Napoleon's footsteps who disclosed the secret of his successes by saying: 'What I do is the product only of my talent, but I have always acted in complete accord with the precepts of the great strategists.' All the same, one cannot claim he has followed Suvorov's advice and read Alexander the Great, Hannibal, Julius Caesar or Bonaparte. Here we are indubitably dealing with a well-made head and what is particularly interesting, all his 'sensible' tactical decisions have always conformed to the fundamental laws of tactics. He has quite rightly played upon the psychology of the fighter aiming to strike a lethal disorganization into our Red Army. He has tried to drive a wedge between head and heart by letting it be largely known that he amnestied simple soldiers and ruthlessly gunned down only commanders and commissars. [...] Makhno has captured the charisma of the commander superbly by throwing into the military balance his last reserve: himself. It is he personally who extricates his troops from all perilous situations. [...] Every bush, every mound, every ravine, everything has been weighed up and is a factor in the equation. Intelligence, liaison and protection are organized to perfection. He is not just very familiar with our weaknesses, but even takes the personalities of our commanders into the reckoning. [...] He strikes on the left then veers to the right, attacks Berdyansk then makes for Gulyai-Polye. He stays no longer than a day or night in any one place, lest he be seriously encircled. In the event of not succeeding, he makes off, dispersing. He does not encumber himself with prisoners; at Andreyevka he dumped 1,200 of them in our path. He is equally ready to jettison his baggage which he lays out as bait, when need be, for our cavalry while he himself makes off fast and far.

Makhno the partisan is enterprising and gallant in the extreme. The first time, he let himself be encircled in Berdyansk and thereby forced us to divert our troops southwards. This was a decoy action; we regrouped vigorously but Makhno discovered that we had not diverted our troops sufficiently towards the south and let himself be encircled

once again, in Andreyevka this time. There, once our troops had been well and truly diverted, he assured himself that the road northwards was free and broke out of our circle in a flash, leaving our troops in disarray and thoroughly disappointed. Within days, he was on the far bank of the Dniepr, near Alexandrovsk; within a week, he was operating in Belgorod.”¹²

In this astonishing tribute from vice to virtue, Ashakhmanov forgets only one thing: that Makhno was fighting for social revolution and freedom, whereas Ashakhmanov served only the narrow interests of the Bolshevik party-state and aspired only to a few medals to display on his breast. The difference accounts for a lot.

The Red Army command entrusted the task of giving chase to Makhno to a “flying corps” under the command of Nesterovich, a corps made up of the best units from the five armies which had failed in the celebrated encirclement operation. This flying corps was charged with dogging the insurgents’ footsteps, denying them all respite and facilitating the actions of the two best divisions of Red Cossacks which had been placed under the command of Primakov and Kotovsky. Makhno had to avail of all the talents that Ashakhmanov acknowledged he possessed in order to escape his terrible stalkers. Arshinov who was along on this dangerous trek describes the seriousness of the situation:

“All escape routes were blocked. The area was a veritable graveyard — nothing but rocks and sheer gorges covered by ice. Advancement was possible only with the most painful slowness, while continual fire spewed from machine-guns and artillery on every side. No one could see any way out, any salvation. However, no one wanted to disperse in disgrace. They all determined to die together, side by side.

It was unspeakably painful at this point to look upon the handful of insurgents surrounded by rocks, the vastness of the sky and enemy fire; they were motivated by the stiffest resolve to fight to the last, already convinced that all was lost. Sadness, despair and a peculiar grief gripped the soul. There was the urge to shout out to the whole world that a crime beyond expiation was in the process of commission, that all that was most heroic in the people, the best that it was capable of producing in heroic times was in the process of being done to death and perishing forever.¹³

At this point wounded, Makhno gave proof of his exceptional strength of spirit, and of the unbelievable resourcefulness of his tactical genius and still managed to give the slip to the inevitable annihilation that seemed to await the detachment. He veered as far away as the borders of Galicia before turning back towards Kiev,

crossing the Dniepr again and popped up — as if by a miracle — in the province of Poltava. With the Red Cossacks still in pursuit, he veered even further north and at last succeeded in shaking off his pursuers at Belgorod towards the end of January. It had been a fantastic trek across more than 1,500 kilometers and five provinces, punctuated by daily combat and against the backdrop of a hostile Nature. To be sure, he had lost all of his baggage, his artillery and his machine-guns, not to mention half his detachment, but now he was in a position to seize the initiative himself.

Unable to defeat the insurgents on the field of battle, the Red authorities took it out on the population of their preferred theater; on December 17th, Frunze ordered all settlements to be encircled and repression of all who aroused the slightest suspicion.¹⁴

In reply other Makhnovist detachments which had remained on home ground mounted reprisals against Chekists, administrative agents, militians and the bands of plunderers commissioned to “requisition” all of the peasantry’s foodstuffs. A report from victualler commissar Vladimirov, giving a catastrophic summary of the situation, left Lenin aghast. Working himself up into a frenzy, the great man conveyed his rage to Sklianski, the secretary of the regime’s military soviet:

“6.11.1921.

Comrade Sklianski,

I enclose a further ‘warning.’

Our military commander has failed lamentably by allowing Makhno to escape (despite huge numerical advantage and strict orders to capture him) and now he has failed even more dismally by showing himself incapable of crushing a few handfuls of bandits.

Have drawn up for me a *short* report from the commander-in-chief concerning what is going on (with a brief breakdown of the disposition of the bands and the troops).

What use is being made of our thoroughly dependable cavalry?

- the armored trains? (Are they deployed rationally? Do they not move around *baphazardly* to recover wheat?)
- armored vehicles?
- aircraft?

How are they used, and how many?

Wheat and heating fuel, all are being wasted because of these bands while we have a million men in our army. Make every effort you can to get the commander-in-chief to get a grip on himself.

Lenin”¹⁵

At the 10th Party Congress in March 1921 with the Kronstadt sailors’ uprising at its height, he scathingly rebuked Frunze, reminding him of the necessity that Makhno be liquidated with all possible speed: “It is going to be an extraordinary,

painful war. But we must have an end of Makhno. I wish you success.”¹⁶ During the same congress, in order to cow the internal opposition which banded together under the name of “Workers’ Opposition,” he equated them with the anarcho-syndicalists and Makhnovists. It is true that a year earlier, he had already deployed the same arguments to confound the leader of the so-called “democratic centralist” internal faction (i.e., a faction that supported the party’s actually operating internally in accordance with democratic centralism.)¹⁷

Lenin had good grounds for feeling uneasy, for not only were the Makhnovists stymieing the many Red units pursuing them, but they were also alerting some of their adversaries to the justice of their cause. In his memoirs, Budyenny, the one-time chief sergeant-major of the tsarist army and now commander-in-chief of the First Army of Red Cavalry whose task it was throughout this period to combat Makhno, relates that following the crushing of one of his army brigades, he had to have the brigade commander, political commissar and two regimental commanders shot in order to stiffen these units’ will to win. Budyenny adds that, to the great disquiet of both himself and Voroshilov who shared command, they had had to face the fact that: “none of the commanders had any inclination to complete the task of wiping out Makhno, regardless of cost and with all possible speed.”¹⁸

Lots of Red soldiers surrendered, in the knowledge that they had nothing to fear, as the insurgents executed only officers and political commissars; some Red soldiers joined the Makhnovists, while others were released and for the most part recaptured by special commissions from the Red Army which escorted them back to their units of origin. Such generosity backfired on the insurgents, for their ex-captives rejoined the fighting and even supplied intelligence about the Makhnovists’ strength and positions. The most spectacular defection was that of the commander of the First Brigade of the Fourth Red Army Cavalry Division, one G.S. Maslakov who, to the absolute consternation of his superiors, defected to Brova’s Makhnovist detachment near Pavlograd on February 9, 1921, along with his whole brigade. Many other Red soldiers deserted and joined, throughout the country, the string of partisan bands fighting against the regime, on behalf of restoration of power to the people, in the format unanimously described as free soviets.

Indeed, after the defeat of the Whites, the populace had awakened to the emptiness of the Bolsheviks’ promises; so it aimed to assert its rights vis-à-vis the party-state which had snatched away the gains of the 1917 revolution. Hundreds of thousands of partisans rose in revolt and turned against the regime’s representatives. Soviet historians have dubbed this period the “mini-civil war,” every whit as murderous as the one against the Whites, for it cost the Red Army, according to official figures, 170,000 dead in 1921 and 21,000 in the following year.

The whole country was ablaze, in Byelorussia, in Russia itself, especially around Tambov where the Social Revolutionary Antonov marshaled a mighty well-organized army of 50,000 at the start of 1921; in Siberia, 60,000 partisans

had revolted in one district alone ²⁰; in Karelia; in Central Asia, in the Caucasus and in Kronstadt, the steadfast citadel of revolution which called Lenin and his confederates to account. It was the biggest scare of the time for the Bolshevik leaders who expected to have their throats cut by rampaging “muzhiks.” They wasted no time in climbing down, lifting the road-blocks and other obstacles to direct barter between town and countryside, restoring private ownership and replacing their “requisitioning/looting” with a levy in kind; in short, they made full speed astern, temporarily shelving their ideological weaponry. The essential thing, as far as they were concerned, was to cling to power and protect their position of dominance and then bide their time. This was quickly followed up by the conclusion of trade agreements (the conditions did not matter) with Britain, Germany and any other country willing to enter into them. Through the good offices of “humanitarian” organizations set up by sympathetic bourgeois, application was made to the United States for charity; other cereal-growing nations too were called upon to rescue millions of peasants from famine (wheat thus collected was of course distributed under the strictest supervision of the State machine). In parallel with this, the fight against the insurgents was stepped up; the Red Army took a back seat to special units and Chekists; they resorted to police provocations. Chekists infiltrated the insurgent groups, the better to expose and crack down on them. This strategy of the “carrot and stick” — with which all authoritarian regimes have been conversant — would nonetheless rescue the authorities and, after several years of intense fighting, contributed to the undoing of most of the insurgents.

In the Ukraine, a region prized on account of its natural resources, there were (again according to official sources) some 45,000–50,000 in revolt against Moscow by the end of 1920. In the months that followed, a secret report from the staff heading the anti-insurgent campaign listed 30 partisan detachments numbering 27,500 infantry and cavalry and with access to machine-guns and artillery pieces. The most significant of these was Makhno’s; he was credited with 2,000 infantry and 600 horsemen, 80 machine-guns, 10 cannon and two armored cars with the telling names of “Death to the communist commissars!” and “Batko Makhno.” For large scale operations the Makhnovists could field 12,000 men, 2,500 of those cavalry. ²¹

Frunze confirmed this estimate by reckoning that he faced 15,000 Makhnovists in December 1920, 5,000 to 6,000 by January and a central core group of 2,500 infantry and cavalry, with 80-to-100 machine-guns and several cannons by March–April 1921. ²²

Adapting to the new mode of struggle, the insurgents overhauled their structures and activities. This was the first partisan war of this century and quite novel compared with all the previous forms of guerrilla warfare and fighting of that sort. For one thing, speed of movement was the priority; a speed of 80-to-100 kilometers daily at times; to this end, outriders rode ahead of detachments to pre-arranged staging posts, to arrange fresh mounts and fresh food with sympathetic local peas-

ants and regularly they plotted the deployment of enemy forces. Secondly, given the huge numbers and concentrations of enemy forces, priority was given to small detachments of several hundreds of partisans operating in different sectors and coming together only for important operations. Certain units were permanently assigned to areas suited to rest and recuperation, and these represented bases offering fresh supplies and manpower. At the head of isolated detachments were tried and tested Makhnovist commanders like Kurilenko, Kozhin, Savonov, Brova, Ivanyuk, Shchuss, Vdovichenko, Zabudko, Parkhomenko and Khristovoy as well as new commanders firmly ensconced in their theaters of operations. Around him, Makhno kept Petrenko, Belash, Taranovsky, Zinkovsky and certain newer partisans, in order to train them in this curious strategy before they set off to implement it elsewhere once they had digested it properly. The above-mentioned secret Red Army report notes, for instance, that the chief of staff of Makhno's main detachment was one Vassiliev, the head of intelligence service was Sidorov-Pavlovich, while command of the different units was vested in three ex-sailors, Kizhko, Liachenko and Gura, and the cavalry commander was former sergeant-major Dolzhenko, almost all of them newcomers to the movement. Furthermore, nearly all Makhnovists dressed in Red Army uniform, which only added to the confusion of their opponents.

Their tactics also were very modern: all nerve points — communication lines, telegraph lines, guard and surveillance posts, sundry depots, etc. — were methodically destroyed. All agents of the authorities, whether Chekists, mobile requisition teams and administrative agents, were systematically subjected to a revolutionary hounding. And propaganda was not neglected either; the movement's *Draft Theoretical Declaration* and the *Statutes of the Free Soviets* were circulated in thousands upon thousands of copies.

The Red Army's high command had a hard time stomaching its defeats. Budyenny wrote that he and the other heads of the anti-Makhno drive "were ashamed to look at one another," and that he "was loath to go to the telephone when Frunze called. It looked like we were about to ensnare Makhno at least, but instead of news of victory, disagreeable news was received."²³ Frunze and his chief strategists and lieutenants — Kork, Eideman, Voroshilov and Budyenny — pored over the reasons for their failures and made significant amendments to their strategy of straightforward encirclement. They analyzed the battle sites and the insurgents' subsequent movements, trying to anticipate and deploy strong units along the supposed itinerary and commissioned their best troops to take on Makhno there. Every modern technology was pressed into service: armored cars, aircraft, armored trains, and mobile artillery.



In March 1921, during the Kronstadt sailors' revolt, Makhno dispatched Brova and Maslakov at the head of a special corps, to spread the fire of insurrection into the Don and the Kuban; Parkhomenko set off with another detachment for the Voronezh region in Russia; a third group of 1,000 insurgents under

Ivanyuk, made for Kharkov. Makhno himself criss-crossed the right bank of the Dniepr. Having been wounded in the foot, he moved around by tatchanka, but remounted his horse as soon as circumstances required it and was unfailingly and permanently to be found at the head of the detachment, personally directing all maneuvers. He returned to the left bank of the Dniepr and fell into an ambush in the vicinity of Melitopol. He gave one body of enemy troops the slip and kept up the pressure on the rest for 48 hours solid, made a forced march of 60 kilometers and overwhelmed another Red Army unit near the shores of the Sea of Azov. Then he split his men, dispatching Kurilenko to give a fillip to the insurgent movement in Berdyansk and Mariupol district, charging him especially to track down and punish a Chekist unit which had earned itself a sinister reputation by shooting the wife and suckling child of one insurgent.²⁴ He himself continued to criss-cross the region along with Petrenko at the head of a contingent of 1,500 horsemen and two infantry regiments, routing several enemy units including an entire kursanty regiment, and seizing munitions, weapons, artillery and horses. Two days after that, he had to tackle fresh Red troops in sizable numbers; he charged them at the head of his partisans but in a counter-attack that was "intrepid to the point of madness," he was gravely wounded in the belly. Having passed out, he was evacuated by tatchanka, regained consciousness, split his unit up into 100 or 200-man groups, sending these out in every direction and was left behind with just his celebrated black sotnia for company.

He wanted to withdraw to some quiet spot to tend to his injury but had to engage one after another, with just his tiny unit, the Ninth Red Cavalry Division and other fresh cavalry troops. A savage "saber engagement" ensued. Yet again the end seemed nigh; the insurgents were on the verge of being overwhelmed by numbers but a final square of expert machine-gunners sacrificed themselves, allowing Makhno to break out of the tightening noose. Before their engagement, their commander, Misha, a native of the Berdyansk region had announced to Makhno: "Batko, you are necessary to the cause of our peasant organization. That cause we cherish. We are all going to die shortly, but our death will spare you, as well as all who believe and protect you. Do not forget to pass that on to our parents,"²⁵ then hugged him and set off to sell his life dearly against the enemy. Makhno was later to recall these heroic comrades, with some emotion, thanks to whom he was able to carry on with his fight.

On March 6, 1921, the Fifth Pan-Ukrainian Congress of Soviets, organized by the Bolsheviks, ordained a drive against "banditry," which is to say against all their political enemies, as a "State task of primary importance. At the same time it declared an amnesty for all "bandits" willing to repent, an amnesty valid up until April 15th and then extended shortly afterwards by one month. According to the authorities, 10,000 insurgents availed of the chance to give themselves up, and these included certain leading Makhnovists: Staff members Zverev and Poleno, Vladimir Sharovsky (who had been in charge of the movement's artillery from the outset),

Makhno's personal runner and the man in charge of the organization's rearguard, Vdovichenko.²⁶ This seems unlikely and is probably a product of misinformation for the last named individual, for instance, had — according to Makhno — been seriously wounded and sent for treatment to Novospassovka. Taken prisoner, he was subjected to heavy pressure by the Chekists to get him to sign a declaration in favor of the regime.²⁷ In the end — one could not swear by any of this — it is very possible that a number of captured insurgents had, under threat of immediate execution, gone over to the regime. The Cheka then attempted to press some of these to dismantle the Makhnovists from within, but, as one soviet historian stipulates, they are alleged to have been shunned or executed by their former comrades-in-arms. This defeatist propaganda went hand-in-hand with a savage crackdown on wounded insurgents and their close relatives; once discovered, death was inevitable for them.

Even so, the regime strove to improve its brand image in the eyes of the populace; wide-ranging propaganda argued that the new reforms and the levy in kind would do away with the bones of contention existing hitherto; the peasants were no longer so brazenly plundered, and henceforth they were to be duly compensated or paid on the nail for requisitioned foodstuffs and horses. The authorities were keen to give the impression that they had mended their ways, were not about to repeat past mistakes and that a return to civilian life would settle all of the problems which had been pending, provided of course that all “bandits” and “wreckers” were eliminated.

In spite of all these blandishments, the insurgents pressed on with their war of partisans through April and into early May. By a quirk of fate, Budyenny and Makhno found themselves face-to-face. Cavalry had been evaluated as of little effect against the Makhnovists and had been switched to the Crimea to put down the insurgency whipped up by Brova and Maslakov. Discovering that Makhno was nearby, Budyenny decided to attempt to pull off a glorious coup: he rode ahead of his troops with a detachment of armored cars and horsemen who were supposed to be novices who would be “blooded” on this occasion. In his memoirs, Budyenny explains that he found himself cut off from his armored cars and, having to face superior forces, was obliged to make good his escape across country by car. He allegedly glimpsed Makhno and his staff watching the engagement from atop a knoll.²⁸ Makhno's version of events is noticeably different: Budyenny showed himself to be a comic opera Cossack and had fled without a thought for anyone but himself. “In a trice, Budyenny — who had been galloping proudly at the head of his troops — turned tail and fled like a craven coward, abandoning his men to their fate.”²⁹ It seems that the latter were not such greenhorns nor as cowardly as their leader, for they offered ferocious resistance to the Makhnovists, such as they had rarely encountered from any Red cavalry unit before; even so, defeated they were, and this had a catastrophic impact upon the rest of the First Red Cavalry which fell apart, experiencing many desertions in the wake of its commander's shameful conduct and was in the end disbanded. This version of events seems a

lot more likely than Budyenny's, for it would be odd for the commander of the Red Cavalry, a Cossack to boot, to have departed by car and to have been able to escape his pursuers across country in this manner! Also his lack of courage was well known to other Red Army chiefs and to Stalin himself who, for that very reason, spared his life during his notorious purges.

At the end of May, Makhno made up his mind to strike a major blow by attempting to take Kharkov, the political capital of the Bolshevik Ukraine. He mustered several detachments and reconstituted an insurgent army of several thousand partisans, 2,000 of those cavalry. Panicking, the Bolshevik leaders erected a veritable human wall of Red troops around Kharkov, backed up by tanks, machine-gun vehicles and substantial artillery. The insurgents were frustrated in their intentions and were forced to revert to several detachments. During one month of incessant skirmishing, they lost 1,500 of their people, suffering their heaviest defeat at the end of June in the province of Poltava. Enemy losses were even more severe, but on their side the manpower reserve was larger than on the insurgent side where new recruits could not always make up either in quantity or, above all, in quality for the loss of battle-hardened partisans. Frunze himself, who had arrived to oversee operations, was taken by surprise by a band of insurgents on June 26; his escort perished while he was wounded and he survived only due to the quality of his mount. His superiors seized upon this as a chance to remove him temporarily from operations, replacing him with Aksentievsky, a tsarist ex-officer. The commander in charge of operations on the ground, Eideman, a great expert in "minor warfare," went through a hard time. One of his adjutants was later on to write that he hovered by the telephone, very nervously awaiting the latest news of operations and, having been himself given a severe dressing-down by his superiors, he "...dealt harshly with his own subordinates and his staff, occasionally cursing them. The directives emanating from Kharkov did not consider his feelings and were increasingly laconic and imperative."³⁰

Another brilliant Red Army chief, Blucher, was called in; he arrived to conduct an on-the-ground inquiry to discover the real reason holding up the "definitive liquidation" of Makhno. One Nikita Khrushchev — who was to make a sinister name for himself in the Ukraine in 1936–37, earning himself the nickname of the "hangman of the Ukraine" — won his spurs at this time fighting against Makhno and other insurgents: "I played my part in the bloody battle joined against the bands of Makhno, Grigoriev and Antonov."³¹ Was he perhaps among the Red troops that Aksentievsky ordered on July 10th to wipe out the "bands" of Ivanyuk, Semerki and Luchenko — which furnished recruits for Makhno's main detachment — within the space of two weeks?³²

The fact is that the regime's whole supply policy was stymied by all these military activities and that, as soon as they learned of the approach of Makhnovist detachments, agents of the authorities scampered off as fast as they were able. The "little war" was at its height although the Reds tended to gain a certain advantage

by defeating Antonov at Tambov as well as other insurgents in Karelia and Siberia. In mid-July, an official report still spoke of 18 bands of insurgents in the Donetz basin region alone, numbering 1,042 with 19 machine-guns.³³ Faced with the Makhnovist detachments, which were also still active, Red commanders decided that Makhno's core group had to be wiped out regardless of the cost; they fielded a special motorized detachment under the command of Guermanovich, with eight armored machine-gun carriers, two fortified transport lorries and two liaison motorcycles at its disposal. Having traced Makhno and 200 insurgents to near Gulyai-Polye, the motorized detachment dismounted from its train at Tsarekonstantinovka on July 12th and set off in pursuit. One of their armored cars fell into a trap laid by the Makhnovists, and its crew was captured. Makhno himself boarded it and used it until it ran out of fuel, whereupon it was burned and its crew of Chekists executed. The motorized detachment's other units managed to locate Makhno and chased him for five days, covering an amazing 520 kilometers in that short space of time! Short of ammunition yet again and with no weapons to avail them against the enemy armor, the insurgents sustained considerable losses and only with great difficulty did they manage to shake off the murderous machines.³⁴

Towards the end of July, Makhno again managed to slip out of reach of the enemy's clutches to the great despair of Red Army chiefs who saw their careers increasingly compromised and certainly feared lest their failure might result in their being lined up before a firing squad. Eideman telegraphed the Kharkov military command on July 22 to insist upon the execution of Kozhine and a certain Marussia who were reserves for Makhno's core group.³⁵ The following day, Frunze outbid him by demanding once and for all the "definitive liquidation" of the Makhnovschina.³⁶

Makhno was grieved to lose one by one his close confederates from the early days: Marchenko (who died at the beginning of 1921), Kurilenko, Shchuss, Kozhin and Zabudko during the summer of 1921. He himself was in a bad way, suffering from his many wounds and was no longer able effectively to direct operations. Even so, he pulled off two more tremendous raids into central Russia, striking out for Veronezh and the Don and then decided in consultation with all the other detachments scattered throughout the country to go abroad to have his wound tended. In his absence and up until his return, Viktor Belash was to assume command of the main core group. On August 13, he left the Don along with his wife Galina Kuzmenko and about 100 cavalry, the most loyal of loyalists, survivors of the famed black Sotnia, bound for Poland. On August 16, they crossed the Dniepr with the Reds in pursuit; on that day alone, Makhno was wounded six times, albeit only slightly. On the right bank of the Dniepr, they encountered several Makhnovist detachments who wished him well in his recovery and that he might return to "rescue" them. On August 19, they unexpectedly ran into a brigade from the Seventh Red Cavalry Division; with another cavalry regiment giving chase, they had no option but to swoop on the enemy encampment, smashing

600 enemy horsemen and carrying off 25 tatchankis with machine-guns mounted. "Recovering from their panic and realizing that they were dealing only with a handful of partisans, the entire Red cavalry galloped off in pursuit,"³⁷ reinforced by an armored machine-gun carrier and a rapid-firing cannon. The insurgents still defeated the 32nd Red Regiment; losing 17 men and covering 120 kilometers, the group escaped from their pursuers. On August 22, Makhno sustained his eleventh serious wound; a bullet penetrated the nape of his neck, exiting through his right cheek. On August 26, a final encounter pitted them against the Red Cavalry; in the course of this engagement, his last remaining confederates from the old days — Ivanyuk, Petrenko and Taranovskys — perished.

A scout bearing a list of intended stopovers along the way to the Polish border was captured by some Red units which consequently assumed positions along the border. Whereupon the Makhnovists switched their itinerary and headed for the Romanian frontier, bordered by the Dniestr, the Ukraine's second great waterway separating the Bolshevik Ukraine in those days from monarchist, bourgeois Romania which was hostile to Moscow and close to the Western powers. Lots of Ukrainian insurgents tried and sometimes managed to cross the river to emerge beyond reach of the Leninist authorities. The undertaking was extremely dangerous, for the whole frontier zone was closely watched by many border posts and was also continually crisscrossed by patrols. So to escape from the Bolsheviks' proletarian "paradise" was virtually impossible! Yet again Makhno devised a bold stratagem; dressed in Red Army uniforms, the insurgents galloped up to one border post. Lev Zinkovsky rudely berated the guards, wanting to know why on earth they had summoned a cavalry unit; before the guards could answer, they had been surrounded and disarmed by Makhnovists. Keen to avoid their doom or perhaps sympathetic, the guards demonstrated extreme goodwill by pointing out the best place nearby to ford the Dniestr. The insurgents acted on this advice under heavy fire from other border guards who — either because they were especially bad shots or because they had no stomach for what was required of them — missed their targets completely. On the other side of the river, the Makhnovists were intercepted by Romanian border guards, relieved of their weapons and escorted to an internment camp on August 28.³⁸

During this last fabulous foray, the little band of the bravest of the brave had covered over 1,000 kilometers in the space of three weeks, cutting a path for themselves amid daily fighting, through an unbroken curtain of enemy troops who had been alerted to their coming at that!

Although Makhno's departure did not diminish the activity of the movement's various detachments, his absence did make itself felt at the level of strategy. Belash, though he had learned from the school of hard knocks along with Nestor and himself a gifted organizer, did not have his colleague's genius for partisan warfare and was unable to avoid his detachment's being taken unawares at Znamenka one day in the autumn of 1921 by sizable enemy forces and almost entirely wiped out. The

ones who got away also tried to slip across the border, and a few hundred of them were to appear later in Romania or Poland. Some emigrated even further afield, to Germany, France, Canada and elsewhere. The wounded Belash was captured and hauled off to the Kharkov Cheka where he was to write his memoirs of his command before being tried and shot in 1923 along with some other Makhnovists — which just goes to show that the movement was still extant.

Lebeds, who had been officially commissioned at the end of 1921 to write an initial study of the Makhnovschina, notes that 30 commanders and 2,443 Makhnovist insurgents were to surrender during the autumn of 1921. Some of them allegedly even asked that their services against the Whites be acknowledged, Lebeds adds — half in amusement, half in indignation.³⁹ We may query the veracity of these figures, for a more recent official source records the elimination of a Makhnovist band in the region of Poltava in 1922 and the dismantling of a clandestine Makhnovist organization in 1923,⁴⁰ as well as the existence of 18 Ukrainian insurgent bands in 1924, only three of which were of Petliurist sympathies. Thus it is possible that Makhnovist bands may have survived as late as 1924 and beyond, for during the Second World War, some Ukrainian partisan groups were to hoist the black flag again and fight against Nazi and Stalinist alike. Perhaps one day when the regime's archives are more readily accessible, we may learn more.

Eideman, Makhno's chief adversary during 1921, was to concede that the movement had not been beaten militarily but politically:

“It was not our military successes against anti-soviet movements but rather the strengthening of the union between the proletariat and the underlying mass of the peasantry that ensured that Makhno, Antonov, the Siberian insurgents and the Kronstadt uprising failed to live up to the hopes of the class enemies of the Soviet State.”⁴¹

Notes to Chapter 25: The Last Year of Fighting and the Death Throes of Libertarian Revolution in the Ukraine

1. The future Soviet Marshal; see his account of the battle in *Krasniy Arkhiv*, Moscow, 1940, No. 104, pp. 101–102.
2. Arshinov, op. cit. p. 189.
3. *The Command Directives from the Red Army Fronts* op. cit. p. 222.
4. *History of the Latvian Infantry*.
5. Frunze, op. cit. pp. 431–438.
6. Ibid, p. 434.
7. Lenin, op. cit. Tome XLV, p. 37.
8. M. Rybakov, “Makhno's 1920 operations,” in *Krasniya Armiya*, 1922, No. 12, pp. 11–27 (quotation from p. 12).
9. *M. V. Frunze on the Civil War Fronts*, Moscow 1941, p. 466.

10. *Voyennoye znaniye*, 1921, No. 20, p. 31.
11. He was buried in Lugansk, his biographer tells us, in the square of the revolution; on his statue(!) the following inscription has been engraved: "Here lie the ashes of Parkhomenko, a Bolshevik who died a hero's death in the fight against the Makhnovist bands," G.L.A. Tokolnikov, *Parkhomenko*, Moscow 1961. (Not to be confused with the Makhnovist detachment commander of the same name.)
12. *Voyennoye znaniye*, No. 18, October 1921, pp. 43–44.
13. Arshinov, op. cit. p. 192.
14. Frunze, op. cit. p. 442.
15. Lenin, op. cit. Tome XXXV, p. 488.
16. Quoted in *Soldiers of the Revolution*, Kishinev, 1977, p. 51.
17. Lenin, op. cit. Tome XXXII, p. 216 and XXX, p. 477.
18. Budyenny, *The Road Traveled* (in Russian), Moscow, 1973, Tome III, pp. 196 and 201.
19. I. Ya. Trifonov, *Classes and Class Struggle in the USSR at the Beginning of the NEP (1921–1923)*, Leningrad, 1964, pp. 4–5.
20. Idem.
21. *Revoliutsionaya Rossiya* (Revolutionary Russia), the Social Revolutionary organ appearing in Prague, 1921, No. 11, pp. 22–25.
22. Frunze, *His Life and His Activity* (in Russian) Moscow, 1962, p. 232 et seq.
23. Budyenny, op. cit. p. 195.
24. Makhno, *The Makhnovschina and its Erstwhile Allies: The Bolsheviks*, op. cit. pp. 37–39, and his account of the operations of this period, published in Arshinov, op. cit. p. 193–200.
25. Arshinov, op. cit. p. 197.
26. Trifonov, op. cit. p. 156.
27. Arshinov, op. cit. p. 195.
28. Budyenny, op. cit. pp. 216–217.
29. Arshinov, op. cit. p. 197.
30. Varetsky, "Marshal Blucher," in *Novy Zhurnal*, New York, 1951, XXVII, pp. 260–265.
31. Khrushchev, *Souvenirs*, Paris, 1971, p. 270.
32. Trifonov, op. cit. p. 281.
33. Idem.
34. E. Esbakh, "The last days of the Makhnovschina in the Ukraine," in *Voyna i revoliutsiya*, Moscow, 1926, No. 12, pp. 40–50.
35. Trifonov, op. cit. pp. 281–282.
36. Idem.
37. Esbakh, op. cit. pp. 47–48. Esbakh had himself been directly involved in this pursuit; thus his account of events, though hardly brilliant of itself, is to be welcomed for its objectivity! In any event, it corroborates Makhno's account as given in Arshinov, op. cit. p. 200.

38. This latter episode is related by Alexei Nikolaev (*First Among Equals*, op. cit.) who must have had it direct from the lips of Makhno's wife or some Makhnovist émigrés.
39. Lebeds, op. cit. p. 41.
40. O.O. Kutcher, *The Crushing of the Internal Counter-Revolution in the Ukraine* (in Ukrainian) Kharkov, 1971, pp. 154–161.
41. R. Eideman, "The Fifth Anniversary of a Lesson," in *Voyna i revoliutsiya*, Moscow, 1926, No. 12, p. 33.

26. The Road of Exile: Bucharest, Warsaw, Danzig, Berlin

Although formal diplomatic relations between them did not exist, Moscow contacted the Romanian Foreign Affairs ministry by radio. On September 17, Chicerin, the one-time tsarist now Bolshevik and People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs in Soviet Russia, and Rakovsky, the chairman of the Ukrainian council of people's commissars, sent a joint communiqué to the Romanian premier, General Averesco, to sue for Makhno's return:

"On August 28 the famous bandit Makhno crossed the Bessarabian border near Monastyrievka along with his band of supporters, seeking refuge on territory which is de facto under the authority of Romania. This bandit, leader of bands of brigands, has committed numerous crimes on the territory of Russia and the Ukraine, burning and looting villages, butchering the peaceable population and extorting its property from it through torture. This is why the Russian and Ukrainian governments hereby make a formal request of the Romanian government that it hand over the leader of the brigand gangs mentioned above, along with his accomplices, as common criminals.

The People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs of the RSFSR."¹

The Leninists had no hesitation in making such diplomatic overtures to the bourgeois authorities of the kingdom of Romania; though held up to public obloquy, these same authorities now proved very useful for the stifling of the fear which the Leninists felt of Makhno. He had to be annihilated and any means would suffice. Of course Makhno could only be referred to as a common criminal, for — had he been acknowledged as a political opponent — any application for his extradition would have been doomed to failure. Let us stress that until quite recently most of the Bolsheviks themselves had been émigrés subject to extradition proceedings; now they were in power and the methods that they had deemed worthy of condemnation were thoroughly respectable. However, their first overture met with rejection on the part of Averesco whose response was passed on to them on September 27, 1921.

"I did indeed receive your radio communication of the 17th inst., and I cannot agree either with its form or with its content. If criminals really have sought refuge on the territory of the kingdom of Romania, your judicial authorities can apply for the return of these individuals and although no convention on this subject exists between our countries, the Romanian government might yet, on a basis of reciprocity, accede to such an application. But to that end one would have to act in accordance with the norms of international law, i.e., an arrest warrant would have to be forwarded, emanating from the competent judicial institution and detailing those articles of the penal code applicable to the offenders. Furthermore, the precise particulars of these offenders would have to be given. Given that the death penalty does not exist in Romania, you would, in addition, have to offer a formal assurance that the death penalty would not be applied against extradited individuals. Once those conditions have been met, the Romanian government will look into the case of the bandit Makhno and his accomplices and will determine whether there are grounds for acceding to the request for their extradition." 2

This bourgeois general was not only pointing out that the extradition request had not been very specific, but also reminding the applicants of the conventions of international law and stressing the absence of capital punishment in his own country. In short, he gave them a lesson in good manners. Chicherin, put firmly in his place, made a further overture on October 22:

"The reply given on September 27 by the head of your government, General Averesco, to our request that the bandit Makhno and the accomplices who accompanied him be surrendered to us, is rather a statement of juridical principles than a communications of a practical nature and offers us no clarification of the real status of this affair. That statement contains no confirmation, even, of Makhno's presence in Romania. As soon as the requisite materials have been collated and the legal forms required by you have been completed, the results will be communicated to you.

However, the Russian and Ukrainian governments consider that formal procedures are only of secondary importance and that these pale into absolute insignificance before the fact that a gang of criminals that has long terrorized the peaceable population of the Ukraine has found a refuge under the wing of the Romanian government. The legal pedantry displayed in this case by the Romanian government has not always been a feature of its conduct, even when more important matters concerning, say, treaty observance, have been at issue." 3

The Romanians were intrigued by this unaccustomed obstinacy. Their Foreign Affairs minister, Take-Ionesco, made a soothing reply in view of what was at stake — the disputed treaty awarding Bessarabia to Romania — by quite simply asking for particulars about Makhno, for he genuinely did not know if this individual was indeed “among those interned by the Romanian authorities,” and he announced that inquiries had been set in motion to trace him. In spite of everything and without setting his face against the possibility of extradition, he hoped that it might proceed according to the legalities.⁴ Sniffing a concession, Chicherin seized the chance to try to force a decision by somehow making the surrender of Makhno a condition of normalization between the two countries:

“[...] We await your confirmation of Makhno’s arrival in Romania in order to be able to undertake further steps of a juridical nature regarding this matter. Through the good offices of their representatives in Warsaw, the Russian and Ukrainian governments stand ready to furnish the Romanian government with documentary and photographic evidence. [...] It was only legalistic nit-picking by the Romanian government in the matter of the bandit Makhno which we have raised, that obliged us to embark upon an evaluation of Romania’s general approach to its international commitments and to point out, among others, Romania’s breach of the treaty of March 9, 1918, under which the Romanian government was required to evacuate Bessarabia within two months.

The Russian and Ukrainian governments will thus consider that the attitude assumed by the Romanian government vis-à-vis this matter will be key to relations between Russia and the Ukraine on the one hand and Romania on the other. In your reply of October 29, we do not see adequate grounds for changing our viewpoint, as set out in our earlier communications, and we are still of the same opinion: that the attitude you have adopted with regard to Makhno is distinguished by such partiality as to make it impossible to discern if your relations with Russia and the Ukraine were in reality such as you describe them.”⁵

The extreme importance with which Makhno was invested by Moscow, which went so far as to make his extradition contingent upon implicit acceptance of a controversial treaty, placed the Romanians in a dilemma. They had to devise some honorable solution, in terms of their interests — recognition of the disputed treaty — and also of the conventions of international law to which they had just alluded; ⁶ and that without loss of face. So they took advice (with regard to this famous Makhno) from the Ukrainian nationalists (Petliurists). As early as September 2nd, the nationalists had been contacted by the anarchist from the Ukraine who asked them to place his detachment under their protection and to make it possible for him to speak with Petliura’s authorized agents in Bucharest so as to examine the possibility of some concerted action aimed at delivering the Ukraine

from its enemies. Makhno, his wife and two confederates had been invited to travel up to the Romanian capital for treatment and for talks with Petliurist diplomatic representatives.

The Petliurist negotiator kept notes of these conversations. These notes record that Makhno stated that it had been his intention to enter Poland, there to seek out Petliura's main headquarters, but before he could reach the frontier, one of the outriders from his detachment had fallen into enemy hands along with the addresses of the stopovers necessary before crossing the frontier; and so he had decided to veer in the direction of Romania instead. The Petliurist agent noted that Makhno and his companions were "very circumspect, do not speak openly of their strength, plans and intentions, nor above all of the reasons which forced them to leave the Ukraine."⁷ He nonetheless managed to get them to tell why they sought an alliance with Petliura: They declared that they had made for the territory of the Don Cossacks and then for central Russia — Voronezh, Tambov and Kursk — in order to assess for themselves the strength of the anti-Bolshevik insurgent movements operating there and had evaluated their limitations and relative powerlessness against the many and mighty special units of the Red Army. From which they had allegedly deduced that it was only in the Ukraine that the insurgent movement stood definite chances of expansion and of throwing out the Muscovite invaders — and so they had come to the conclusion that joint action with the Petliurists was called for.

In fact, Makhno and his companions were laying a false trail; they had never collaborated with the Petliurists and were well aware that a huge gulf divided them. However, their position could not have been more delicate; they realized that of the Romanians they could expect nothing, that they were at the mercy of an extradition order and that their only hope lay in some agreement with Petliura, even if only a circumstantial and temporary one. Only at that price could they avoid being handed over to Moscow; so they accepted they would have to recognize the authority of the Ukrainian nationalist government-in-exile although hitherto, as they told their interlocutor, they had reckoned social slogans a better device for the fight against the Bolsheviks. They went on to say that they reckoned the Ukrainian nationalist government which enjoyed the support of Poland and Romania and could call upon a well-equipped army could act effectively against the Red Army by opening up an external front while they could carry on with their partisan warfare in the interior. In this case, they seemed convinced of the prospects of their insurgent movement which accurately reflected the aspirations of the Ukraine's population.

But their Petliurist interlocutor was not completely taken in by their sudden conversion; in his report he pointed out the necessity of his government's "completely liquidating this movement and its organization before absorbing it into the Ukrainian nationalist movement."⁸



For neither side was the outcome of these talks very conclusive. Meanwhile, Chicherin's assistant, Karakhan, traveled specially to Warsaw to meet with Romania's diplomatic representative there and to press the demand that Makhno be extradited. But the Romanians by now knew what was what in this use of the label "bandit" to designate a political opponent. Moreover, they did not want to alienate the Ukrainian peasantry by handing Makhno over, for they knew that a future armed conflict with the Bolsheviks could not be ruled out and — should that come about — their attitude towards Makhno, if they failed to extradite him, might work in their favor.

In view of the deadlocked situation, Makhno and some of his companions decided to carry on regardless; they escaped from their internment camp and tried to cross the Polish border. They were picked up by Polish border guards who turned them back into Romania, whereupon the Romanian border guards sent them back to Poland. This game dragged on all night until they were at last accepted into Poland and shipped on April 12, 1922 to an internment camp.

The moment he arrived in Poland, Makhno besieged all of the country's official agencies — the Foreign Affairs ministry, the Polish Socialist Party, Pilsudski himself, and others — for permission to move on to Czechoslovakia or Germany. In all he wrote off a dozen letters to this effect without result. On June 30, 1922, a soviet repatriation commission visited the Scholkovo camp where he was an internee and four Makhnovists, desperate or bewildered by their predicament, asked Makhno to intercede with the Poles and Soviets on their behalf in order to have them returned to the Ukraine. The camp commander turned down this request and thereafter had Makhno and his companions closely guarded. On July 18, Galina Kuzmenko, Makhno's wife, traveled to Warsaw herself to make overtures to the ministries concerned. She was cold-shouldered; a high-ranking official at the Home Affairs ministry, one Zhelikovsky, abruptly snapped: "Wait until your case comes up, then we shall see what to do with you. We cannot let you go unpunished, for Polish citizens have suffered from your handiwork in Russia[!]"⁸ For his part Pilsudski replied on August 17 that he had "passed your request to the Interior Ministry." None of these moves came to anything, for the Polish secret police — the *Défensive* — had plans of its own for Makhno. First it assigned him to a Major Szarbson to be persuaded to stay in Poland, and then it was on to Lieutenant Blonski who said to him: "Why leave Poland? The Czechs are cowards, and they will hand you over to Moscow! As for Germany, the Bolsheviks are quite at home there! Stay with us; just adopt Petliura's platform, and all will be well for you!"¹⁰ The Poles wished to make use of him in conducting destabilizing exercises in the Ukraine, but Makhno bluntly refused all these blandishments.



Not that Moscow had remained idle; having learned that Makhno was an internee, it again approached the Poles with an extradition request, and then, seeing how slim the chances of its success were, targeted the Ukrainian libertarian for a

provocation. It commissioned one of its agents, Ya. Krasnovolsky, who had been keeping tabs on the Makhnovists since Romania, to suggest to Makhno that he lead an insurgent movement in eastern Galicia, a region populated by Ukrainians but arbitrarily awarded to Poland under the Treaty of Riga. Makhno responded that he "could not enter into any serious talks with the Bolsheviks until such time as all anarchists and Makhnovists imprisoned in Russia had been freed."¹¹ Not that Makhno's answer unduly surprised the Bolsheviks; their object was merely to compromise him in Polish eyes so that the latter would expel him to Russia. There they themselves would see that he got a hospitable welcome in the Cheka's dungeons. They arranged for their agent to fake an escape attempt on the night August 2–3, 1922 and for him to be caught in possession of documents which, he would "spontaneously" confess, had been addressed by Makhno to the Soviet diplomatic representative in Warsaw, Maximovitch. These documents were encoded using the same code that Makhno had employed in other letters sent to Makhnovists interned in Poland and Romania. In addition, they bore Makhno's signature but not in his hand. No matter, for Krasnovolsky took it upon himself to hand over the key to the code; they were plans for the insurrection in Galicia, apparently forged for that purpose by the Bolsheviks. Makhno was promptly picked up by the *Défensive*, as were his wife and two of his closest comrades, Kumara and Jacques Domashenko. All four were switched to the Paviac political prison in Warsaw and accused of subversive activities against the Polish State.

An examining magistrate by the name of Luxemburg (!) looked into the affair. They were to remain in prison for 13 months before being brought to trial. Meanwhile, Galina, Makhno's wife, gave birth on October 30 to a little girl called Lucie. Only once during his long months in custody was Nestor able to see them together.

An intense press and public opinion campaign was waged in libertarian circles worldwide and especially wherever the Russian anarchist Diaspora had a presence: the United States, Canada, Argentina, France and Germany. Already, thanks to the intervention of some anarcho-syndicalists during the Profintern's Moscow congress, ten Russian anarchists (Voline among them) had been deported from Russia. For his part, Arshinov and his wife had managed to cross the border clandestinely and reach Berlin, where he hurriedly brought out a history of the Makhnovist movement in Russian, followed up soon by German, French and Spanish editions. The anarchist press worldwide carried a fair number of articles on Makhno and his role in the Russian revolution. The Russian libertarian communist weekly, *Amerikanskiye Izvestia*, published in New York, opened a subscription to help jailed Makhnovists; by November 29, 1922, \$1,476 had been raised. An attempt was made to pass these funds to Makhnovists jailed or interned in Poland and Romania. However, some of these Makhnovists, unable to bear their living conditions, applied for repatriation even at the risk of being shot or, at best, deported to Siberia. As for Makhno, he had — so to speak — been "vaccinated" against imprisonment by his

previous ten years of prison and penal servitude before 1917. He busied himself with drafting his memoirs which he had passed on to Arshinov; they were also published in the Berlin review of the Russian anarchist exile group, *The Russian Messenger*, (in Russian, of course). He also penned letters to émigré Don Cossacks and an open letter to the Bolshevik-Communist Party of the Ukraine and Russia. All were intercepted and seized by the examining magistrate. Just to be on the safe side, he learned Esperanto and studied German. However, harsh conditions in custody in the Mokotow prison led to a recurrence of the tuberculosis which had been gnawing at him for about ten years.

As the trial scheduled for November 17, 1923 approached, the campaign by anarchists worldwide was stepped up; libertarian papers carried a lengthy appeal "against the crime being hatched by the Polish and Russian governments," signed by German libertarian communist organizations, the French Anarchist Federation and anarchist personalities Rudolf Rocker, Sébastien Faure, Louis Lecoin, Alexander Berkman, Emma Goldman and others. The Polish libertarian, Casimir Teslar, who had been in the Ukraine with the Makhnovists and who had just been deported from Russia by the Bolsheviks was frantically active "sounding the alarm." The Warsaw anarchist youth group also issued an urgent appeal:

"Comrades!

Demonstrate outside the Polish embassies in your countries! Send them your protest resolutions. Have recourse to the most extreme measures. The revolutionary proletariat must not allow the oppression in Polish jails of brave fighters for freedom and Anarchy. Only vigorous intervention by the toilers can save Makhno."¹²

In fact everyone's fear was that Makhno would be extradited to Russia where one could easily guess the fate that awaited him. The "extreme measures" advocated by the young Polish anarchists did not fail to make an impact upon Polish opinion which had at last seen sense and was swinging now in favor of the accused. And Bulgarian anarchists openly threatened to dynamite Polish embassies and establishments worldwide.

In these conditions, the trial went favorably for Makhno and his co-accused. It transpired that Krasnovolsky had also been manipulated by the Polish secret police, the *Défensive*, and that the prosecution had insufficient evidence. Makhno spoke brilliantly and demolished the allegations; the court was obliged to acquit the accused. Freed nearly a month after his acquittal(!), Makhno was given permission to stay in the Poznan region and then to leave for Danzig (today Gdansk) which at that time was a free city, albeit under Prussian administration.

The stalking by Bolshevik agents, though, did not end. They contacted Makhno, passing themselves off as Russian foreign trade representatives, and suggested that he return to Russia with solemn guarantees from the Soviet embassy in

Germany regarding his safety and that of any who might accompany him. Makhno's answer to them was that he could make no decision without first meeting his friends Voline, Arshinov, Rocker and Berkman who were in Berlin. Whereupon it was put to him that he should go there; he agreed, thinking that this might get him to Berlin where he would be more secure. Along with a trusted friend, he set off by car along with two Bolshevik agents; shortly before they crossed the German border, his friend informed the driver that, once in Berlin, Makhno would speak only to Krestinsky, the Soviet ambassador and then only in the home of a private citizen rather than on any premises under Soviet authority. Seeing their kidnap scheme fall apart, the Bolshevik agents backtracked, only to denounce Makhno a few days later to the Prussian police. To begin with he was imprisoned; then, when his health deteriorated, he was transferred under guard to a hospital.¹³ Thanks to some German anarchists, he soon escaped from there and was preoccupied with reaching Berlin, a city that, on one hand, offered greater safety and where, on the other, lots of libertarians lived. It was at this juncture that there was an incident with Voline who, on November 24, 1924, had received 75 dollars from Karpuk (an Ukrainian anarchist in the United States) to secure a phony passport for Makhno. Not a practical sort, and with a wife and five young children to support, Voline had spent the money on his personal needs; thus he was unable to secure the necessary papers. In his place he sent a German anarchist individualist from Hamburg who was on the run from the law and also in need of reaching Berlin; this very queer "go-between" had 300 gold marks on him but was imprudent enough to hand them over in advance to the seaman who had undertaken to ferry them by launch across the briny to the port of Stettin¹⁴ in German territory. The seaman wasted no time in squandering the sum on drink the following night, then refused them the promised passage. Exasperated by such delays and having now been clandestinely in Danzig for forty days, Makhno resolved to cross into Germany on foot along with a German comrade, bringing with them the none-too-astute "go-between."¹⁵ The plan succeeded, and Makhno at last found himself in Berlin among his Russian anarchist colleagues and other anarchists there — people like Rudolf Rocker, Ugo Fedeli, and Alexander Berkman. Even there he was scarcely at ease, for the Germans could have brought him to book for his activities against them in the Ukraine during 1918. David Poliakov, a Russian libertarian living in France, made the journey to Berlin and in April 1925 brought Nestor Makhno back with him to Paris where, in theory, the Ukrainian leader no longer had anything to fear from officialdom.

Notes to Chapter 26: The Road of Exile: Bucharest, Warsaw, Danzig, Berlin

1. *Soviet Ukraine: Four years of War and Blockade: An Anthology of Official Documents drawn from the Ukraine Red Books*, Berlin, 1922, p. 91, and *Documents on the Foreign Policy of the USSR*, Moscow, 1960, Tome IV, p. 364.
2. *Soviet Ukraine*, p. 92.
3. *Ibid*, pp. 96–97.
4. *Ibid*, pp. 98–99.
5. *Ibid*, pp. 101–102.
6. It is noteworthy that the countries bordering the USSR — Finland, Turkey, the Shah's Iran and of course the satellite nations — in defiance of all of the “conventions” of international law — handed back all Soviet citizens who sought asylum with them. The scruples of the Romanians at the time in question seem very old-fashioned when viewed in the light of the *realpolitik* of our own day.
7. *Soviet Ukraine*, op cit. pp. 123–123.
8. *Ibid*, pp. 123–125.
9. Arshinov and Voline “Makhno before the Polish Court” (in Russian), an article in the New York Russian libertarian communist weekly *Amerikanskiye Izvestia*, November 28, 1923, p. 2.
10. *Idem*.
11. Letter from Makhno to Jean Grave, January 11, 1927, preserved at the French Institute of Social History.
12. In *Volna*, Detroit No. 45, September 1923, pp. 45–46.
13. Letter from Makhno to Jean Grave, op cit.
14. The port was then part of East Prussia which has since been absorbed by present day Poland.
15. N. Makhno *Concerning Voline's “Explanations”* (in Russian) Paris, 1929, pp. 12–14.

27. Exile in Paris (1925–1934)

So, at the end of a long and eventful odyssey, Makhno arrived in the City of Lights. He expected to find there a little ease and that he would be beyond the reach of his many enemies: White Russians, Bolsheviks, Ukrainian nationalists and other lesser species. The better to cover his tracks, he had had a passport issued to him in Berlin in the assumed name of Mikhnenko. His wife and daughter had gone on ahead to Paris, some comrades having seen to their direct transfer from Poland. After arrival on September 18, 1924, they had at first been denied entry on December 27, probably because their papers were not in order, and then were given permission to settle in France after the socialist parliamentarian Paul Faure had intervened on their behalf. Back together again, the little family received a gracious welcome from May Picqueray who “always had a good soup a-simmering or a cafetière ready to pour” for foreign comrades in dire straits.¹ She arranged temporary lodgings for them and took Makhno off to receive the medical care he needed from some friendly physicians.

Although the language barrier made communication difficult, the French anarchists made Makhno warmly welcome; over the preceding two or three years indeed they had become conversant with the Makhnovist insurgent movement, thanks to Arshinov’s book and to essays and articles carried by the libertarian press.²

To begin with, Makhno and his loved ones were taken in by some Russian friends at Saint-Cloud, then spent two months as Georges Friquet’s guests in Romainville until Fuchs, a French libertarian, found them a little apartment at 18 Rue Jarry in Vincennes, into which they moved on June 21, 1926. For a time Nestor found work as a smelter’s assistant at a foundry at No. 6 on the same street before joining Renault as a lathe operator, but the state of his health obliged him to give up both these jobs. In fact, splinters from a dum dum bullet were still lodged in the bones of his right ankle; the wound had ulcerated and gave him atrocious pain, so much so that he could not bear to stand upright and walked with a pronounced limp. An operation in 1928 failed to cure his ankle and amputation was averted only by his steadfast refusal. His wife worked for a time in a shoe factory in Paris before spending a period in a small grocery store, keeping the pot boiling

— in both senses of the phrase. A well-to-do libertarian illegalist undertook to pay Nestor a small allowance to enable him to write his *Memoirs*. He set about this task, and the first volume appeared in a French translation by Waletsky in 1927. It concerned the year 1917 in the Ukraine (and was to appear in Russian two years later). As the cover price was quite high, the book sold poorly, and this jeopardized publication of two follow-up volumes which were ready for publication by 1929 but which were to appear only after Makhno's death.³

Nestor's health was further assailed by a recurrence of his tuberculosis and the pains from his many wounds. The physician and libertarian feminist Lucile Pelletier who was unstinting in her treatment of him was later to say that his body was literally encased in scar tissue. For a time his wife was obliged to move out lest their little girl be infected by her father's tuberculosis.

Several Makhnovists had managed to slip through the Cheka's net and, crossing the frontiers, came to settle near Nestor. One of them, Vassili Zayats, found a life of exile so distasteful that he took his own life in despair on October 1, 1926 by shooting himself in the head, in Makhno's very room. Fortunately Piotr Arshinov, his old colleague, arrived to move into the same building along with his own wife and son. Together they were at last to make a reality of a scheme they had cherished some 15 years previously while in the cells of the Butyrki prison, by bringing out a Russian-language libertarian communist theoretical review, *Dyelo Truda*. This review, of a very high caliber, appeared bi-monthly from 1925.

In it Makhno had an article in virtually every issue over a period of more than three years. The thought processes of the magazine's leading lights crystallized in the drafting of a plan for an organizational platform for the anarchist movement in which they sought to draw lessons from anarchism's experiences in the Russian revolution: Its weaknesses they credited to what they argued was the congenital defect of the traditional libertarian current, namely incoherence and lack of cohesion. For their part they proposed to work towards a precise re-definition of the underlying principles of libertarian communism and to arrive at a practical structuring of the movement subscribing to those principles into a collective operating in close liaison with the toiling masses. This scheme was to be the focus of debate in the libertarian circles of the day throughout the world. The debate among the Russian anarchists was turbulent as detractors — spearheaded by Voline — saw the whole scheme as an attempt to "bolshevize" anarchism; this charge was rather silly when leveled against men who had engaged in armed struggle against the Leninists and paid very dearly for the experience in physical and psychological terms.⁴

A meeting was held to discuss this draft Platform at the Les Roses cinema in L'Hay-les-Roses on March 20, 1927; the premises were raided by the police who had been panicked — on the basis of "inside information" — by this gathering which drew Russian, Polish, Bulgarian, Italian and even Chinese anarchists together. French cops rounded up the participants in the belief that perhaps they had stumbled upon some vast world-wide conspiracy. Caught up in the dragnet, Makhno

was sentenced to be deported from France on May 16th. Lobbying of the prefect of police, Chiappe, by the anti-militarist anarchist activist Louis Lecoin (who had good reason to know him, having been arrested by him numerous times) ensured that the deportation order was postponed for an initial period of three months by way of a trial period, from October 19, 1937, conditional upon Makhno's observing absolute political neutrality. Henri Sellier, the councilor-general and Socialist mayor of Suresnes, also stepped in and stood a guarantor for Makhno.



At this point, a dramatic incident focused public attention on Nestor. On May 25, 1926, the Ukrainian national leader Petliura, also a refugee in Paris, was assassinated by Samuel Schwarzbard, a Jewish Ukrainian anarchist and an acquaintance of Makhno's to boot. Schwarzbard had lost numerous family members in anti-Jewish pogroms in the Ukraine and, holding Petliura to blame for these massacres, had gunned him down with his revolver. According to what the Bulgarian anarchist Kiro Radeff has told us, Schwarzbard had called on Makhno the evening before the assassination to consult with him and let him in on his plans. Nestor had tried to talk him out of it, telling him that anarchists fought against principles and not personalities and that, as far as he was aware, Petliura could not be held accountable for the pogroms in that he had always condemned them and had numbered Jews among his supporters and indeed even in his government (Arnold Margoline, an Ukrainian of Jewish origins, had even led the Ukrainian nationalist mission attached to the Entente). All to no avail, for Schwarzbard went ahead with his scheme. We might point out that Schwarzbard's lawyers, Henry Torrès and Bernard Lacache, made a special trip to Russia to collect documentary evidence authenticating Petliura's responsibility in the matter of the pogroms, but for all their eagerness to confound a political enemy, the Bolsheviks were unable to supply such evidence.

Capitalizing upon all this sensationalism, a rather unscrupulous author, Joseph Kessel, himself a Jew of Russian extraction, published a far-fetched novel entitled *Makhno and his Jewess*, wherein Makhno was depicted as an abominably cruel degenerate ogre and bloodthirsty butcher nonetheless touched by the beauty and love of a young Jewish woman, even to the extent of leading her up the aisle and thereby achieving his life's ambition: to marry her in church and thus convert her to the Orthodox faith! One would be hard pressed to come up with anything more dismal and shabby, but the hack Kessel, desperate to attract attention to his pathetic self, claimed that his story was true, or at least "...as true as the documentation upon which it was based" and that the "novelist, whatever his subject matter, be it imaginary or historical, reserves the right of construction, composition and direction over his story [sic!]." ⁵ The "documentation" to which Kessel was referring was a tale published in 1922 by a White officer by the name of Gerassimenko who was rather suspect (convicted of espionage on behalf of the Bolsheviks in Prague in 1924 and subsequently deported from Czechoslovakia).

Published in a White Russian magazine in Berlin, this “tale” had probably been intended to discredit Makhno who was interned in Poland at the time and to speed his extradition. Gerassimenko argued in it that Makhno had gone over to Wrangel and placed the following words in his mouth: “In Russia there is room only for monarchy or anarchy!”⁶

Informed of the storm of indignation provoked by his “novel,” Kessel corrected his aim slightly in the second edition of his text in 1927. He now wrote in his foreword that he had “invented the conflict that seemed to him most likely to throw into relief a figure and an atmosphere with which he was conversant.” He also vouchsafed the information that he had discovered that Makhno was living in Paris and had allegedly “...even uttered threats against me for having dared to portray him so penetratingly and, in his estimation, falsely.”⁷ Thus Kessel had supposedly displayed tremendous courage in “daring to portray penetratingly” — another publicity coup that was not allowed to go unexploited — whereas Makhno, hands tied by a threat of deportation, was denied the same facilities for expressing his opinions. As for his “text,” Kessel pressed on regardless and without amending as much as a single comma of it, hinting at a further source: one Arbatov, who describes in a Russian monarchist paper the alleged “exploits” of Makhno, in much the same flavors as Gerassimenko.⁸

The danger for Makhno was that Kessel might so mislead his ill-informed readership that in the emotional climate then prevailing among European Jews, some hothead — keen to imitate Schwarzbard — might select Makhno as a target. In the face of such a thinly disguised incitement to murder, Makhno was thus compelled to speak up several times on the subject of pogroms: in *Le Libéraire* (he did not enjoy Kessel’s access to the “big circulation newspapers”), he issued an appeal “To the Jews of all Lands” to quote him specific instances of pogroms that could be laid at the door of the Makhnovist movement. All in vain, for the very good reason that there had been none, as we shall establish anon. On June 24, 1927, the Club du Faubourg organized a debate on the issue in the Hall of the Learned Societies. Makhno spoke on “the facts about the pogroms in the Ukraine” and explained how he personally had protected Jews in the region under his influence. Other Russian and Ukrainian libertarians of Jewish extraction backed him up on this point and called Kessel to order; the only excuse that Kessel, who was there, could come up with was “...the novelist’s right to fictionalize.” And there the “Kessel” affair stopped; the murder of Petliura and the controversy aroused concerning Makhno suited Moscow down to the ground — she had never asked so much of the country which had taken in her sworn enemies.



On July 21, 1927, Makhno attended the banquet given by the Anarchist International Defense Committee to celebrate the release of the Spanish anarchists Francisco Ascaso, Durruti and Jover. He delivered a short address in Russian which was simultaneously translated for the benefit of all present. As the dinner ended, a

meeting was arranged with Ascaso and Durruti. The meeting took place in Nestor's cramped quarters and went on for several hours in the presence of Jacques Dubinsky, a bilingual Russian libertarian who acted as interpreter whenever Makhno was unable to make himself understood in his poor French. The Spanish anarchists hailed Makhno as the symbol of "...all revolutionaries who have fought for the realization of anarchist ideas in Russia," and they paid "...tribute to the Ukraine's rich experience." Makhno replied that by his reckoning conditions for a "revolution of robust anarchist content" would be better in Spain than in Russia, for Spain had "...a proletariat and peasantry with revolutionary traditions, the political maturity of which is evident from their every reaction. May your revolution come in time to grant me the satisfaction of seeing alive an anarchism informed by the Russian experience. In Spain you have a sense of organization that we in Russia lacked, for it is organization that ensures the thoroughgoing success of any revolution." He hoped that they would learn from the Makhnovist experience which he spent several hours expounding to his Spanish colleagues. As he took his leave of them, he told them with an optimistic grin: "Makhno has never shirked a fight; if I am still alive when you begin yours, I will be with you."¹⁰

By this time Makhno was in fact ailing both psychologically and physically. He was suffering from his wounds and an aggravation of his tuberculosis. Moreover, the controversy regarding the draft Platform degenerated and relations with its adversaries, especially Voline, their spokesman, were strained. This is an important point and worth going into, for Voline was a prominent personality in the Russian anarchist movement and had also been chairman of the Makhnovists' Military Revolutionary Soviet for over two months in the autumn of 1919. He had been persecuted by the Bolsheviks and arrested in November 1920, following the breakdown of Moscow's alliance with Makhno. At the 1921 Profintern Congress, the French and Spanish anarcho-syndicalist delegates had spoken up on his behalf; after some difficulties, Lenin and Trotsky deigned to deport him along with nine other leading anarchists as well as their families. Then Voline spent some time in Berlin before moving on to settle in Paris, where he had lived prior to 1914. He was very active in publicizing the facts about the Leninist regime either on speaking tours or by drafting articles for the libertarian press worldwide, knowing several foreign languages as he did. He was a superb propagandist and above all an exceptional public speaker. During the Russian revolution he delivered upwards of a hundred talks. As a result, he felt a certain superiority over "practical types" and to some extent stood guard over the "purity" of libertarian principles although he himself was quite a newcomer to the libertarian persuasion, having been won over while an émigré before 1914 on contact with Kropotkin. Thus he was violently opposed to the Organizational Platform scheme of *Dyelo Truda* and supported instead the Anarchist Synthesis advocated by Sébastien Faure, a sort of symbiosis of the three basic strands of anarchist doctrine: the individualist, the syndicalist and the communist. Whereas Makhno, Arshinov and colleagues held that libertarian communism was built upon an all-embracing

notion of class struggle, incorporating syndicalism as a means and respect for the rights of the individual as a goal. The two views were different while not mutually exclusive and, had there not been the context of the failure of the Russian revolution and the life of exile, perhaps the debate might not have been so embittered and passionate. Relations between the two men (Makhno and Voline) were embittered when Kubanin's official book on the Makhnovschina came out in 1927 and referred to the minutes of Voline's interrogation by a Chekist examining magistrate when he had been captured in December 1919. There, Voline complained of the "abuses" of the Makhnovist intelligence service — which he almost placed on a par with the Cheka — and spoke of his "clashes" with Makhno on this point.¹¹

Makhno made his reply to Kubanin shortly after in a pamphlet and, in passing, dealt with the "case" of Voline. He explained how Voline had frequently turned to the Makhnovist counter-espionage service. Thus, at the time of his capture by the Red Army, on his way to Krivoi Rog — to give a talk there — he had been in the company of the leader and the finest men from the service. Then again, he had no cause to complain, for he himself took initiatives. For instance, it had been his own decision to seek Makhno out, along with a Bolshevik leader by the name of Orlov, during the occupation of Ekaterinoslav in order to secure for him a warrant for search and seizure of the goods of a Russian nobleman who had fled to join Denikin, with the benefits going to the region's Bolshevik committee. Makhno had categorically refused to oblige and had scolded Voline for his political inconsistency.¹² Things might have been left there, and the dirty linen could have been "washed" among intimates only, but there was no knowing what was eating at Voline and what induced him to publish a little pamphlet called *Explanations* over a year later, in which he reproached Makhno for "wanting to settle personal scores with him," thereby revealing certain character traits, to wit, a "hostility towards intellectuals, his suspicions and the mischievousness of his nature (sic)!" He refuted everything that Kubanin depicted him as having said, gave an account of his "capture" and announced that at the time he had not been bothered about knowing whether or not his companions were members of the Makhnovist counter-intelligence service in that he had been sick with typhus. He could no longer recall the episode with the Bolshevik Orlov either and hinted that Makhno had mixed him up with somebody else, but nonetheless acknowledged that it had fallen to him to act in conjunction with Bolsheviks who had used him as an intermediary to deal with Makhno and, anyway, dismissed this as being of secondary importance. Finally he recorded his assistance to Makhno when Makhno was caught in the "rat-trap" in Danzig in 1925 and closed by stating that all that remained of Makhno's reproaches of him was "...a dark cloud of mischief and calumny.... Whom and what can that all serve?"¹³ According to Marc Mratchny, one of his own anarchist comrades from the Ukraine, Voline was regarded as a "shallow mind,"¹⁴ but here he demonstrated singular inconsistency by pouring oil onto the fire and then asking what purpose it all served. In any case, Makhno's answer came the following month, also in the form of a pamphlet, crossing the t's and dotting

the i's. Makhno explained how Voline had been specially escorted by comrade Golik and about 20 of the most reliable members of the Makhnovist counter-intelligence service and how it was because of his own "stupidity" that Voline had not only been captured but also brought about the capture of several of those with him. Apropos of his joint venture with Orlov, no, he wasn't mixing him up with somebody else, Voline was indeed the one. As for his (Makhno's) alleged "hostility towards intellectuals," he had always had high regard for "...genuine intellectuals and hates only those who are blackguards and whom he can readily distinguish from the former." Moreover, he had no scores to settle with Voline, for he "...could not do that with a comrade, which Voline had ceased to be in his view ever since he had discovered his true personality in the emigration." Finally what had him at odds with Voline was not personal considerations, although Voline's conduct had been most blameworthy at the time of his escape from the Danzig "rat-trap" and was nothing to "brag about," but rather the "falsehoods and cowardice" of the man who had for a long time been chairman of the Makhnovists' soviet.¹⁵ Henceforth he swore undying enmity towards Voline who paid him back in his posthumous work *The Unknown Revolution* by ascribing serious personal shortcomings to him, as we shall see in the next chapter.

The squabble can be put down to the poisonous atmosphere created by the controversy surrounding the Organizational Platform of *Dyelo Truda*, or indeed to the difficulties of émigré life and the social differences, which it aggravated, between Voline the intellectual and ideologue, and the peasant-worker activist Makhno. Indeed one might speak of a clash of personalities or of misplaced sensitivities and with good reason, but there was something else as well. Makhno was very well aware that, through him, it was the whole movement and the memory of his dead comrades who were under fire from all sides, as much from those who should have been closest to them as from their avowed enemies. This was the reason why he could brook no slight against himself or his comrades in arms, of whom Voline seemed to be dismissive, forgetting that it had been they who had been in charge of watching over him, for which duty they had paid a high price. Likewise he could not accept Voline's being so offhand about his own responsibilities when it was Makhno himself who had insisted upon his being appointed chairman of the insurgents' Military Revolutionary Soviet in October 1919, something which he obviously would not have done, he now claimed, had he been aware of Voline's true character as it had been revealed to him since his emigration.

Viewed in this light, defense against all manner of attacks and criticisms became something of an obsession with him; as the gossip persisted it was up to him to explain or justify himself. Let us consider two instances which illustrate his "solicitude" on the part of "friends": On the first occasion he attended a commemoration at the hall of the (masonic) Grand Orient in the Rue Cadet in Paris, to mark the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution, under the auspices of some Russian "fellow travelers" of the Bolsheviks. Apparently he went along to heckle, yet there were some who argued that he had been invited by the Soviet embassy

and was going to join the Communist Party! He found it necessary to rebut this rather cavalier interpretation of things through the columns of *Dyelo Truda*.¹⁶ On the second occasion, he published an article on “Soviet Power: Its Present and Its Future,” in the magazine *Borba* (The Struggle) run by the Ukrainian Bolshevik defector Grigory Bessedovsky; provoking criticism from Arshinov and the Russian anarchists in Chicago! He found it necessary to clarify things by saying that he was big and ugly enough to know what he should or should not do and needed “no wet-nurse; I grew out of that decades ago and acted as one myself for many a long year towards others, Arshinov included.”¹⁷

In addition, relations between these two cooled because Arshinov tended to personalize — unduly for Makhno’s taste — the debate on the Platform which they had drafted together. All the more so, in that Kubanin and some soviet authors, as well as “friendly” anarchists, had a tendency to depict both Arshinov and Voline as Makhno’s spiritual “mentors.” In some cases this was an effort to play down the peasants’ role in the movement by making them subordinate to workers or intellectuals, and in other cases the assumption was that Makhno, being virtually “illiterate” could not possibly have thought up, much less drafted his numerous written works without the aid of a ghost-writer. This last assertion was formally refuted for us by Ida Mett, who, between 1925 and 1927, served as the secretary/typist of Makhno and the *Dyelo Truda* group. According to her, Makhno was very fussy about form, and for every occasion when he accepted suggestion and advice, there was another when he reserved the right to decide upon the merest comma in his writings.¹⁸ Later, Marie Goldsmit, an old Kropotkinist, served him in the same capacity before she committed suicide in 1933.¹⁹ So let us look at Makhno’s “literary output” during his first years in exile.

Over the years 1926–1929, he published a whole series of articles and texts of major significance both historically and theoretically. If one also takes account of the writing of the three volumes of his *Memoirs*, one might regard these years as highly prolific, although widely underestimated. Or quite simply unknown, which is certainly unmerited. Makhno advanced a number of specific details about the movement: He ironically and categorically denied that the Makhnovschina may have flown the black pirate flag — skull and crossbones — as some claimed to be able to make out in certain photographs of the Makhnovschina.²⁰ Regarding the charges of anti-Semitism, he supplied rebuttals several times; he also furnished details about the character and meaning of the Makhnovist movement, etc. He especially did so in his essential answer to Kubanin, with its evocative title; *The Makhnovschina and its Erstwhile Allies: The Bolsheviks*. His theoretical contributions to libertarian communism were not negligible either: articles on the State, the national question, revolutionary discipline, the revolution’s defenses and revolutionary organization. Likewise, he subjected the Bolsheviks to robust criticism, exposing their contradictions and lies, in articles like “The notion of equality and the Bolsheviks,” “How the Bolsheviks lie (the truth about the anarchist sailor Zhelezniak),” “Open Letter

to the Russian Communist Party and its central committee (on Bela Kun and the second alliance),” “In Memory of the Kronstadt uprising,” “Great October in the Ukraine,” and “The Peasantry and the Bolsheviks.” He also issued appeals for solidarity with persecuted Russian anarchists in the USSR, on behalf of the Anarchist Black Cross, and on behalf of the Kropotkin Museum in Moscow. Likewise, he monitored international political developments, offering his advice in “Britain’s world policy and the tasks of revolutionary toilers.” All these articles appeared in Russian in the review *Dyelo Truda*; some were translated and also appeared in *Le Libertaire*.²¹ In short, as far as he was concerned, the fight went on, though the pen had replaced the saber. As for the situation in France, he was obliged — having the sword of Damocles hanging over his head in the form of risk of deportation should he intervene in the slightest in internal politics — to stick to theoretical and organizational matters and to avoid appearances at public meetings and rallies.



It is worth stressing this productive output for it took place in wretched circumstances: physical pain, growing psychological isolation and precarious financial circumstances. Passing through Paris, the Bulgarian anarchist doctor Baleff invited Makhno to come and settle in Kasanlik in the Valley of Roses in Southern Bulgaria. Makhno declined, for Russian Whites were solidly ensconced there, had official military units and were much to be feared. He did odd painting and decorating jobs, tried his hand at shoe-mending along with Arshinov and a few other comrades, making women’s shoes, a trade very current among the Russian émigré colony in Paris until an industrialist revolutionized manufacturing techniques and rang the death-knell of handmade production.

Whereupon Makhno found himself absolutely on his uppers, financially speaking. His wife subsidized the couple’s needs as best she could, but she earned only a pittance working as a domestic cleaner and laundry worker in an establishment far outside Paris, for there was the hostility of Russian émigré circles to be faced once they discovered who she was. Some French comrades, hearing of these material straits and Makhno’s crumbling health, issued an appeal in the April 6, 1929 edition of *Le Libertaire* “For long-term solidarity on Makhno’s behalf”²² in the form of a regular subscription that would afford the invalid (whom vicious tongues were by then describing as the “living corpse”) a small allowance. A committee was established to that end, and Nadaud was appointed secretary. Regular statements of account appeared in *Le Libertaire*. Thus, by June 20, 1929, 7,180 francs had been raised, a modest enough sum of 3,300 francs being paid out to Makhno at the rate for 250 francs weekly, just enough for him to scrape by. The committee made the gross blunder of forking out 3,880 francs on postage and stationary merely to get some circulars out! Even so, the allowance was regular for over a year up until the 1930 Congress of the Anarchist Federation, when the majority was overturned as “anti-Platformists” gained the upper hand over “pro-Platformists.” Makhno, well known as an ardent “organization-ist,” sent the

Congress an open letter that was scathing about these “anti-Platformists,” whom he described as “chaotic elements”: “[In many countries] the movement is disorganized within and without and finds itself in a state of decrepitude. We ought to think on that and overcome these difficulties together. In its resolutions, Congress ought to rise above the childish babbling of those who are a drag upon our movement’s development.”²³ Needless to say, this attitude did nothing to endear him to the new majority. From July 1930 they announced that *Le Libertaire* would no longer have anything to do with the subscription fund; any who so wished were invited to send their “mite” directly to Makhno, whose address was given (N. Mikhnenko, 146 Rue Diderot, Vincennes). In the issues of the paper after that, they carried statements of the accounts received in the interim and repeated their suggestion that monies be sent directly to the individual concerned. In June 1931, a benefit event was organized for Makhno, but organizational expenses and sundry others ensured that little money was raised. Thus, aside from some Russian, Bulgarian, Spanish and French anarchists who did not forget him, Makhno was scarcely able to rely upon solidarity from the Parisians at *Le Libertaire*. However, in the absence of his being able to go back to the Ukraine to resume the campaign he had broken off in 1921, fresh hopes were raised, for some Spanish anarchists proposed that he assume the leadership of a guerrilla campaign in Northern Spain as part of a revolutionary upheaval in 1931. So Makhno was taking an interest in matters Spanish and wrote two articles on the subject. He was insistent about the necessity:

“...of helping toilers to establish organs of economic and social self-governance, free soviets, as well as armed detachments for defense of the revolutionary social measures that they will of necessity have to impose, after having achieved consciousness and broken all the shackles of their servile condition. It is only thus and only through these methods of overall action that revolutionary toilers will be able to act in good time against attempted subversion of the revolution by some new exploitative system. By my reckoning, the FAI and CNT ought, for this purpose, to be able to call upon minutemen groups in every village and town, and they should not be afraid to take in hand the strategical, organizational and theoretical direction of the toiler’s movement. Obviously, when that time comes, they will have to avoid joining forces with political parties generally and with the Bolshevik-Communists in particular, for I assume that their Spanish counterparts are worthy imitators of their masters. They will follow in the footsteps of the Jesuit Lenin or even of Stalin, not hesitating to assert their monopoly over all the gains of the revolution [...] they will inevitably betray their allies and the very cause of revolution and turn into the worst of despots. The Russian example ought to spare us from arriving at that stage. May the Bolshevik-Communist blight not set foot on the revolutionary soil of Spain.”²⁴

This cautionary advice was followed up by an examination along similar lines of “...the history of the Spanish revolution of 1931 and of the role played by the socialists — of right and left — and the anarchists,” in 1933.²⁵

At around the same time Makhno suffered a tremendous psychological blow at the end of 1931, when his comrade and friend for over 20 years, Piotr Arshinov, went over to the Bolsheviks. This led to a stormy falling out between them. How was one to account for this unexpected U-turn by Arshinov who, up until a few months before, had been writing virulent and highly interesting articles against the Stalino-Bolshevik regime? The clarity — some might say rigidity — of the stances assumed by Arshinov in the organizational controversy had alienated the sympathies of many anarchists from him even though they had initially been attracted by the proposed overhaul of the underlying principles of libertarian communism, and he became the “black sheep” of the international anarchist movement. Some went so far as to suggest that his origins in 1904 as a member of the Bolshevik party was one explanation for his unduly “organizational” thinking. For his part, prey to continual criticism for trespasses against the Holy Fathers of Anarchy, Arshinov had become increasingly intractable regarding his detractors, even to the extent of breaking radically with traditional anarchism and advocating a highly structured and unmistakably vanguardist anarchist “party.” Not that it was these options that had divided him from Makhno, who was himself a fervent “organization-ist”: it was, rather, a certain sectarianism which had led him to equate his anarchist adversaries with his statist or authoritarian enemies. What is more, Arshinov had experienced a host of personal troubles, in particular deportation from France and a dramatic bust-up with his wife who, wearying of émigré life and homesick, wanted to go back to Russia along with their son. As Arshinov had formerly been on very friendly terms with Sergo Ordzhonikidze (they had shared the same cell twenty years before), the latter, who had since become a close confederate of Stalin, had offered to sponsor Arshinov’s return with no old scores to be settled. Thus, more than any organizational considerations, it was these personal ones that probably explained his sudden recognition of the soviet authorities and his return to Moscow in 1933. There he was to work as a proofreader up until 1937 in which year he was executed on a charge of having sought to “...restore anarchism in Russia.”



Having fallen out with most of the U.S.-based Russian anarchists who were supporters of Arshinov, Makhno was left very isolated, demoralized, extremely ill and under-nourished to live in deteriorating circumstances. Only some Bulgarian anarchists and a few Makhnovists as hard-up as himself kept in touch with him and helped him insofar as their slender means allowed — although Makhno often declined financial help, out of pride. He was not inactive, though, and continued to write articles for the Russian libertarian review, *Probuždeniye*, published in the United States. In particular, he published an “ABC of Anarchism” wherein he forcefully set out his beliefs and an essay on the “Paths of proletarian power” in

which he raised pertinent questions regarding the nature and content of Bolshevik power, its relationship with the ideas of Marx and Lenin and the proletariat, a part (primarily urban) of which, he argued, had found its place in the sun under the new regime, to the detriment to the rest of its class and peasant masses. In this way he complemented the analysis of "...many anarchists who tend to think that the proletariat bears none of the responsibility for the evolution of the Russian revolution, having allegedly been duped by the intellectual social caste, which by virtue of a whole succession of historical phenomena and alterations to the role of the State, supposedly sought in the course of this process to supplant the capitalist bourgeoisie by making use of the proletariat's struggle."²⁶ He strenuously recommended them to painstakingly scrutinize the phases of the Russian revolution, as well as the parts played by one and all in this evolution, and this with an eye to avoiding repetition of the mistakes made and to being in a position to combat Bolshevik-Communists effectively, while offering a clear and distinct libertarian alternative. The last piece of writing from his pen was an obituary notice on his old comrade Nikolai Rogdaiev who died in Central Asia to where he had been banished by Moscow. Rogdaiev had been anarchism's trailblazer in the Ukraine and Russia at the turn of the century. He had helped set up lots of groups of militants and fighters and had fought on the barricades in Moscow himself in 1905. He had been a redoubtable "debater," confounding his Social Revolutionary and Social Democrat adversaries so well as to attract many militants from their organizations over to the anarchist camp. He had also engaged in a lengthy polemic with Lenin in Switzerland and thereafter been on friendly terms with the Bolshevik leader. During the 1917 revolution, Rogdaiev had settled in Samara and had been meaning to join the Makhnovschina in the autumn of 1919, but Voline's presence had changed his mind, for he could never forgive Voline for having been an associate of Vladimir Burtzev — the Sherlock Holmes of the Russian revolutionaries' world who had unmasked the agent provocateur Yevno Azev, among others — nor for failing to lift a finger when he, Rogdaiev, had been accused, groundlessly, of being an agent provocateur. In 1920 Lenin had summoned him to Moscow, urging him on one hand, to persuade Makhno to "subordinate himself" to the Kremlin, and on the other to take up an important post (based on his knowledge of foreign languages) on the staff of the Red Army on the Western front. Rogdaiev had unequivocally declined both suggestions, which had promptly put him in difficulties with the Samara Cheka. These were later smoothed over, as he went on to hold an educational position in Tiflis, kept in touch with *Dyelo Truda* and indeed, sent it some money. Makhno was much affected by his death and at a meeting on January 21, 1934, read a lengthy report in memory of his friend, concluding with this pathetic farewell:

"Very dear friend, comrade and brother, sleep easy in the heavy slumber from which there is no waking. Your cause is our cause. It shall never perish. It will spring to life again in the generations to come who will

take it up again and enrich it. It will motivate the open, healthy life of the struggle of toiling humanity. Friend, you will remain with us forever! May shame and damnation rebound upon those who have besmirched your name, who have slowly and cravenly clawed at your soul and your heart right to the end.”²⁷

In doing so, Makhno never suspected that these very same words, right down to the curse on slanderers, might soon, very soon, be applied to himself!

In fact, he was by now absolutely destitute; only after his death was his wife to send that obituary piece off to the *Probuzdeniye*, and she was to explain that he had not been able to do so himself for want of the price of postage.²⁸ Due to malnutrition, his tuberculosis gained ground, gnawing away at his lungs, to the extent that less than two months later, on March 16, 1934, he was hospitalized in the tuberculosis ward of the Tenon clinic. Parisian libertarians bestirred themselves and reformed the “Makhno committee” with an eye to “...organizing vitally needed solidarity.”²⁹ In July, Makhno was operated upon but too late to stop the downward spiral. He was placed in an oxygen tent and then, on the night of July 24–25, drifted into a sleep from which he never woke. In the early hours of July 25, he was pronounced dead. He would have been 45 years of age in another three months.

A gathering of some 500 people attended his cremation on July 28th at the Père Lachaise cemetery where his ashes joined those of the Communards of 1871. Numerous obituaries were carried in the libertarian press worldwide.

For all the commemorative activities, one cannot help wondering about the “faltering” solidarity displayed by Paris’s libertarians during his last days. We have mentioned, for instance, the worrying aspects of the accounts of the Makhno committee: A statement for the period from May 3 to August 31, 1934 records receipts of 4,131 francs in contributions from all over the world, especially from some Russian and Italian anarchists in the United States, as well as from many French libertarians, among them Jean Grave. But when one turns to the expenditure column, one is dumbfounded to discover that only 123 francs had been paid over to Makhno, another 100 to his wife and 300 for their daughter. Whereas his death mask(!) cost 310 francs, the committee’s correspondence costs came to 74 francs, and insertions in *Le Libertaire* 500 francs!³⁰ In the second statement of accounts, covering the period from August 31, 1934 to September 30, 1935, contributions were still coming in, especially from Russian anarchists in the United States, as well as from the Jewish Club in Paris, making a total of 3,467 francs. Among the expenses was an advance of 1,800 francs made out to Voline for preparation of the outstanding volumes of Makhno’s memoirs, plus 650 francs for a bas-relief of Makhno(!), and sundry correspondence costs.³¹ In an effort to understand this and to discover more, we inquired among the surviving members of this famous committee and put the following questions to them, among others: “In the financial

statement from the Makhno committee, as it appeared in *Le Libertaire* after his death, it appears that a significant sum of money was in hand, upwards of 4,000 francs, yet between May 1934 and his death on July 25, only 123 francs had been paid out to him. How is that to be explained? Did the committee pay out anything to him between 1931 and 1934? The committee was supposed to help Makhno's wife and daughter. Did it do so?" Among the four replies we received, only Nicolas Faucier's is a complete response, but unfortunately, he was unable to offer any explanation of the committee's shortcomings, as he was not resident in Paris at the time in question.³² The other members of the committee either sidestepped the questions asked, or — visibly ill at ease — declared they could no longer recall such ancient history to mind. So we have to take it that they found it easier to deal with a symbol — as the obituary notices described Makhno — dead rather than alive! Nicolas Faucier did tell us that there were rumors "to the effect that Makhno frequented the nearby Vincennes racetrack where ... it seems he gambled what small change he had left out of whatever advances were made to him after he had paid the basic expenses of his loved ones." It was "...also said that he had taken to the drink, but that I could not confirm."³³ Quite apart from the slanderous aspect of these "rumors," those subscribers who had contributed their "mite" had certainly not intended any surveillance to be maintained on whatever use Makhno chose to make of it. The money was to have been quite simply passed on to him, leaving it to him to spend it as he saw fit, or at least that is our opinion. So we reckon these "committee men" bear a heavy responsibility, for it seems obvious to us that, had Makhno had access to more money, he would not have gone to a premature death and might have been able to participate in the Spanish libertarian revolution of 1936, for which he had prepared himself, and — who knows? — might have had a certain influence there, or even died in action as did two Makhnovists who wound up in the International Group of the Durruti Column.

As for the money paid out to Voline for "preparing" the remainder of Makhno's memoirs, let us see what use was made of that. The first volume had already come out, as we have seen, in Makhno's lifetime, in French in 1927, and in Russian in 1929. After that, the second and third volume were ready, having been typed and checked by Ida Mett and Marie Goldsmit, and all that was missing was the cooperation of a publisher. Makhno had himself announced as much in 1927 in a letter to the Russian-Ukrainian worker colony in the United States, hoping that good translators could be found to see to a Ukrainian language edition.³⁴ Meanwhile, he published a large portion of the second volume in 1932 in the U.S.-based Russian libertarian newspaper, *Rassuyet* (Dawn) under the title of *Pages of Gloom from the Russian Revolution*. Shortly before his death, sensing the imminence of the end, he had entrusted all his papers, including the manuscripts of those two volumes, to his old friend Grisha Bartanovsky — known as Barta — whom he had known in the Ukraine in 1907 and bumped into again as an émigré, asking Barta to make the best use of them. After his friend's death, Barta

had sought out the doctor and libertarian activist Marc Pierrot to seek his advice. He had then decided to hand back the manuscripts of the two unpublished volumes of memoirs to Makhno's wife, Galina Kuzmenko, and to leave it to her to determine what was best. Galina passed them on to the aid committee, probably lest the monies collected be completely "frittered away" and the committee in turn commissioned Voline to "prepare" them for publication and contacted the U.S.-based Russian libertarian organizations with a view to possible publication. Other manuscripts, documents, correspondence, handbills, and newspapers Barta kept in a small case which went missing during a war-time search by the Gestapo — Barta was an anarchist and a Jew — and so have probably been lost forever.³⁵

In 1936 and 1937, the second and third volumes of Makhno's memoirs came out, thanks to funds collected by Russian libertarians in the United States, under Voline's "editorship" and complete with foreword and notes by Voline. But what could this "editorship" have amounted to? We have compared the extract published in 1932 in *Rassvyet* and the version published under Voline's "editorship," and, aside from the re-deployed comma or the pruning of circumlocutions, we have found nothing extra in the Voline version. But what had Voline to say on the matter?

In his foreword, Voline "...much regrets that a personal clash with Nestor Makhno" had prevented him from "drafting" the first volume which had appeared during the author's lifetime, for he would have been able to polish up the format and avoided the "...disappointment of readers" (?). He goes on to say that "...shortly before Makhno's death, their relations had improved and that he had intended to suggest to him that the remainder of his memoirs be drafted with his "participation" and that "only Makhno's death had prevented realization of this plan."³⁶ This account of things is wholly false, for Kiro Radeff told us that he had tried to effect a reconciliation between the pair and had informed Makhno on his hospital bed that he had included Voline in his support committee, whereupon the Ukrainian anarchist had retorted: "You have betrayed me!"³⁷ Indeed, it was to misunderstand Makhno to think that he would so easily forgive Voline's past trespasses. Yet Voline states in his foreword that he had done no more than touch up the "literary form" of the text. In which case his handiwork — proofreader's work — has nothing to do with what one understands by "drafting," which would suggest that Makhno did not know how to write! However, he justifies it by mentioning that Makhno "possessed only a rudimentary education and did not have much of a grasp of literary language, though this did not prevent him from having a very characteristic style all his own."³⁸ Somewhat embarrassed nonetheless by his contradictions, he chooses to move on to the content of Makhno's memoirs, which he praises for their historical and documentary interest concerning the years 1917 and 1918. He does express reservations about Makhno's critical considerations regarding the passivity of certain of the Russian anarchists of the day, as well as what he considers the over-inflated evaluation of the revolutionary role of the Ukrainian peasantry and laments the fact that the memoirs stopped at the end of 1918, before the great blossoming

of the Makhnovist movement. Voline promised a book that would reprint others of Makhno's writings, collecting all of the articles of his that had appeared in the Russian libertarian press, plus some unpublished manuscripts (probably the ones then in Barta's keeping). In 1945, shortly before his death, Voline was to forward all his papers and books to his closest friend Jacques Dubinsky who was to see to the publication in 1947 of Voline's overview of the Russian revolution, his book *The Unknown Revolution*. Those papers finished up later in the possession of Voline's children. We managed to get sight of a copy of them. The whole collection is made up of notes and drafts; no doubt it is this patchy condition that has thus far prevented their being published. Voline reiterates his charges against Makhno and, insofar as one can tell, the underlying cause of the rift between them can be traced to personality clashes and social tensions: Makhno "had never made the slightest move to strike up a more personal friendship with him" and had supposedly displayed a "blind trust in the peasantry and distrust of every other class in society; a degree of contempt for intellectuals, even anarchist ones."³⁹

In *The Unknown Revolution*, Voline has no hesitation in stating that Makhno "...led in Paris an extremely dismal existence in material as well as in psychological terms. His life abroad was one long, lamentable agony against which he was powerless to contend. His friends helped him to bear the burden of these sad years of decline."⁴⁰ We have seen how his exile was anything but unproductive and that only the very last years were very dismal, due primarily to the actions of certain of his "friends." No question about it; Makhno who had already sampled Bolshevik "friendship" could have taken as his own the dictum: "Just preserve me from my friends, and, as for my enemies, I will see to them myself!"

Notes to Chapter 27: Exile in Paris (1925–1934)

1. May Picqueray, *May la réfractaire*, Paris 1979, pp. 186–187.
2. The Group of Russian Anarchist Exiles in Germany, *La Répression de l'anarchisme en Russie soviétique*, Paris, 1923. *Le Libertaire* in 1922: No. 163; Angel Pestaña, "The Makhno legend," No. 190; M. Ne., "Nestor Makhno," No. 193; "The Makhnovist movement and anti-Semitism," No. 194; Renato Souvarine, "Makhno in the light of anarchism," No. 198; "Against the infamies prepared by the Polish and Russian governments (For Makhno)," No. 203; Voline, "Further data on Bolshevik agents (M. in Poland)," No. 217; March 16, 1923, Teslar, "In aid of Makhno." *La Revue Anarchiste*: Teslar, "The truth about the anarcho-Makhnovist movement and on the peasant revolutionary Nestor Makhno," No. 15, 1922.
3. In his lifetime, an excerpt from the second volume was to appear in *Le Libertaire*, as "The origins of the Ukrainian insurrection and the anarchists' role," No. 224, October 5, 1929 and the two ensuing issues.
4. We intend to devote a further work to this Platform scheme and to the controversy which followed upon it.

5. Joseph Kessel, *Makhno et sa Juive*, Paris, 1926, p. 11.
6. K.V. Gerassimenko, "Makhno," in *Istoriia I sovremennik*, Berlin, 1922, pp. 151–201.
7. J. Kessel, *Les Coeurs Purs*, Paris, 1927 pp. 13–17.
8. Arbatov, "Batko Makhno" in *Rul*, Berlin 1922: reprinted in *Vozrozhdeniye*, Paris, 1953, No. 29, pp. 102–115 and in *Arkhiv russkoy revolyutsii*, 1923, Vol. 12, pp. 83–148.
9. N. Makhno, "Appeal to the Jews of all lands," in *Le Libertaire* and *Dyelo Truda* 23–24, 1927, pp. 8–10; and "The Makhnovschina and anti-Semitism," in *Dyelo Truda* 30–31, 1927, pp. 15–18.
10. Conversation mentioned by Ascaso and other sources quoted by Abel Paz, *Durruti, le Peuple en armes*, Paris, 1972, pp. 117–120.
11. Kubanin, op. cit. p. 116.
12. N. Makhno, "The Makhnovschina and its erstwhile allies: The Bolsheviks" op. cit. pp. 41–43.
13. Voline, *Explanations* (in Russian), Paris 1929, pp. 3 and 12.
14. Marc Mratchny, in letter of September 7, 1970 to Roland Lewin, Grenoble.
15. N. Makhno, *Concerning Voline's Explanations* (in Russian), Paris 1929, p. 11.
16. *Dyelo Truda* No. 35, April 1928, "Reply to the questions of the American comrades."
17. *Probuzdeniye*, Detroit No. 23–27, October 1932, "N. Makhno, the Progress club of Chicago and Piotr Arshinov," p. 60.
18. Statement made to the author during several conversations in 1970–1971.
19. Marie Goldsmit, alias Marie Isidine and Maria Korn, author of many articles in the Russian and French libertarian press and, in collaboration with Professor Y. Delage, of several scientific works e.g., *Théorie de l'évolution*, 1920 and others published by Flammarion.
20. On the other hand, the Kornilov Division's White officers' regiment did wear a black badge with a skull over crossed swords.
21. We hope to be able to publish an anthology of these tests anon.
22. *Le Libertaire*, No. 198, April 6, 1929.
23. Manuscript letter, preserved in Jean Maitron's archives.
24. Letter to the Spanish Anarchists, April 29, 1931, published in the Russian anarchist review, *Probuzdeniye*, Detroit, June–October 1932.
25. *Probuzdeniye*, No. 30–31, January–February 1933.
26. *Probuzdeniye*, No. 18, 1932, pp. 45–48.
27. *Ibid*, No. 52–53, November–December 1934, p. 31.
28. *Idem*.
29. *Le Libertaire*, No. 420, July 1, 1934.
30. *Ibid*. No. 424, October 19, 1934.
31. *Ibid*. No. 475, December 20, 1935.
32. Letter to the author, November 24, 1981.
33. Letters to the author, October 8, 1979 and June 27, 1981.
34. *Dyelo Truda*, No. 29, October 1927, pp. 9–11.

35. It is to be regretted that Barta did not deposit these papers safely in a library or institute, the best guarantee of their being preserved. Also, Makhno was himself an assiduous reader at the Library of the War Museum in Vincennes (now the BDIC. in Nanterre).
36. N. Makhno, *Beneath the Blows of the Counter-Revolution*, edited by Voline, with foreword and notes by Voline, Paris, 1936, p. 3.
37. Statement made to the author in 1974 and to Michael Palij in 1975.
38. N. Makhno, *Beneath the blows ...* op. cit. p. 4.
39. For a more detailed analysis of these documents, see Bibliographical Afterword below.
40. Voline, *La Révolution Inconnue*, Paris, 1947, p. 669.