

28. Nestor Makhno's Personality: Character Traits and Idiosyncrasies

Thus far and to avoid our narrative's becoming too nebulous, we have scarcely dwelt upon the personality and certain facets of the life and activities of Nestor Makhno. We now return to these and are going to attempt, with the help of sundry testimony, to reconstruct his portrait, his qualities and shortcomings which on occasion may better explain certain successes or failures of the movement as a whole.

According to the overlapping descriptions of people who met or associated with him in Paris, Makhno was rather short — standing about 1.65 meters tall — with black hair, blue-gray eyes, a high broad forehead and, by around 1927, he had a rather “hefty” look about him. This latter characteristic dated back to the years of the revolution, for ten years of imprisonment had turned the young heavy-set lad (as he appears in a photograph from 1907) into a man, a young man, to be sure, but one rather gaunt in appearance. The open air, better food and the exploits and tough encounters of the ensuing years endowed him with a more robust aspect.

The earliest portrait of him at this time upon which we can call is that by the Ukrainian nationalist Magalevsky who met Makhno in the spring of 1917. He describes him as a “...man small in stature, rather skinny wearing his hair long and with a small brown moustache”¹; he records Makhno strolling about town for nearly an hour, listening in on the conversations and observing the behavior of all and sundry, without uttering a word himself. The anarchist Josef Gotman, known as “The Emigrant” on account of his having lived in the United States for many a long year, saw Makhno at roughly the same time as a “...man of slightly less than average height, powerfully built, with piercing steel gray eyes and a determined expression. Son of a Ukrainian peasant, in his veins flowed the blood of Zaporog Cossack ancestors renowned for their independent spirit and their fighting qualities. Although weakened by long incarceration, during which his lungs had been affected, Makhno amazed everyone with his vitality and energy.”²

At the end of 1918 the insurgent Belash also saw him as “...not quite as tall as the average, with a lively manner, snub nose and long hair that falls to his neck and shoulders, giving him an adolescent air. Dressed in baggy pants over officer's

jackboots, a dragoon's jacket with buttoned-up collar, a student cap upon his head, and a Mauser revolver slung at his shoulder."³ A few months later, Dybets offered one of the most interesting portraits of him:

"What was he like? Well, how can I put it? He was small of stature. He wore his hair long, tumbling down his back. In winter as in summer, the only head covering he would have any truck with was the *papakha*. He was perfectly expert in the handling of all manner of weapons. He was a dab hand with the rifle and an excellent saber-man. Using the Mauser and the Nagan [revolvers — A.S.] he was a crack shot. He knew how to fire a cannon, which he required of all his entourage; the Batko himself could use a cannon [...] As an anarchist, he had read the works of Kropotkin, Orgueani and probably Bakunin; there, it would appear, his intellectual baggage stopped. There was no denying his uncommon innate gifts, but one could only take him to task for failing to develop them and having failed to grasp the responsibility that he bore."⁴

In short, Dybets was carping at Makhno for not having undergone metamorphosis, as he himself had, from libertarian into Bolshevik and maybe for not having pushed his "intellectual baggage" as far as the learned works of his new masters; that said, he did acknowledge some very fine qualities in the man. These had escaped the attention of one of his party colleagues, Braznev, who met Makhno in May 1919 and noticed the "long hair hanging over his forehead," found his nose to be "long and pointed" and that he had the "long face of a seminarian"; Braznev later acknowledged that he had been tempted to pull out his Mauser and put a bullet in the back of Makhno's head while he was perusing a letter from headquarters!⁵

When Lev Kameney came to Gulyai-Polye on May 7, 1919, one of his escorts drew this thumbnail sketch of Makhno: "A thickset fellow, fair-haired [?], clean-shaven, with piercing light blue eyes, forever gazing into the distance and rarely looking his interlocutor in the eye. He listened to what one had to say with his eyes lowered and head slightly tilted, with a curious expression, as if he was about to knife us all where we stood, and walk away. He wore a *burka* [Caucasian felt overcoat — A.S.], and a *papakha* on his head, and a saber and revolver at his side. His staff commandant is a typical Zaporog."⁶ The author of this portrait added that it was as if he had been transported back among the Zaporogs of the 18th century.



Some months later, in August 1919, in Pomoshnaya railway station when the 58th Red Army Division joined up with Makhno, a Bolshevik by the name of S. Rosen had occasion to see him close at hand; he saw him as having blue eyes, being dressed like a hussar, resembling a "common soldier rather than the Ukrainian batko which he was made out to be," only his "wicked gray eyes hinted at extraordinary

strength of will and toughness.” Makhno delivered a fiery anti-Bolshevik speech, labeling Bolsheviks as usurpers and stranglers of the people’s freedom and accusing them of fleeing like cowards before the Whites, abandoning the Ukraine to their mercy, whereas he pledged to smash Denikin into three short planks [a reference to a coffin? — A.S.]. Rosen stresses that Makhno shouted rather than spoke, with the consummate zeal of the agitator; the conclusion of his speech had been drowned out by cheering from the crowd of soldiers. One Bolshevik made to reply to him, but he had not allowed him to speak, and proposed that a revolutionary committee be formed forthwith.⁷

At around the same time, an Italian diplomat traveling in the area was intercepted by some Makhnovists; this was Pietro Quaroni; he offers us this picturesque description of his adventure. First of all he was confronted with “a tall, dark commander with a monumental set of moustaches and a still fresh scar running across his face. A Cossack cap sat lopsided on his head, his uniform was very vaguely reminiscent of the old Russian uniforms: Two machine-gun ammunition belts criss-crossed his chest; and lastly there was that broad leather belt with some grenades dangling from it.”⁸ It transpired that this was the commander of Makhno’s black sotnia. Quaroni was led before Makhno in a *khata*. The batko was alone, seated in front of a crudely-hewn table. The Italian diplomat depicts him as being “short, with straight, chestnut-brown hair hanging down to his narrow adolescent’s shoulders. A black cloth jacket girded by the inevitable crossed machine-gun belts; a revolver and a saber hung at his waist; on the table one could just make out his boots, gleaming.” He found him to have “small dark eyes with, from time to time, a maniacal stare and the occasional flash of cold curiosity; but, throughout, the expression of an indomitable and well nigh superhuman determination.” Quaroni exchanged a few words with his host and was very struck by his voice: “Such a voice as I have never heard; in tone, very high though not shrill, and abruptly modulated; one sometimes almost felt as if one was listening to a cock crow[!].” Probably an aficionado of the opera and under the influence of several glasses of vodka proffered by his host and which he did not dare decline for fear of offending Makhno, the Italian remarked a “long and strident burst of laughter” from the Batko who made an astonishing speech to him, unless, with the passage of time and his imperfect grasp of Russian, Quaroni had picked up certain words and phrases wrongly. According to him, Makhno had supposedly urged him to intercede with the Western allies to get them to support him:

“I am the one whom the Allies should be supporting. The Whites? They no longer stand any chance, and will never get the Russian people under their yoke again. The Reds? But if they win the day, you’re going to have problems putting paid to them. I, on the other hand, reckon that factory life, city living cannot but make a man unhappy; but in the countryside, once the big landlords have been done away with,

everybody will be able to live content. Look, this is marvelous soil; we shall sell you our wheat and from you we will buy the industrial products we lack and we shall all be happy; a happy, free peasant people will never seek trouble with its neighbors.”⁹

Makhno assured him that every peasant in Russia was on his side and undertook, with the Allies’ help, to rid the country of Reds and Whites alike. Although such words from Makhno’s lips seem unlikely, Quaroni’s version is nonetheless interesting, for he reconstructs this much more likely essential message: “It was a matter of doing away with landlords and government and of securing absolute freedom for the peasants. The old, old anarchist revolution, in short, the timeless dream of the Russian peasant — the revolution of Stenka Razin and Emilian Pugachev.”¹⁰ The diplomat’s short sojourn among the Makhnovists ended with a madcap race in a tatchanka, that “civil war jeep.” Quaroni’s recollection of the episode proved quite wistful, as he confessed, deep down, a pronounced sympathy for anarchy and recalled his interlocutor with “a twinge of regret.”

One month later, shortly before the battle of Peregonovka, there were some contacts between the Makhnovists and Petliura’s Ukrainian nationalists. One of the latter, a certain Vinar, portrays Makhno as a “solidly built fellow, of average height, dressed in a blue shirt tied at the waist by a green belt.”¹¹ Another Petliurist tells of Makhno’s arrival at the Uman headquarters. On the eve of the scheduled rendezvous, some Makhnovist emissaries had showed up to reconnoiter the place and posted themselves in positions where they might sound the alarm at the first sign of danger. The next morning on the stroke of 10:00 A.M., about 20 horsemen arrived on the gallop, with five tatchankis mounted with machine-guns bringing up the rear; in the middle tatchanka was Makhno, dressed in a long green Cossack greatcoat; other horsemen formed a rearguard. All of this cavalry lined up in two ranks facing the Petliurist headquarters, allowing the tatchankis to pass between them. Preceded and followed by two bodyguards brandishing revolvers, Makhno dismounted and walked towards the building. Armed with two revolvers himself, he entered the staff room, briefly greeted the Petliurist commander who had risen to welcome him, then promptly sat down in an armchair in order to avoid a handshake from his host.¹² There was little trust between the two sides, and the Grigoriev precedent must have been still in their minds, which accounts for the plethora of precautionary measures.



In Autumn 1919, during the occupation of Ekaterinoslav, Outman, an inhabitant of the city, caught sight of Makhno and found him “...small, slight, with a face almost womanly because of the long black hair that fell to his shoulders; he inspired dread, what with his staring, maniacal [?] piercing eyes and the cruel crease at the corner of his mouth, taken together with a pallid, washed-out face. It was hard to put an age on him — perhaps 25, maybe 45. No one could rest easy

under his gaze; one nurse whom he questioned for a full hour [she was suspected of harboring White officers] later had a nervous breakdown, so much so that for weeks there were fears for her sanity [!] From what she said, the hardest thing to bear had been the end of the interrogation, when Makhno became pleasant[?].”¹³

We have another piece of testimony to temper this chilling picture. It comes from a young student at the city’s Mining Institute, who had been delegated along with some other students to approach Makhno to seek clarification of certain Makhnovist impositions upon local intellectuals, one of whom was suspected of being a Denikinist spy and had been flogged. Having arrived with some trepidation, the student and his friends had quickly been reassured by Nestor who gave them a friendly welcome, standing up, smiling and shaking hands before inviting them to be seated, offering cigarettes and asking what he might do for them. The student took in the room they were in; roomy, well-lighted, with a huge table upon which two grenades, a Colt, two field telephones with wires trailing off outside, plus a samovar had been placed. The batko was not at all like a “father” figure and the student wondered why that title had been awarded to him. Makhno was wearing a khaki tunic, held closed by strapping that passed over the shoulders. An insurgent acted as orderly and jotted down the decisions reached during the exchange. Makhno listened attentively to the grievances of his visitors, occasionally interrupting them to seek further detail, and then told them of the problems he had in preventing abuses perpetrated by bandits professing to belong to the Makhnovist movement, although he had already had a number of them hanged. He declared that certain acts were the handiwork of Bolshevik provocateurs who had “everything to gain by the intelligentsia’s turning away from the Makhnovists,” especially in the cases which they had mentioned, for the insurgents never used the lash on anyone. They either shot those proven guilty, or released those found innocent. His visitors noted that it pained him to see the insurgent movement thus blackened to the advantage of its enemies. He undertook to look into the matter personally, chatted amiably with the students and asked them if they did not want to throw in their lot with the anarchist movement, as their presence might bring a lot of improvements.¹⁴



Towards the end of 1920, the French libertarian Mauricius (Vandamme) spent some time in the Ukraine and happened to come across an anarchist peasant whose name he discovered only later; Nestor Makhno. These were the circumstances: against a romantic backdrop — a dingy tavern in Odessa — Mauricius spoke the password: “Have you any sunflower seeds?” and was escorted up a “fire-escape” into a separate room, where he found a “thick-set peasant, with rugged features; thirty to thirty-five years old, but prematurely wrinkled, stubborn forehead, deep-set eyes as clear as spring water, with a determined, forceful manner mitigated by the timeless nostalgic dreaminess of the Slav[!].” A Social Revolutionary acted as interpreter. Makhno told him that the “Ukraine’s peasants made the revolution to

get rid of feudal lords who were grinding them down and exploiting them and will never agree to the return of the old regime, but they do not want to fall under the yoke of communist bureaucrats either: They want to be free. All peasants accept and like the soviet system, but [they must be] soviets freed of government influence. [...] The communist functionaries are parasites who aim to ape the tsarist lordlings and oppress the peasant; the latter is quite prepared to work, but not in order to keep these idlers in food. He will defend his freedom against usurpers. [...] The peasants want to live by their toil, not wear anybody's yoke nor oppress anyone."¹⁵ Mauricius fails to give the exact date of this encounter but places it after the breakdown of the second alliance and thus probably in 1921, when Makhno was in the Odessa region. This testimony is precious for it appeared at the beginning of 1922, at a time when the Makhnovist movement was not yet well known in France and, above all, for the first time in the West, it reproduced the full text of the second alliance between the Makhnovists and the Bolsheviks, which authenticates his gripping account beyond all doubt.

The last reference we have unearthed to Makhno's presence in the Ukraine depicts him as "...a thirty-five year old man, with the ruddy cheeks of the consumptive, long hair falling to his shoulders, a physiognomy reminiscent of the sacristan of some parish in the back of beyond."¹⁶ Now one has to take into account the many wounds he had received, as well as the extremely exacting conditions of the fight against the Red Army — which is to say, a certain physical exhaustion — further aggravated by his lengthy detention in Poland. In 1925, when Alexander Berkman finally made his acquaintance in Berlin, he was "...taken aback by his appearance": the "powerful leader of the insurgents had been reduced to a shadow of his former self. His face and body bore the scars of wounds and his shattered ankle had left him permanently infirm."¹⁷ However, his spirit and determination were intact and he expressed the desire to return to the land of his birth "to resume the struggle for freedom and social justice. He found life in exile to be unbearable, feeling wrenched away from his roots, and he pined for his beloved Ukraine." Berkman several times heard him say that he had to get back "over there, for we are needed."



Nourished by his exploits, the legend surrounding him was further reinforced by the many feats, real or imagined, with which public gossip credited him. The most wide-spread gossip concerned his unexpected appearances in the most diverse disguises and appearances. In the early days and given his flowing locks and beardless face, the most commonly assumed disguise was as a woman. Wearing make-up and dressed as a peasant woman off he would go to survey enemy positions before hiding some inscription by way of registering his visit, just before disappearing. One day he did just this to check out the Bolsheviks' abuses in Gulyai-Polye and left them this blunt warning: "Came. Saw everything. Vengeance will be taken. Batko Makhno."¹⁸ Perhaps his companions employed the same procedure to ensure that he seemed to be everywhere at once and to undermine the enemy's morale? Another

version has it that he arrived, in peasant garb, to sell some vegetables in a village market. Whereupon, the next day, notices pinned up on the fences announced that those who had purchased such and such a vegetable had been dealing with none other than Batko Makhno. It was also said that he had had some banknotes printed, normal on one side but bearing on the reverse this humorous inscription: "Hey, chum, stop worrying! The smart money is on Makhno!"¹⁹ A variation on this slogan stated that "...ours are no worse than yours."²⁰

Other things too attested to Makhno's ability to be everywhere and nowhere. One day the commuter train between Alexandrovsk and Melitopol was attacked by a gang of armed men. They moved through the carriages, "steaming" the passengers; when they came to one passenger who had so far been sitting quietly in his seat, they were asked: "Who are you people?" and replied "Makhnovists," whereupon the nameless passenger whipped out a revolver and gunned them down. About 50 other "passengers" meted out the same treatment to the rest of the gang. Then the "nameless" passenger reveals his identity — Nestor Makhno — and delivers a speech to the real passengers, setting out the insurgents' honest intent.²¹ Another time, a peasant begs a lone horseman to help him extricate his cart from the mud; this done, he thanks him and is about to move off when two more horsemen happen by and hail the lone horseman as ... Batko Makhno: Whereupon the peasant dissolves in apologies for having put him to the trouble and thanks him all the more warmly.²²

All of these deeds, real or imagined, spread by word of mouth and they earned Makhno unparalleled popularity among the peasantry, a popularity that occasionally bordered on outright adoration. Alexander Berkman records how one day in Dibrivka he came upon an "...aged muzhik, a real patriarch, with a long white beard, who doffed his *papakha* at the very mention of Makhno's name. 'A great and good man,' he said, 'may God protect him. He passed this way two years ago, but I remember as if it were yesterday. Standing on a bench in the square, he spoke to us. We are uneducated folk and could never make head or tail of the Bolsheviks' speechifying whenever they addressed us. But Makhno speaks our language, simple and direct: 'Brethren,' he told us, 'we have come to help you. We have driven out the landlords and their hirelings, and now we are free. Divide the land among you fairly and equitably, then work as comrades for the good of all.' A holy man," the venerable peasant concluded with conviction, going on to bring up the prophecy of Pugachev, the great 18th century rebel: "I have only frightened you, but one day a steel broom will come and it will sweep you all away, ye tyrants over the holy ground of this Russia of ours." Well, the broom has come and it is Batko Makhno."²³

The old peasant, though, had lost one of his sons in Shkuro's occupation of his village, but Makhno, tipped off, had arrived in the middle of the night with a hundred men, and, with the help of local peasants, driven out Shkuro's 3,000 Cossacks. Such personal fearlessness — Makhno always led from the front

— created fierce competition among the other insurgents, none of whom wanted to be outdone. Hardly ever wounded during the first three years of the civil war, a legend of invincibility came to surround him. Arshinov who considered this a “psychic anomaly”²⁴ relates that he would “...stroll around under the bullets and shrapnel as if these were raindrops.” To this was added a sang-froid that was always the same, even, indeed especially, in the most threatening circumstances as at Peregonovka or the Cheka-instigated attempt on his life; as he was walking down the main street of Gulyai-Polye, a killer, lying in wait around a corner, tossed two bombs at him. Fortunately, neither exploded; without flinching, Makhno drew his revolver, shot down the Chekist, picked up the bombs and took them to the movement’s headquarters, remarking that these Bolsheviks were sending him some decidedly queer presents!²⁵

A strategist of genius (the word is not too strong for this gift of his was universally acknowledged), Makhno exploited the lie of the land to perfection; those steppes stretching into the distance, virtually treeless and unforested but corrugated everywhere by deep ravines invisible at a distance. His familiarity with the region thus proved crucial. The tactical methods employed — trickery, the element of surprise, the lightning raid, the sham retreat and extreme mobility — made up for the insurgents’ numerical and technical inferiority. It was he who invented the tatchanka with its machine-gun mounting as transport for mounted infantry. Among his stratagems, the most celebrated, was wearing the disguise of the regular soldier; one by one he became an officer of the Varta, the White Cossacks, the Denikinist army and then a Red Army NCO.

We might also mention the use of marriage or funeral processions for military purposes. Berkman quotes one instance of this sort, as related by a Bolshevik: Makhno arranged for a wedding to be held in a Denikinist-occupied village. Passing themselves off as happy revelers, the insurgents doled out generous vodka rations to the troops of the garrison. As the drinking binge reached its climax, Makhno showed up at the head of a detachment. Taken by surprise and overpowered, the 1,000 Denikinists surrendered without a fight. The conscripts among them were sent home, the others being bound for the execution stake. Yet such strokes would have come to nothing had Makhno not been permanently on the alert. In the beginnings of the movement in the autumn of 1918 he slept fully dressed on a table over a three-week period, ready for any eventuality. When it came to weapon maintenance (especially maintenance of machine-guns) and the combat training of his partisans, he was extremely meticulous, almost obsessive. He explains himself in his reply to Kubanin concerning the allegedly gratuitous machine-gunfire by his chief lieutenant, Semyon Karetnik:

“Semyon Karetnik and all my other aides who succeeded to positions of responsibility adhered as if to a law to a precept which they inherited from myself: Upon taking up an office of responsibility, never to rely

upon anyone else in the proper running of combat units, especially prior to each operation. Always to go and check it out yourself. This rule was above all applied to machine-gun units which, during operations and marches, had to follow me at all times at the head of the entire army. In such instances it was Semyon Karetnik's duty to inspect these units, particularly in winter, when the slightest drop in temperature could freeze the machine-guns. He checked it out because he knew me well, for it was my custom to ride well ahead of the army, and he knew that, in the event of an encounter with the enemy, I would not wait for the rest of the force to arrive but would attack immediately, lest the enemy have time to organize himself, even though this might cost us many losses at the opening of the engagement, before the enemy was overwhelmed by our attack. It was on such occasions that Semyon Karetnik would test the machine-guns, usually by loosing off five or six rounds himself, in the presence of the gunners."²⁶

These precautions explain the frequent successes of his surprise attacks and make absolute nonsense of Voline's allegations of alcoholism which were of course made once Makhno was dead. Had he been alive he would have rebutted them and held them up to ridicule. It is in fact inconceivable that Makhno or his close companions could have indulged in drunken binges, given the constant tension in which they lived; the slightest bingeing could have cost all their lives in an instant, for engagements erupted at the most unlikely hours of the day or night and so they had to be constantly on the alert. All servicemen know that much, and during his famous raid, for instance, the Don Cossack general Mamontov, who was extremely temperate himself and who also led his men from the front, came upon 1,000 barrels of alcohol in Frolov. He promptly ordered them smashed, in which the tearful Cossacks obliged him (we do not know whether their tears were due to the alcoholic vapors or to their regrets!). Mamontov was perfectly well aware that, had he not done so, then within the hour all his men would have become corpses.²⁷ Makhno did the same thing with the alcohol of the Berdyansk distillery on one of the occasions when he seized the port; the barrels were emptied onto the snow, when they might have been used to banish the chill.



An important question arises concerning the impact of "Batko" Makhno's charisma upon the movement as a whole. In the minds of many, Makhno is regarded as a chief to whom all the insurgents were subordinate. As we have seen, the supreme authority of the movement was vested in the general congress of peasants and insurgents of the region; the leadership appointed between two congresses, the Military Revolutionary Soviet, had merely executive powers. The essential decisions of the movement were always made after a general assembly of the insurgents; however, certain tactical and strategic decisions of a military character fell exclusively to

Makhno and the members of his staff. Thus, here, “Batko” Makhno meant a leader of men in military matters and military matters only. This notion was wholly in tune with the traditional usage among the Makhnovists’ ancestors — the Zaporog Cossacks. In this instance, the role of Batko, equivalent then to the title of *ataman koshevoy*, had not initially had such charismatic connotations. As we may judge from a description given by Gogol. One Kirdiaga is duly elected (in his absence) as *ataman koshevoy*. A dozen Cossacks go off to fetch him and tell him:

“Come along! You’ve been elected *koshevoy*!”

‘For pity’s sake, my lords,’ he replies, ‘I am unworthy of such an honor. How could I be *koshevoy*? I lack the wisdom necessary to hold such high office! Is there really no one worthier in the whole army?’

‘It is as you have been told!’ the Cossacks bellow.

Two of them grab him under the arms and despite his efforts to resist by bracing his legs, he is at last hauled off into the middle of the square to an accompaniment of prods, heavy claps on the back and admonishments:

‘Don’t by so shy, damn it! Accept the honor, you cur, since it has been offered to you!’

Whereupon the crowd is asked if it is indeed willing to have Kirdiaga as its *koshevoy*. When it replies in the affirmative, the symbolic mace is offered to the newly elected one. In accordance with ancient custom, he declines it twice before accepting: four old Cossacks then step forward from the assembly and place a handful of earth atop Kirdiaga’s head, and smear his face; he remains impassive, and thanks the Cossacks for the honor they have done him.”²⁸

One can readily understand how, in these conditions, the title of Batko implied a limited command although he could influence certain other decisions through the power of his word or arguments. The example of the Grigoriev affair illustrates this point; after the initial contact with the ataman, Makhno and the members of his staff withdrew to consider their options. A first vote indicated that four favored an alliance, but seven were against that but for the immediate execution of this pogromist. At this point, Makhno piped up and declared that “...Whatever the cost, we must enter into an alliance with Grigoriev, for we do not know as yet what support he has and we can always shoot him later. We have to redeem those who follow him, the ones who are innocent victims and we must at all costs absorb them into our units.”²⁹ A second poll demonstrated the impact this argument had made; now nine favored an alliance and two abstained. When the time came to make the decision — which had such tragic implications for the destinies of the movement — whether to ally yet again with the Red Army,

Makhno had been dilatory; had he set his face against it, there can be no doubt but that events would not have taken such a dismal turn. The likelihood is that he was unwilling to oppose the vast majority of the insurgents who favored such a pact. On the other hand in the case of Fedor Glouschenko, commissioned by the Cheka to assassinate him, he was unable to resist his comrades' decision to have him executed in spite of the condemned man's repentance. If Makhno clung to and made use of the title *Batko*, this was because he appreciated that it was a rallying point for the peasantry as a whole who looked to him. Otherwise, as a convinced anarchist, he had no truck with the honors bestowed by any authorities; he contemptuously repudiated the decorations and ranks awarded (and the substantial salaries they implied) by both the Red Army and the Whites. Let us add for the record that under Wrangel, certain White politicians had been willing to confer upon him the title of the first "Count of Gulyai-Polye," but there is no telling whether he was aware of this curious plan.³⁰ All of these shenanigans did not prevent his enemies from placing a considerable price on his head when the time came, in an effort to rid themselves of this symbol of people's self-rule. Thus his responsibilities did not turn his head for, as one of his obituaries had it, he "...did not know how to 'act out a part,' his pre-eminence being natural, the result merely of an exceptional strength of will."³¹ And this strength was derived from his intense faith in anarchy. At the outset of the insurgent movement in 1918, he had dreamed of a life in which there was "...neither slavery, nor falsehood, nor infamy, nor despised divinities, nor chains, where love and living space will not be for sale, where there would only be men's truth and nothing else..."³²



As an émigré Makhno had to summon up all his strength of will just to face the adversities and the slings and arrows of exile in strange lands and often hostile surroundings. France lived up to her reputation as a land of asylum, although he was informed at the Paris prefecture of police that it was on account of him that the Allied intervention in Russia had failed, but that this was not being held against him and that he was being granted a residence permit.³³ In this light, it is all the more to his credit that he was able to engage in such intense memorialist and intellectual pursuits in the years 1925–1929, complementing on paper the fighting that he had led on the ground. Here let it be noted that his style, while not as "literary" as Voline might have wished, was quite vivid. In his writing he simultaneously described what was done and what he felt, and in some places this did not preclude a degree of pathos and undue prolixity; however, he always brings out the underlying and implicit meaning of his standpoints, sometimes with great lyricism. In his dealings with other libertarians, it was not his intention to capitalize upon his "prestige" and he was always like a brother. Kiro Radeff has told us how Makhno's personal magnetism worked with French workers and others who, knowing nothing about the man, aside from his name, Nestor, would chat very warmly with him. He had remained humble among the humble, true to his class.

Some libertarian militants from Aimargues, a small town in the Gard department — at the time it was France's most anarchist town in terms of numbers and the intensity of the libertarian activities engaged in — met him in 1929, during the short trip that he had made to deliver his daughter Lucie there to holiday with some friends. Comrades Chotand (known just as Chocho) and N. have described to us a Makhno who was anything but intimidating, with his cloth cap, steady glance, strong handshake and open, friendly manner.



Honed by the misrepresentations, controversies and squabbles of the years 1927–1929, his character soured somewhat, his diffidence increased and he no longer let anything pass without a snappy reply, becoming less approachable.

What truth was there in the innuendo about his having been an habitu  of the Vincennes race-track and his fondness for the demon drink? Kiro Radeff has confirmed that Makhno was wont to go along to watch the horses race, not so much to have a flutter on the outcome as to relive certain feelings at the sight of the mounts — a quite normal thing in a horseman. As for over-indulgence in wine or spirits, Bulgarian comrades who were intimate with him right to the end — Kiro Radeff, Erevan and Nikola Tchorbadjietf — have categorically denied to us that he had any such weakness. Not once did they ever see him drunk or drinking heavily; indeed, they claim that his health was such that it would not allow him to drink much. Ida Mett has something to say on this point also:

“Was Makhno the drunkard as which Voline describes him? I think not. During three years in Paris, I never saw him drunk, and I saw him very often at that time. I had occasion to accompany him as interpreter to meals organized in his honor by some foreign anarchists. One glass, and he became intoxicated; his eyes would sparkle and he became voluble, but I never saw him really drunk. They tell me that in the last years of his life he went hungry, let himself go and maybe at that point he took to the drink; that seems to have been a possibility. But generally speaking it took only a few drops of alcohol to intoxicate his ailing and weakened body. Being ataman, he must have drunk as much as any Ukrainian peasant in his everyday life.”³⁴

For our part, we have not been able to uncover any first-hand evidence of Makhno's possible drunkenness; nothing to endorse the U.S. academic Paul Avrich's categorical assertion that Makhno “...found only in alcohol the means of escape from this strange world into which he had been thrown.”³⁵



Makhno had paid a high toll to the revolution in both personal and family terms. His aged mother had been man-handled and driven from her humble abode; three of his brothers had been, respectively, killed by the Austro-Germans, the Whites and the Reds. He had split up with his first companion, Nastia, over a

misunderstanding; at the time of his odyssey across Russia, she had given birth to a still-born child and then, in the belief that Nestor was dead, she had set up home with another comrade. For a time he had another sweetheart, Tina, a telephonist in Dibrivka and then, from the start of 1919 he had had a consistent relationship with the woman who was to become his life's companion, Galina Kuzmenko, a Gulyai-Polye schoolteacher. She was a highly active participant in the insurgent movement, as adroit in the handling of a rifle as of a machine-gun, and for a time she had been involved in the intelligence branch. It was undoubtedly her commitment to the cause which had brought her and Makhno together. And she had paid dearly for it. Her father who naively believed that the "Whites and the Reds are men too," had been shot by the latter in August 1919 simply for being Makhno's father-in-law. Here let us make it clear that the couple never married, contrary to some assertions which have them marrying in church(?). Galina candidly admitted this in an article on the death of her father which appeared after Makhno's death.³⁶ She described herself as a "Makhnovist, not an anarchist," we are told by Nikola Tchorbadjieff who describes her as a "...tall, beautiful woman, erect, candid, likeable, smiling, very dignified and a good mother." In 1921 along with Nestor she had come within an ace of death when the village where they were staying was ringed by the Red Army which knew of their presence and had searched every home with a fine-tooth comb. Standing behind a door, with revolver at the ready, Nestor and she had awaited discovery, intent upon selling their lives dear; fortunately, the troops had not been curious enough to look behind the door of the room they were searching. May Picqueray also describes Galina as ... "very devoted, calm and sensible, attached to Nestor and likeable"; on the other hand, little Lucie who must have been almost three years old in 1925, struck May as a little imp, what with her climbing and jumping off the table.³⁷ According to certain "rumors," the couple had their ups and downs but there too we have not been able to discover anything specific; Nikola Tchorbadjieff, who had been their neighbor, denied as much to us and pointed out instead that they got along famously.

However, Ida Mett levels serious charges against Galina; she describes her as a Ukrainian nationalist, credits her with an overbearing attitude towards her companion and even accuses her of having tried to murder him in his sleep in 1924 in Poland following an affair she had had with a Petliurist officer. As evidence of this murder bid, she cites the broad scar that Makhno displayed on his cheek. We pointed out to her that it was common knowledge that the scar was the result of a bullet which had struck him in the back of the head, exiting via the cheek ... to which she retorted that she had only "heard tell" of this. Ida Mett also accused Galina of having stolen her companion's private diary and of having destroyed it in concert with Voline — whose companion she allegedly became — because of scathing remarks it contained about them. Here again Ida Mett was unable to provide detail and had retreated behind a "hearsay" defense. Such allegations therefore must be taken with a large pinch of salt. Nikola Tchorbadjieff did confirm to us that Galina was on

friendly terms with Voline after Nestor's death but that there was nothing to suggest more intimate relations; their dealings must have had to do with the preparation of Makhno's manuscripts and memoirs. What is not open to debate, is Galina's loyalty to the memory of her comrade, as her article in Ukrainian in *Probuзdeniye*, refuting the calumnies of Ukrainian nationalists, bears witness.³⁸ Also she had been jailed in a Warsaw prison for 13 months; she could not have wound up there merely for being Makhno's companion; she must have been engaged in tremendous joint activity with Nestor whose secretary and confidante she had always been. It strikes us that her part in the movement was much more important and remarkable than it seems; for instance, it was she who took on the delicate and dangerous mission of contacting the Russian-American anarchists Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman who were at that stage well-disposed towards Lenin, in the summer of 1920. She briefed them on the real nature of the Makhnovist movement; neither Goldman nor Berkman concealed the strong impression she had made on them. Emma mentioned the risk she had run in coming to see them; Galina replied that she had "...faced danger so often that she no longer gave it a thought." The pair spent the whole night in conversation; Emma noted her "...ravishing face" and Berkman speaks of her as a "young woman of remarkable beauty." She questioned Emma Goldman about "women abroad, especially in America: What were they doing? Were they truly independent and acknowledged? How did relations between the sexes stand? And birth control?" Emma was impressed by this "urgent thirst for knowledge" and sensed her "enthusiasm quicken" in response to Galina's. It seems that for the visiting couple (Berkman and Goldman) this encounter was a watershed; hitherto, they had been starry-eyed about the Lenin regime. A meeting with Makhno was planned by means of a stratagem; Makhnovists would seize the train carrying Goldman and Berkman, thereby saving appearances in Moscow's eyes and then they could have a more detailed briefing on the Makhnovschina. But circumstances prevented realization of the plan.³⁹

In exile, Makhno had patiently striven to separate his companion Galina from his activities, even claiming in one article that his wife was not politically-minded, this in the probable aim of not compromising her in the eyes of the French police and his Russian enemies. He may even have urged her, before dying, to go home and carry out a mission there among his surviving comrades. Some argue in favor of this; first there is mention of the existence of three caches of arms and valuables somewhere in the Ukraine, the whereabouts known only to these two; then we have been able to establish that, during the war, Galina and her daughter, Lucie Makhno, did set out for Berlin before trying to reach the Ukraine. According to Ida Mett, both allegedly perished in an air raid, but Kiro Radeff told us that he spotted Galina on a Paris bus after the war, though he was not sure enough to approach her. There is no question but that Galina remained loyal to the struggle waged in 1919-1921 and that she tried to carry it on by whatever means she had at her disposal.



Let us move on now to the vices and various shortcomings ascribed to Makhno's personality and begin with his old comrade Piotr Arshinov who, in his *History of the Makhnovist Movement* first lists many obvious qualities before coming to his main fault; Makhno's alleged ignorance of matters historical and political, and his lack of adequate grounding in theory. Given the part that Makhno played in it, these shortcomings would have had a serious impact on the whole movement. Arshinov also mentions a "complete lack of education" and a degree of "nonchalance," especially in the autumn of 1919 when the Bolsheviks re-invaded the Ukraine.⁴⁰ He cites no other examples or specific case to back up his remarks; from which we must deduce that he took Makhno to task for not having taken sufficient precautions against Moscow and not having really opposed that second compact with the Red Army. It might have been interesting had he let us in on his own position, for it would appear that he was part of the movement at this point. In any case, as we have seen, Makhno, acting alone, never at any time arrived at any decision binding upon the movement as a whole; in which case, Arshinov's reproach applies equally to the other insurgents. Note that at the time, Bolshevism was a new phenomenon and that few were conversant with Lenin's career as a militant, his double-talk and his Jacobin-Blanquist views. Many another revolutionary, Bolsheviks included, let themselves be taken in even though they were "university graduates" or had taken "lengthy party courses" and this was true also and not least of the anarchists. Kropotkin himself had entertained illusions about the Leninist regime. Also, we do not share Arshinov's opinion of Makhno's education and his political and historical knowledge. He was not as bereft of these as all that as we have had occasion to note. Consequently, this "failing" does not stand up, unless Arshinov was willing to say more about it and focus attention, say, on the treatment meted out to the Whites' plenipotentiaries — hardly in keeping with the usual conventions — or take Makhno to task for having abdicated his responsibilities in June 1919 by deferring to Trotsky, or even for having underestimated the Ukrainian nationalist factor. That would be at once too much and not enough, so we shall stick to the single example that Arshinov does cite.

Voline repeats the fault pointed out by Arshinov and tacks on certain reproaches of his "moral qualities" and "moral duties," in which Makhno and his comrades were deficient; he looks upon this as the movement's "dark side." He has ... "heard tell that certain commanders — Kurilenko is mentioned most often — were morally better equipped than Makhno to lead and steer the movement as a whole."⁴⁴ Unfortunately, Voline did not "...know Kurilenko and could not offer any personal opinion of him," which somewhat brings his "hearsay" testimony into question. On the other hand, he puts Makhno's "carelessness" down to alcohol abuse, his "greatest failing." Curiously, this "failing" showed itself morally: "In Makhno, the inebriated state showed itself primarily in the moral domain. Physically, he was not unsteady on his feet. But under the influence of alcohol, he became perverse, over-excitable, unfair, intractable and violent." Let us leave it up to Voline to

determine the difference between a "moral" and a "physical" state of intoxication and just deplore the fact that he waited until Makhno was dead before ventilating this charge, which we think unlikely for the reasons we noted earlier. Voline targets another great fault in Makhno and many of his closest associates; their "attitude towards women. Allegedly, they forced certain women to participate in 'sorts of orgies'." This very grave charge is categorically rebutted by Ida Mett; Makhno had told her "...that he could have had any woman he chose in his glory days, but that in reality he did not have the spare time to devote to a personal life. He told me this by way of refuting the legend of orgies that had allegedly been organized by and for him. Voline in his book rehearses the same claptrap. In reality, Makhno was celibate, or rather chaste. As for his relations with women, I would have said that there was in him a combination of a sort of peasant simplicity and a respect for womankind that was typical of turn of the century Russian revolutionary circles."⁴²

Let us add that Isaak Teper, a *Nabat* anarchist who spent some months as a participant in the movement, cites in his study the case of the Makhnovist commander Puzanov who had raped a nurse and been brought before an insurgent tribunal. Makhno had allegedly been insistent that he should be shot and it was only on a majority vote that he was merely relieved of his command and placed in the front lines, where he was killed shortly afterwards.⁴³ Let us not forget, either, the presence of Galina Kuzmenko or other insurgents who would never have stood for such an attitude toward themselves or other women.

Voline also speaks of "personal caprices," or "dictatorial antics," "arbitrariness," "absurd outbursts" and "brainstorms," as well as of a "sort of military clique" — or cabal — surrounding Makhno. Here again he fails to mention many hard facts and these charges seem above all to have been prompted by personal rancor. For what reason did Voline seek to besmirch the memory of his co-religionist? To be sure he had been a participant in the insurgent movement only for four months and his opinion was valued for only that space of time, and one might discern in this personal enmity the antagonism between "talker" and "doer," in short between the gossip and the activist. For her part, Ida Mett "certifies" that not only did Makhno "...have no liking for Voline, but had no respect for him, regarding him as a worthless, characterless individual." Which probably accounts for Voline's attitude.

Ida Mett speaks of the failings that she was able to discern in the émigré Makhno, emigration being the only time she had any dealings with him. In particular she stresses his "...extreme incredulity and diffidence," even towards his closest friends who wished him well. She reckoned that his attitude was a "pathological consequence" of Nestor's military activities. She also found him to be a "cantankerous" character, and detected a "...measure of hostility towards intellectuals," towards whom he allegedly felt "a degree of envy" (?). According to her, he had also been "jealous" of the "careers" of Voroshilov and Budyenny. It would appear that she had some difficulty in translating into good French, this "resentment" on

Makhno's part towards these individuals and intellectuals whom he could see right through, ever since his days in the Butyrki prison. Magalevsky, quoted earlier, tells us that in Gulyai-Polye in 1917, he heard Makhno tell the peasants, after sitting through the speechifying of local notables and bigwigs: "Do not believe what these intellectuals tell you; they are the enemies of ordinary folk."⁴⁴ On the other hand, we saw him in Ekaterinoslav lamenting the inadequate numbers of intellectuals in the movement. In his *ABC of the Revolutionary Anarchist*, he notes that, out of every ten intellectuals who move towards the oppressed toilers, nine will seek to pull the wool over their eyes, but the tenth will be their friend and will help them to avoid deception by the others,⁴⁵ which in our view is a good general estimate. Thus he did not wholly embrace the critical theses expounded with regard to intellectuals by the Russian Pole Machaiski whom he was to encounter on his trip to Moscow in the spring of 1918.

In trying to defend Makhno's memory against Voline's charges, Ida Mett also revealed her own confusion on certain points. Indeed, among some assertions that seem well-founded, some evaluations appear very shallow:

"Was Makhno an honest man seeking the good of the people, or was he a maverick who chanced to fall from the heavens? My reckoning is that his social goodwill was sincere and above question. He was an innately gifted politician (?) and threw himself into stratagems which were often out of proportion with his limited political knowledge. However, I believe that he was perfectly at home in the role of popular avenger. As for knowing what he and his class wanted and hoped for, that was indeed the Makhnovist movement's Achilles heel; but it was a weakness shared by the whole of peasant Russia of whatever persuasion. They wanted freedom and land, but how were they to use these two things? That was more difficult to determine."

Such incomprehension of the nature and goals of the Makhnovists is the "Achilles heel" of Ida Mett herself, a young Lithuanian Jew and city dweller, a newcomer to revolutionary circles, unfamiliar with the ins and outs of the clashes in the Ukraine.



Let us just mention the rather bizarre assessment of Louis Dorlet, alias Samuel Vergine, author, in *Le Libertaire*, of a eulogistic obituary piece on Makhno; he wrote us that he had seen "...Makhno two or three times. He was a boor that believed in holding nothing back(!)." ⁴⁶

And ourselves, what might we criticize in Makhno or take him to task for? For a start, there was his serious underestimation of the Ukrainian national factor, as he later acknowledged in exile. His ignorance of the Ukrainian language and culture served him ill, although the rather Russified southern Ukraine had been more receptive to the general concerns of Russia. For instance, he made the mistake

of initiating a fight against the Ukrainian nationalists without properly dissociating himself from Muscovite imperialism. A *modus vivendi* with the Petliurists could have enabled Makhnovists to devote themselves better to the fight against the White and Red invaders. As a result, a more discriminatory evaluation of the danger posed by the different enemy forces — and he patently underestimated the Bolsheviks in this context — might have wrought a complete change in the course of events. Yet these shortcomings cannot be imputed to Makhno alone, for anarchist doctrine too had neglected the national factor and the hegemonic ambitions of the Jacobin-Leninists. That leaves his excessively severe treatment of certain marauders or perpetrators of anti-social acts — he systematically had them hanged or shot. Aside from this trait, it appears to us that he acted for the best, in conjunction with the insurgent masses and the precepts of libertarian communism. Thus, Koval, a Russian anarchist who had been an active participant in the 1917 revolution, reckons that men such as Makhno are very rare and “...appear only once a century.”⁴⁷ One obituary saw him as the incarnation of the struggle against all tyrannies and for “...the transformation of our servile world into a free society without masters or slaves.”⁴⁸ Lipotkin, author of another obituary notice predicts that when the Russian people overthrow the Bolsheviks’ dictatorship, they “...will remember with pride and love their most courageous and most authentic combatants, among whom Nestor Makhno will be well to the fore.”⁴⁹

Notes for Chapter 28: Nestor Makhno’s Personality: Character Traits and Idiosyncrasies

1. Magalevsky, op. cit. p. 61.
2. Cited by Alexander Berkman *Nestor Makhno, the Man who Saved the Bolsheviks*, an English-language manuscript written shortly before his death in 1935 by this Russian-American anarchist. Our thanks to the International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam — which has it — for having authorized us to publish extracts. The text takes up and develops the “N. Makhno” chapter in Berkman’s book *The Bolshevik Myth*, published in New York, 1925, pp. 182–196.
3. Belash op. cit. p. 212.
4. Dybets op. cit. p. 39 and pp. 44–45.
5. Braznev “The partisans,” in *Novy Mir*, Moscow, 1925, No. 7, p. 75.
6. V. S. L. B. *Kamenev’s Expedition*, op. cit. p. 136.
7. S. Rosen, op. cit. p. 125.
8. P. Quaroni *Croquis d’ambassade* (translation from the Italian), Paris, 1955, p. 4 et seq.
9. Ibid. p. 10
10. Ibid. p. 6.
11. L. Vinar “Relations between N. Makhno and the Ukrainian national army (1918–1920)” (in Ukrainian) *Rozbudova derzhavi*, Munich, 1953, 2, pp. 14–20.
12. E. Yakimov “Makhno’s visit to Uman” Chernova Kalina, Lvov, 1931, pp. 78–80.
13. Gutman, op. cit. p. 67.

14. V.T., an engineer deported to Germany during the second world war before becoming a refugee in France, in *Dyelo Truda* No. 41, 1953, pp. 25–27.
15. Mauricius *Au pays des soviets. Neuf mois d'aventures*, Paris, 1922, pp. 261–267.
16. S. M. "The Makhnovschina," in *Revolutionary Russia* (in Russian), Prague 1922, No. 7 p. 23.
17. A. Berkman, op. cit. p. 29.
18. A. Nikolaev *First among Equals* (in Russian), op. cit. p. 124.
19. Kalinin *Russia's Vendée* (in Russian) op. cit. p. 286.
20. A. Nikolaev *Nestor Makhno* (in Russian) op. cit. p. 95.
21. A. Nikolaev *Batko Makhno* (in Russian) op. cit. p. 17.
22. A. Nikolaev *Nestor Makhno* (in Russian) op. cit. p. 93.
23. A. Berkman, op. cit. pp. 12–13.
24. Ida Mett *Souvenirs sur Makhno*, 7 page, typewritten manuscript on deposit at the Library of Contemporary International Documentation, in Nanterre, Paris, 1948, p. 5.
25. A. Nikolaev, op. cit. p. 99.
26. N. Makhno, *The Makhnovschina and its Erstwhile Allies, the Bolsheviks* op. cit. pp. 31–32.
27. I. Kalinin, op. cit.
28. Nikolai Gogol *Taras Bulba*, Paris, 1930 pp. 84–86.
29. Kubanin, op. cit. p. 80.
30. Nazhivin *Writings on Revolution* (in Russian), Berlin, 1923 p. 314.
31. Murometz, in *Probuzdeniye* No. 52-53, November–December 1934, p. 16.
32. N. Makhno "Memoirs" (in Russian) in *Anarkhicheskii vestnik* op. cit. no. 1, p. 28.
33. Conversation reported by Nikola Tchorbadjief.
34. Ida Mett, op. cit.
35. Paul Avrich *Les Anarchistes Russes*, Paris, 1979 p. 275.
36. G. Kuzmenko "Memories. My father's death," in *Probuzdeniye* No. 76, 1936, pp. 14–24.
37. Author's interview with May Picqueray, September 28, 1981.
38. *Probuzdeniye* No. 50-51, September–October 1934.
39. A. Berkman, op. cit. pp. 14–22, and Emma Goldman *Epopee d'une anarchiste*, Paris, 1979, p. 263.
40. Arshinov op. cit. pp. 217–220. Note that Arshinov was himself a self-educated worker.
41. Voline *La Révolution Inconnue*, Paris, 1947, pp. 680–683.
42. Ida Mett, op. cit.
43. I. Teper, op. cit. p. 84.
44. Magalevsky, op. cit. p. 63.
45. *Probuzdeniye* No. 19, January 1932, p. 20.
46. Letter to the author, October 4, 1981.
47. F. Koval "Demand Makhno's Release," in *Amerikanskyye Izvestia* January 17, 1923, p. 6.
48. "Death of N. I. Makhno," in *Probuzdeniye* No. 47-49, June–August 1934, p. 2.
49. L. Lipotkin "Nestor Makhno," in *Probuzdeniye* No. 50-51, September–October 1934, p. 16.

29. The Makhnovists

Most observers, eyewitnesses and historians of the civil war in the Ukraine are agreed in acknowledging the representative nature of the Makhnovist movement as far as the peasant population, and especially its poorest stratum, are concerned. There is in existence a rather telling breakdown of the Makhnovschina's social composition. In figures quoted by Kubanin, relating to insurgents who allegedly applied in April 1921 to take advantage of the Bolshevik authorities' amnesty (in fact, they were probably taken prisoner and forced, under threat of execution, to go over formally to the regime) we find that, of 265 Makhnovist insurgents, 117 had no land at all, either because they had been farm laborers before the revolution or because they had been workers, or because the Reds had confiscated their land; 91 insurgents worked a plot of less than four hectares — an area regarded as the minimum necessary to support a household — and only 57 owned larger tracts.¹ Such evidence invalidates the description "kulak" as applied to the movement by Trotsky and the official authorities and instead backs up Makhno's claims about the poor peasant profile of the movement. These rural proletarians — we might say "slaves bound to the soil" — were descendants of the peasants reduced to serfs by Catherine II and cheated after the abolition of serfdom in 1862,¹ when they had been forced to buy back the land which they had always worked. In addition, they had been joined by a number of workers who had been driven out of the towns by penury, chaos and arbitrary policing organized by the Leninists.

In organizational terms, the insurgent army relied upon a network of local detachments which, according to the numbers of their fighters and the extent of their activities, became regiments bearing the name of their places of origin; Kubanin for instance talks about the Sixth Ekaterinoslav Regiment. Thus these units were homogeneous, which made it hard to plant troublesome or suspect elements in them. Volunteer service was the very essence of the movement, although it earned captured Makhnovists the worst of treatment; not for them the extenuating grounds of compulsory mobilization. It goes without saying that, as volunteers, insurgents received no pay, although the Red Army — during the life spans of the two alliances — had sought to place them on a payroll. Consequently their entire upkeep was dependent upon the voluntary contributions of the local populace. Furthermore,

most of the insurgents were not mobilized on a permanent basis; they had to go home to perform the requisite farm labors, provided of course that circumstances on the front allowed and that they had the agreement of their military leadership.

This status as peasant-soldiers defending their land and their liberty is reminiscent of that of their Zaporog peasant forebears; and the similarity carried over into the partisan warfare tactics that wrought such havoc among their opponents. Thus, Kubanin stresses the extreme mobility of the Makhnovist cavalry, covering an average of 60–100 kilometers a day, whereas regular cavalry covered only 40, and, on very rare occasions, 60 kilometers.² Such a pace was possible only with the support of the population and the painstaking organization of fresh mounts at certain agreed staging-posts; outriders, having swapped their tired mounts for fresh horses and resting up, would drop back into the rearguard. This switch-over came into play in engagements; Kubanin describes its devastating results:

“Whenever Red troops brought severe pressure to bear on the Makhnovist army, the latter often beat a hasty retreat, striving to vanish from the enemy’s field of vision, then promptly attacking his rear, having taken care to leave one unit up ahead to serve as bait for the Reds. It was through such swift, forceful, unexpected onslaughts that the Reds often found themselves beaten. Just when a Red unit thought that it had defeated the Makhnovists and went to cap its success by giving chase, it often found itself in fact under attack from the rear. If that approach failed, the Makhnovists, under constant pressure from the enemy, used to split their units into different groups, scattering in every direction, thereby completely disorienting the enemy. Sometimes these groups would split themselves up into regiments, regiments into sotnias and so on down to quite tiny tactical units. By 1921 the whole of the Ukraine teemed with such Makhnovist detachments sometimes coming together into a single force, sometimes scattering themselves throughout the countryside again and, burying their weapons, reverting into ‘peaceable villagers.’”³

These were typically Cossack tactics and the Makhnovists may be deemed nothing short of “Anarchy’s Cossacks,” so reminiscent were their methods of the methods of their ancestors. Kubanin takes the line that this had more to do with “peasant cunning,” both because he knew nothing or wished to know nothing of similarities with the Zaporogs, and because he confounded such fighting methods with those of the peasantry generally. Not that the insurgents scorned the latter, however; the partisan Osip Tsebry supplies us with one rather striking example; in 1918 some peasants from the Zhmerinka region (of western Ukraine) were in the habit of going out into the fields, hiding their rifles and machine-guns among their wheat; a passing patrol or small unit of Austro-Germans or Varta would suddenly find itself attacked and wiped out by the peasants who, in order to shift suspicion,

wasted no time in alerting the relevant command to a detachment of origins unknown having been responsible for the raid.⁴ The whole tactics of the Makhnovist detachments on campaign were based on extreme mobility, itself down to the quality of the mounts — often the horses of German settlers, which were renowned for their sturdiness — and to the courage of the individual fighter. Yefimov, a Red Army “military expert” charged with combating the Makhnovschina, quite rightly stresses the differences between the Red Army trooper and the Makhnovist insurgent. In the case of the former, the common soldier finds his idiosyncrasies and qualities leveled out by absorption into the generality which led to one of two extremes in engagements; either an infectious enthusiasm if the situation was favorable, or a general despondency and mass surrender by every unit in the event of misfortune. The Makhnovist’s performance, though, was something else again:

“By reason of his experience of partisan warfare or of the social conditions of his existence, the Makhnovist is possessed of highly developed personal qualities; he feels wholly independent everywhere. Even in combat, his favorite order of cavalry attack is the *lava* which affords every combatant maximum autonomy. His personal qualities as a fighting man ensure that he does not lose his head in the most dangerous moments, nor does he have to await specific instructions; he knows what he has to do; there is no need for him to be called to order and under constant supervision.”⁵

That writer also points out that a fair number of insurgents had seen service in the Russo-German war and had emerged from it with solid experience of weapons and of coming under fire. We may add that the common effort against all the invaders and enemies of every hue was a strong bond connecting the insurgents; they called one another *bratishkis* (little brothers). Abetted in this way by social motives and its taste for independence, this “ragamuffin” army, sourcing its weapons wholly from the enemy, was able to pull off remarkable feats in defeating modern well-equipped whole armies — of Germans, Austro-Hungarians, Ukrainian nationalists, White Cossacks — and to keep the Red Army at bay for a long time.



Another important feature of the Makhnovist movement was the youthfulness of the insurgents, most of whom were less than 25 years of age. On this point, Kubanin quotes an interesting statistic, regarding the Fifth Ekaterinoslav Regiment towards the end of 1919; of 253 insurgents, 72 were aged 20 or less, 126 were aged between 21 and 25, 51 between 26 and 30, and only four of them were over 30 years of age. So there was a certain osmosis between the experienced fighters and the youngest volunteers. The older adults and adolescents did play their part in the movement, however, either by keeping it continually briefed on the enemy deployment or by hiding the detachments’ arms and munitions, thereby representing a novel sort of “rearguard.” Nor were young girls and women idle;

several thousands of them acted as couriers or intelligence agents or looked after the supply and medical services. When Ekaterinoslav was occupied in 1919, Gutman (whom we have already mentioned) was curious to find some young Amazons, dressed in black, entering the town along with the bulk of the Makhnovist troops; he described them as "intellectual anarchists."⁶ Broadly speaking, Makhnovist units contained few women; it was only in 1919 when the units retreated as the Whites advanced, that many women joined their convoys either accompanying relatives or companions, or to escape violation by the oncoming Cossacks. Here, let us point out that the Russian Civil War — like all civil wars generally — was hellish for most women, a matter on which most historians are discreet to the point of silence. As far as the Whites were concerned, women were part of the booty, especially if they happened to be Jewish or related to insurgents — and here the presumption was generally enough — and were systematically raped. Where the Reds were concerned, they were generally spared this fate, but it depended on the unit commanders and whom they were forced to billet. Elsewhere in the country or in Russia, women were obliged to give themselves simply to get past Chekist checkpoints or to secure passage on a train, or to obtain a morsel of food. In view of this situation, there was a terrible upsurge in venereal diseases and rampant demoralization among the female population.⁷

The wife or sweetheart of any well-known insurgent was especially targeted. Galina Kuzmenko tells how the wife of Nestor's oldest brother, Savva Makhno, was tortured cruelly and at some length by White officers in June 1919; they beat her, stabbed her with their bayonets, cut off one of her breasts and only then did they shoot her.⁸ Chekists too tormented one insurgent's wife and, in the end, shot her down with her infant in her arms; Makhno ordered Kurilenko to hunt down and punish these criminals, which he did, personally, shortly afterwards.⁹



Another thing the insurgents had in common with the Zaporog Cossacks was the unalterable principle that various command positions were elective. In its mobilization call on April 10, 1919, the Third Gulyai-Polye Congress issued a reminder about the need to elect both regimental and other unit commanders at all levels; it recommended that competent persons be appointed, preferably ones conversant with military tactics due to their service in the Russo-German war. All units had to assemble in a pre-agreed location, line up in columns and proceed with elections in strict conformity with regulations.¹⁰ Both Yefimov and Kubanin stress the presence of former tsarist army NCOs among the Makhnovist commanders; these had "...borne all the brunt of the imperialist war"; Kubanin notes that they had "...furnished Budyenny to the Red Army and a whole series of talented commanders to Makhno." According to him, the "...Makhnovists' subtle and supple tactics required commanders in whom their detachments could have boundless confidence, commanders who were daring, wily and experienced, as the facts demonstrated their commanders to be."¹¹ He stresses that each detachment was a "...close-knit

family, each commander dependent on it insofar as he had been elected by and was answerable to it." However, if need be, the Staff could punish commanders by reducing them to the ranks of their unit; by the same token, ranking insurgents were stripped of their mounts and their weapons.¹² According to Kubanin most of the commanders were both anarchists and peasants. Former tsarist officers whom the Bolsheviks turned into "military experts" were despised, regarded as useless and, as representatives of the hated order of the pomieschikis and bourgeois, ruthlessly exterminated.¹³

Again according to Kubanin, the "...supreme body of the insurgent army was its Military Revolutionary Soviet, elected at a general assembly of all insurgents. Neither the overall command of the army nor Makhno himself truly ran the movement; they merely reflected the aspirations of the mass, acting as its ideological and technical agents."¹⁴ Yefimov is of much the same opinion; the detachments as a rule had every confidence in their elected commanders who, for the most part, were "...highly courageous men displaying great determination [...] instigators of military operations, as well as of military and civilian strategies, in concert with the Military Revolutionary Soviet. This latter, and Makhno himself never reached any decision without consideration of the advice or position of the detachments. No decision was ever taken by just one individual. All military matters were debated in common. Usually the Military Revolutionary Soviet sat in the presence of the army's higher commanders. At every stage of the process, the Makhnovist detachment remained the driving force behind the whole movement."¹⁵

The highest positions of responsibility — chief of Staff, cavalry commander, commander of the special detachment and of each of the three army corps — were subject to rotation and were filled on a rota basis by the most capable and renowned of the insurgents. This stipulation regarding the collective thinking of the Makhnovists, as even official Soviet sources are forced to concede, is of the utmost importance, for certain outside observers — sometimes even anarchists, such as Voline, as we saw earlier — have misrepresented this elective hierarchy as a military "camarilla" and a "dictatorial" role played by Makhno.



Among the most prominent Makhnovist commanders, let us first of all turn to Semyon Karetnik, a comrade of Makhno's from the earliest days. A highly impoverished peasant, Karetnik had worked as an ostler before the war; during it he became an ensign and the military experience thus acquired was extremely useful to him in the struggle that he waged from the summer of 1918 on. Tall, burly, wearing a small moustache and always dressed in a leather jacket, he might be regarded as the No. 2 strategist of the movement, which owed many of its successes to him. At the time of his execution — he was captured, through treachery, by Bolsheviks who were as afraid of him as they were of Makhno — he must have been about 30 years of age. Another of the movement's leading figures, Fedor Shchuss, enjoyed among the insurgents a prestige almost equal to Makhno's.

He too was a poor peasant — the Bolsheviks labeled him a lumpen-proletarian — from Bolshe-Mikhailovka (Dibrivka). Having been a sailor during the war, he had become, in 1918, one of the most active members of the anarchist black guard of Gulyai-Polye, before fighting against the Austro-German invaders with some success. Dybets offers a highly-colored portrait of him, albeit one bereft of all sympathy for he had had a lot of trouble escaping Shchuss after his “exploits” as a Bolshevik political commissar:

“He was a tall, strapping figure of a fellow with long black hair [this hairstyle subsequently became something of a fashion among young Makhnovists — A.S.]. His costume was eccentric; feather in his cap, velvet jacket, boots with spurs and saber by his side. During Makhno’s banquets, he stayed silent and as motionless as a statue. He honestly thought that he would be immortalized in popular legends and ballads. Once he showed me some verses from some Ukrainian poet eulogizing one of the exploits of batko Shchuss when he had, unaided, rendered ten police hors de combat.”

According to Dybets, he was a kick-boxing and wrestling champion, even had some expertise in jiu-jitsu and could strangle someone with a sudden grip.¹⁶ Tremendously courageous, he was, turn and turn about, a cavalry commander, commander of the cavalry brigade of the Third Makhnovist army corps and a member of the Staff. According to the young Ekaterinoslav student mentioned earlier, Shchuss had a tendency to race off on frenzied raids which were not always justified and he had to be closely watched. Here he is described as we see him in the photographs available to us:

“Dressed in a hussar’s tunic, with sailor’s cap, bearing the ship’s name — St. John of the Golden Tongue — encrusted in gold letters, with a Caucasian dagger and a Colt thrust into his belt and two grenades at his side.”¹⁷

In the rather similar account of another witness in 1919, the gold-lettered inscription on the band of his sailor’s cap read “Free Russia.” Oddly, his horse was “bedecked with ribbons, flowers and pearl bracelets at its feet.”¹⁸ According to A. Nikolaev who must have had it from a reliable source, Shchuss was also fancy free and took a very close interest in the prettier insurgent women.¹⁹



Piotr Petrenko-Platonov, another native of Dibrivka was one of the most courageous insurgent commanders; an ensign during the war, he commanded an insurgent front at the end of 1918, acted as Dybenko’s chief of staff for a period of two months, in May–June 1919, and then was for a long time in charge of the main Makhnovist detachment in 1921. Vassili Kurilenko was another of the movement’s stalwarts. Tall, fair-haired and mustachioed he was about 28 years

old in 1919, powerfully built, a born horseman of tremendous daring. He was a cobbler from Novospassovka and had been an anarchist since 1910. Dybets speaks very favorably of him, although he appears to have been oblivious of his very active work among the insurgents in that he boasts about the man's gifts as a soldier and leader of men but credits him with sympathies for the Reds which he certainly could not have entertained, given the fate reserved for residents of his home town by the Reds, as described to us by dissident general Grigorenko.

Viktor Belash, a 26 year old worker from the same area was an exceptionally talented military organizer; it was he who planned many of the operations and who was for a long time the insurgent army's chief of staff and its last commander, before capture by the Red Army. While in prison he wrote extensive memoirs (three sizable exercise books were filled) of which we have had only a very brief extract published in the Ukrainian Communist Party's historical review *Letopis Istarii*; according to Kubanin, he also wrote a treatise on the civil war. In this way he fought to the last with his pen, before being shot in 1923. We might point out that, to take revenge on the partisans, the Austrians shot his father, grandfather and cousin, before setting their home on fire.

Viktor Popov held positions of great responsibility in the movement — being the last secretary of the Insurgents' Military Revolutionary Soviet — and undeniably deserves to be rescued from oblivion. A Black Sea sailor aged about 25 in 1919, he was a member of the Left Social Revolutionaries and directed his party's revolt against the Bolsheviks in Moscow in July 1918. The rising failed, just, largely on account of the mercy shown to arrested Bolsheviks and Chekists — Dzherzhinsky among them — and of the rebels' dithering over an attack upon the building containing Lenin and his party's central committee. In the forlorn hope that they might carry the day by moral pressure alone, they shrank from shedding the blood of their "brethren." A fatal error, for Bolsheviks had no such hesitation or scruples. In 1919, Viktor Popov fought against Denikinist troops alongside a detachment of his fellow party members in the Ukraine, before going over to the Makhnovists in April 1919. According to Teper, whose version is accepted by Kubanin, Popov allegedly had pledged his undying hatred of the Bolshevik-Communists and had set himself a target of 300 of them to be killed at his own hands — only two-thirds of which figure he achieved! If this is true, it would appear astonishing that he should have been the one who went with Kurilenko to negotiate the second alliance with the Red Army, and even more startling that he should have remained several weeks in Kharkov in the lions' den, before being arrested and shot by the Cheka through Moscow's treachery. Kubanin overstates his case by describing him as the most ferocious opponent of any compact with the Bolsheviks.²⁰ Although a bitter enemy of the Leninists, whom he could not forgive for having betrayed the revolutionary aspirations of the 1917 revolution, he must nonetheless have believed in their bona fides at the time of the second compact with the Makhnovists and was content, as many another revolutionary was, to fight them with

the written and spoken word (Teper mentions meetings organized in Kharkov in October–November 1920, and refers to articles in *The Makhnovist Voice* in which Popov gave the Bolsheviks a dressing-down).

There is little material available to us on the other commanders and military leaders of the Makhnovist insurgent movement. However let us mention some figures more deserving than such heroes of the revolution as the Bolsheviks have turned into mummies; Alexander Kalashnikov — worker's son, NCO during the war, secretary in 1917 of the Gulyai-Polye libertarian communist group, he was behind the 58th Division's defection to the anti-Bolshevik cause at Pomoshnaya in August 1919; Piotr Gavrilenko whose crucial role in the defeat of Wrangel we have already stressed; Milhailov-Pavlenko, son of peasants from central Russia, a Petrograd anarchist who arrived to join the movement at the beginning of 1919 and organized and led its engineer and sapper units; Vassily Danilov, a poor peasant from Gulyai-Polye and farrier, he was in charge of keeping the artillery supplied right from the outset; Alexei Marchenko, another poor Gulyai-Polye peasant, an anarchist since 1907 and a good propagandist; Bondarets, cavalry commander; Garkusha, commander of a special detachment of insurgents; Tykhenko, in charge of provisions; Buryma, in charge of mines; and the successive commanders of the movement's main detachment ... Vdovichenko, Brova, Zabudko, Tomas Kozhin (who also commanded the famous machine-gunner regiment); Chumak, the movement's treasurer; Krat, head of the economic section; Batko Pravda (probably an alias), an odd figure, an anarchist railwayman who lost his legs in an accident — severed by a train — looked after transport and was very active, although Belash has it that he was over-fond of the drink and had little taste for collective discipline; Grigory Vassilevsky, a poor peasant from Gulyai-Polye closely associated with Makhno for whom he acted as deputy on several occasions and served for a time as chief of staff; Klein, a poor German peasant; Dermendzhi, a daring commander of Georgian extraction; Taranovsky, a member of Gulyai-Polye's Jewish community, was the movement's last chief of staff; the brothers Ivan and Alexander Lepechenko, active participants in the fight against the Austro-Germans from spring 1918 on; Alexei Chubenko, engine-driver, adjutant to Makhno and later in charge of the sappers; Sereguin, a workman, in charge of supplies for the army.



All of these revolutionaries, thrown up by the masses, as best they could to combat all enemies of popular autonomy unfortunately have this in common: they all perished at Bolshevik hands, either in battle or after having been captured by treachery. Others, such as Grigori Makhno, who was the insurgent army's chief of staff for a while, or Isidor "Petya" Lyuty, a painter and decorator, or Boris Veretelnikov, a Gulyai-Polye foundry worker (who later worked at the famous Putilov plant in Petrograd), a very active propagandist and likewise chief of staff for a time, met their deaths in the fight against the Whites. Lev Zinkovsky-Zadov,

commander of the special detachment, as well as Jacques Domachenko, a worker and sometime chief of staff, accompanied Makhno into Romania and thence to Poland; after which we lose track of them.²¹

One female figure in particular is deserving of attention, Maroussia Nikiforova. A working woman, born in Alexandrovsk, she was sentenced to death for terrorist acts in 1905, the sentence being commuted to imprisonment for life. Removed to Siberia, she escaped in 1910, spent some time in Japan, the USA and Western Europe and then went back to Alexandrovsk in 1917, there to set up a Black Guard of the Ukraine in conjunction with the Odessa detachments, and detachments in Ekaterinoslav, Elisavetgrad and elsewhere. These Black Guard units harried the Ukraine's bourgeoisie and big landlords. In 1919, Maroussia Nikiforova joined the Makhnovist movement; regarded by Moscow as too much of a wildcat, she was sentenced to a "ban on office-holding" (!) for one year, later cut to six months upon Kamenev's intervention at the time of his visit to Makhno, as we have seen. More sedentary tasks she found dissatisfying and so she took a hand in the fight against the Denikinists a short time later. Some claim that she was hanged by Slashev in Simferopol in the autumn of 1919, but in the autumn of 1921 we find a certain "Maroussia" heading a detachment fighting against the Reds, though we cannot say for sure that they are the same person. An ardent libertarian, she is sometimes depicted as dressing entirely in black, and galloping on a white horse at the head of 1,500 fanatical horsemen!

We might also reveal the presence of a Frenchman, a certain "Roger," referred to simply as "The Frenchman" by Teper and by Marcel Body.²² This Roger, it would seem, had guts and was a "hard man" who had had "...some brushes with the French courts" and had deserted from the French expeditionary corps in Russia. He had spent several months with the Makhnovist movement and could not stop singing Makhno's praises, so much so that Voline wanted to introduce him to Lenin so that he could repeat his favorable comments about the Ukrainian insurgents. By the end of spring 1919, Roger was in the Bolshevik camp and was foisted upon Podvoisky, the Ukrainian commissar for war, at Marcel Body's recommendation, as leader of a detachment of Belgian armored cars which had been lying idle since the armistice, and he took part in bitter fighting against the Whites. Subsequently, he dabbled in shadier business, in the Cheka's hire or manipulated by them, before vanishing into the maw of the system, and was never able to go home to France, because, as Marcel Body has it, he "knew too much."



In a civilian capacity, a number of teachers took part in the Makhnovist movement and in its social and economic organizational ventures. Some of them paid dearly for this; Galina Kuzmenko quotes the case of the brothers Yefim and Daniel Marutsenko, as well as Daniel's wife — all three teachers in Pestshanybrod, the town where Galina was born — who were shot by the Reds in the summer of 1919 on account of their Makhnovist beliefs.²³ Another teacher, Chernoknizhny,

from the Pavlograd region, was returned as chairman of the Military Revolutionary Soviet by the Second Gulyai-Polye regional congress. After the collapse of the front in June 1919, he was outlawed and wanted by both Reds and Whites. He appears to have played a part of prime significance in defining the movement's objectives.²⁴ A medical team was established with the help of doctors and nurses and at the time of the occupation of Ekaterinoslav there was an attempt to train male and female nurses to render first aid.²⁵ Again we might mention the existence of a "Ballad of the Makhnovists" written by a Russian anarchist by the name of Ivan Kartashev and modeled on the lyrics and music of the celebrated old ballad of "Stenka Razin."²⁶



So, there are several elements which help to identify the social and military character of the Makhnovist insurgent movement; the fact that it was representative of the rural proletariat, to which most of its members belonged; its self-organization and direct democracy, strongly reminiscent of Zaporog libertarian traditions, and the determination to take up arms and fight to the death in defense of its social gains. But what was its relationship with anarchism as preached at the time and what might its possible contributions to libertarian communist theory and practice have been? This is what we are now going to look at.

Notes to Chapter 29: The Makhnovists

1. Kubanin, op. cit. p. 161.
2. Ibid. p. 170.
3. Ibid. p. 169.
4. *Dyelo Truda*, New York, December 1949, No. 31 "Memoirs of a Partisan" pp. 17–18.
5. Yefimov, op. cit. pp. 220–221.
6. Gutman, op. cit. p. 62.
7. Ludovic-H. Grondijs, *La Guerre en Russie et en Sibérie*, Paris, 1922, p. 453. This is one of the best books to have been published on the years 1917–1920 in Russia, in terms of its wealth of documentation and the caliber of the observations of the author, a war correspondent for the western press.
8. Galina Kuzmenko, *Souvenirs*, op. cit. p. 16.
9. *The Makhnovschina and its Erstwhile Allies, the Bolsheviks* op. cit. p. 38.
10. Antonov-Ovseenko, op. cit. Tome IV, p. 107.
11. Kubanin op. cit. p. 175.
12. Ibid. p. 183.
13. Ibid. p. 168.
14. Ibid. pp. 167 and 226.
15. Yefimov, op. cit. p. 197.
16. Dybets, op. cit. pp. 129–130.

17. V. T. *Dyelo Truda*, op. cit. p. 26.
18. Sosinsky, *Volya Rossii*, Prague 1927, p. 41.
19. *The First among Equals*, op. cit. p. 58.
20. Teper, op. cit. p. 27, and Kubanin, op. cit. p. 175.
21. We have collated all this data from references in Arshinov and Makhno and from the various books consulted by way of reference.
22. Marcel Body, *Un piano en bouleau de Carélie mes années de Russie 1917–1927*, Paris, 1981, pp. 102–103. Body gives a gripping account of the civil war in the Ukraine in April–August 1919 (he was a participant in Yakir's retreat) pp. 99–131. We must thank him here for the additional information that he has kindly supplied us with in respect of this "Roger" and the ethos of the time.
23. Galina Kuzmenko, op. cit. p. 17.
24. See the appendices for the full text of one of his speeches on the definition of free soviets.
25. Kubanin, op. cit. p. 190.
26. A. Gorelik, "The Ballad of the Makhnovists," in *Volna* op. cit. no. 33, September 1922, p. 21. (The lyrics, none too brilliant in the Russian, would be banal in translation, so we refrain from reproducing them here.)

30. The Makhnovist Movement and Anarchism

During the years 1917–1918 the whole of the eastern Ukraine — fertile ground for the emergence of just such a movement on historical and social grounds — had been troubled by a strong libertarian current. Anatol Gorelik, the then-secretary of the Ekaterinoslav-based anarchist bureau for the Donetsk basin, offers us an impressive picture of this overpowering activity. Hundreds of anarchist militants were at work inside various labor organizations and enjoyed much popularity among the masses: in Ekaterinoslav, the secretaries of the trade unions of the metalworkers, bakers, shoemakers, garment-makers, woodworkers, millers and even more were anarchists. They also had a considerable foothold in the city's factory and workshop committees. So much so that in October 1917, when the Bolshevik coup d'état was carried out, an 80,000-strong demonstration was organized, headed by the city's Anarchist Federation and the libertarian labor militants from the main local plant — the Briansk plant where Makhno had also worked in 1907; the crowd marched behind unfurled black flags. This surge of enthusiasm from the workers was unbounded for several weeks, until the Bolsheviks' freedom-stifling activities began to have their noxious effect:

“At the time of a general regional conference, many delegates from the factory and workshop committees sought out the anarchists to ask them to help the workers to take the whole of production in hand. For three days and three nights ordinary workers sat to consider the issue. The Bolsheviks needed all of their ‘influence’ (denial of the necessary funding, raw materials, supplies, transportation, etc.) to bring the Ekaterinoslav workers to heel and secure recognition for the authority of statist bureaucrats. The same thing was repeated in other large cities such as Kharkov, Odessa, Kiev, Mariupol, Rostov, Petrograd, Moscow and Irkusk.

[...] The masses were permeated with anarchist propaganda, through discussions, meetings and debates. So great and so imperious were the thirst for reading and the itch to understand what was going on, that in many villages, in the summer-time, at the end of a hard

day's work, the peasants would come together and spend hours at a time listening to books read aloud to them. In the province of Kiev, I happened to see some anarchist newspapers circulate through three districts, so well-thumbed that the print was now barely legible: but the young peasants read them from cover to cover nonetheless. In the Ukrainian countryside, I came upon certain peasants who had read the whole of the anarchist literature in Russian, from Stirner to Tucker, and had a grasp of theory as good as, if not better than professional politicians."¹

In the year 1918 alone, Gorelik was in ongoing correspondence with no less than 1400 villages in the region! He reckoned that "...had anarchists wanted to recruit for an anarchist 'party' in the Donetz basin, they could have counted on members by the hundreds of thousands."² Yet he stresses a huge dark cloud hanging over such promise: the absence of many anarchist militants, especially the ones who had returned from exile abroad and who were looked up to as the "anarchist intelligentsia." For one thing they nearly all settled in the big cities and in the capitals of the "paper revolution" (as Makhno had it) — Petrograd and Moscow — and then again and more especially they actively collaborated with the Bolsheviks even to the extent of joining so-called soviet institutions or indeed the Bolshevik Party itself, rather than helping to create a broadly-based "specifically libertarian front":

"The lying big talk of Lenin and other Bolshevik Social Democrats turned the heads of many anarchists, especially those who were intellectuals: though continuing to be critical of the 'centralizing' Bolsheviks, the latter espoused slogans like 'In Russian the social revolution has begun — The difference between Bolsheviks and anarchists is as thin as a cigarette paper.' — 'On to anti-state socialism, on to anarchism, through the dictatorship of the proletariat!'

[...] The intellectual 'leading lights' were not conversant with the masses' state of mind. Only distant echoes from this movement reached their ears, and then mostly in a distorted form. As for them, instead of urging on the toiling masses, instead of adding to their strength and their aspirations, instead of making the necessary analyses and supplying clearly libertarian solutions; instead of building upon their libertarian consciousness, a consciousness stirring but neither solidly formed nor crystallized, instead of assisting the theoretical instruction of dynamic young militants, instead of helping to expand the libertarian movement's activities, they devoted themselves to either playing down the inevitable threat of a Bolshevik party dictatorship, or thoroughly immersing themselves in syndicalism or even peddling

anarcho-Bolshevism. But nowhere did there sound a great summons to the creation of a specifically libertarian front.

Had that been done, there would have been a lot fewer casualties and the results of libertarian endeavors would have been better. In any event, the anarchists would not have found themselves under the heel of Bolsheviks, and worker and peasant organizations of libertarian outlook might have been created. But only the libertarian rank and file, more revolutionary than the anarchist leaders, were at work among the masses.

Thus, instead of making a theoretical and practical contribution to the problems of founding the country economically upon an anti-statist base: instead of being among the masses to carry on with libertarian endeavor and to answer the worried questioning from the worker and peasant masses regarding the chances of a new form of social relations and of the practices that such implied, many anarchists, especially the 'anarchist intelligentsia,' resolutely defended the Bolsheviks' 'tactic,' regarding their presence in power as inevitable."³

This paradoxical evolution on the part of anarchist intellectuals and militants of proven mettle was in every particular matched by that of their contemporaries in every other revolutionary organization and party — Mensheviks, Left SRs, Center SRs and Right SRs, Bundists (Jewish Social Democrats) — within the context of a socio-economic and historico-political phenomenon that we have analyzed elsewhere.⁴ Gorelik speaks of "abdication and desertion by the bulk of the intellectual anarchists" and contrasts this with the obscure but dogged endeavors of the libertarian rank and file, for all its generally inadequate theoretical equipment. In part, we find this dichotomy again in the Makhnovist movement: The intellectuals placed it under the microscope to verify it was truly of the libertarian persuasion, while the rank and file unstintingly got involved in it, especially during the struggle against Denikin, when the insurgents were fighting on the same side as the Bolsheviks.

In April 1919, Arshinov arrived in Gulyai-Polye along with other anarchists come from Moscow: he promptly breathed life into the Makhnovists' cultural section and took charge of publication of their mouthpiece, *The Road to Freedom*. The following month 36 members of the Ivanovo-Voznessensk anarchist group (Ivanovo-Voznessensk being an important center of the textile industry in Russia lying east of Moscow) joined the movement, with two well-known militants at their head: Chernyakov and Makeev. Dozens of other Ukrainian and Russian militants also showed up, including some members of the Ukrainian Anarchist Confederation, the "Nabat" (Tocsin). Among these were several émigrés returned from England and the United States upon learning of the revolution: Josef Gotman, Aly-Sukhovolsky and Aron Baron (Polevoy). June 1919, when Moscow broke off the

alliance with the insurgents, was a turning point. Two of the more active militants, Burbyga and Mikhailov-Pavlenko (the latter a Petrograd anarchist who had come to put his engineering skills at the disposal of the Makhnovists) were seized along with several dozen insurgents and shot by Voroshilov and the Melitopol Cheka, on Trotsky's orders.⁵ Jacob Glakson, Casimir Kovalevich, Cremer and other libertarians in the Makhnovist movement or from the Ukraine pledged themselves to avenge the murder of their comrades. First of all they traveled to Kharkov, intending to execute Rakovsky, Piatakov and other Ukrainian Bolshevik leaders, before deciding to strike in Moscow against the very head of the system. They settled in the capital and surreptitiously organized themselves, contacting some Left SRs and Maximalists who were equally keen to avenge party colleagues whom the Leninists had shot. They carried out a number of "expropriations" against State banks in order to fund their schemes. They aimed to dynamite the Cheka headquarters in Moscow, followed by the Kremlin; the explosives were ready when a golden opportunity presented itself: A regional assembly was scheduled to meet on September 25, 1919 at the Moscow committee's headquarters in Leontiev Lane and the main Bolshevik leaders would be present. Lenin himself was due to attend. One of the terrorists, the left SR Cherepanov was quite conversant with the place and on his instructions Piotr Sobolev threw a high-explosive bomb just as the meeting was getting underway but before Lenin had shown up. Twelve Bolsheviks, including the secretary of the Moscow Committee, Zagursky, were killed and another 28 wounded, including Bukharin, Pokrovsky, Stieklov, Yaroslavsky, Shliapnikov, Olminsky, etc. A short time later the attack was claimed by a Pan-Russian Insurgent Committee, in the name of the *Third Social Revolution*; it stipulated that it had avenged the Makhnovists shot on June 17 and that the immediate task before it was "to wipe the regime of the commissarocracy and Chekas off the face of the earth, and establish thereafter a Pan-Russian and free federation of unions of the toilers and oppressed masses."⁶ The "clandestine anarchists" published two issues of a newspaper, *Anarchy* and several handbills such as "No time to lose," "The truth about the Makhnovschina" and "Where is the way out?" There they framed a rabid criticism of the Leninist régime:

"You are in power in Russia, but what has changed? The factories and the land are still not in the toilers' hands but in that of the boss-State. Wage slavery, the fundamental evil of the bourgeois order, is still in existence: as a result, hunger, cold and unemployment are inevitable. On account of the 'need to put up with everything' for the sake of a better future, and to 'defend' that which is already won, a huge bureaucratic machine has been set up, the right to strike abolished, and freedoms of speech, assembly and the press have been stamped out.

[...] It is our belief that you, personally and subjectively, may have the best of intentions: but objectively and by nature you are rep-

representatives of the class of bureaucrats and functionaries, of a band of unproductive intellectuals.”⁷

Obviously such actions and declarations were of a sort to discomfit those anarchist “personalities” who had been flirting with the Bolshevik régime. And so certain indiscretions followed: Two months later, Kovalevich and Sobolev were surprised by some Chekists; they used revolvers and grenades to defend themselves before blowing themselves up with dynamite. Six other members of their organization, also pinned down in a house, blew themselves up as well. Eight others were taken into custody by the Cheka who extracted confessions before shooting them. The panicked authorities were startled to uncover tentacles of these “clandestine anarchists” even in the ranks of the Red Army and the Communist Party itself.

At the same time, the Nabat threw its whole weight solidly behind the Makhnovist movement, depicting it as the executive arm of the Third Social Revolution. The Nabat was a force to be reckoned with in the Ukraine: it had its headquarters in Ekaterinoslav, in the same building and on the same landing as the Bolsheviks. Unfortunately the fight against the Whites had absorbed nearly all of its membership, a fair number of whom never made it back from the fields of battle. Several militants of some repute nonetheless joined up with the Makhnovists but, in most cases, for no more than a few days. Makhno later referred to this intermittent presence by writing that the “...insurgent peasant masses liked and trusted those whom they saw in their ranks not just to spread the glad tidings there but also brandishing a rifle, as capable as anybody else of fighting and suffering on the cause’s behalf.”⁸ Thus he deplored the fact that many urban anarchists had often vanished just as suddenly as they had appeared, and from this he concluded that when all was said and done, the impact of these “tourists” could not have been weaker, and that all the theoretical and organizational work had been left up to the poor peasants, anarchists from Gulyai-Polye and district, among them every one of the commanders and post-holders named in the last chapter. Thus it was they who carried the whole burden of the movement. Dybets corroborates this evaluation by stating that Voline — though chairman of the Military Revolutionary Soviet at this time — had no “...real influence over Makhno who paid more heed to the lowliest commander of the tiniest band of insurgents, not to mention his Staff, at whose beck and call he was at all times and whose opinion alone counted in his eyes.”⁹ Even so, we should specify that, in the context of the time, the military situation was the only one necessitating consultation, for one thing, and then again Makhno was very careful not to meddle in civilian issues which were left to the Military Revolutionary Soviet.

To be sure, neither the “free soviets” nor the insurgent army, with all that this implies — hierarchy (albeit elective), command, discipline, fighting and execution of enemies — were consonant with the anarchist teaching peddled hitherto, although Bakunin would probably not have disowned these methods of struggle. Following publication of Arshinov’s book, several anarchist commentators were

quick to seize upon those controversial or contradictory points. What line did they take? The first to open the debate was Marc Mratchny, a one-time Nabat member deported from Russia in 1922 who had spent only a day or two among the Makhnovists. In July 1923 in *Workers' Road*, the Berlin-published mouthpiece of the Russian anarcho-syndicalists, he lashed into the Makhnovschina, loosing off a few "arrows" at it. He claimed that Batko Makhno's role and that of his movement had been overrated by certain anarchists to the detriment of the role of the working class which stood accused of reformist and moderate tendencies. This, he argued, was an absurd heretical view: The revolution could not but be a workers' revolution and the handiwork of the workers themselves, especially in respect of the building of a new, rational economy. Mratchny then wanders off into Biblical quotations to demonstrate that manual and intellectual workers should expect salvation of none but themselves, and that there would be "no Caesars, nor Tribunes, nor Batko, however anarchist" (this libertarian enunciation of the obvious goes on) coming along to help out the International, "and no insurgent army, even should it be made up of folk like Bakunin and Kropotkin."¹⁰ In a review of Arshinov's book in the same issue of the paper, Mratchny emerges from such abstract considerations to express the view that Arshinov would have done better to report what he had seen and experienced first hand, rather than writing a complete history of the movement: he singles out the attacks on intellectuals and labels the Makhnovist movement "military anarchism" whose impact upon the Russian workers' movement would ultimately have been damaging. He then asserts that "...the Makhnovschina, so mighty and victorious against the White reaction, weakened, melted away and decomposed whenever it had to deal with the Red reaction, when it sought to direct its blows against the Communist Party's dictatorship." He criticizes the execution of Gluschenko, the repentant Chekist, and of the White emissaries, then wonders in what way the insurgents' "counter-espionage" differed from that of the Cheka or the White counterpart? Likewise he stigmatizes the "dictatorial" role of the "Batko," the "anarchist authorities" of the Makhnovists, and records the privileged status of cavalry in the Makhnovist army. All in all, the Makhnovist movement for all its verbiage strikes him closer to the Left SRs than to the anarchists. With free soviets the "transitional period" was being granted citizen status and, he concludes paradoxically, "One hundred percent anarchist is not achievable immediately, especially not by some dark cavalry raid."¹¹

In March 1924, V. Khudoley in a lengthy review of Arshinov's book, takes the opposite line to Mratchny: If the Bolsheviks and Italian fascists emerged victorious from their civil wars, this was only because they had annihilated their adversaries' armed forces: so anarchism will only be able to defeat the State if it in turn annihilates all statist armed forces. No trade union can accomplish this and all threats of general strikes and other bombast will in any case be nothing more than a "cardboard saber." Only an army of partisans will be able to encompass

destruction of the State. Khudoley goes on at length about this military aspect in order to acknowledge the Makhnovist movement's important contribution, and he expresses the hope that some participant in the movement will manage to write a military history of the Makhnovschina. On the other hand, he is on Mratchny's side regarding free soviets, reckoning that the Left SRs there had imposed their notion of an "informal State" with diffused powers. Furthermore, he reckons that the supreme organ of the insurgents — their general congress — is only a "pale imitation of the Constituent Assembly." In his view the insurgents' theoretical *Draft Declaration* is in fact a draft of the establishment of a Makhnovist state founded upon decentralization and diffusion of power: these "free soviets." He too speaks of an "anarchist power" and wonders if anarchist society has any need of general congresses to pronounce upon anything at all. It has as its "...sole Constitution only the unfettered initiative of individuals and groups: it is set up only through the creative endeavors of the masses, groups and individuals and not through the legislative action of congresses, even should these be 'non-party.'" Finally, he welcomes only the military side of the movement, this being "quintessentially Bakuninist" and repudiates the civilian side which is stained with Left SR statism, leading on to "anarchist authorities."¹²

E. Z. Dolinin (Moravsky) also published an anarchist critique of Arshinov, taking the notion of free soviets violently to task. Indeed, he detected the birth of an army of parasitical bureaucrats through these agencies, which by his reckoning indubitably represent a sort of State, decidedly more appropriate to the "more honest of the Bolshevik marxists than to anarchists." Arshinov's reproach to the Russian anarchists, that they did not adequately participate in or support the Makhnovist movement, he turns around. "Anarchism cannot rely upon bayonets: it can only be the product of mankind's spiritual cultivation," he goes on, whilst not denying the interest of insurrections or of the Makhnovschina which may be necessary but are not sufficient for the creation of a new "human culture." By contrast, he raves indignantly against executions of unarmed folk — pomieschikis, White envoys, that repentant Chekist, an insurgent charged with having put up an anti-Semitic poster, and even ataman Grigoriev — for, he asserts, it is not with the bullet that people are to be educated or re-educated. In this regard, he considers Makhnovists no better than the Bolsheviks. Let us straightaway offer a corrective to this objection of the "angelic variety": whereas violence is not an end in itself, it seems nonetheless more pardonable in the oppressed than in the oppressor, and in the case of the Makhnovist movement, the distinction between former and latter is instantaneously discernible and so we can know what is afoot, without wondering if perhaps the other cheek should not have been turned to the blows from the Austro-Germans, Ukrainian chauvinists of the Varta, Bolsheviks, Denikinists and other aggressors against the laboring populace. Dolinin's piece closes on a crucial question: how could the Makhnovists have concluded a second alliance with the Bolsheviks, when lots of Russian anarchists had seen through these and distanced

themselves from them? He regrets that the insurgents had come to their senses too late and "...had at last begun to sweep all the Bolshevik criminals and bandits from the face of the earth." And he cites this tardiness as a probable cause of the movement's failure.¹³

Naturally these criticisms and objections drew replies from Arshinov and from Makhno himself. Arshinov was to devote two lengthy articles to an item by item rebuttal of the points raised. For a start, he explained how it had been necessary to publish a documented history of the movement: the available information was too partial and too inadequate for a complete picture of the Makhnovschina to be formed. He was amazed that the criticisms, which of course were no more than was to be expected of enemies should be coming from Russian anarcho-syndicalists, Mratchny in particular, an ex-member of the Nabat now advocating a "transitional economy and political stage for the revolution." He brought up Mratchny's contradictory statements about "100 percent instantaneous anarchism," about the "transitional stage" in the shape of free soviets and his use of the term "military anarchism." And he reaffirmed the most important point:

"The insurgent army was indeed set up by the peasants and workers themselves to defend their territory and rights against the many enemy forces aspiring to enslave them: [The] Makhnovschina has denied all statism and aspired to the building of a free society on the basis of the social independence, solidarity and self-direction of the toilers..."

claiming that most of the Left SRs and Maximalists, swept along by the libertarian current, became anarchists and that their influence upon the movement and party or faction had consequently been nil: only ignorance of the movement could explain such allegations: the argument to the effect that the Makhnovist movement had been lame in its opposition to the Bolsheviks was taking up the Bolsheviks' contentions about the insurgents' being broken up by the Red Army: but this contention did not hold water, because if, unlike the White and foreign reactionary armies, the Communist Party's Red Army had managed unaided to defeat the Makhnovschina, proletarian history would judge it all more harshly. Arshinov also took exception to Mratchny's claim about the "...decomposition of the movement..." "...up until the very last day of its existence, the movement fought with rare heroism for the basic notion of social revolution," and it was essentially for that very reason that the Bolsheviks had treacherously turned on it. How come the Makhnovschina had been defeated by Bolshevism? One might "...come up with many reasons as valid for anarchism's defeat as for those of the other socialist tendencies in the Russian Revolution." He singled out one of these, the "...dichotomy introduced between the military activity and the constructive social practice of the movement, which did not allow all organizational forces to express themselves." Another not inconsiderable factor had been:

“the demagogic fashion in which the Bolsheviks presented themselves in the face of the White counter-revolution, substituting the notion of soviet power for the idea of the social independence and self-direction of the toilers, which afforded them the chance to engage in boundless exploitation of the ideas of the social revolution and command the trust of several strata of toilers.”

The Makhnovist insurgent army's counter-espionage/intelligence service had been a purely military agency: its tasks were:

“(a) not to allow agents or enemy armies to infiltrate Makhnovist ranks (b) to be fully conversant with the enemy's deployments and military plans (c) to maintain ongoing liaison between the isolated detachments of the insurgent army: in times of military operations, its members participated in engagements alongside other insurgents.”

When towns were occupied, the job of the service had been to expose the hidden enemies on the ground, another purely military function — nothing to do with the police activities of the Cheka or Denikin's political counter-espionage. As for the execution of White envoys, there might be a divergence of opinions about that, but Mratchny would have been better advised at the time to join in the movement rather than hold back, only to ventilate his accusations now. And as for the ‘dictatorial’ role of ‘batko’ Makhno, his “role was that of military leader as commander of the army. However he was but one part of the whole and as subject as any other insurgent to decisions of the Military Revolutionary Soviet. Outside of the army, comrade Makhno only enjoyed a well deserved popularity, nothing more.” And cavalry had enjoyed no advantages over infantry. Certain infantry regiments such as the 13th, Third Crimean and First Ekaterinoslav regiments were regarded as among the bravest and most popular insurgent army units. He makes an interesting point about the use of the word “political” to refer to the self-direction of the toilers, as mentioned in the fourth point (never activated) of the compact agreed with the Red Army in October 1920. Arshinov explains that the insurgents had used this adjective quite deliberately in that the Bolsheviks accorded a secondary and junior significance to the expression “social self-direction” in comparison with the political functions of the state. Also, the only discussion possible on the meaning of “transitional stage” consisted of asking whether a full-blooded anarchist society was to be expected overnight, or merely its groundwork and if one was not just simply mixing it up with the “outset of the construction of that society.” And Arshinov closed his first reply by ascribing Mratchny's different views to the influence of Bolshevik hearsay.¹⁴

In a further reply to critics, he readily acknowledges that the alliance reached between the Makhnovists and Bolsheviks was a compromise, a purely military

compromise to be sure but a compromise for all that. He excuses point three of the agreement, relating to election of delegates to the Fifth Congress of soviets of the Ukraine, as a precaution on the insurgents' part against a surprise attack from the Bolsheviks. In any case, the military alliance agreed could not be compared, as E.Z. Dolinin had compared it, to the theoretical surrender and collaboration of some anarchists with the Leninists. Apropos of executions, Arshinov readily conceded the harshness and cruelty of such acts: however, account had to be taken of the fact that they had occurred in the context of military confrontations and that the toiler population had itself been subject to bestial treatment at the hands of its enemies — pomieschikis, police, Chekists — and that it was also often the populace itself who singled them out and reported their crimes. He also deplored the execution of the author of an anti-Semitic poster and of the Bolsheviks accused of attempting the life of Makhno (Polonsky and others) but pointed out that the military context and resultant tensions accounted for these moves which were but incidents (regrettable ones, certainly) rather than anything systematic. Nor does he deny the existence of orders, commands, and discipline in the insurgent army — things introduced at the instigation of the mass of insurgents themselves — measures which might be distasteful, but then again circumstances and the struggle against regular, well-organized, disciplined armies necessitated certain things. Then Arshinov turns to Khudoley's remarks. He is delighted to find Khudoley recognizing the need for a partisan army to defeat the armed apparatus of the State. Then he recalls that the movement had circulated and in fact implemented the idea of anti-authoritarian toilers' communes as well as the notion of free soviets, albeit not quite as ...

“...legislative institutions, but as a sort of platform gathering together the toilers on the basis of their vital needs. Their assigned goal was to carry out the wishes already expressed and formulated by the toiling masses. Let us be clear on this: the peasants and workers of any village or township have a whole series of issues and common tasks to be resolved: provisions, self-defense, liaison between countryside and town, and many others. It behooves them to come to some agreement among themselves on all these matters and then to take decisions as a result: if these are to be put into effect, they need strength. In the minds of the Makhnovists, that strength we embodied in the free soviet of the toilers.”

Arshinov points out that such agencies already existed inside the anarchist movement in the form of soviets, federations, secretariats or executive committees. So he is astonished that Khudoley should regard as anti-anarchist this means of collectively resolving practical tasks and issues, and that he should also reject congresses as supreme bodies. Arshinov thinks that Khudoley and Dolinin must have considered these free soviets as agencies empowered, not to execute but to delegate and decide, with delegates imposing their wishes upon the rank and file

and not the other way around. So where are they to stand come the social revolution and what will then be their role? All these arguments are in fact superficial and infantile. The Makhnovist movement, Arshinov concludes, was open to all anarchists and it was up to them to air their disagreement with this or that feature, provided they clearly set out their reasoning and came up with another solution. Anarchism is not some "...bookish sect that might deign to take an interest from its Olympian heights in the social struggle of the toilers: quite the contrary, that struggle is its natural element."¹⁵

Pertinent or not, these criticisms, objections and reservations deserve to be known so that the free spirit of debate that prevailed among Russian libertarians may be demonstrated. On the other hand, another Nabat member, Lewandovsky who emigrated to the west, voiced graver accusations of a slanderous sort: according to him "among the Makhnovists, as among the Bolsheviks, a Cheka existed; there were shootings, mobilization, there was Makhno's dictatorship and his staff's and freedom existed only if one did not engage in propaganda against them." In particular he was critical of the execution of the Bolshevik Polonsky and reckoned that, sooner or later, Makhno and the anarchists would have found themselves at daggers drawn.¹⁶ Ugo Fedeli interviewed Makhno about Lewandovsky's accusations:

"To be sure,' Nestor Makhno conceded, 'the Makhnovist insurgent movement had many enemies even among the anarchists, especially now that it no longer exists. What do you expect? When we were strong and when the movement was in the ascendant on account of its size and importance, but chiefly because it had resources, well of course there was no shortage of friends or of those who, whilst not entirely favorable, sent out signals of friendship to us.'"

Concerning Lewandovsky, Makhno specifies that he had spent two days with the insurgents in October 1920, putting to them a grandiose scheme for an anarchist university in Kharkov, for which he sought the "modest" donation of 10 million rubles. At the time, Makhno, being wounded in the leg and able to get around only on crutches, was unable to leave Gulyai-Polye: so he was able to attend a meeting of the town soviet, called especially to examine this request for a subsidy, and he spoke right after Lewandovsky:

"We occupy a region nearly 200 kilometers deep by 300 kilometers broad. We have with us millions of peasants but scarcely any schools. We are short of people willing or able to help these masses to better themselves educationally, yet you arrive here from the towns where education is already readily available. You, who could be helping us greatly in this task, come to see us only in order to ask for money towards the establishment of a new university in Kharkov. But why

there? Because it is a focal point, you will say to me. Well, no, we have no wish to go on repeating the centralist mistake made by comrades whose chief preoccupation has been to set up headquarters for their organizations in Moscow. They're all there: the anarchist federation, *Golos Truda*, etc. Yes, let your university be set up, but here among peasants in dire need of education.”¹⁷

This line of argument struck a real chill into Lewandovsky's enthusiasm and he promptly left, without having been granted the money he sought. It was this that undoubtedly led him to proclaim to any who would listen that "...the Makhnovist movement had done a lot of harm to the anarchist movement." Makhno adds that this was not the only case: others showed up looking for "subsidies" and they included Abraham Gordin who had, however, gone over to the Bolsheviks: every time that their requests were denied, these petitioners "...became fresh enemies of the movement." In this way we get a better grasp of the roots of the resentment shown by Lewandovsky and of certain other critics whose attitude was undoubtedly, it is worth saying, less than disinterested.

Although this debate may have been of great interest in establishing the nature and content of the Makhnovschina, one thing should be made clear. At no time had Makhno and his closest colleagues described the movement they led as exclusively anarchist, and that despite their being staunch libertarian communists long since put to the test. This was probably the basic reason why they shrank from calling the insurgent army "anarchist," rather than Makhnovist. Indeed, as far as they were concerned, it was a motley mass movement inside which all supporters of social revolution could co-exist. The Left SR presence — Veretelnikov, Popov (although these later became anarchists) — the Bolshevik element (one of whom, Novitsky, was even elected on to the Military Revolutionary Soviet in October 1919) and the non-party revolutionaries (Kozhin, Ozerov) testify to this plurality of tendencies. The movement's theoretical *Draft Declaration*, drawn up by Makhno and his libertarian communist comrades, was founded on the notion of free soviets as on the autonomous collective and military voice of the toilers as a whole, and not only a single class, or any single party with an appetite for hegemony, which was how the Leninists for instance thought of it. In their view the system of free soviets was only a transitional stage essential for the weaving of the social and economic ties leading on to a federation of libertarian communes, with the State thus finding itself consigned to the museum of irksome antiquities.

Nonetheless, in a later article, Makhno specifies that the *Draft*, as the name indicates, was to have been debated and possibly adopted by a general congress of the insurgents but the military situation had prevented this. He asserts that it was not a question of the "...Constitution of a Makhnovist State. It was the hurried handiwork of the Gulyai-Polye libertarian communist group.”¹⁸ As the insurgents

were at loggerheads over the phrasing of certain points, they capitalized upon Voline's presence in late August 1919 to ask him to look over the draft of the text. He worked on it for a month and made do with polishing the literary style, from which Makhno concluded that the points at issue had apparently not scandalized Voline and that as a result, the *Draft* was not at odds with anarchism, especially not the Bakuninist conception of the transitional period, which would not be a "diffusion of power" but rather the elimination of the class State and economic inequalities.

A little later, Voline corroborated Mahno's version by specifying that he took Liaschenko's place as chairman of the Military Revolutionary Soviet for a two month period only at Makhno's suggestion, since he had not inserted anything of his own into the *Draft Declaration* in accordance with the express wishes of the insurgents but had made do with rephrasing certain formulations and polishing the literary style. He had not at all tried to "anarchize" the *Draft*, which he regarded as an accurate expression of the thinking of the Makhnovist insurgent movement.¹⁹

Bolshevik commentators for their part saw nothing very new in this text as compared with the precepts of Bakunin or Kropotkin.²⁰ Yefimov gives this interesting description of the Makhnovist practice of free soviets:

"These organs of power were very primitive. There was no central organ of government: there was only the Military Revolutionary Soviet which was at once a sort of parliament and central military agency dealing with both military and civil matters. This agency had a wide range of functions, but in performing these, it presented itself only as a steering body and had no rights of its own, all power being vested in the local organs. Everything boiled down to each village and each district directing itself with complete independence. Nevertheless, the structure of this illusory power was along soviet lines: there were executive committees, soviets of deputies, where elected individuals would come together and grapple with various, though not fundamental issues." ²¹

A curious admission: in their actions the insurgents implemented their anti-authoritarian preferences, realizing their age-old aspirations. Arshinov spells out the three ideas underlying this approach: "(a) the right of the toilers to complete freedom of initiative (b) the right to their economic and social self-direction and (c) the anti-statist principle in social construction." For him, the Makhnovschina showed itself to be "...an anarchist mass movement of toilers, not fully formed nor quite crystallized, but striving towards the anarchist ideal and treading a libertarian path." ²² Arshinov draws a distinction between this coherent behavior and the theoretical abdication and passivity of many intellectual anarchists, whose absence was sorely felt in the movement. Here he agrees with Anatol Gorelik's criticism and adds that, in his opinion, there are two essential reasons underlying this default: a measure of theoretical confusion, and the chronic disorganization

of anarchist militants. Makhno also accepted this analysis, for it goes without saying that Anarchy was not, to him, some cherished utopia of the intellectuals who, while waiting the advent of the age of happiness, snugly occupy their cozy little niches in the existing system of alienation, but rather a practical and immediate social ideal. In exile this attitude led the two friends to devise a *Draft Organization Platform* for the anarchist movement, wherein they were to pick up and expand upon the 1919 *Draft Declaration* and then draw the lessons of the Makhnovschina experience, of the Russian revolution and of the anarchist movement's failure during that period.



Be that as it may, by virtue of its peculiarities, the Makhnovist movement occupied a separate place in both the doctrine and practice of libertarian communism historically, making its own original and essential contribution. It only remains for us to look into the critical presentation of the notion of free soviets as an "anarchist" power, some sort of "anti-authoritarian authority," which is to say one restricted to a purely executive and non-decision-making role, as Yefimov diagrammatically represents it. In which case the term no longer carries the negative import of arbitrary authority or State power, the emanation of some clique or class: rather it comes to stand for the will and free choice of the community of toilers as a whole, in the ability of each to make decisions and act in harmony with all the others. Taken in that sense, the Makhnovists' Military Revolutionary Soviet was indeed an organ of power. In principle executive power but, given the circumstances, very often decision-making power as well: likewise, the aspiration of this whole revolutionary era could be encapsulated by the slogan of "...All *power* to the free soviets!" Let us note that there is here a semantic taboo for many anarchists, which has sometimes condemned them to impotence and a shirking of responsibilities, if not in fact many a time to tag along behind actual State power. By way of corroboration for our argument, let us cite the extraordinary situation that faced the Nabat anarchists meeting in Kharkov in October 1920: a delegation from several red Army units from Moscow and elsewhere sought them out to propose to them that they "take power": the delegation itself undertook to arrest Lenin and the Communist Party central committee! Voline and his colleagues blandly explained to them that anarchists did not seek power, and that the "masses" had to act for themselves and they amiably refused the offer. Anatol Gorelik also tells of this incident and adds his personal comment that had the anarchists so desired, they could have taken power in the Ukraine, so high was their revolutionary standing in the eyes of the Red soldiers and toilers.²³ Plenty of scope there for meditations upon the different interpretations of the word "power"!

Notes to Chapter 30: The Makhnovist Movement and Anarchism

- 1 A. Gorelik, in A. Skirda *Les Anarchistes dans la révolution russe*, Paris, 1973, p. 66 and p. 73.
2. Ibid. p. 63
3. Ibid. pp. 61–62 and p. 66.
4. J. W. Machajski, *Le Socialisme des intellectuels*, translated and with introduction by A. Skirda.
5. Gorelik was an eye-witness to the execution of 69 Makhnovist volunteers for joining up with the Red Army in Melitopol.
6. Makintsian, *The Red Book of the Cheka* (in Russian), Moscow, 1920.
7. Idem. On this affair, see Kubanin, op cit. pp. 214–222.
8. *The Makhnovschina and its Erstwhile Allies, the Bolsheviks* op. cit. p. 47.
9. Kubanin op. cit. p. 207.
10. *Rabotchy put's*. Berlin, No. 5, July 1923, pp. 1–3.
11. Ibid. pp. 15–16.
12. *Volna*, March 1924, No 51, pp. 15–20.
13. *Amerikanskiye Izvestia* No. 128, May 28, 1924, pp. 6–7, an article reprinted in E. Z. Dolinin *In the Storm of Revolution* (in Russian), Detroit, 1954, pp. 362–368.
14. P. Arshinov “Anarchism and the Makhnovschina,” in *Anarkhichesky Vestnik*, Berlin, 1923, No. 2 pp. 27–37.
15. P. Arshinov “Anarchism and the Makhnovschina,” II, *Volna* No. 56, August 1924, pp. 28–34.
16. A. Lewandovsky “Outline of the anarchist movement in Russia during the revolution” in *La Revue Anarchiste* No. 29, July–August 1924, pp. 13–14.
17. Ugo Fedeli “Conversing with Nestor Makhno,” in *Volontà*, II, No. 2, August 1947, pp. 44–49.
18. N. Makhno “Open Letter to Maximov,” *Dyelo Truda* No. 15, August 1926, pp. 10–12.
19. Voline, *Dyelo Truda* No. 16, September 1926, pp. 15–16.
20. Kubanin op. cit. pp. 96–97, and Teper op. cit. p. 61.
21. Yefinov op. cit. p. 196.
22. Arshinov op. cit. pp. 230–231.
23. Gorelik, op. cit. p. 76, and Voline’s comments as reported by Nikola Tchorbadjeff.

31. Apropos the Charges of Banditry and Anti-Semitism

The Makhnovschina, as a social movement so subversive of the established order and aspiring, in the name of Anarchy, to do away with all state power and ensure that the toilers ran their own lives, could hardly be opposed by its enemies in precisely those terms. It had at all costs to be brought somehow into disrepute and shown in the most ignominious light. Hence the charges repeatedly mooted against it, of banditry, looting and thuggery, not forgetting the allegation of anti-Semitism. Since the credibility of the charges is largely dependent on the standing of the accusers, let us have a look at whom we are dealing with here.

That the Austro-Germans should have regarded the insurgents as so many “bandits,” since they were “irregulars” is only to be expected of regular troops. On the other hand, it was hard for them to bandy about adjectives such as “thieves” or “looters,” when their own exploits in that regard were nothing to be proud of. Nor were the Whites of such immaculate whiteness in this respect, such was the extent (and more) to which their “warlords” had ransacked the occupied territories. As for the Reds, they were equally unqualified to pronounce such judgments, having milked the whole of the Ukraine dry by formally instituting plunder by the State. Although the true “bandits” do not appear to have been those so labeled — the facts turn the charges back against the accusers — let us nonetheless look into the Makhnovists’ conduct vis à vis the populace. In order to do this, let us look to the soviet sources of the day which can scarcely be suspected of covering up: according to Yefimov, the “Makhnovists’ basic precept — take nothing from the peasants was strictly adhered to. Only on the initiative of the detachment commander could it be breached.”¹ Another commentator, Lebeds, took the line that: “... Makhno and the Military Revolutionary Soviet strove to preserve the army’s ‘popular insurgent saintliness’; insurgents were shot for looting; and it was forbidden to ‘seize goods, seize flour from mills or change horses in the absence of the peasants; they exchanged several of their weary horses for one fresh mount; in his directives, Makhno issued reminders that insurgents had to be friendly and considerate towards the local population.”² Lebeds records that in return, locals would re-supply the insurgents, tend their wounded and keep them briefed on Red

Army movements. Kubanin is even more categorical: after a scrupulous examination of the Makhnovist archives, he asserts that the command took all necessary measures to avert acts of looting or banditry, especially in 1918 and 1919 (which is to say during the time when they were not fighting the Red Army). Search and seizure warrants were "... issued only by the Military Revolutionary Soviet, the staff and the movement's supply corps"; otherwise, the detachment commander was answerable for the conduct of its members. Kubanin was forced to note that during the lengthy occupation of Ekaterinoslav at the end of 1919 there was none of the "...mass looting like under the Whites and Makhno's execution on the spot of some marauders made a great impression upon the city's population."³ In so doing, Kubanin was formally rebutting the curious claim of his party colleague, Christian Rakovsky, to the effect that "...it was the rule among the Makhnovist army to loot for two days per month.(!) But of course the Makhnovists turned those two days into an entire month"⁴ — a rebuttal very very rare, even for those days. The allegation is less queer if one knows that, on the basis of reports from Chekists and political commissars, Rakovsky had written an awful pamphlet on the situation in the Ukrainian countryside, seated all the while in his plush office as the puppet president of the Soviet Ukraine. Kubanin goes on to say that goods seized by the Makhnovist Army were distributed by the local inhabitants and the movement's supply corps. And what did these "goods" consist of? The property of the big landlords, the urban bourgeoisie, and the "depots" of the Whites and Reds, derived from systematic plundering of the laboring population.

It is, consequently, noticeable that none of the charges of banditry aired by this one or that, stands up to a serious examination of the facts. In spite of all that, how are they to be explained? Perhaps in terms of the age-old fear that the rural bourgeoisie and squire-archy felt of the dark, nameless peasant mass, these "yokels" whose wrathful vengeance they rightly feared. On the other side of the coin, one might speak of the peasant "milleniarism," of the hatred for towns as unhealthy places where the holders of power, the central administrations, the exploiters and their lackeys were ensconced. A picture that has to be refined somewhat, in that the Ukrainian countryside was strewn with large towns of 10,000–20,000 inhabitants — Gulyai-Polye for one — and hardly fitted in with Marxists' traditional notions of the peasantry; here peasants did not live a life turned in upon itself; on the contrary, they were bound by close ties, through countless yearly fairs and the incessant trade in various produce. Something else needs explaining, too; hanging the label "bandits" on individuals fighting for their autonomy — an attitude quintessentially mystifying to anyone fond of power over his neighbor — ensures that they can be unceremoniously written off; summary execution of prisoners and suspects, breach of compacts agreed to, reneging upon one's word of honor ... the statist schemers shrank from nothing. So it was primarily a political argument, essential in order to dismiss one's adversary and deny him right of reply.



The charge of anti-Semitism is part and parcel of the same mentality. But here too let us look to the facts. The Makhnovist movement embraced without distinction representatives of the various ethnic communities of the region under its influence, to wit: a vast majority of Ukrainian peasants — nearly 90 percent of the movement, Arshinov claims — the six-to-eight percent of peasants of Russian origin, followed by members of the dozen Jewish and Greek farming communities of the region and in lesser numbers, Georgians, Armenians, Bulgars, Serbs, Montenegrins and Germans. This circumstance alone would be enough to account for the absence of chauvinist nationalistic feelings from the movement. Later, during the fight against the Red Army, some deserters, like many Don Cossacks, went over to the insurgents. Kubanin mentions the figure of 17 Jewish farming colonies in the Alexandrovsk and Mariupol districts — the heartlands of the Makhnovschina — and writes that there the Jewish peasant was a “brother” as far as peasants of other extractions were concerned, having had the same relationship as these with the pomieschik.⁵

We should specify that national identity is mentioned here only to illustrate our point, for we have yet to discover how the insurgents described themselves. For instance, Nestor Makhno did not describe himself as a Ukrainian but merely as an anarchist; his beliefs were dismissive of all national differences. He did not even speak Ukrainian — only in exile did he learn it — and expressed himself in Russian, that being the most widespread tongue in the tsarist empire. Then again, ever since his days as a teenage militant, he had had fellow-believers and fellow-activists of Jewish origin (in fact in 1905 Jews accounted for the overwhelming majority of Russian and Ukrainian anarchists) and he had never had any problems with them. When he returned to Moscow at the end of June 1918, he had been saved from certain death by his friend Moshe Kogan, himself a native of Gulyai-Polye and future president of the local soviet in 1919. Later Makhno had been ruthless with any display of anti-Semitism in the movement's sphere of influence. When bully boy tactics were employed in 1919 against some Ukrainian and Jewish peasants by persons professing to be his followers, he had issued an appeal to all peasants, raising violent objections to such conduct and even threatening suicide if his name was again to be used to cover such ignominious acts. And the population had been mightily impressed by this declaration.⁶ Following a provocation by Denikinist agents, when several members of a Jewish settlement had been massacred by insurgents, Makhno had insisted upon the shooting of the culprits, rather than their being sent up to the front line as a joint Bolshevik-Makhnovist commission of inquiry had determined. He then had rifles and ammunition issued to the region's Jewish farming settlements, this at a time when there was a dire shortage of weapons among the front-line fighters, which brought him criticism from Ukrainian insurgents and peasants. In reply he had taken it upon himself to set up, with Jewish fighters exclusively, an artillery battery and support squad made up of veterans of the Russo-German war under the command of Abraham Schneider. This unit heroically defended the approaches

to Gulyai-Polye against Shkuro's Cossacks and was wiped out only after it had cut down a number of the assailants.

Moreover, there were 200 Jewish infantry in one of the Gulyai-Polye regiments and a great number of others scattered through the various Makhnovist units. Several commanders, including Taranovsky, the movement's last chief of staff, and Lev Zinkovsky, commander of Makhno's personal escort at the time of his passage into Romania, were Jews. Three out of the five members of the movement's cultural section — Helen Keller, Yasha Sukhovolsky and Josef Gotman, known also as "The Émigré" (the last two were later murdered by the Cheka) — were of similar origins. Isaak Teper, editor of *The Makhnovist Voice* in Kharkov in October 1920, and other leading Nabat members, such as Mratchny, Gorelik, Aron Baron and Voline, were also of Jewish origin. There is thus no avoiding a simple commonsense realization; had the Makhnovist movement or Makhno had any anti-Semitic tendencies, not one of these insurgents and anarchists of Jewish origin would have tolerated or countenanced them and would instantly have dissociated themselves from the movement. Let us recall also the main reason why ataman Grigoriev was executed: for having ordered pogroms. Also these pogroms occurred in those Ukrainian provinces of high Jewish population, which is to say in the western parts; there were none in the Tavrida or in Ekaterinoslav province. In his book, Voline quotes the conclusions of Cherikover, a specialist investigator of persecutions and pogroms against the Jews in the Ukraine:

"Makhno's attitude is not to be compared to that of the other armies which operated in Russia during the happenings of 1917–1921. On two points I can offer you absolutely formal assurances:

1. It cannot be gainsaid, that of all these armies, Red Army included, it was Makhno's army which behaved best towards the civilian population generally and the Jewish population in particular. I have plenty of irrefutable testimony to that. Compared with the rest, the proportion of justified complaints against the Makhnovist army is insignificant.
2. Let us not speak of pogroms supposedly organized or encouraged by Makhno himself. That is calumny or error. Nothing of the sort occurred."

Cherikover specifies that on every occasion when some pogrom or some outrage was imputed to Makhnovists, he was able to verify that on that date none of their detachments could have been in the place concerned. A Jewish committee set up in Berlin in the 1920s with the participation of both Left and Right Social Revolutionaries, and members of the Bund (the Jewish social democratic labor party), Mensheviks (Aronson) and anarchists came to similar conclusions regarding such accusations leveled against the Makhnovists; on the other hand it did manage to authenticate pogroms carried out by Red Army and White army units.⁸ Even more

interesting: these same charges of anti-Semitism were rebutted by Soviet authors during the 1920s, even though they were on the look-out for the slightest grounds on which to discredit the movement. Lebed states that the:

“Makhnovist command and Military Revolutionary Soviet had declared war on anti-Semitism, unlike other atamans who sometimes played on political positions by openly using the watchword of ‘Get the communists and Jews!’ Makhno and his staff, in their proclamations, stressed the unacceptable nature of anti-Semitism and combated signs of it through extreme repressive measures.”⁹

And Teper writes that “Makhno was as far removed from nationalism as from the anti-Semitism ascribed to him by many”; in his view, if there was anti-Semitism, it was when the Makhnovist army amalgamated with some units under Petliurist influence or simply common criminals seizing upon any excuse to indulge in looting.¹⁰ Antonov-Ovseenko goes one better: “There was no basis for accusing Makhno of personally supporting anti-Semitic tendencies. Quite the contrary, he did all in his power to combat pogroms.”¹¹ To back up what he says, he reproduces a lengthy appeal drafted by Makhno and Veretelnikov denouncing all acts of banditry and anti-Semitism perpetrated in the insurgents’ name and proposing to punish the perpetrators as promptly and severely as possible. Kubanin is equally clear: “In 1918 and 1919, the behavior of the Makhnovist army towards the Jews displayed not the slightest hint of anti-Semitism and this is as true of the mass as of the leadership.”¹² He stresses the presence of many Jews among the Makhnovist command during those years and reaffirms that “Makhno was not personally anti-Semitic”; according to him, it was only when the Makhnovists were fighting the Red Army after 1920 that they joined up with some Petliurist detachments and adopted more nationalistic attitudes denouncing “Muscovite aggressors” and calling for “the liberation of the Ukraine from the Russian yoke,” but without quite turning anti-Semitic. The most recent of the monographs published on the Makhnovschina inside the USSR, Seymanov’s monograph, is even more definite; it registers no inkling of Ukrainian chauvinism in the movement and argues that the “...so very widespread belief about the Makhnovschina’s anti-Semitic character does not square with the facts.” Semanov takes up the arguments of his predecessors, noting the presence of lots of Jews among the movement’s leadership and the “complete absence of anti-Semitic statements.”¹³

Makhno himself returned to these lingering misrepresentations several times in articles, written while the movement was still extant, for *The Road to Freedom*, and also while an émigré in Paris.¹⁴ Among his fellow exiles were many anarchists of Jewish origin: David Poliakov, Ida Mett, Waletsky, Ranko, and Grisha Bartanovsky to whom he entrusted his archives before dying. All of the evidence that we have been able to amass from people who knew him in Paris bear witness to

his having been a stranger to anti-Jewish prejudices which strikes us as setting the seal upon the matter.

So why this persistent rumor of Makhnovist anti-Semitism when the merest inquiry bursts that particular bubble? Several explanations are possible. On the one hand, the conduct of the Jewish armed company of Gulyai-Polye when the Austro-Germans invaded: their treachery must have left an anger among the region's population, in spite of the efforts of Makhno and his anarchist colleagues. Then again among the Ukrainian bourgeoisie degraded by the insurgents, there was also a large number of Jews, as well as among the Chekists and Bolshevik officials executed in 1920 and 1921 and so these could have been put down as casualties of popular vendetta against their co-religionists as a whole. Finally, many maverick gallows birds were ravaging the country, and it suited them to cover up their misdeeds by invoking the Makhnovist movement which enjoyed the best brand-image among the Ukrainian populace. Be that as it may, as far as their political adversaries were concerned, the argument was a weighty one enabling them to cheaply dismiss the professed aims of the movement, only to acknowledge later on, once their defeat had been finalized,— as indeed the Bolsheviks did — that such charges had had no substance to them.

Notes to Chapter 31: Apropos the Charges of Banditry and Anti-Semitism

1. Yefimov op. cit. p. 196.
2. Lebeds op. cit. p. 30.
3. Kubanin op. cit. p. 185–187.
4. Rakovsky *The Struggle for Liberation of the Countryside* (in Russian), Kharkov 1921, p. 31.
5. Kubanin op. cit. p. 29.
6. N. Makhno "Memoirs," in *Anarkhichesky Vestnik* op. cit. No. 5-6, p. 19.
7. Voline op. cit. p. 675.
8. G. Maximov, "Nestor Makhno and pogroms," in *Dyelo Truda* No. 51, May–September 1956, p. 26.
9. Lebeds op. cit. p. 43.
10. Teper op. cit. pp. 50–51.
11. Antonov Ovseenko op. cit. Tome IV, p. 105.
12. Kubanin op. cit. pp. 163–165.
13. Seymanov op. cit. pp. 39–40.
14. "The Jewish question" in *Anarkhichesky vestnik* op. cit. No. 5-6, pp. 17–25; "The Makhnovschina and Anti-Semitism," in *Dyelo Truda* No. 30-31, pp. 15–18; and "To the Jews of all lands," in *Dyelo Truda* No. 23-24, pp. 8–10.

32. Historiography and Mythomania

Throughout this book we have relied upon primary sources and references, to wit, the accounts and reports of protagonists in and eyewitnesses to the events described and we have also relied upon archive materials borrowed from official soviet publications. In regard to the latter, we have been able, with only a few exceptions relating to minor details, to consult virtually every text in print. Obviously, and for all the concrete particulars that have emerged from them, we must have reservations about their use in that we cannot have direct access to the archives from which they are extracted. Among the documentation which might have rendered certain portions of our study more exhaustive, we might cite the complete collections of the three Makhnovist press organs which we have only glimpsed through a few random issues accessible here in the west. The “memoirs,” or “confessions” of Viktor Belash and Alexei Chubenko, Makhnovist leaders captured by the Red Army and induced to “confess,” might also have proven useful to us, for only the odd snippet quoted by Kubanin has been accessible. Likewise, Arshinov drafted his *History of the Makhnovist Movement* surreptitiously in Russia and the first four more or less complete drafts of it were lost following Cheka raids, along with the movement’s fundamental documentation: personal notes from Makhno, biographical notes on the most active insurgents, a complete collection of *The Road to Freedom* (comprising 43 issues, so far as we can tell), and sundry other precious papers. In all logic, all these items should be stored in the Cheka or Red Army archives; Lebedev for instance refers to issues of *The Road to Freedom* in various formats and printed on different colored newsprint. Also the archives of the Romanian and Polish political police may hold the papers seized from Makhno; one might say the same of the little case full of papers left in the possession of Grisha Bartanovsky and seized by the Gestapo in Paris during the second world war. Perhaps someday all these materials may make it possible to complete the picture of the Makhnovist movement’s deeds and feats, provided they have not been lost forever in the convolutions of police bureaucracies or fallen victim to the passage of time (and the deterioration of paper) and the destruction inherent in warfare.

We think it opportune to rehearse, briefly, the chronology of the available printed sources. “Credit where credit is due!” So we shall begin with the view of the

winners, the Leninists, for whom History is their private preserve enabling them to control the present through the past and to justify all the “human sacrifices” carried out in order to build their hegemonic power. The earliest studies, at once political and military, were addressed to the party and army cadres at a time when the anti-Makhnovist campaign was still raging; the necessity of this “mini-civil war” had to be explained and the insurgents’ goals and fighting methods reported. Thus it was hardly surprising that they should have been published in reviews intended for internal use, reviews of small circulation and that, at first sight, they should display a startling objectivity, except of course where the defeats and losses sustained by the Red Army are concerned, these being issues on which the greatest discretion was observed. This “objectivity” can be explained; it was necessary so that the military and political cadres might draw useful lessons from it. Oddly enough, all later soviet monographs refrain from citing them, doubtless regarding them as unduly favorable to the Makhnovists. The most remarkable of these pieces is undeniably Yefimov’s — from which we have borrowed time and again — for it has the advantage of offering an overall analysis of the fight against Makhno during 1920. The other articles focus on specific clashes and these take care not to go into too much detail on the insurgents’ performance.¹

The chief military leader to whom it fell to wage the campaign against the Makhnovists, Eideman, took it upon himself to expand politically upon the reprehensible aspects of the Ukrainian “banditry” in several pamphlets and articles.² Another eminent Red Army strategist, the one-time tsarist colonel Kakurin, drew the lesson from this fight against “banditry” by stigmatizing it as a “specific social disease” and calling for the beefing up of the police apparatus in order to stifle it.³



The first general official study of the Makhnovschina was written in September 1921 and appeared above the signature of D. Lebeds ... this was *Appraisals and Lessons of Three Years of Anarcho-Makhnovschina*. The author sets out his intention of making a study of this movement’s “petit bourgeois and kulak banditry,” though he sets out “idiosyncrasies of a revolutionary and popular nature,” setting it apart from other instances of “banditry”: Petliurist, or independent socialist, or populist or anarchist, or bourgeois and seignorial counter-revolutionary, not forgetting the Cossack Volnitsa. This fruit salad acquires a curious flavor when Lebeds lumps together the Ukrainian “bedniaki” (poor peasants) and the Russian “seredniakis” (medium peasants)! And this only to deduce that the “seredniakis,” Makhno’s supporters, were the equivalent of the Russian kulaks and espoused the anarchist ideology as the one best suited to their fight against the soviet authorities! Makhno, “an enthusiastic practitioner of anarchist doctrine,” thereby becomes “the tool of the kulaks.” The contortions of this argument⁴ then lead the author to say that the first alliance with Makhno simply could not have held up because his principles of “...freedom, electivity of command and his partisan warfare methods” were having an erosive effect upon the Red Army by detaching “...the least conscious groups,

especially the sailors who went over to him.”⁵ In passing, Voline is awarded the title of Makhno’s “spiritual master”; then Lebeds states that the insurgents’ Fourth Congress, banned by Trotsky, had meant to sever the Makhnovist region from the remainder of the Ukraine by instituting the “...libertarian republic of Makhnovia.” Further on, he corrects his aim just a touch: the Makhnovist army was not “made up solely of kulaks; authentically poor peasants also belonged to it,” and the insurgents were frequently joined by entire groups of “kombeds” — the poor peasantry committees set up by the Leninists.⁶ Let us pick out this interesting definition of the insurgents’ ideals: “A refounding of society in such a way that everyone has an equal opportunity to enjoy life and its benefits; organization of social relationships in such a way that no group is dependent upon any other, no individual upon any other, so that every trace of power is banished from human relationships.”⁷ Whereas he formally rebuts the charges of an alliance between the Makhnovists and the Whites, Lebeds reckons that as a catchphrase libertarian commune failed to take account of “...the workers’ and peasants’ lack of preparedness for that phase of society”; he ties in the “dictatorship of the workers” with the expansion of productive forces and stresses the need for a central worker-peasant State apparatus that is well-organized if the economy is to be successfully repaired. A telling remark: Lebeds is worried about the Makhnovists’ “petit bourgeois humors” infiltrating the workers’ districts, into the workshops and factories, among the weary and backward (?) worker masses.⁸ He notes at this point that the sailor rebels of Kronstadt had taken up the Makhnovists’ catchcries of “free soviets and the third social revolution,” which had attracted some Communist Party members, especially younger ones, over to their revolt. Kronstadt’s proclamations had even been reprinted by the anarcho-Makhnovists who made no bones about their sympathies with that insurrection. Finally, to justify three successive alliances with the Makhnovists — who, let it be said in passing, acknowledge only two — Lebeds reckons that this was due to the “...proletarian party’s underlying attitude towards the petite bourgeoisie. We may reach an understanding with it, and pass accords, but in the final analysis we have to master it.” Thus he could see no “sin” in armed struggle waged against the insurgents, for this was merely a “question of tactics.”⁹ This convoluted reasoning avoids neither confusion nor the most blatant contradictions, and it is startlingly revealing of the regime’s dilemma, unable as it was to explain its struggle against Makhnovist “banditry”; even so, it was to be the same old story with all subsequent policy statements, to which the occasional minor variations were to be added. But his book is no less precious for all that; it contains substantial extracts from the Makhnovist press and invaluable factual material drawn from sources to which we could not otherwise gain access.



Three years later the account of Isaak Teper-Gordeyev, a one-time Nabat member who had probably been asked by the Cheka to make honorable amends, saw the light of day. In fact, in the guise of taking Makhno to task, Teper indulged himself

in an outright tirade against his former organization. His thesis is quite bizarre: that the Nabat guided the Makhnovschina by remote control in order to seize an autonomous territory where it might indulge in a social experiment in anarchism! Teper even goes so far as to depict Aron Baron, his ex-comrade, as the “dictator” of the Makhnovist movement during a good part of 1920! Not that this hinders him from peppering his account with numerous scathing remarks about Makhnovist “kulaks” and other recantations inspired by his Chekist “supervisor of studies.” His pamphlet boasts but one positive point; it supplies details of certain Makhnovists, and — above all — it reprints, for the first time in toto, the text of the agreement concluded in October 1920 between the Makhnovists and the Red Army.

In 1926 we may note Anishev’s curious foreword to I. Kalinin’s book (Kalinin was a White ex-reporter) on *Russia’s Vendee* (the Cossacks of the Don and Kuban). Anishev takes exception to Kalinin’s depiction of Makhno as a mere bandit who allegedly recruited solely on the basis of sharing plundered goods. In his view “...such an assessment of the Makhnovschina could only be acknowledged as tenable for the second quarter of 1921,” in that it would be a mistake not to discern behind Makhno’s banditry a general peasant uprising against the dictatorship of the big landowners and generals. This clarification gives pause for thought; on the one hand, it is out of place in the foreword, and, on the other, one needs to read Kalinin’s book from cover to cover to find that he only has a few lines about Makhno anyway!¹⁰

The following year, in a monograph on the “Denikinschina,” D. Kin acknowledges that the Makhnovists were a real “nightmare for the Whites,” but at the same time he asserts that “Anarchy was the flag that shrouded the aspirations of kulaks.”¹¹ Also in 1927, a real monograph appeared on the Makhnovschina above the signature of Kubanin and under the sponsorship of Pokrovsky, the then “boss” of official historiography. Kubanin has scientific pretensions and seeks as a Marxist to comprehend “the only attempt this century to achieve libertarian communism.” He painstakingly examines the movement’s social and economic characteristics, the Bolsheviks’ agrarian policy in the Ukraine and the various phases of the Makhnovschina. However, his approach is most convincing when he notes that the centers of the movement matched those rebel districts most active in 1905 against the pomieschikis, before going on to try to explain it away in terms of the importance of beet production! Remarkably, he cites virtually none of the earlier official studies as references, implicitly dismissing them as worthless. His reasoning is transparent; allegedly, the Makhnovist movement was made up for the most part of “seredniakis” who were supposedly led, in the period of the struggle against White counter-revolution by “bedniakis” and workers, and later, in the days of the fight against the soviet authorities, by “kulaks.”¹³ His conclusion is less simplistic: the Makhnovschina was on the right lines in 1918 and 1919 when it fought foreign occupation and the White backlash, but once it opposed Moscow, it became inherently counter-revolutionary! “The entire history of the Makhnovschina rests upon

the dithering of the southern steppes' seredniak between reaction and revolution." In spite of such reductionism, his work is extremely useful — in the absence of other sources — with regard to various aspects of the Makhnovist movement, in terms both of the plentiful quotations, the statistical evidence and the usage (for the first time) of the archives of the Cheka and Red Army, as well as for certain "admissions" about the "mistakes" of Leninist agrarian policy and the approach of the Bolshevik party-state, of which we shall give a sample. Let us open with this "gem": "In criticizing soviet power, Makhnovists stated that in Soviet Russia there was no freedom of speech, no press freedom, etc., which the Bolsheviks were supposed to have promised. These petit-bourgeois revolutionaries failed to grasp that if we enforce the dictatorship of the proletariat, we are consequently the foes of democratic freedoms. When and where have the Bolsheviks ever talked about liberty, equality and fraternity under the dictatorship of the proletariat?"¹⁴ Had Leninists dared issue such a statement in 1917, we are prepared to wager that they would have quickly vanished into historical oblivion. But now, ten years on, they could casually fly their true colors! Kubanin then recalls that the sovkhoses had been "organized along the lines of nationalized industry, i.e., the produce was to be placed at the complete disposition of the State," which caused dissatisfaction in the petit-bourgeois producer who had taken the slogan "Factory to the worker, land to the peasant" in a petit-bourgeois, syndicalist sense, as meaning "All of the land and the factories would come directly under the disposition of the producer who worked on that land and in those factories."¹⁵ He goes on to note that many anti-soviet (or more "precisely, anti-proletarian") seredniak peasant movements were mobilized in the name of "soviet power."¹⁶ Finally in a note, he draws a parallel between one of the Makhnovist tactics — individual terror — and that employed by the kulaks in 1927, thereby acknowledging the peasantry's ongoing anti-Bolshevik struggle.¹⁷

In order to condemn these Makhnovist methods, Kubanin conveniently uncovers in Eideman's archives a personal diary kept by Makhno's "wife," one Gaenko, killed in the spring of 1921 — a diary that portrays the actions of the insurgents in an unfavorable light. In vain was Makhno to deny any connection with this alleged wife and to rebut with ease the deeds and dates set out in this canard; all for nothing: to this day this "diary" remains the clinching argument of Soviet historians and their foreign acolytes — like Aragon¹⁸ — in denouncing the misdeeds of the Makhnovists.

In 1928 on the occasion of a second edition of Gerassimenko's "account," *Batko Makhno*, we are rewarded with a preface and critical notes by P.E. Schegolev previously known as an expert on the Decembrists, Pushkin and Lermontov (which is to say on the 19th century) and also as one of the founders of the Museum of the Revolution in Leningrad. He opens by quoting the orthodox views of Yakovlev and Trotsky on the Makhnovschina, before going on to mention Kurilenko, Karetnik, and Ivan Lepechenko and Viktor Belash, as if they were still alive and "...working peaceably in the Ukraine." Too often, he says, published materials and memoirs

on this period are of "dubious quality," when not neglectful of those which could be of primary importance. Then he describes Gerassimenko as "naive" for having stated that Makhno had prevented Denikin's seizure of Moscow (which was the first time this assessment was made public in writing in the USSR). All in all, Schegolev's foreword sticks to the "official" line, but the notes less so; he derides the accounts of Boris Pilnyak and of the "young French writer Joseph Kessel" whose "novel" is "...complete fabrication!" The main novelty in this publication consists of the reprint in full, as an appendix, of directives and telegrams Makhno sent to Moscow regarding Grigoriev and his resignation from his position as Red Army divisional commander, as well as of his long letter to Arshinov concerning the final moments in 1921 of the anti-Bolshevik struggle. These documents, lifted from Arshinov's work, are brought to the attention of the Soviet public for the very first time. Schegolev himself underlines this and has no hesitation in speaking about the "colorful language" of Makhno's letter, reminiscent in his eyes "...of the finest passages of Babel's short stories on the civil war." We may wonder what led this venerable historian, who died three years later, to take such a close interest in Makhno. Doubtless it was some barely disguised sympathy.

1928 also saw the appearance of the monograph by Rudnev, a sort of popularized version of the Kubanin work, in that it contains neither notes nor references. The author tells the whole story of the movement in a much more coherent fashion than Kubanin; he is openly hostile to the Makhnovschina "...a cover for the kulak movement" but nonetheless concedes that it played a crucial role against Wrangel in 1920, notes "Makhno's efforts" to "abide loyally by the agreement concluded with the Bolsheviks" and points out that some Red units and their commanders crossed over to the Makhnovists during 1921, an allegation tantamount to sacrilege at the time. Let us take note of his conclusions: "Soviet power and the laboring peasantry were at loggerheads. The former called for the land to be taken into the hands of the State; the latter wanted it handed over in its entirety to the local community which was supposed to know better than anybody else how it should be shared out."²⁰ Thus this analysis registers fairly faithfully the antagonism between the respective outlooks of the insurgents and the Bolshevik party-state.



In 1930 at the time of the "de-kulakization" which was proceeding apace, the Ukrainian Communist Party's history review, *Letopis Istorii*, carried Erde's analysis of the *political program of the anarcho-Makhnovschina* which in itself had nothing new to contribute, simply borrowing from all previous official studies.²¹ Not until 1937, when the Stalinists clashed in Spain with Spanish anarchists, did the topic recover any immediacy. Em. Yaroslavsky published a survey of *Anarchism in Russia* (translated into several languages) repeating the most hackneyed charges against the Makhnovists, nonetheless leaving a way out for "well-meaning" Spanish anarchists for, he said, the "Makhnovist movement had not always been hostile to the revolution from its outset and throughout its existence. There were times when it

helped the revolution.”²² A direct reference to the two alliances agreed with the Bolsheviks. Not that that meant that Leninists could countenance “free soviets,” which provoked Yaroslavsky to anger: “The very notion of a Soviet without any power is one of the most damaging concoctions to emanate from Mensheviks and White Guards. It is a light which gives no heat[!], a cold fire[?], senile impotence, an empty, noxious phrase.”²³ It is true that the Stalin years registered a lively enrichment of the language of abuse and the author was not one to be outdone by official speeches anathematizing the “lewd vipers” and other “monsters” in the hire of the international reaction! With Yaroslavsky, one finds more social nuances than in Lebeds or Kubanin: “The Makhnovists’ hatred for the poor peasants was the hatred of kulaks for the poor peasants and workers.”²⁴ Intoxicated, he even speaks of the “Makhnovian state of Gulyai-Polye,” of a “...kulak police state with its spies, executioners, prisons, irresponsible despotic commanders, its army,” and of the destruction of “all press freedom, all political liberty.”²⁵ It appears here Yaroslavsky is extrapolating and crediting to the Makhnovist movement specific features of his own party. Only those anarcho-syndicalists who went over to the Bolsheviks are spared in his view, for they “...took a tiny step forward towards a proper understanding of the revolution, its course and its tasks.” Very obviously, this was pointing out to the anarcho-syndicalists of the Spanish CNT the road they too should go down. Echoing the ravings of this unsavory individual, the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, in its first edition in 1938 carried an entry devoted to the Makhnovschina: “Movement of kulaks, anarchists and White Guards [...] carried out anti-Jewish pogroms, savage looting and murders of communists.”²⁶

Beginning around the same time was a succession of “Moscow trials” which captured the attention of worldwide public opinion, which was intrigued more by these intestinal struggles than by the fate of the millions of peasant victims of Stalinist collectivization in the foregoing years. An international panel of figures “on the left” was set up to look into the origins of score-settling: straight away it came to seek an explanation from Trotsky (who had been banished from the “holy of holies” some years before) of his own conduct towards the Kronstadt sailors and Makhno. The one-time “Carnot” of the Bolsheviks deigned to answer thus:

“Makhno was a blend of fanatic and adventurer. But he became the focus of the tendencies that provoked the Kronstadt uprising. Generally, cavalry is the most reactionary category of troops. [?] The man on horseback holds the man on foot in contempt. [!?] [...] Makhno’s anarchist ideals (negation of the state, contempt for central authority) could not have been better matched to the mentality of this kulak cavalry. Let me add that in Makhno the hatred felt for the urban worker was complemented by a pugnacious anti-Semitism.”²⁷

A while later he was at it again, declaring peremptorily that “only a man with an empty mind could see in Makhno’s bands or in the Kronstadt insurrection a

struggle between the abstract principles of anarchism and state socialism.”²⁸ Trotsky kept faith with himself as he had been during his offensive against the Makhnovists in June 1919; in this way he demonstrated his inability to grasp the way that the Russian revolution had degenerated from its beginnings. Failing to question at all his own contribution to this dismal evolution, indeed the very opposite, he continued to stake his claim to the Bolshevik inheritance seized by his twin Stalin, by using precisely the same arguments and anathemas. It was only a short time before he himself fell victim to methods he had so adroitly used against the revolutionary insurgents that he was to revise part of his incisive judgment of Makhno, who “had good intentions but acted damned badly.”²⁹ The hubris that had earned Trotsky so many enemies in his own party was still casting him in the starring role of the man who knew how to act “well” or “badly.”

For nearly 20 years after that date, a leaden silence hung over the Makhnovschina; this was the heyday of the regime’s “hacks writing to order.” Didn’t they go to the lengths of rewriting the whole history of the civil war just to uncover the hitherto well-hidden feats of that “little father of the peoples” Josef Vissarionovich Djugashvili, alias Stalin! For instance the book by one A.V. Likhovatsky on *The Crushing of the National Counter-revolution in the Ukraine in 1917–1922* has not a single word to say in its 651 pages about Makhno! Rehearsing such memories could well have put ideas into the heads of mischief-makers, a sort that were thick on the ground in the vast jail that the USSR had become!

In 1962, in a Ukrainian encyclopedia the Makhnovist movement was still being lumped willy-nilly with the “kulaks, Social Revolutionaries, anarchists and Petliurists,” the free soviets became “soviets without communists” and so on and so on.³⁰ Not until 1964 and the after-effects of the Khrushchev “thaw” did a study of some interest appear; within the framework of the “mini-civil war” it deals with military and political aspects of the fight against the Makhnovists. With a print-run of only 2,140 copies, Trifonov’s work was meant for “students of history, secondary-school and university teachers, as well as party cadres.” As the “mini-civil war” had been completely neglected during the period of the “Stalin cult,” the stress was henceforth to be on “the activity of the Soviet government, with Lenin at its head, and of the local party organs, Red Army Cheka, militia and special counter-insurgency corps.”³¹ Trifonov takes the precaution of reporting that the campaign waged against the dictatorship of the proletariat by kulaks — led by the petit-bourgeois parties of the Social Revolutionaries, Mensheviks, anarchists and all the rest — was inspired and organized by international imperialism. This ritual incantation is still relevant, for the old, old ploy of ascribing the roots of “difficulties” at home to the handiwork of foreign foes excuses even the worst repressions. In spite of this, the book furnishes details galore, especially about military operations, all drawn from archives. But what makes it really interesting is its critical handling of all previous monographs on the Makhnovist movement.

Out of all the contradictory sources, only Arshinov's book is quoted; the writer — who is described as the "personal tutor" and "mentor" of the arch-bandit Makhno — cannot, says Trifonov, disguise a "zoological hatred of communism;" his book can be dismissed on account of its "anti-communist venom!" As for Lebeds, he is taken to task for uncritical use of sources (probably his substantial quotations from the Makhnovist press) as well as for having described the Makhnovschina as a "petit-bourgeois spirit of revolt." Teper too is accused of having raised doubts about Makhno and even for having "tried to rehabilitate him!" Kubanin is alleged to have allowed gross methodological errors regarding definition of the social nature and political complexion of Ukrainian banditry to slip through. Trifonov puts him straight: Makhno and his entourage represented the interests of the wealthiest village kulaks from 1918 on! Furthermore, Kubanin is alleged not to have been critical enough of the "Memoirs" of arrested Makhnovists and to have quoted too extensively from Arshinov, without the requisite authentication. Only Yaroslavsky is spared and with good reason: their loyalties are the same, with Trifonov's Stalinism merely dispensing with Stalin.³²

Finally in 1968 a substantial article by Seymanov appeared. Trifonov's black and white judgments are toned down a bit; Makhno supposedly "enjoyed for a time the support of a comparatively broad stratum of the peasantry. This is why the struggle against him was so protracted, wearying and bloody."³³ Seymanov proposes to expose the "absence of positive social ideals" from the movement, a goal readily achieved in that from his sources — all of them familiar — he heeds only the most negative aspects likely to bolster his thesis. To conclude our review of the historiography, let us mention Kanev's monograph on anarchism where the author rails against the "western bourgeois counterfeits of history who dare make revolutionaries of anarchists and Makhnovists and take Bolsheviks to task for having eradicated them."³⁴

The regression since the 1920s is self-evident; compared with such liturgical paeans to the role of Lenin and the Party, the studies by Yefimov, Antonov-Ovseenko and, to a lesser extent, Lebeds and Kubanin could pass for paragons of objectivity! Whereas these authors were not afraid to reprint Makhnovist texts extensively and hint at certain weaknesses and shortcomings in the Leninist regime, post-Stalinist hagiographers do not shrink from denying all voice to opponents of their Manichaean contentions.

In the West, historians were for a long time content to examine only the views of the victors, ignoring the "mini-civil war" of the years 1920–1924 virtually entirely. Over the past few years there has been a clear turn-around on this count, and some studies have been marked by a resurgence of interest in this period. In English, several works are deserving of attention, including the monographs on Makhno by Michael Palij, an American of Ukrainian extraction, and by Michael

Malet, a Scottish historian.³⁵ Their common intention has been, so to speak, to rehabilitate in academic circles Makhno and the Ukrainian insurgent movement which he led; a very laudable object to be sure, but one that we hold to be secondary, the most important being to make the experience of the Ukrainian libertarian communists known to a wider public and to extract from it lessons of use to the contemporary revolutionary project. Dealt with in broad outline, the actions and feats of the Makhnovists — as well as the complex of military operations connected with this — remain isolated from the context of the Russian revolution overall. Here again we come upon the classic drawbacks of academic research, which is generally content coldly to catalogue events without venturing any thoroughgoing analysis, nor, above all, describing their phases with all the detail that one might hope for. On the methodological side, certain basic sources — such as Yefimov — are omitted or inadequately used, whereas other more dubious ones are utilized and are the source of scattered inexactitudes. In spite of everything one should rejoice at publication of these excellent studies which are correctives to the mediocre Anglo-Saxon university literature tackling the subject.

In French, since the 1920s, only Arshinov's book and the first volume of Makhno's memoirs were available. 1947 saw the appearance of Voline's posthumous work *La Révolution inconnue*: Voline had promised a great work on Makhno and the Makhnovschina, but this falls far short of that, maybe on account of the war or other circumstances. Let us quote, from memory, the criticism that Ida Mett made of it at the time of its publication:

"Far from disclosing fresh facts, the author reprints whole pages lifted from the *History of the Makhnovist Movement* written by Arshinov in 1921. On the other hand, he quotes not one word from the private *Memoirs* of Nestor Makhno despite being in possession of the original which he discovered under the pillow of Makhno's hospital deathbed. To be sure there are points of interest in his description of the Makhnovschina, but their historical value is undermined by the absence of footnotes, the turgid hectoring and a measure of distasteful self-obsession. To conclude, the author, his objectivity and impartiality overflowing, launches into descriptions of the negative personal aspects of Makhno's, and this inelegant, 'impartiality' is singularly reminiscent of personal, posthumous vengeance."³⁶

Legitimate criticism, for we can discern long paraphrases of or quotations from Arshinov and from Makhno; Voline's few rudimentary anecdotes were not such as to justify his moral judgments on Makhno and his comrades, judgments out of place after such reasoning.

In 1970 the first volume of Makhno's *Memoirs* was re-published thanks to the writer Daniel Guérin. In a short preface Guérin reviews the characteristics of the movement and laments a "certain relative weakness," due to the "dearth of

libertarian intellectuals in its ranks,” although at least “intermittently it was helped by outsiders[?].” Guérin takes the opportunity to look forward to a “brilliant psychological profile of Makhno by an English author, Malcolm Menzies.”³⁷ This “profile” duly appeared in 1972, in a translation from the English manuscript, and leaves our hunger unassuaged, for the author — utterly ignorant of his subject — makes do with rehashing some autobiographical writings of Makhno (available in French at that) as well as a few items of gossip, collected who knows where, since he quotes no sources and peppers the whole with psychological considerations more revealing of his own turmoil than of Makhno’s. Having acted as godfather to this “own goal,” Guérin does not stop there; in an anthology of anarchist texts that could not have been bettered, he describes the Makhnovist movement as a “gigantic *jacquerie* accompanied by a guerrilla war spearheaded by an avenger, a sort of Robin Hood [...] a relatively uneducated peasant [...] a guerrilla war foreshadowing the revolutionary war of the Chinese, Cubans, Algerians, and of heroic Vietnam.[!]” Undaunted by unnatural comparisons, Guérin adds that Trotsky should be “respected,” ... “having been a great revolutionary,” and that the “sins accumulated by the Bolshevik authorities between 1918 and 1921, the culmination of which would be Kronstadt [and Makhno?] take nothing away from the conviction and genius of the authors of the October Revolution.”³⁸ With his contradictory evaluation, Guérin discloses his difficulties in reconciling the irreconcilable; his Leninist-Trotskyist sympathies, his neophyte zeal for peddling the curious amalgam dubbed “libertarian marxism,” and the anarchism of the Makhnovists.

In 1975 Wolodymyr Holota (apparently of Ukrainian extraction) submitted a Ph.D. thesis at Strasbourg University on *The Ukrainian(?) Makhnovist Movement* and at the end of an unimaginative compilation of slim references in French and a few others in Russian and Ukrainian, arrived at an ambiguous conclusion, close to Guérin’s thesis.³⁹

It was on the basis of these French “sources” that Yves Ternon, a urologist and amateur historian, published a small book on Makhno in 1981. Let us skip the inaccuracies, confusions and unwarranted inclusions, to take note of the author’s medico-historical diagnosis: Makhno was the “indicator, the intermediary between a people and its entry into history, the diastatic [!] factor which accelerated the reaction and acted only where the wherewithal for action was to hand[?].”⁴⁰

Some may perhaps advance as an extenuation these authors’ sympathies for Makhno. That argument carries little weight, in view of the very personality of the Ukrainian libertarian who had little taste for indulgence and would assuredly not have appreciated the means employed by such lame “defenders” in putting themselves forward.

Despite the notorious weaknesses and shortcomings of the genre, one can account for their appearance by the dearth of works on Makhno deserving of the name; it must be obvious that they would have never seen the light of day had French institutional historians tackled the subject seriously as their Anglo-Saxon

counterparts Palij and Malet have done. Thus Roger Portall, who teaches Russian history at the Sorbonne, has no hesitation in a small volume issued in 1970 in talking about the Makhnovschina as a "movement of anarchist inspiration, grouping under Makhno's command, very diverse political and social elements and allying itself successively with the Bolsheviks and then with the White armies [which] complicated the situation even further. The movement was liquidated in 1921; the Red Army absorbed part of its troops." ⁴¹ And should this "uncomplicated" Sorbonne character wish to apply for the imprimatur of the Kremlin, we should point out to him that even Soviet historians have moved on from this!



Such handling of Makhno and of the Russian revolution in general deserves some clarification of what a methodology really suited to the subject should be like. For a start, let us stress the condition *sine qua non*, a perfect knowledge of Russian ought to be a prerequisite, for only in that tongue are all sources accessible. Yet that is a necessary condition but not a sufficient one, for there is no shortage of students of Russian in France; other qualities are equally desirable, if not crucial; the ability to tackle rigorously but open-mindedly the differing points of view of all parties concerned. Thus, such work implies a complete independence of mind, namely no dependency on any "thesis supervisor" nor on any "mandarin," and no concern to please/displease the established authorities or some possible "clientele." As we can see, this rules out dilettantes greedy for "acclaim" and academics preoccupied with "furtherance" of careers. Let us also consider the intense effort required to authenticate the accuracy and appropriateness of sources, the need to make things as accessible to the reader as possible — in short, the accomplishment of a thankless and wearying task from which many recoil. Yet something very important is at stake; millions of men fought and died for their beliefs, others carry on their fight. That alone is what matters and not the self-esteem nor notoriety of any side. Contrary to the Leninists' zealot axiom "only the truth is revolutionary" — we know what this one-way truth amounts to — let us adapt the adage and say that only the *quest* for the truth is revolutionary. As we see it, only with this attitude can a fruitful approach be made to the events of the years 1917–1921 — among others.



To wind up this bibliographical tour we now must look at an area where the elementary rules we have just catalogued do not apply: novelistic literature. Without dwelling too long upon it, let us quote a few snippets from these "œuvres": Vetlougine, a White Russian refugee in Paris, performed the opening honors with a pamphlet published in 1920; a chapter of this is given over to the "Night over the Ukraine," in fact to Makhno who is depicted in the most caricaturish light. The author puts these words into his mouth: "Free Russia needs neither posts nor telegraphs. Our ancestors wrote no letters and sent no telegrams and were none the worse for that!" ⁴² According to Vetlougine, Makhno only took his political bear-

ings every autumn! Hélène Isvolsky, daughter of the former tsarist ambassador to France, follows Vetlouguine's example. She credits Makhno with the "first exploit" of having "murdered an aristocratic marshal who was imprudent enough to arrive to look into some shady affairs." Makhno had been "dispatched to Siberia, from where he escaped several times. [...] He is feared and adored like a god[?]" and there is more of the same to follow.⁴³ Z. Arbatov published what purports to be a life of Makhno; he describes him as being "small of stature, arms stretching to the knees, face marked by smallpox, dark brown eyes, reminiscent of an owl blinded by a sudden light." The author claims to be the son of the household in which Makhno allegedly set up his headquarters at the time of the occupation of Ekaterinoslav; according to Arbatov the Makhnovists had supposedly and systematically sabered down in the street all who wore furs or good overcoats, amusing themselves by cutting off heads with one stroke and by other actions that need not be mentioned, for they undoubtedly testify to Arbatov's deranged mind.⁴⁴ Gerassimenko, of whom we have already spoken, depicts Makhno in similar colors; at age eleven he had allegedly been a "shoelace-seller" in Mariupol and distinguished himself by wayward behavior which had earned him a thrashing from his superior, who supposedly admitted to having "smashed 40 rods on the back and head of young Nestor in three months, to no effect," for Nestor had allegedly taken his revenge by cutting the buttons off his clothes! We have seen the use to which these "sources" were put by Joseph Kessel; however, he does not stand alone. Boris Pilnyak⁴⁵ "produced" a novel along similar lines! Both of them have been flayed by the Soviet historian Schegolev as we have seen. For the record let us note that Bagritsky, Mayakovsky and Demian Bedny all "conceived" atrocious poetry on Makhno.



The "proletarian" Count Alexei Tolstoy (no relation to the illustrious author of that name), an inveterate ex-monarchist who became Stalin's sycophant, mentions Makhno and the insurgents in a novel, with equally unsavory imagination.⁴⁶ Closer to our own day, Paustovsky the "liberal" Stalinist of the 1950s offers us an excellent example of novelistic invention: one scene takes place in the railway station in Pomoshnaya where two trainloads of Makhnovists speed past the narrator, who nonetheless has time to store a mountain of details in his memory, such as the tattoos of a "broken-nosed sailor": "I did not have time to take in the details of this masterpiece. All I can remember is a hotchpotch of female legs, hearts, daggers and serpents[!]" The author obviously has problems matching the time to his fertile imaginings. He sees Makhno in a "black felt cap and unbuttoned blouse," his "expression signified laziness, smug serenity, languor. [...] A moistened fringe fell over his furrowing brow. His eyes — the mischievous yet empty eyes of a polecat or a paranoiac — glinted with a hothead's fury. [...] Lazily, Makhno raised his revolver and without a glance at anybody, without taking aim, just fired. Why? Go ask him. Can anyone guess what goes on inside the head of a rampaging monster?"⁴⁷ What is going on inside the head of this Paustovsky? No doubt

serious mental storms in that he seeks to depict a scene that lasted for only a few seconds over six full pages of the most minute detail! Yet he is not the king of this particular castle. A British science fiction writer, Barrington Bayley, presents us with one "Kastor Krakhno" (sic!), leader of the "Death to life!" anarchist movement. His French publisher, fearing that the allusion might not be too obvious, takes the trouble to resolve the equation "Krakhno=Makhno," which instantly categorizes the setting and the intentions behind Bayley's novel. In his stellar kingdom, rent by civil war, Krakhno emerges to mount a spirited celebration of anarchist nihilism and "Death to life!"⁴⁸

Finally, a study on the "Cossacks" blithely states that "Makhno was a stockily-built blond, dressed entirely in black [...] real name Afouka Bida, a Jew converted at a very early age to anarchist beliefs."⁴⁹ What can one say about all this literary garbage which certain of the aforementioned "apprentice Makhnologists" have no hesitation in utilizing as the basis for their delirious imaginings? To "literary" experts we shall leave the task of diagnosing the pathological roots of the inspirations of those scribblers whose compulsive myth-peddling and vulgarity are equaled by their incompetence.

And let us add a personal note: During a 1960s screening in Moscow of the film adaptation of Vishnievsky's play *The Optimistic Tragedy*, one scene shows Makhno carried on palanquins and holding a parasol; this sight, designed to provoke hilarity, was greeted by the hundreds of spectators by a stony silence, evidence that no one is taken in by the officially-approved travesty.

Notes to Chapter 32: Historiography and Mythomania

1. In addition to the texts and articles already mentioned, we might cite the series carried by the Red Army review *Armiia i revoliutsiia*; Likharevsky, "The Andreevka confusion" (the battle against Makhno on December 14, 1920) No. 3-4, 1921; Makusenko, "Operations against Makhno from June 9 to 16, 1921," No. 3-4; Eideman, "Makhno," No. 1-2, 1923; then N. Sergeyev, "The Poltava operation against Makhno," in *Voyna i revoliutsiia*, Moscow, No. 9, 1927; Romanchenko, "Episodes from the struggle against Makhno, Summer 1920" (in Ukrainian) in *Letopis revoliutsiia* No. 4, 1931.
2. Eideman, *The Struggle Against the Insurgent Kulaks and Banditry* (in Russian) Kharkov, 1921, and *The Stamping Grounds of the Atamans and Banditry*, Kharkov, 1921.
3. N. Kakurin, "The organization of the drive against banditry according to the Tambov and Vitebsk experience," in *Voyennaya nauka i revoliutsiia*, No. 1, 1922, Moscow p. 83.
4. Lebedev op. cit. pp. 7 and 10.
5. Ibid. p. 16.
6. Ibid. p. 25.
7. Ibid. p. 33.
8. Ibid. pp. 48 and 50.

9. Ibid. p. 53.
10. Kalinin op. cit. p. 1.
11. D. Kin *The Denikinschina* (in Russian), Moscow, 1927, pp. 190–194.
12. Kubanin op. cit. p. 226.
13. Ibid. p. 98.
14. Ibid. p. 119.
15. Ibid. p. 59.
16. Ibid. p. 63.
17. Ibid. p. 114.
18. Aragon, *Histoire de l'URSS*, Paris, 1972, Tome 1, pp. 260–261.
19. V. I. Gerassimenko *Batko Makhno* (in Russian) 2nd edition, Moscow 1928, pp. 6, 8, 38 and 107.
20. Rudnev op. cit. pp. 4, 90–91, 95–96 and 100.
21. *Litopis istorii* (in Ukrainian) Kharkov 1930, 1(40) pp. 41–63 and 2(41) pp. 28–49.
22. Em. Yaroslavsky *L'Anarchisme en Russie*, Paris, 1937 p. 68.
23. Ibid. p. 74.
24. Ibid. p. 89.
25. Ibid. p. 90.
26. Tome XXX VII, pp. 500–501.
27. Victor Serge and Leon Trotsky *La Lutte contre le Stalinisme*, Paris, 1977, pp. 175–176 (the text is from September 10, 1937).
28. Ibid. p. 198 (text published in March 1938).
29. Trotsky *Stalin*, English translation from the Russian by Ch. Malamuth, New York and London, 1941, p. 337. Let us remember that this passage and the pages following, containing interesting self-critical comments, do not appear in the French edition published by Grasset, Paris, 1948.
30. *Ukrainska radenska entsiklopedia* 1962, Tome VIII, pp. 561–562.
31. Trifonov op. cit. p. 2.
32. Ibid. pp. 7–16.
33. Semanov, op. cit. p. 37.
34. S. Kanev *The October Revolution and the collapse of anarchism* (in Russian), Moscow, 1974 p. 348.
35. Michael Palij *The Anarchism of Nestor Makhno, 1918–1921: An Aspect of the Ukrainian Revolution*, Seattle and London, 1976; Michael Malet, *Nestor Makhno in the Russian Civil War*, London 1982.
36. *Masses: Socialism et liberté* Paris, December 1948, pp. 30–31.
37. Makhno *La Révolution Russe en Ukraine* Paris, 1970, pp. 8–10.
38. D. Guérin, *Ni Dieu ni maître*, Paris 1970, Tome III p. 134 and Tome IV pp. 5–6 and p. 53.
39. W. Holota *The Ukrainian Makhmovist Movement, 1918–1921, and the Evolution of European Anarchism through the Debate on the Platform, 1926–1934*, Strasbourg, 1975 (Roneoed).

40. Y. TERNON *Makhno, La révolte anarchiste*, Brussels, 1981, p. 161.
41. R. Portal, *Russes et Ukrainiens*, Paris, 1972, p. 75.
42. A. Vetlougine *Les Aventuriers de la guerre civile* (in Russian) Paris, 1921 pp. 148–150.
43. *La Revue de France* No. 16, November 1921, pp. 183–184.
44. Z. Arbatov “Batko Makhno” in *Vozrozhdeniye* Paris, September–October 1953 pp. 102–115; lifted from the article “Ekaterinoslav 1917–1922” in *Arkhiv Russkoy revoliutsii* XII, 1923, pp. 83–148.
45. Pilnyak “The debacle” in *Russkiy sovremennik* III, 1924.
46. A. Tolstoy *The Road of Storms* Moscow, 1962, Tmes II and III.
47. C. Paustovsky *Une Ère inconnue commencée* Paris, 1964, pp. 208–214.
48. B.J. Bayley *Les Planètes meurent aussi*, Paris, 1974, blurb. (In English, *Annihilation Factor* New York 1972).
49. Y. Bréhéret *Les Cosaques*, Paris, 1972, pp. 287–289.

33. Summing Up and Lessons

Through the militant and revolutionary activities of Nestor Makhno and his comrades we have been able to trace the process initiated in the Russian Empire by the tremors of 1905, continuing through the convulsions of 1917 and concluding with the torment of the years that followed. Hindsight has made our vista even wider: these events were only harbingers of a more thoroughgoing cataclysm which was to cast its shadow over the whole century. Viewed in this light, what happened in the Ukraine takes on a tremendous significance. Let us take note of the curious repetition of history which turned the region under Makhnovist influence — the steppes of the southern Ukraine — into the main battleground of this process, just as it had been in the days of the great historical upheavals which followed the Asiatic invasions from the beginnings of the Christian era right up to the waning of the Middle Ages. Let us note too that the decisive military clashes of the Russian Civil War set Cossacks of various persuasions at one another's throats: White Cossacks, Red Cossacks, yellow-and-blue (Ukrainian nationalist) Cossacks, and Black Cossacks (Makhnovist-Zaporogs). Let us now look at the results and the lessons to be drawn.

This upheaval, intended to make an end of all alienation and violent oppression, led a people which had but recently emerged only a few decades earlier from feudal serfdom, into an enslavement to the state without parallel and precedent in history. The cost in human terms was of catastrophic proportions: by our reckoning, nearly one-and-half million people lost their lives during these ghastly years in the Makhnovist region¹ and nearly 20 times as many in the whole of Russian territory in the course of armed struggle, repressions, famines and epidemics, plus the huge losses inflicted by the Russo-German war. Gulyai-Polye, capital of "Makhnovia" saw its population fall from 25,000 of 1917 to 12,027 by 1926.² The Makhnovist movement had lost 90 percent of its active participants, which is to say 300,000 men, according to an estimate of March 1920.³

One image of this devastation: Since the construction at the beginning of the 1930s by American engineers and slave laborers from the Gulag of the Dniepro-Stroi dam near Alexandrovsk, the "Makhnovist" region has seen its topography altered, and the waterfalls and rapids on the Dniepr — features symbolic of the Zaporogs — have been submerged by flood waters.

We have managed to pick up the trails of several Makhnovists who got out to France: Kharlamov, Mazer and Zarenko settled in the Paris area near to Makhno's home. Bolshakov and Soldatenko served with the Durruti Column during the Spanish revolution and fell at Villa Mayor near Zaragoza in 1937; David Poliakov, after refusing to wear the yellow star during the German occupation, was deported to — and never returned from — the Nazi camps, and it seems that two other Makhnovists may have emigrated to Canada after 1945.

The fate of other, less glorious protagonists proves equally tragic. Mai-Maievsky, the embezzling White general who commanded the army of White Volunteers in 1919 only to be replaced in 1920, died of a heart attack on the very day that Wrangel's defeated troops evacuated the peninsula. Baron-General Wrangel also died in 1929 in Brussels in mysterious circumstances. General Pokrovsky-the-Executioner was killed in Bulgaria in 1923 by his own Cossacks. Slashev, criticized by his own in Constantinople, defected to the Reds, taught at the Higher Military Academy of the Red Army and died in Moscow in 1929, assassinated by someone who claimed to be the brother of one of his victims in the Crimea. During the second world war, Krasnov and Shkuro formed Cossack units in the service of the Germans, but the Germans grew suspicious of them and avoided deploying them against the Red Army. In 1945 the British handed them over to Stalin: he had them hanged in Moscow's Red Square in 1947 with eleven other Cossack generals as "traitors to the nation." Only Denikin died in bed, that same year, in the United States.

As for the Red generals, who distinguished themselves in the fight against the Makhnovists, and had been burdened with medals and certitudes, they in turn fell headlong into the trap. Nesterovich who had commanded the special "flying corps" in December 1920 against Makhno, never recovered from this sinister assignment: while on a mission abroad, he abruptly gave up all activity and found a job as a "factory worker." The GPU did not quite see it like that; Nesterovich was too knowledgeable about too many compromising matters. "One of his former friends invited him to dinner and poisoned him. His corpse was photographed and the negative sent to Moscow as proof of his execution."⁵ Kotovsky who had been involved in Yakir's retreat and the hunting down of the Makhnovists in January 1921 was killed in 1925 in "unexplained circumstances" by one of his associates, probably on GPU instructions; his excessive popularity in the army incurred the displeasure of Stalin who was concerned to eliminate all potential Bolshevik "Bonapartes." Frunze, the commander in chief of the campaign against Makhno in 1921, replaced Trotsky as Commissar for War; he died on October 31, 1925, during a routine stomach operation. A haphazard accident can be ruled out; it had been on express orders from Stalin and the Central Committee that he had made up his mind to undergo the operation. According to one of his adjutants, he had had a premonition of its fatal outcome. Officially, he succumbed to an "overdose"

of anaesthetic.⁶ The celebrated Red generals Yakir, Eideman, Uborevich, Primakov, Kork and Tukhachevsky were shot on July 11, 1937 after the gravest accusations. Levenson, S.S. Kamenev, Kakurin, Rakovsky, Karakhan, Dybenko and Yakovlev (Epstein) — who signed the agreement with Makhno — disappeared when their turn came, victims of the perverse operation of the mechanism which they themselves had set in motion. Probably none of them had sufficiently pondered Saint-Just's famous phrase: "A revolution that stops half-way is digging its own grave!" Only Voroshilov and Budyenny proved spineless enough to weather every storm: they passed away peaceably in their beds.

Thus, sooner or later the "victors" shared the fate of the "vanquished" and they too were gobbled up by the "cannibalistic" revolution. Very few of them had realized that it was not enough to give the worm-eaten edifice of the Russian Empire a coat of Red paint to change its nature. The enshrined system of exaggerated state centralization, the despicable nature of the methods used, the dictatorship of the leaders and the passive obedience of the masses could only have exacerbated, not the class struggle, but the "competition for placements" and in that game, no one could be sure that he would not be out black-guarded. But that is not all — the historical responsibilities must be determined with precision: Arshinov denounces the "noxious role" of Bolshevism which "...snuffed out revolutionary initiative and the autonomous activity of the masses, thereby eradicating the greatest revolutionary opportunities that the workers had ever had in history." He reckons, however, that Bolshevism did not bear "sole responsibility for the failure of the Russian revolution. It has merely acted out what was devised decades ago by socialist science. Its every move was inspired by the general theory of scientific socialism."⁷ In Arshinov's view, the working class worldwide had to hold "socialism as a whole" responsible for the deplorable situation foisted upon the Russian peasants and workers. From which he deduced of course that the proletariat has no socialist "friends" — these being in reality "enemies aspiring only to seize the product of their labor"⁸ — and that they should count on nobody but themselves.

Nestor Makhno arrived at the same conclusion and recalls that it is by destroying the State once and for all — (the State of which socialists are the stalwart supporters) — that the toilers will at last be able to build the society of their dreams:

"The final and utter liquidation of the State can only take place when the approach of the toilers' struggle is as libertarian as possible, when they themselves will work out the structures for their social action. These structures must take the form of organs of social and economic self-direction, the reform of free (anti-authoritarian) soviets. The revolutionary toilers and their vanguard — the anarchists — must analyze the nature and structure of these soviets and stipulate their revolutionary functions in advance. It is upon that that the positive

evolution and development of anarchist ideas among those who will shift for themselves in liquidating the State in order to build the free society, is dependent.”⁹

In this regard, the exemplary struggles and achievements spearheaded by Makhno and the Ukrainian insurgents offer comfort to all who — some fine day — may seek return to these roots of the Russian and Ukrainian revolutions and this time see things through to their natural conclusion in a *genuinely* humane society.

A.S. 1982

Notes to Chapter 33: Summing Up and Lessons

1. We have used the method of cross-checking demographic statistics, taking soviet sources into account: one set of figures mentions 250,000 victims in the province of the Northern Tavrida alone (quoted by Makhnovets, “The truth about Makhno,” in *Novoye Russkoye slovo*, New York, March 2, 1969, p. 8), but it goes without saying that these figures can only be approximate in that there were vast migration movements.
2. *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, First Edition, Moscow, Tome XIX. The third edition sets the town’s population in 1970 at 16,000 inhabitants.
3. P. Arshinov, op. cit. p. 7 and A. Nikolaev *The First Among Equals*, op. cit. p. 40.
4. Louis Mercier-Vega *L’Incredible Anarchisme* Paris 1970, p. 14 and further information supplied to the author and confirmed by the Spanish Libertarian Fortera, from Montpellier.
5. Gregory Bessedovsky *Oui, j’accuse!* Paris, 1930, pp. 34–36.
6. I. K. Hambourg *The Way it Was* (In Russian), Moscow 1965, p. 182 (in 1926 Boris Pilnyak wrote a novella directly based on this affair, *The Tale of the Unextinguished Moon*, which created a sensation in its day and subsequently led to his being swallowed up by the Gulag.)
7. Arshinov op. cit. pp. 250–251.
8. Idem.
9. N. Makhno “The course of struggle against the State,” in *Dyelo Truda* No. 17, October 1926, pp. 5–6.

Documents from the Makhnovists

To complement our study, we reprint in full the most telling statements of principle issued by the Makhnovist movement.

Document No. 1 is lifted from the review *Russkaya Mysl* (Russian Thought) Books I and II, published in Sofia by Piotr Struve. The document contains the essential passages from the pamphlet (32 pages in 8§) published by the Gulyai-Polye "Nabat" anarchist group in 1919 and previously inaccessible in the West.

Document No. 2 consists of the Makhnovists' *Draft Declaration* — their political charter based on a Bulgarian edition published in Sofia in 1921 (37 pages in 32§), a copy of which exists at the International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam: lengthy quotations (in Russian) appeared in Kubanin's *Theses on Free Soviets* and Kolesnikov's *The Worker Question*, so we [A.S.] have re-translated it from the Russian and Bulgarian, with Matin Zemliak's kind assistance in the case of the Bulgarian.

Document No. 3 is taken from the same Bulgarian publication Sofia.

Documents Nos. 4 to 9, originals of which are in the possession of the IISH in Amsterdam, were published in Russian in the Institute's journal, *International Review of Social History*, Vol. XIII, part 2, 1968, with a foreword by I. J. Van Rossum (pp. 246–268).

Document No. 10 was published in the review *Volna* (The Wave), Detroit, No 24, December 1921.

Document No. 11, a reconstruction of Chernoknizhny's speech, has been borrowed from A. Nikolaev's *First Among Equals*, op. cit. pp. 44–46.

Document No. 1

A minute on the February 2, 1919 Second Regional Congress in Gulyai-Polye, attended by 2245 delegates from 350 districts, soviets, unions and front-line units.

Comrade Makhno declines the proposal that he chair the congress, citing "military development on the front" and is elected honorary chairman of the congress.

The delegation which journeyed to Kharkov to make contact with the [Bolshevik — A.S.] provisional government of the Ukraine, makes its report: Comrade Lavrov relates his conversation with the deputies (the delegation had not been received by ministers or commissars): the spokesman reports that a response was forthcoming on the attitude of the provisional government of the Ukraine to Batko Makhno: as yet there has been no formal agreement, though one is anticipated and the provisional government nurtures no hostile intent towards Makhno and looks forward to doing all it can to help him in the struggle against the Counter-Revolution. During the ensuing debate, comrade Chernoknizhny (delegate from the Novapavlovsk district) points out: "The report informs us of the recent formation in the Ukraine of a Bolshevik-communist government, which is making ready to monopolize the soviets." He went on to say: "While you peasants, workers and insurgents were containing the pressure from all the counter-revolutionary forces, that government, ensconced in Moscow and then in Kursk, waited for the Ukraine's workers and peasants to liberate the territory from the enemy. Now that the enemy is beat ... a government arrives among us calling itself Bolshevik and seeking to foist its party dictatorship upon us. Is that to be tolerated? We are non-party insurgents who have revolted against all our oppressors and we will not countenance fresh enslavement, no matter what party it may emanate from!"

Another delegate, the peasant Serafimov, declares: "Already a new danger looms before us — the danger of one party, the Bolsheviks, who are already forging new statist chains destined for us. The Bolshevik government does its best to convince us that it serves the interests of workers and peasants and that it brings emancipation to toilers ... But why then does it aspire to rule over us from above, from its ministerial offices? From our Russian brethren we know what sort of revolution Bolsheviks make ... We know that up there the people are not free, and that the whim of the party, Bolshevik chaos and the violence of the commissarocracy rule the roost. Should this party attempt to bring such 'freedoms' here to us in the Ukraine, we must then announce loudly that we need no such savior or master, that we have no need of dictatorships, that we can arrange our new life for ourselves."

Comrade Bozhno, an anarchist insurgent, declares: "No matter what the cost, we must set up soviets that are beyond all pressure from whatever parties.

Only toilers' soviets, non-partisan and freely elected are capable of affording us new freedoms and rescuing the toiling people from slavery and oppression. **Long live freely elected anti-authoritarian soviets!**"

The Bolshevik-communist Karpenko interrupts, but his speech is continually heckled. When he declares: "The dictatorship of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie must be introduced," one voice retorts, "At the moment all we can see is the Bolsheviks' dictatorship over the anarchists and Left SRs." Another voice heckles: "Why do they send us commissarocrats? Those we can live without. But if we must have commissars, we can always appoint some from our own ranks."

In a speech on the current situation, chairman Veretelnikov offers the following important news: "In 1905 when the atmosphere was so oppressive, an anarchist group was organized here in Gulyai-Polye: its existence was soon made known when comrade Alexander Semenyuta, whose name was familiar to few people up to that point, died in action against the police. Comrade Makhno was arrested and sent with many other revolutionaries for penal servitude, where he served ten full years. After the overthrow of the autocracy, Makhno returned to Gulyai-Polye. When the revolutionary movement here took on a serious character, I was in Sebastopol. This joyous news brought me home to the town of my birth, where a harrowing scene awaited me [the Austro-German occupation — A.S.] ... Events then moved at a dizzying pace. The 'batko' set off with one detachment, others spread out in the directions of Taganrog, Rostov, Tsaritsyn, etc."

Comrade Makhno delivers a purely revolutionary address of unmistakably anarchist tone and directed at the Bolsheviks. For openers, Makhno stated that the ... "people, starving and bereft of everything, bled white after the fratricidal war, refused to fight on the front." But in place of the bloody tsar, a new criminal had ensconced himself on the throne, in the shape of the provisional government. "At that point anarchists mounted intense propaganda and fought with every means at their disposal against the provisional government's adventure. Everywhere, in factories, workshops and barracks, anarchists explained that the fratricidal war at the front had to be prosecuted further: which led, in Petrograd, to their being arrested at their headquarters at Durnovo House and to the shooting of certain of their number." Noting that anarchists and Bolsheviks had been united then by the persecution they suffered, Makhno declares: "once power had fallen into the hands of the toiling people in the shape of freely elected soviets, things proceeded apace ... These free soviets did not long survive ... The Bolshevik party extended its monopoly over them and set about purging the revolutionary soviets and persecuting anarchists; those who, only the day before, had been hunted and persecuted with them now refused to acknowledge their fellow strugglers. Until today when we witness the Bolsheviks' brute force and oppressive violence against toiling people who can stand no more." In conclusion, comrade Makhno declares that if the Bolsheviks are coming to help their comrades he will tell them: "Welcome,

dear brothers,” but if they come to bring the Ukraine under their sway, we shall tell them: “Hands off!”



Other speakers (Khersonsky, Chernyak) spoke to the same motion. Khersonsky declares: “No party has any right to arrogate State power to itself.” Chernyak stipulates that: “all who denounce the activities of the commissars and Chekas have themselves sampled them to their cost, and have been under their yoke.... Many decent revolutionaries who knew jail, imprisonment and penal servitude during tsarism, are now once again filling Russia’s prisons.” He insists that the necessary steps be taken to set up economic soviets, non-party political and anti-authoritarian, on the basis of elective principles allowing for recall of representatives failing to act upon the wishes of their mandatories. “We want all vital issues resolved on the spot and not according to the decrees of some power ‘on high’ [we want] all workers and peasants to determine their destinies for themselves, with delegates having merely to implement the wishes of the toilers.”

Comrade Kostin (Left SR) speaks of peasant uprisings against the Bolsheviks: “These are not the actions of individuals; rather, the peasants of many districts, marching out with their wives, children and aged parents to face the bullets of the Letts and Chinese in that they can see no other option. These are all your brothers, the same poor peasants every bit as oppressed as you are here in the Ukraine. Why do they revolt against the Bolsheviks to the cry of ‘all power to the soviets. Down with the commissarocrat!’? Because the policy of those currently in power in Russia pushes them to it. For instance, the Bolsheviks have invented supply detachments. They arm workers and send them into the countryside to wrest wheat from the peasants by force, giving them nothing in return. They carry off the last reserves of wheat, often bought by the peasants themselves and they carry off the last jugful of milk, the last item of clothing, the last pair of boots; they take everything. They organize general plunder, which has become the rule. That in a few words is what Bolshevik policy is all about.”

Comrade Baron (anarchist) also speaks out against the Bolsheviks: “We have what is called the ‘soviet Government,’ which describes itself as a worker-peasant government but which not one of us has elected. It is a government of usurpers that capitalizes on our weakness — the absence of close cohesion from our ranks — wields its usurper power over us, makes deals with foreign imperialism and again slips a noose around the necks of toiling people. The Bolsheviks, who were revolutionaries before the October coup d’état, now shoot genuine revolutionaries whose only crime is to think differently from them.” Baron concludes his speech with these words: “Insurgent comrades. Your task now consists of creating everywhere, in every single village, anti-authoritarian and freely elected soviets which will meet all your needs, and of building your economic life and defending your real interests without interference from any commissars representing the narrow interests of one party and subjecting you from above to their party’s yoke. There is

no way to complete emancipation from the yoke of capitalism and of all power, no way to social revolution except through economic, anti-authoritarian, free soviets, through an authentic regime of toilers' soviets. **Long live the free anti-authoritarian people which builds its life without any political authorities and tutors at all!"**



Batko Makhno endorses the resolution moved by the anarchists' union, the Left SRs, the insurgents and the congress presidium. It is carried by 150 votes to 29 against, with 20 abstentions. The resolution is scathing in its assessment of Bolshevism:

"The political commissars and others appointed by government and not elected by us monitor every move of the local soviets and ruthlessly crack down on peasant and worker comrades who make a stand to defend the people's freedom against the representatives of central government. The latter, styling itself the worker-peasant government of Russia and of the Ukraine, is blindly obedient to the party of Bolshevik-communists who, in the narrow interests of their party, persecute all other revolutionary organizations in despicable fashion. Sheltering behind the slogan 'dictatorship of the proletariat,' the Bolshevik-communists have decreed themselves a monopoly on the revolution, regarding all who do not think as they do as counter-revolutionaries. The Bolshevik authorities arrest and shoot Left SRs and anarchists, ban their newspapers, and stifle any manifestation of revolutionary discourse.

To demonstrate its power and without consulting the workers and peasants, the Bolshevik government has opened negotiations with the allied imperialist governments, promising them all sorts of advantages and concessions and allowing them to bring troops into certain places in Russia which thereby come under the sway of the Allies.

The Second regional congress of front line fighters, insurgents, workers and peasants from the Gulyai-Polye region calls upon comrade peasants and workers vigilantly to monitor the actions of the Soviet-Bolshevik government which, through its handiwork, represents a real threat to worker and peasant revolution. That different revolutionary organizations, freely expressing their ideas, should exist is only normal, but we will not allow any to set itself up as the only power and force others to dance to its tune. In our insurgent struggle, we need a fraternal family of workers and peasants to defend land, truth and liberty. The Second regional congress urgently calls upon worker and peasant comrades to undertake for themselves, on the spot, without any constraints or decrees and despite all oppressors and aggressors the world over, the building of a free society without lords or masters and without subject slaves, without rich or poor.

The congress salutes all the workers and peasants of Russia who struggle as we do against world imperialism.

Down with the commissarocrats and self-appointed representatives!

Down with the Cheka, the new Okhrana!

Long live the freely elected worker-peasant soviets!

Down with the exclusively Bolshevik soviets!

Down with the accords between the Russian and international bourgeoisie!

Shame on the socialist government that parleys with the imperialist allies!

Long live the worldwide Socialist Revolution!"

The congress then passes a resolution ... "against anti-Jewish looting, attacks and pogroms carried out by various suspect individuals who misuse the name of decent insurgents."

Apropos of pogroms against Jews, this resolution spelled out the following stance:

"National antagonism, which in some places has taken the form of anti-Jewish pogroms, is a bequest of the autocratic régime. The tsarist government whipped up the unconscious masses of the people against the Jews, in the hope of thereby shifting responsibility for its crimes on to the poor Jewish mass, thereby distracting the attention of the toiling people away from the real causes of their misery: the yoke of Tsarist autocracy and its thugs."

The movement's internationalism finds expression in the following points from the resolution:

"The oppressed and exploited of every nationality and persuasion have revolted in solidarity with the Russian revolution and the coming worldwide social revolution. The workers and peasants of every land and all nationalities face a huge common task: the overthrow of the yoke of the bourgeoisie, the exploiter class, the overthrow of the yoke of *capital and State* with an eye to establishment of a new social order founded on liberty, fraternity and justice.

The exploited of every nationality, whether they be Russian, Polish, Latvian, Armenian, Jew or German, must come together into one huge united community of workers and peasants and then, in a mighty onslaught, deal a final decisive blow to the class of capitalist imperialists and their lackeys in order to shrug off once and for all the shackles of economic slavery and spiritual serfdom.

Down with capital and power!

Down with religious prejudices and national hatreds!
Long live the social revolution!"

On the matter of organization of the front, congress, repudiating mobilization "through constraint," came out in favor of "mandatory" mobilization: "Each peasant capable of bearing arms ought **himself** to recognize his duty to join the ranks of the insurgents and to defend the interests of the whole toiling people of the Ukraine."

On the agrarian issue, the congress passes a resolution based on the following principles:

"The land belongs to no one and only those who work it may have the use of it. The land should pass into the hands of the Ukraine's toiling peasantry *gratis*, in accordance with an *egalitarian working arrangement*, i.e. it should ensure that the needs of each person are met according to established norms and should be worked by each individual *in person*. Until such time as the agrarian issue is radically resolved, congress wants local agrarian committees to draw up an immediate inventory of all holdings of the big landowners, the common lands and all the rest; then they can share them among the landless peasants or peasants with inadequate holdings, supplying them with the wherewithal for planting."

Document No. 2

Draft Declaration of the (Makhnovist) revolutionary insurgent army of the Ukraine adopted on October 20, 1919 at a session of the Military Revolutionary Soviet.

The toiling classes of Ukraine are today confronting events of enormous importance and historic implications. Without doubt, the significance of these events goes beyond the limits of the revolutionary insurgent army's activity. But, being in the vanguard of the fight in progress, the latter deems it its duty to spell out to the toilers of the Ukraine, Russia and the whole world the aims for which it fights, as well as its analysis of recent happenings and the current situation.

In February–March 1917, Russia and the Ukraine experienced the *First Revolution*, which led to the fall of Tsarist autocracy and brought about the advent of a State political power comprised at first of personages from the big industrial bourgeoisie and then of representatives of the small and medium bourgeoisie. Neither of those two governments proved stable. Eight months were enough for

the revolutionary masses to overthrow these authorities which had nothing in common with the interests and aspirations of toilers.

As early as July 1917, the necessity of a *Second Revolution* was apparent. This took place at the end of October and paved the way for seizure of State power by the Bolshevik Social Democrat party which looked upon itself as representing the revolutionary proletariat and poor peasantry or, to put it another way, the social revolution. That party was very soon waging an ongoing campaign against all competing parties with an eye to arrogating power to itself. Since its watchwords coincided with the aspirations of the toiling masses, the latter threw their weight behind it when the crucial time came. And so this eight month period of government by the bourgeoisie in coalition and of rivalry between the differing political parties ended in the Bolshevik Party's taking power.

However it very quickly became apparent that this party and this State power — just like any party and all State power — functioned only for themselves and turned out to be utterly powerless to achieve the great objectives of the social revolution: by virtue of that very fact they were a hindrance to the free creative activity of the toiling masses who alone were capable of tackling this task. It is self-evident that in controlling the whole of economic and social life, any State power inevitably gives rise to new political and economic privileges and undermines the very foundations of social revolution.

The Bolshevik-Communist Party's inability to offer an authentic avenue of struggle for socialism quite naturally led to discontent, disappointment and bitterness among the toiling masses. The disorganized condition of economic life, the consequence of a bad agrarian policy led to serious disturbances in the countryside. The Bolshevik authorities have succeeded, however, in organizing in Russia a mighty State machine and a compliant army which it uses as its predecessors did, to stamp on any manifestation of popular discontent and resistance.

In the Ukraine the situation is otherwise.

Before making the acquaintance of the Bolshevik authorities, the Ukraine was occupied by the Austro-Germans who installed their vassal, the hetman Skoropadsky there. They were replaced by the power of Petliura. The excesses of these authorities triggered an explosion of outrage from the people and a wholesale rejection of the very idea of State power, which assumed the form of a mighty popular insurgent movement, driven by an authentically revolutionary anti-party and anti-authoritarian mentality. In a series of engagements after the departure of the Austro-Germans, revolutionary insurgents purged the Ukraine of supporters of the hetman and of Petliura: the Bolshevik-Communist authorities seized upon this to arrive and ensconce themselves in the spring of 1919, bringing disappointment very quickly in their wake. Within a few months, the discontent and hostility of the toiling masses of town and above all of countryside was made violently manifest.

Large regions, such as the provinces of Ekaterinoslav and Tavrida, began to drift more and more unmistakably towards economic and social self-organization on a basis of animosity towards parties and State power. No political activity was allowed there. Towards the end of the summer, the whole country was prey to huge peasant insurgent movements against the Communist Party's arbitrary rule. The *Third Revolution* comes to light and guides this widespread insurrection.

Meanwhile, the reaction had raised its head. The *Third Revolution* stood against the attempt to restore the old régime. In the hope of finding themselves once again masters of the situation by annihilating both their enemies — the revolutionary insurrection and the reaction — the Bolshevik authorities plotted and treacherously facilitated the crushing of the main core of the Makhnovist insurgent army. However the State machinery and armed forces of the Bolshevik-Communist authorities in turn proved incapable of putting down roots in the Ukraine and of replacing the revolutionary insurgent movement in its fight against Denikin. The revolutionary insurgents emerged from these difficult circumstances weakened but not defeated. Driven far from their home ground, they strove to survive at any price and while roaming other regions of the Ukraine they prosecuted an all-out struggle against the Denikinists, against Trotsky's deliberate misrepresentations and the dangerous set-back to the revolution.

Now the flames of peasant insurrection and the struggle against reaction are raging throughout the whole Ukraine. A new enemy of the toilers appears, in the shape of Petliura's bourgeois, republican government. A confrontation, at once inevitable and critical (only time will tell who will emerge victorious from it) pits the notion of libertarian organization as taken up by significant masses in the Ukraine against the notion of political power — be it monarchist, Bolshevik-Communist or bourgeois republican.

Such, in broad outline, has been the hard revolutionary experience that we Makhnovist insurgents have been through over these past two and a half years of revolution. It only remains for us to add that in our region and in many another more distant one, we have been witnesses to and participants in successful essays in libertarian social and economic organizing, free of interference from any government. Most of them were interrupted only following violent intervention by some authority or another.

The upshot of this difficult but enriching experience, as well as the theoretical tenets that characterize it, leads us to make the following clear and specific declaration:

The unraveling of the revolution has convinced us beyond all question that no political party and no State authority is capable of resolving the great issues of our day, or of re-launching and organizing the country's devastated economy while stimulating and meeting the needs of the toiling masses. We are persuaded that in the light of this experience, huge masses of the peasants and workers of the Ukraine have come to the same conclusion and that they will not countenance any political oppression.

Our reckoning is that in the near future all the toiling classes will arrive at the same conclusion and that they themselves will see to the organizing of their professional, economic, social and cultural lives on the basis of free principles, dispensing with the oversight, pressure and dictatorship of any personage, party or power whatever.

We declare that the popular insurgent movement presently developing in the Ukraine represents the start of the great *Third Revolution* which will once and for all free the toiling masses of all oppression by State and Capital, be it private or statist.

We declare that our Makhnovist insurgent army is merely the fighting core of this Ukrainian people's revolutionary movement, a core whose task consists everywhere of organizing insurgent forces and helping insurgent toilers in their struggle against all abuse of power and capital. The Ukraine is on the brink of a genuine peasant social revolution. That is the import of the situation. We Makhnovist insurgents are the children of that revolution, here to serve and protect it. Whenever it spreads like a mighty brushfire through the whole of the toilers' Ukraine, freeing it of all aggressors and all powers, we faithful fighters will mingle with the millions of people's insurgents. Then, shoulder to shoulder, we will partake in the free building of a new life.

As regards our thinking on the essential issues of economic and social reconstruction, we regard it as essential that the following be stressed: once toilers have the freedom required to determine their fate for themselves, they will naturally and inevitably, the vast majority of them, move towards realization of genuinely communist social principles. We reckon that only the toiling masses have the capacity to enact these principles, provided that they have access to the completest freedom of socio-economic creation. Thus we consider imposition of our ideal by force as quite irrational and out of place. We think, likewise, that it would be wrong to seek to trail the masses along in our wake, by means of leadership from above. We mean to restrict our role to simple theoretical and organizational assistance, in the form of proposals, advice, suggestions or guidance. Our thinking is that whereas the people should have the opportunity to listen to all opinion and advice, they alone should decide to act upon them with absolute independence and freedom, without interference from parties, dictators or governments of any sort.

We make every effort to communicate these views to the toiling masses, whilst focusing their attention upon their own autonomous role in free soviet construction.

The soviet system.

Our conception of an authentic system of free soviets we express as follows. In order to introduce a new economic and social life, the peasants and workers naturally and freely set up their social and economic organizations: village commit-

tees or soviets, cooperatives, factory and workshop committees, mine committees, railroad, Post and Telegraphs organizations and every other union and organization imaginable. In order to establish natural liaison between all these unions and associations, they set up agencies federated from the bottom up, in the shape of economic soviets whose technical task is to regulate social and economic life on a large scale. These soviets may be district soviets, town soviets, regional soviets, etc.... organized as the need arises on a basis of free principles. In no case would these be political institutions led by this or that politician or political party, who would dictate their wishes (as happens behind the mask of "soviet power"). These soviets are only the executive arms of the assemblies from which they emanate.

Such a soviet arrangement is a true reflection of the organization of the peasants and workers. If this creation is indeed the free handiwork of the peasant and worker masses themselves, if the bracing economic work of all the grassroots agencies and federative soviet organizations begins to attract more and more toilers, without any interference or arbitrary meddling by any party or authorities whatever, then, by our reckoning, it will be possible speedily to introduce an economic and social system based on the principles of social equality, justice and fraternity and thereby put paid to the existence of class differences, political parties and States, as well as the domination of one nationality over others. Gradually and naturally the backward and non-toiler strata of the population will be absorbed into this system. All "political activity" which leads inescapably to creation of privilege and a mechanism for economic and political enslavement of the toiling masses will be proved redundant in practice, and "political" organizations will tend to wither away of themselves.

Our answer to the questions that will be put regarding "official" agencies and sundry social pursuits relating to education, medicine, statistics, registration of marriages, deaths and births, etc. is that maximum scope will be afforded the priceless and prolific initiative of the individual, within the framework of the soviet. All of this will be no problem and will be best resolved by local agencies of self-governance.

Judicial and administrative machinery.

As far as the depiction of this machinery as necessity goes, we must first of all reaffirm our position in principle: we are against all rigid judicial and police machinery, against any legislative code prescribed once and for all time, for these involve gross violations of genuine justice and of the real protections of the population. These ought not to be organized but should be instead the living, free and creative act of the community. Which is why all obsolete forms of justice — court administration, revolutionary tribunals, repressive laws, police or militia, Chekas, prisons and all other sterile and useless anachronisms — must disappear of them-

selves or be abolished from the very first breath of the free life, right from the very first steps of the free and living organization of society and the economy.

The free organizations, associations and soviets of workers and peasants must themselves prescribe this or that form of justice. Such justice should not be enforced by specialist officials, but rather by trustees who enjoy the confidence of the local population, by arrangement with it and utterly repudiating sanctions prescribed in the past. Likewise, popular self-defense must be based on free organization, and not left to specialist militias. Not only does formal organization of justice and defense by the State not achieve its aims, but it is a betrayal of all true justice and defense.

The question of supplies.

At present this question could not be posed any more acutely. Resolution of it is of the utmost urgency, for the whole fate of the revolution hinges upon it right now. The major flaw in the previous revolution [the Bolsheviks' — A.S.] proceeded from the complete disorganization of supplies, which led to a dichotomy between town and countryside. The toilers must pay the utmost attention to it. This issue was particularly easy to resolve at the beginning of the revolution, when life was not yet in complete disarray and when food was available everywhere in more or less adequate supply. At that point, the contest between socialist parties for control of political power and then the Bolshevik party's struggle to hold on to it, monopolized the attention of the workers and peasants who left the question unresolved and failed to display sufficient vigilance. As for the Bolshevik authorities, they proved quite naturally incapable of resolving the matter.

Here too we reckon that a just resolution of this matter and restoration to order of everything relating to it can only be devised by the toilers themselves through their free organizations. None but they will be able to settle the matter viably. In this regard, the toilers must fight shy of disunity, and close unity between workers and peasants has to be achieved. This will not be hard if they dispense with political organizations and verbose politicians. Released from all political authority, the towns will convene a comprehensive congress of workers and peasants and this will establish among its priorities the supply question and the re-establishment of economic links between towns and countryside, setting in train an equitable exchange of basic necessities. It will be up to trades organizations, cooperatives and transport agencies to take this further. Suitable agencies will be set up to seek out, consolidate and relaunch industrial and agricultural production: these will introduce a system for trade and fair distribution of goods. In this context, the workers' and peasants' cooperatives and free associations will have to play a crucial role. Only in this way, we reckon, can this particularly important issue of supply be resolved.

The land question.

The process of rebuilding and rapidly improving our agrarian economy which is at present in ruins and very limited, requires reorganization of the working of the land through absolutely free and voluntary decision-making by the toiling agricultural population in its entirety (obviously help from experts can be assumed). The village traders will have to be removed from this process quickly. We are persuaded that the solution to this problem of land will emerge unaided through communist organization of the peasant economy. Everyone will quickly be persuaded that growth of output and the meeting of all needs can only be ensured by the community and not by private individuals. However, any imposition of communism through constraint or top-down administration must be rejected.

The Bolsheviks' decree regarding "nationalization of the land," which is to say the placing of all lands in the hands of the State (in fact the hands of the government, its agencies and functionaries) must be disregarded. A State take-over of land will inescapably lead, not to fair and free agricultural structures, but to the reappearance of a new exploiter and master in the shape of the State, which will have recourse — as bosses do — to wage slavery and will impose all manner of corvées, levies, etc. upon the peasantry by force, just as its pomieschiki predecessors did. The peasantry will reap no advantage from being faced by just one master — the State — even more powerful and cruel than the thousands of little bosses, masters and pomieschikis. Lands seized from great estate owners should not be at the disposal of the State but placed in the hands of those who actually work them: the peasant organizations, free communes and other unions.

The manner in which the land, equipment and very organization of the agricultural economy are to be handled should be worked out freely at peasant congresses, after discussion and passed as resolutions, without any interference by any authority whatsoever.

We consider that solution of all these matters by the peasants themselves will usher in a natural process of expansion of the social organizations of the peasant economy, beginning, say, with egalitarian and commensurate division of the land, farm equipment and livestock: with social organization of labor and of the distribution of produce on a basis of cooperation: with social usage of the land and equipment, etc.: that is to say, according to a more or less avowedly communist formula. The manual and mental exertions of experienced and capable villagers, in close concert with workers' organizations, will complement this process and speed its development. Meanwhile, private holdings will be speedily and easily whittled down. The active peasant population will readily gain the upper hand over representatives of the large proprietor class by first of all confiscating their estates for the benefit of the community and then integrating them naturally into the social organization.

Let us draw the attention of the peasant population to expanded cooperative organizations (artels) and production for distribution. Our reckoning is that coop-

erative organization is, as an initial phase, the most appropriate and natural step along the road to constructing the agricultural economy on new foundations.

What is called the "soviet economy," where, inevitably, wage-slavery and arbitrariness and violence from Bolshevik-Communist functionaries prevail, must be wholly eradicated. The issue of the role of capable and specialist agronomists, as well as sundry other problems can be settled through discussion, as will decisions taken by peasant organizations and peasant congresses. Wage-slavery in all its manifestations must be eradicated beyond recovery.

It is all too apparent that a fair solution and further evolution of the land question are largely and closely dependent upon an equitable solution of the labor question. It is also up to the workers' organizations to establish a number of links with the villages ... enough such links to be in a position to barter all sorts of industrially produced materials and items for agricultural produce. Only a close, brotherly union of worker and peasant in organizations for mutual aid in production and in economic exchange, will be able to devise a natural, well-planned and fair solution to the agrarian question.

The labor question.

Having witnessed many an attempt mounted by various political parties, "businessmen" or "erudite personages" to resolve the labor issue: and having scrupulously examined the idea and the results of state take-over (nationalization) of the means and instruments of worker production (the mines, communications, workshops, factories, etc.) as well as of the workers' organizations themselves (trades unions, factory and workshop committees, cooperatives, etc.), we can announce with certainty that there is one genuine and fair solution to the workers' question: the transfer of all the means, instruments and materials of labor, production and transportation, not to the complete disposal of the State — this new boss and exploiter which uses wage-slavery and is no less oppressive of the workers than private entrepreneurs — but to the workers' organizations and unions in natural and free association with one another and in liaison with peasant organizations through the good offices of their economic soviets.

It is our conviction that only such a resolution of the labor issue will release the energy and activity of the worker masses, give a fresh boost to repair of the devastated industrial economy, render exploitation and oppression impossible, and put paid to speculation and swindling and bring to an end the artificial escalation of prices and runaway rise in the cost of living.

We have come to the belief that only the workers, with the help of their free organizations and unions, will be able to secure their release from the yoke of State and Capital (private and state alike), take over the working of mineral and coal reserves, get workshops and factories back into operation, establish equitable exchanges of products between different regions, towns and countryside, get rail

traffic moving again, in short, breathe life back into the moribund shell of our economic organization.

No State authorities, no party, no system for direction and supervision of workers, commissars, officials, political activists and others can, we are thoroughly persuaded, meet the target set. The organization of work, production, transportation, distribution and exchange should be the task of free workers' unions, abetted by experienced and competent individuals, in a context of free labor in factories and workshops.

In order to ensure that such organization is active and its development fruitful it is vital that, above all else, genuine worker congresses and conferences be prepared on free foundations, without pressures or dictatorship from parties or individuals. Only those free congresses and conferences will have the capacity to arrive at an effective resolution of all the urgent issues of worker life and of worker construction along necessary and purposeful lines.

Needless to say, just resolution of and further progress on the worker question are largely dependent on an equitable solution to the supply issue and the division of the land, as well as the financial question which is also closely bound up with the worker question.

The housing issue is part and parcel of this and so we are offering only the essence of our position on this matter: one of the primary tasks of the free worker organizations is to see to equitable allocation of available accommodation and thereby pursue the construction of requisite housing and this is achievable only in collaboration with those in charge of housing management (the house and district committee).

The financial question.

The financial system cannot be divorced from the capitalist system. The latter will soon be replaced by free communist organization of the economy, which will incontrovertibly lead to the disappearance of the finance system and its replacement by direct exchange of produce through the social organization of production, transportation and distribution.

However this transformation will not be effected in a day. Although the monetary system today may be in complete disarray it must of necessity continue to operate for a time. For the moment, it is vital that it be organized on new foundations.

Thus it is not a matter of retaining or re-establishing it, but only of adapting it on a temporary basis to fairer ground rules. Up until the October coup d'état, the people's wealth was concentrated either in the State's hands or in those of the capitalists and their agencies. Compulsory taxation and growing exploitation were at the root of this concentration. The Bolshevik-Communist authorities set themselves above the toilers as a boss-exploiter-State. They see themselves as the rulers

and organizers of the country's monetary system. In fact the Bolshevik State and its officials have sole disposition of the people's wealth. In our view, this situation has to change radically.

In keeping with the introduction and expansion of the system of free toilers' soviets, ushering in a new and free life, all compulsory taxation should be discontinued and replaced by free and voluntary contributions from toilers. In a context of free and independent construction, these contributions will undoubtedly produce the best results.

By implication, the State's centralized public treasury, in whatever form it may appear (even in the guise of "People's Bank") should be wound up and replaced by the decentralized system of genuine people's banks established along cooperative lines. The founders and depositors of these banks should be workers and peasants only, that is to say their associations, unions and organizations, on the basis of a freely agreed levy.

In the case of unavoidable outlay on this or that undertaking or service at a regional or even national level (take Posts and Telegraphs, for instance), the general congress or soviet of that agency should receive the required sum from the people's banks. These latter may be communal, soviet or social, etc. as the case may be. The amount of these voluntary contributions will be determined by reckoning social needs and outlays. Not one single kopeck of the people's money may be spent without the express permission of the organization (be it congress, commune, soviet or union). At the appointed time, the different social services and agencies submit their projected expenditure to their respective agencies which, if need be, endorse the projected budget.

Such, in broad outline, is the financial system which we think should be employed during the time when currency and money circulation are still extant. Only that sort of an arrangement is going to be fully compatible with an authentic soviet system.

As regards currency as such, at the outset there may be more of this in circulation than needed. Thus, as the new organization of labor is reinforced and develops, workers and peasants will move from the money system towards the system of simply recording social labor performed. Such recording will afford the bearer the right to draw from social stores and markets those items and articles of which he has need, and which will begin to be in plentiful supply thanks to the organization of the new need-centered economic machinery.

The day is not far off when every toiler, thanks to his labors on society's behalf (and thus on his own behalf as a member of society) will upon producing the necessary proof, be able to obtain those products and goods he cannot do without.

The national question.

Clearly, each national group has a natural and indisputable entitlement to speak its language freely, live in accordance with its customs, retain its beliefs and

rituals, draw up its school books and have its own managerial establishments and agencies: in short, to maintain and develop its national culture in every sphere. It is obvious that this clear and specific stance has absolutely nothing to do with narrow nationalism of the "separatist" variety which pits nation against nation and substitutes an artificial and harmful separation for the struggle to achieve a natural social union of toilers in one shared social communion.

In our view, national aspirations of a natural, wholesome character (language, customs, culture, etc.) can achieve full and fruitful satisfaction only in the union of nationalities rather than in their antagonism. One people's struggle for liberation leads naturally to the same chauvinistic struggle on the part of other peoples and the upshot, inevitably, is isolation and animosity between the different nations. Of necessity, this appreciation of the national question, a profoundly bourgeois and negative one, leads on to absurd and bloody national conflicts.

The speedy construction of a new life on socialist foundations will ineluctably lead to development of the culture peculiar to each nationality. Whenever we Makhnovist insurgents speak of independence of the Ukraine, we ground it in the social and economic plane of the toilers. We proclaim the right of the Ukrainian people (and every other nation) to self-determination, not in the narrow, nationalist sense of a Petliura, but in the sense of the toilers' right to self-determination. We declare that the toiling folk of the Ukraine's towns and countryside have shown everyone through their heroic fight that they do not wish any longer to suffer political power and have no use for it, and that they consciously aspire to a libertarian society. We thus declare that all political power of whatever provenance, that seeks to rule and direct by means of constraint and arbitrariness, is to be regarded by the toiling Ukrainian masses as an enemy and counter-revolutionary. To the very last drop of their blood they will wage a ferocious struggle against it, in defense of their entitlement to self-organization.

Needless to say, in the society founded on truly soviet foundations, such as we have spelled them out, the question of proportional representation and other political procedures do not arise.

Culture and education.

In a free society, culture and education cannot be the monopoly of the State, nor of government. They can only be the concern of individuals and organizations freely and naturally united with one another. The living and free creation of the cultural values to which the spirit of the toiling masses will cling can only come about in those conditions.

Civil liberties.

It must be self-evident that the free organization of society affords every practical opportunity for realization of what are called "civil liberties:" freedom of speech, of the press, of conscience, of worship, of assembly, of union, of organization, etc.

The defense of society.

For as long as the free society may need to look to its defenses against outside attack, it will have to organize its self-defenses, its army. We see this as a free contingent, founded on the principle of election to positions of responsibility, and closely tied to the populace. It should be placed under the authority of the toilers' organizations of the towns and countryside, so as to protect them against any violent trespass on the part of any State or capitalist power, and to guarantee them freedom of social construction.

Relations with foreign states.

The expanded congresses that represent all the organizations from the towns and villages — which make up the free society — will appoint a commission whose task it is to maintain regular relations with foreign states. This activity ought to be public and free of ambiguousness: no "secret diplomacy" can be countenanced. Issues that the commission cannot resolve will be left for extra-ordinary congresses to debate and determine.

Such, as we see it, are the bases upon which the free, just and wholesome society for which we are fighting, should be founded.

It is not for us to impose these ideas upon the toiling populace through coercion: our reckoning is that our duty is merely to make our view known and to offer workers and peasants the chance to debate this viewpoint freely — this and others as well, so that they may have absolute freedom to opt for this or that path to the economic and social reconstruction of society.

We are convinced of it: it is only by appealing to the most comprehensive freedom of inquiry and experiment in matters of reconstruction that the toiling population will be able to devise the natural route that leads on to an authentic and wholesome socialism. This freedom of inquiry and experimentation in construction we shall maintain and defend with all our might: it will no doubt be defended in the same way by all the toilers of the Ukraine whom we call upon to take a hand in our great common fight, amending as the need arises the inevitable mistakes and shortcomings, by displaying their sympathy and bolstering it through the continual recruitment of new fighters and defenders of freedom. It is through the concerted efforts of the broader community of toilers that the shape of the

new society will be freely molded, and by defending this entitlement to creative freedom with armed force that *we shall win*.

Document No. 3

**To the entire working population of the city of Alexandrovsk and environs.
Comrades and Citizens!**

Detachments of the Revolutionary Insurgent Army of the Ukraine (Makhnovist) are at present stationed in your city. That army has broken the back of the Denikinists, defeating them between Uman and Pomoshnaya, and is hotly pursuing the remnants of the enemy as they flee eastwards.

The staff and the entire Makhnovist movement deem it their most important duty to inform you of the following:

1. Hitherto you have been told on every side that Makhnovists were bandits, brigands, and pogromists. Be informed that this is the foulest slander. The members of our insurgent army are decent revolutionary peasants and workers. In any case, let the peaceable population of the city, regardless of nationality, be assured of its safety, let it carry on blithely with its work and let it not look upon us as its enemies.

2. The Revolutionary Insurgent Army has set itself the goal of assisting the peasants and the workers in their long and demanding struggle to emancipate toilers from every form of the yoke of capital and political power, a catastrophic yoke which they can well do without. For that reason, our army appears as the friend and defender of the workers, peasants and the poor generally. It relies not only upon their sympathy and their trust but equally upon their collaboration and involvement.

Whilst not meddling in the civilian life of the population, the Insurgent Army will be taking certain essential measures aimed at the wealthy bourgeois class, as well as at Denikinists and their supporters. Measures that will be enforced in an organized way. Persons who may arrive to carry out searches and make arrests in the name of the Makhnovists should, if they fail to produce a warrant, seal and signature from the unit commander and signature of the army inspection service, be instantly placed under arrest and brought before the unit staff or that of the inspection branch.

The same procedure should be applied to looters and assailants who may face execution on the spot.

3. The Revolutionary Insurgent Army urges the toiling population of the city and its environs to embark forthwith upon independent organizational endeavor, to wit: any organization representative of local factory workers, railroad workers, posts and telegraphs employees and peasants shall convene a general conference

of representatives of all the region's toilers. That conference is to raise, discuss and resolve a whole series of social and economic issues: city defenses, organization of fair distribution of essential goods and socially useful items available in the city; it will see to relations between the city and the villages so as to organize exchange of goods and merchandise.

This assembly will lay the lasting groundwork for a free system of peasant and worker soviets. Non-authoritarian reconstruction of social and economic life should thus be initiated.

4. The Revolutionary Insurgent Army calls upon the entire toiling population of the city and its environs to embark in a general way upon autonomous activity in matters social and military alike. The insurgent army will withdraw from the city just as soon as its work has been completed. The toiling population itself is to see to the organization of its social and economic life as well as its defenses against all trespass on the part of the bourgeoisie and any authorities, and is to take upon itself the struggle for the complete success of the revolution.

Alexandrovsk, October 7, 1919.

The Staff of the Insurgent Army (Makhnovist)

Document No. 4

Peasant Comrades!

The toiling peasantry of the Ukraine has been struggling against its age-old enemies and oppressors for many a long year. Thousands of the finest sons of the revolution have fallen in the struggle for complete emancipation of toilers from every yoke. A mortal blow was dealt to the butcher Denikin through the heroic efforts of the insurgent army of the Ukraine. The peasant insurgents, with their guide — Batko Makhno — at their head, stayed for long months in the rear of the White Guard enemy, surrounded by an enemy outnumbering them ten to one, and decimated by the most horrific malady — typhus — which daily carried off hundreds of the finest fighters in their ranks: running low on munitions, they all swooped upon the enemy with daggers drawn, and under their mighty onslaught Denikin's best troops, the units of General Shkuro and Mamontov, took to their heels. At the cost of unbelievable effort and blood spilled by the best fighters, insurgent peasants destroyed Denikin's rear and opened up a route to brethren in the North, peasants and workers: in the wake of Denikin's hordes, Red Army comrades entered the Ukraine — workers and peasants from the north. In turn, the toiling peasantry of the Ukraine was confronted by — besides the broader issue of the fight against the White Guards — the problem of building a real soviet order, in which soviets

elected by the toilers would be servants of the people, carrying out decisions that the toilers themselves would reach at a Pan-Ukrainian congress of toilers.

However, the Communist Party leaders who, in the Red Army, had created a blind and docile tool for defending the commissarocracy, set about mudslinging and peddling the worst calumnies about the best leaders of the insurgents, having determined to "grasp the nettle" and destroy the revolutionary insurgent movement which was hindering these commissar gentlemen from lording it over the toilers of the Ukraine. In the toilers, these commissarocrats wish to see only "a human weapon," as Trotsky said at one congress, only cannon fodder to be hurled at anyone one wants but who must on no account be afforded the right to dispense with the Communists' help and make their own working lives and their own order for themselves.

Peasant comrades! The insurgent army of the Ukraine (Makhnovist) is drawn from among you. Your sons, your brothers and your fathers have filled our ranks. The insurgent army is blood of your blood, flesh of your flesh. Having sacrificed tens of thousands of victims, the insurgent army has fought for the toilers' right to build their order for themselves, to determine the disposition of their goods for themselves and not for all the world to hand over to the commissars.

The insurgent army has fought and fights still for real soviets and not for the Cheka and commissarocracy. In the days of the hangman — the Hetman's day — and the Germans and Denikin, the insurgents rose up en masse against oppressors in the defense of the toiling people. Now too the insurgent army considers that it has a sacred duty to defend the interests of the toiling peasantry against attempts by these commissar gentlemen to hitch the Ukraine's toiling peasantry to their chariot. The insurgent army knows these "upstarts" only too well and well remembers these "liberator" commissars. The autocrat Trotsky has ordered the disarming of the insurgent army set up by the peasants themselves in the Ukraine, for he appreciates that as long as the peasants have their army defending their interests he will never be able to force the toiling people of the Ukraine to march under his baton. By avoiding clashes with the Red Army and abiding only by the wishes of the toilers, the insurgent army, not wishing to shed fraternal blood, will take care to protect the toilers' interests and will lay down its arms only on the instructions of a free Pan-Ukrainian toilers' congress, at which the toilers themselves will articulate their wishes. The insurgent army — the sword in the hands of the toilers — calls upon you, peasant comrades, immediately to convene your own congress of toiling muzhiks and to take into your own hands both the further pursuit of your well-being and your hard-earned wealth.

It is true that the power-hungry commissars will take every step to thwart the holding of a free congress of toilers: for that reason and in the very interests of the toilers the stifling of this congress by the commissars must not be allowed: to that end, it should be clandestine and held in a secret location.

Peasant comrades, prepare yourselves for the holding of your congress! Make haste to accomplish your task! Your enemies are not sleeping; don't you sleep either: that will ensure your victory!

Long live the free congress of the region's toilers! Down with commissarocracy! Long live the insurgent peasant army!

February 8, 1920.

The staff of the insurgent army of the Ukraine (Makhnovist).

Document No. 5

Who are the Makhnovists and for what do they fight?

1. The Makhnovists are workers and peasants who rose up back in 1918 against the oppression of the bourgeois power in the Ukraine of the Austro-Hungarian and German occupiers and of the Hetman. The Makhnovists are toilers who have raised the banner of revolt against Denikin, against any yoke, any violence and any falsehood, from wherever they may come. The Makhnovists are the very toilers whose labors enrich, fatten and sustain the bourgeoisie in general and at present the Bolshevik bourgeoisie in particular.

2. Why do we call ourselves Makhnovists?

Because in the darkest days of the reaction in the Ukraine we have seen among us through thick and thin, our friend and guide Makhno whose voice has spoken out against all oppression of toilers throughout the Ukraine, inciting struggle against all oppressors and all the marauders and political tricksters who misled us. Now this friend through thick and thin still marches in our ranks towards our ultimate objective: the emancipation of toilers from every yoke.

3. How do we see any emancipation coming to pass?

Through the overthrow of all government: monarchist, coalition, republican, Social Democrat, Bolshevik-Communist ... which must be replaced by a soviet regime independent of them all, and without authority or arbitrarily determined laws: for the soviet order is not the power of Bolshevik-Communist Social Democrats which currently proclaims itself the soviet power, but is instead the higher form of anti-authoritarian, anti-governmental socialism which expresses itself through the construction of a free, harmonious community independent of every power: and the social life of the toilers, wherein every individual toiler and the community in general will be able to seek a happy, prosperous life in an autonomous way according to the principles of solidarity, friendship and equality for all.

4. What is the Makhnovists' conception of the soviet regime?

The toilers themselves ought freely to choose their soviets: soviets that would carry out the wishes and decisions of these same toilers, which is to say executive soviets, not authoritarian ones.

The land, workshops, factories, mines, railways and other assets of the people should belong to the toilers who work there which is to say that these must be socialized.

5. What are the means used by the Makhnovists to attain these goals?

Revolutionary, unflinching and consistent struggle against all falsehood, all arbitrariness and all oppression, no matter whence it may come: this is a fight to the death, the struggle of free speech and true endeavor, conducted with weapons in hand. Through the elimination of all who govern, through destruction of all the foundations of their lies, whether in the political, statist or economic spheres. And it is only through destruction of the State and by means of social revolution that the realization of a truly soviet socialist regime of workers and peasants will be feasible.

April 27, 1920.

The Cultural Instruction Section of the (Makhnovist)
Insurgent Army.

Document No. 6

Down with fratricidal strife!

Red soldier brethren: Nicholas's henchmen kept you in ignorance and led you into fratricidal war against the Japanese and then the Germans and many another people, simply to increase their own wealth, whereas all you had to look forward to was death at the front and complete ruin at home.

But the dark clouds and fog that blinded your eyes lifted, the sunlight broke through and touched you and you put paid to that fratricidal war. That, though, was only the calm before a fresh storm broke.

Now they send you out again to fight us "Makhnovist insurgents" on behalf of a so-called "worker-peasant" power which once again brings you shackles and slavery! The wealth and the delights go to this gang of parasite bureaucrats who suck your blood. Can you have failed to grasp this in three years of fratricidal strife?

Will you again shed your blood for the freshly resurrected bourgeoisie and for the commissars it has created who dispatch you to the slaughter like cattle!

Have you not yet understood that we "Makhnovist insurgents" are fighting for complete economic and political emancipation of the toilers, for a free life without these commissars and other agents of repression!

May the dawn rise also over your camp and show you the way that leads to eradication of fratricidal strife among the toiling masses. On that road you will find us and you will go on fighting in our ranks for a better future, for a free life. At every encounter with us and in order to avert shedding of brothers' blood, send us your delegates for talks, but if this is not possible and the commissars force you to fight us anyway, throw down your rifles and come to our fraternal embrace!

Down with the fratricidal war between toilers!

Long live the peace and fraternal union of toilers of every land and nation!

May 1920.

The Makhnovist Insurgents.

Document No. 7

To all toilers of cart and hammer!

Brothers! a new and mortal danger threatens all toilers. All the dark forces of the former lackeys of Nicholas the Bloody have come together and with the help of the Polish lords, French instructors and the traitor Petliura are bearing down on the Ukraine to restore the autocracy among us, and burden us with the estate-owners, capitalists, land agents, gendarmes and all the other executioners of the peasants and workers.

Comrades! the commissars and leaders of the Bolshevik-Communists are good warriors only when they are fighting poor folk. Their punitive detachments and Cheka are above all expert in killing workers and peasants and torching villages and countryside. But against the revolution's real enemies, against Denikin and the other bands, they shamefully take to their heels, like the despicable cowards that they are.

You, comrades, will not have forgotten how last year, the gold braid-wearers all but entered Moscow and, had they not been stopped by the insurgents, the tricolor flag of Autocracy would long since have been unfurled over revolutionary Russia.

The situation is the same now, comrade! The Red Army, sold out at every turn by its generals and cowardly commissars, quits the front in panic, ceding region after region to the Polish lords. The towns of Zhitomir, Kiev and Zhmerinka have long since been occupied by the Poles: the White Guards' front line nears Poltava and Kherson. And in the Crimea, Denikinists who have been dug in for the last four months await the opportune moment to reoccupy our native regions.

Brothers! Are you going to blithely await the arrival of the Whites without lifting a finger, are you going to yield up your wives and your children to the exactions of the generals and the Polish Lords?

No, that must not be. As of one mind, to arms and join the ranks of the insurgents!

Rise up along with all of us Makhnovists against all oppressors! In every village, organize detachments and liaise with us! Together we shall drive out the commissars and Cheka, and along with Red Soldier comrades we shall build a solid fighting front against Denikin, Petliura and the Polish Lords!

Comrades! This is not the time to delay: organize your detachments without delay. To work!

Death and ruination to all oppressors and lordlings!

Let us commit ourselves to the crucial final struggle for a true Soviet regime, in which there will be neither Lords nor serfs!

To arms, brothers!

May 1920.

The Cultural Instruction Section of the Revolutionary
Insurgents (Makhnovists) of the Ukraine.

Document No. 8

To the young!

Why do you stay at home, comrade? Why are you not in our ranks? Or perhaps you await the arrival of the commissar with his punitive expedition to enlist you by force? Do not kid yourself with the thought that they will not find you, that you will be able to hide, to run away. The Bolshevik authorities have already proved that they will stop at nothing: they will arrest your family and your parents and will take hostages: when they so choose, they will have their artillery bombard the whole village and so, sooner or later, you and your chum who is still at large will be carried off by the government as soldiers.

And then they will send you, weapon in hand, to kill your own worker and peasant brothers, the revolutionary Makhnovist insurgents ...

So we Makhnovist insurgents are not stay-at-homes, although each of us has a family and parents and dear loved ones, whom we have been reluctant to leave. But we are revolutionaries. We cannot look on with indifference as the toiling people is once again reduced to serfdom, as new despots posing as socialists and revolutionaries and displaying the badge of worker-peasant power, lord it over us without control.

Three years of revolution have clearly demonstrated that all power is counter-revolutionary, whether it be the power of Nicholas the Bloody or that of the Bolshevik-Communists. We Makhnovists have raised the banner of insurrection for a complete social revolution against all power, against all oppressors and we fight for the free soviets of toilers.

Join us, comrade! Let the rogue and the coward hide behind someone's skirts at home, we have no need of those who hide behind anyone's skirts. But you, decent worker or peasant, your place is with us, with the Makhnovist insurgent revolutionaries. We press no one into service. But remember that with their savage repression the Bolshevik authorities have forced us into a struggle without quarter.

So make up your mind, comrade! Mobilized by the commissars, you will be sent against us and we will be forced to deal with you as an adversary and as an enemy of the revolution. With us or against us. The choice is yours!

June 1920.

The Makhnovist insurgents.

Document No. 9

The Makhnovists' address to the toiling Cossacks of the Don and Kuban.

Cossack toiler comrades! For two years you have groaned beneath the yoke of the tsarist general Denikin. For two years your sworn enemies, the big landowners and lordlings have forced you to defend their riches and the oppressors of the toiling people. For two years running, they have squeezed you in a vice. While the wealthy amassed their riches from your blood and sweat, made merry and gave themselves up to debauchery. For two years, the blood and tears of the toilers have flowed in the Kuban and on the Don. For two years, the revolution was smothered in your region, Cossack toilers.

Through your efforts, comrades, the yoke of Denikin and his gang has been shrugged off and the revolution is triumphant once again in the Kuban and on the Don.

However, scarcely had you had time, comrades, to recover from the nightmare you lived under Denikin before new oppressors arrived in your regions.

The party of the Bolshevik-Communists, having seized power, dispatched its commissars and Cheka to your villages and your stanitsas: they oppress you no less than their tsarist henchmen predecessors, Cossack toilers. *

As under Denikin, the Bolshevik authorities' punitive detachments seize your wheat and livestock, and take your sons, and if you dare to protest at the violence done before your eyes, well, they will flog, imprison and indeed shoot you.

Why, then, Cossack toiler comrades, did you revolt against Denikin if it was only to place yourselves under a new yoke now in the shape of the Bolshevik-Communists? Is that what you shed your blood for, to allow the commissars and power-lovers now to lord it over you, stifle you and do violence to you?

Listen, brothers, to what we Makhnovist revolutionary peasants have to tell you. We too have been oppressed since the revolution by a whole series of powers and parties. At first the Austrian and German oppressors tried to reign over us along with the Hetman: then it was the adventurer Petliura, then the Bolshevik-Communists, and General Denikin. But we very quickly disabused them of any inclination to carry it on and, as you have certainly heard tell, as early as the summer of 1918, with the Gulyai-Polye peasant, toilers' friend, anarchist and revolutionary Nestor Makhno as our guide (he whom the tsarist authorities had locked up for more than ten years in its prisons and penitentiaries because of his love for the toiling people), we rose up and drove out the Austro-German bands and for nearly two years now we have been pressing on with our struggle against all oppressors of the toilers. We are now waging a relentless struggle against agents and commissars of the Bolshevik authorities: we execute and drive these oppressors from our regions.

The ranks of our revolutionary insurgent detachments are swelling daily. All the oppressed and humiliated join our ranks and the time is approaching when the toiling people in our region will rise up and drive out the power of charlatan Bolshevik politicians, just as they did before with Denikin.

But having driven out the Bolshevik oppressors, it is our intention to entrust power over us to nobody from now on, for we Makhnovists consider that the toiling people has long ceased to be a flock of sheep for anyone to lead as he may see fit. We find that the toilers will be able to organize a free regime of soviets along independent lines, dispensing with party, commissars and generals: a soviet regime in which those who will have been chosen as members of the soviet will not, as now they can, be able to command us and give us orders, but will instead be the instruments of what we will have determined at our assemblies and toilers' congresses.

We will make every effort to ensure that all the wealth of the country such as the land, mines, workshops, factories, railways and the rest belong not to private individuals nor to the State, but exclusively to those who work them.

We shall not put up our weapons until such time as we have eliminated economic or political servitude once and for all, until such time as genuine equality and fraternity reign on earth.

That, comrades, is what we fight for and what we summon you Cossack toilers of the Don and the Kuban to fight for.

In our insurgent army there is a goodly number of Don and Kuban Cossacks: they formed two cavalry regiments which fought bravely with us against the Denikinists. We now call upon you Cossack toilers again, to join our ranks in

order to wage a common struggle against the oppressors and the Red hangmen Trotsky and Lenin. Enough of slavish submission and toleration of the yoke and the power which calls itself worker-peasant. To arms and into the ranks of the revolutionary insurgents, and then we shall quickly rid anyone and everyone of this urge to oppress and grind us down.

Do not, comrades, believe the calumnies that label us bandits or which say that we are only a gang. These are lies peddled by the Commissars for the sole purpose of misleading the peasant toilers and workers who are well aware that Makhnovists are decent toilers who, having no wish to be enslaved, have risen up to free themselves once and for all from every yoke. Do not believe the Bolsheviks' newspapers which report virtually every day that Batko Makhno has been killed and that we Makhnovists have been crushed. These are only lies. Batko Makhno lives and continues with us to defeat the regiments and punitive detachments of the power of the commissars day after day, striking mortal panic into the hearts of Red oppressors.

Rise up, Cossack toilers, against the yoke and oppression of the commissars! Do not let them set foot in your villages and stanitsas! Pay them no taxes! Deny them your wheat! Do not let them take your sons as soldiers! Organize your insurgent detachments. Execute the aggressors. Join with us. We will afford you all possible help.

Enough of slavish forbearance! Let us put an end to the vexations visited upon us!

Long live the insurrection for a genuine system of worker and peasant soviets! Long live the free Don and the free Kuban!

Long live the fraternal union of the toilers of every land and all nations!

Long live the social revolution!

June 1920.

The Soviet of the Revolutionary Insurgents of the Ukraine
(Makhnovists).

Document No. 10

Workers, peasants, and Red soldiers!

With your own eyes you saw how the villainous bourgeoisie, with Denikin and company at its head, sought to reduce the workers and peasants to serfdom for fully a century and tried to reintroduce the feudal system of the great landowners. But they have been definitively crushed through the spirit of revolutionary revolt that is abroad among the Makhnovists.

Now again the beast bares its fangs: abetted by the western bourgeoisie of which it seems to be the final card, it hurls its hordes upon us, seeking to subject us to its power and foist its yoke upon us. We can have but one reaction: to have no truce of any sort with them, for we have set ourselves a single goal: to fight to the last drop of blood to annihilate our bourgeoisie once and for all, and with it the worldwide bourgeoisie, or perish in the attempt.

Listen to what the Bolshevik-Communists, the agents of the "worker and peasant" government, say about us. By means of craven falsehoods they accuse us in their slanderous propaganda of siding with Wrangel: which makes them the laughing-stock of workers and peasants the world over. Have they no shame? Do not they themselves represent the new counter-revolution with their authoritarian institutions like the Cheka and the power of the commissars who make up a new aristocracy like the autocracy before them?

Yes, we must record the fact that the only ones responsible for the emergence of the counter-revolution are the Bolsheviks themselves, the advocates of the "socialist State." They lead us in the direction of State capitalism, of new despots at home and they revive private capitalism, our greatest enemy.

We Makhnovists will either fall in combat or we will win and destroy the new capitalism in both its guises, and we will build a new life under a genuinely free socialism!

Down with oppressors of the toiling people, whether they come from the Right or Left!

Long live the worldwide union of towns and villages!

Long live the social revolution!

July 1920.

The Information Committee of the Insurgent Army of the Ukraine (Makhnovist).

Document No. 11

The Makhnovist conception of soviets

The first session of the free soviet of Gulyai-Polye was held in the great hall of the town's college. The teacher Chernoknizhny, chairman of the soviet, gave this address:

"Comrades! Let us salute the formation of Gulyai-Polye's first free soviet. On this occasion, I think it essential that a brief general account be given of the nature, organization and import of free toilers' soviets such as they have been established at the toilers' own instigation in this free region of ours.

Let it be stated first of all that the characteristic feature of social life among us takes the form of toilers' self-governance in local affairs; this going hand in glove with organization of the partisan struggle: and all of this is at odds with the Bolsheviks' conception of political soviets.

The free soviets of toilers represent a firm realization of the principles underlying such self-governance...

- Soviets free, in that they are wholly independent of any central authority whatever and are elected with complete independence to boot.
- Soviets of toilers, in that they are founded on a basis of shared labor and embrace only toilers, operate in accordance with their wishes, serve their interests alone and are wholly impervious to any and all political influence.

Each such soviet is executor of the wishes of local toilers and their organizations. Soviets elsewhere, which are to liaise closely with them, will be able to set up popular self-governance bodies, coordinating their activities insofar as their territorial remit and economic activities require.

Publication of a declaration on the principles, broad characteristics and organization of free soviets on the part of the Military Revolutionary Soviet¹ represents the prescribed constitution of these organizations.

It is interesting to note that since its inception, the idea of free soviets has begun to be favorably and instantly received by the masses, and has spread in very quick order to regions far removed from Gulyai-Polye.

Having instinctively grasped the simple system of free soviets, the peasants have striven slowly but surely to establish such organizations. Once they have accomplished this, they will indubitably become its staunchest supporters and will without the shadow of a doubt feel that this is a wholesome foundation that guarantees the construction of a shared, free existence.

Likewise appreciation of the necessity for direct union with the workers of neighboring towns is beginning to ripen and gain ever greater sway over the peasant masses.

Let us quote the example of the Gulyai-Polye peasants' appeal: "Worker, hold out your hand to the peasant," which has not gone unheeded: it spreads and is discussed and has become our region's watchword: among the urban workers whom it has reached it arouses lively interest. And neither encirclement by hostile forces from every camp, nor the expression of other schools of thought, are impediments to propagation of the notion of a rapprochement between workers and peasants.

The conception of free, toilers' soviets springs from life itself. This transitional form of self-governance leads on in practice to the non-authoritarian order of the future, founded upon principles of unrestricted freedom, complete equality and fraternity.

In other words I would say that the libertarian current will, in this way, have found its true expression, its rightful one: social action. The receptivity of the toilers is an irrefutable demonstration that love of liberty is abroad among the

peasants, as is the unshakable determination to play their parts in the building of a free, independent and egalitarian life.

In a different, less troubled context, that same movement could have taken a different tack, found expression in quite different ways and would also have been quite wholesome, original and deliberate in its development. Ultimately, we must believe that it would have led to construction of the groundwork of a really free society of toilers.

But to our regret, these are at present naught but dreams, for harsh reality presents a very different face. What does this consist of, exactly?

The fact of the matter is that even now the traditional enemy of Labor and of Liberty — Authority — is making inroads in this region of ours. The essential and underlying motivation of the exploiters who invade our region (Bolsheviks and Denikinists) consists of their steadfast determination to assert their power by violently eradicating everyone else's freedom and, what is more, wholly reducing the toilers to the status of inanimate objects.

By such methods, all these statist-authoritarians will annihilate all the efforts and advances of the toilers.

In the first instance, the peasant's life and labors would be saddled with the yoke of the Cheka and the Sovnarkom [soviet of people's commissars], which is to say a gang of adventurers, expert in political chicanery: the very same people who have adroitly deceived the toilers and have turned the Russian social revolution into a vague effervescence of the masses.

In the second instance, the peasant has to look to the rule of the cosh of these privileged "gentlemen" who hide behind the gold-braided saber-draggers.

The peasantry could not and of course would not accept this prospect, once having sampled the fruits of the liberty tree. For that very reason, it has risen up as one man in defense of its derided interests. It has risen because it has once and for all rejected state exploitation of society, rejected economic plunder and political whimsy.



"I call upon you," Chernoknizhny closed, "to watch over the peasantry's ideal of free, toilers' soviets, as you would over the apple of your eye, for, as I have indicated, such soviets assure the people of authentic self-governance by the toilers themselves and lead on to real freedom, genuine equality and honest fraternity."

Note to Document 11

1. A reference to the Draft Declaration: see Document No. 2.

Bibliographical Afterword (1984)

It seems opportune here to review some new publications and information that have come to light since the publication of our biographical study, itself the fruit of 18 years of research and authentication, which is to say that it was by no means improvised, which is more than can be said of most of the publications on the subject. Generally the sensational aspects of certain accusations and allegations is played up so as to overshadow the real import of the Makhnovist insurgent movement. This is true for example of the publication by Pavel Litvinov (the grandson of Stalin's Foreign Affairs minister of that name) of a samizdat text (i.e. a clandestinely self-published text) entitled *Nestor Makhno and the Jewish Question*.¹ Litvinov is at pains to show that Makhno was never an anti-Semite, quite the opposite indeed, that he "deserves to be held in high regard and have his memory honored by Jews." Quite an attractive and welcome undertaking this, were it not for the fact that it is bringing coals to Newcastle for, as we have pointed out before, even Bolshevik historical studies have always repudiated this absurd allegation of anti-Semitism on Makhno's part. What is more, Litvinov ties in this issue with the rebirth of Jewish nationhood and indeed with the attempt to create some revolutionary Jewish "Zion" in the Ukraine! What is to be welcomed though is the fact that Litvinov capitalizes upon the opportunity to retrace the main features and accomplishments of the Makhnovist movement, especially its crucial part in defeating the Whites. Let it be noted that essentially the sources that he has used have been published outside Russia: some come from Russian anarchist reviews and other works published in France and in the United States during the 1920s and 1930s: which is to say that against all the odds they have achieved their objectives even inside Russia by helping to restore the truth of events. Aside from a few mistakes — Litvinov has Makhno working in Paris as a film technician! — this essay does deserve to be more widely known, especially in Israel and among Jewish readers, given that many of these still place credence in the "rumors" about Makhno. On the other hand, it has nothing new to offer Western readers who have access to much more comprehensive texts and works on the subject: also, it is hard to fathom the sensational publicity accorded Litvinov's essay by certain French and Italian anarchists.² Maybe because for such a long time there was a dearth of historical and theoretical investigations and works on the subject of

anarchism, this accounts for many anarchists having become “avid consumers” and applauding as soon as some academic or somebody quite removed from the movement and its beliefs, deigns to show an interest in Anarchy!



We have also come by another Russian manuscript text dealing with the life of Lev Zadov-Zinkovsky, the commander of the unit that smuggled the gravely wounded Makhno over the border into Romania in August 1921. The author of this manuscript, one Jacob Gridin, describes himself as a former member of the NKVD, (the Cheka was first renamed the GPU, then became the NKVD before becoming the KGB of today) and a recent emigrant to Israel. According to Gridin, Zadov — who had for a time been chief of the Makhnovist intelligence service — allegedly contacted the GPU while in exile in Romania and rendered it valuable services. In particular he is alleged to have lured a captain of the French counter-espionage service into an ambush in the Ukraine and to have murdered him in his sleep, all in order to prove his bona fides to the GPU and secure rehabilitation for himself as well as for his brother. This little spy story even features a grieving and pretty widow whom this Zadov allegedly took it upon himself to console! Where the shoe pinches is with the allegation that Zadov had been ordered by his Muscovite superiors to “liquidate” Makhno who, it is alleged, was then (in 1922) to be found in one of Warsaw’s finest hotels (in fact, Makhno was then sampling the “delights” of a lengthy and uncomfortable stay in the city’s political prison!). Zadov purportedly accomplished this task successfully and lived a life of ease up until the “nasty” Stalinist purges of 1938, whereupon he is alleged to have met his end.

As we know nothing of Zadov’s true fate, it is still feasible to embroider upon what became of him: however, unlikely circumstances are rather too thick on the ground here and we should bear it in mind, first, that in Bolshevik studies, Lev Zadov and his brother are portrayed as the executors of Makhno’s “dirty work” and especially as unmerciful Bolshevik-killers and, secondly, that they had been convinced anarchist activists ever since 1905, which fact had earned them several years in tsarist prisons, and thirdly, that they had repeatedly given proof of their devotion to the Makhnovist movement’s cause.

All of which makes us skeptical about such unlikely claims about them, unless they have been confused with other individuals. Moreover, we should expect further revelations of the same sort from emigrating Soviet Jews, for a goodly number of them have, like Gridin, been ex-members of the GPU, or indeed privileged members of the State apparatus or other agencies of the regime, or indeed children or parents of such. Self-evidently there is no question of placing the slightest credence in this sort of misrepresentation, unless of course there is documentary or tangible evidence to substantiate their ravings.



In our book we mentioned the existence of a manuscript essay of memories of Nestor Makhno by Ida Mett, a member of the *Dyelo Truda* group from 1925

to July 1928. A small publisher has had the bright idea of bringing this out as a 28-page booklet (starting from an original of just six and one quarter pages!) augmented by a few personal remarks on the “radicality of Nestor Makhno, in which respect he emerges as determinedly modern, in that, practically and historically he steps outside anarchist ideology.... For Makhno the revolution simply cannot be the endorsement of any ideology — even the anarchist one — but rather is the destruction of all ideologies.”³ For some years now, it has been fashionable to toss the term “ideology” around, until it has become universally applicable and all-embracing, but if one takes it to signify a coherent view of life and society there is much to be gained from comparing such glib and empty assertions with the views spelled out in great profusion in Makhno’s own articles. As for Ida Mett’s essay, we have already spelled out its limitations. Certain of her remarks are well “over the top”: she has Makhno “jealous of the Jews,” but “capable of being a friend to a Jew without a second thought.”(?) She also has him “jealous of intellectuals” and, more seriously, “jealous” of the careers of Red generals Budyenny and Voroshilov, so much so that his “mind was stalked willy-nilly by the idea that he too could have been a Red Army general. However, he himself never told me as much.”(!) Such a “telepathic” approach greatly undermines the relevance of her opinions and might even border upon base slander and backstairs gossip: it would have been better to call a halt to it. Ida Mett, whom we knew personally deserves to be assessed on other, more pertinent of her writings.



We come now to one of the most interesting of bibliographical novelties. In our biography of Makhno we mentioned the existence of certain manuscripts by Voline which had remained unpublished to date and to which we had been unable to gain access. They had been in the possession of Rosa Dubinsky, the widow of the first publisher of Voline’s posthumous book *The Unknown Revolution* before being “retrieved” forcibly by Voline’s eldest son, Igor Eichenbaum who at that time subscribed to political views far removed from those of his father. On the strength of what we had been told by Rosa Dubinsky, the historian Daniel Guérin seemed to have played an ambiguous role at the time of this episode. He subsequently forwarded to us a denial wherein he stated that this “episode had taken place unbeknownst to me.”⁵ Duly noted.

We have also learned since that several copies of these manuscripts were in circulation: first of all in the hands of Daniel Guérin, then with the Historical Secretariat of the French Anarchist Federation and finally Leo Eichenbaum, Voline’s second son, had deposited a copy with the “Banque du Son et de l’Image” founded by Roland Fornari.⁶ Thanks to the kindness of the latter, we were able to consult these famous unpublished notes by Voline. And what do they contain? Well, to our great astonishment there is first and foremost the conclusion to *The Unknown Revolution*, which four successive editions of that book have thus deliberately jettisoned! And a rather substantial text it is too — 110 pages — and only the portion dealing

with the meeting with Voline and Trotsky in New York, shortly before their return to Russia in 1917, was used by Daniel Guérin in the latest edition of his anthology *Ni Dieu ni maître* (*No Gods No Masters*). Given that Guérin was also involved in the publication of the two latest (French) editions of *The Unknown Revolution* we asked him why they had been bereft of this “conclusion” which is part and parcel of the whole. His reply was that the decision not to use it had been made jointly with Igor Eichenbaum in that it struck them that the contents of the “conclusion” “weakened” the rest of the book. Once we read it in our turn, we reached a different opinion for it strikes us as being quite consistent with Voline’s psycho-moral analyses and whereas he is mistaken in presenting events worldwide “*from 1914 up until September 1940*” as the “*destructive period of the worldwide social revolution*,” one could forgive him this error but not in any way condone censoring his posthumous book of its “conclusion,” which should be making sense of the whole thing. We can only hope that the next time the book is due for republication, this amputation will be well and truly repaired.

Among Voline’s unpublished papers there is also correspondence of his from towards the end of his life, and here he tackles the subject of interest to us here. In a letter from Marseilles dated November 4, 1944, to one Henri, he berates a certain Frémont for allegedly “*peddling rumors about my relations with Makhno*”: Frémont had it from “*...Makhno’s own lips that since a particular moment, the latter and I have not been such good friends as once we were*,” and had supposedly leveled the “*stupid charge*” against Voline of having “*stolen some documents from Makhno*.” By way of “*formal and palpable proof of the nonsensicality of this crude invention*,” Voline cites three things in his defense: (1) he had allegedly “*sacrificed two whole years of my activities in 1921–1923 to bringing out Arshinov’s History of the Makhnovist Movement*”: he goes on to say that “*...and I mean ‘sacrificed,’ for I could have devoted my free time instead to literary work of my own that I was pressed to do and that interested me*.” (2) He had taken a back seat to Arshinov because he himself had only been involved with the Makhnovist movement for six months whereas Arshinov had been there right to the end and was consequently better “*qualified to write its history*.” Subsequently he had only made use of the latter, and made do with adding a few personal anecdotes to that portion of *The Unknown Revolution* dealing with the Makhnovist movement. This is only a banal statement of facts obvious to any reader, but it is good to see Voline making it explicit himself: (3) he alludes to his work as “*literary editor*” of Volumes II and III of Makhno’s *Memoirs* which appeared in Russian in 1936 and 1937. Translations into French of his forewords to both volumes followed, as did part of his introductory essay on the Makhnovist movement, lifted from *The Unknown Revolution*. Voline concludes his second letter of November 11, 1944, again to Henri, by hoping that his explanations “*will satisfy the comrades’ curiosity and prove to them that the yarns about my conduct are merely the consequences of a crass and stupid calumny that was predicated upon many comrades’ ignorance of the true situation*.” Without more detailed knowledge of the

precise contents of this alleged "calumny," we can only record what Voline has to say and of which everyone may make what they will.

Let us above all note Voline's important clarification of the fate of Makhno's manuscripts: Galina Kuzmenko, Nestor's wife, is supposed to have burned the valise filled with her spouse's papers during the German occupation and to have let Voline know shortly before she left for Germany in 1942. Let us stress her lack of imagination in so doing: she would have been better advised to entrust the papers to reliable friends or to some library.

In other letters addressed to Marie-Louise (Berneri?), Voline outlines a complete history of his writings on the Russian revolution and makes them the basis for *The Unknown Revolution*. He also announces a forthcoming work on Makhno but is having trouble finding the "way to tackle it." He is counting upon using the notes that he had used during lectures on Makhno in 1935–1936. Tuberculosis denied him the time to complete the undertaking and he died a short while later, leaving the project at the notes and outline stage, though these by themselves amount to 236 partly typewritten pages. Let us look at their contents.

The text is entitled *Makhno, a Contribution to Studies on the Enigma of the Personality*. Drafted in 1945, it deals with generalities regarding the Russian revolution and supplies autobiographical information on Voline himself. The first item of interest for our purposes is its disclosure of Voline's influence on Arshinov's *History of the Makhnovist Movement*. It had been at Voline's insistence that Arshinov had mentioned the movement's shortcomings and those of Makhno himself, after having retorted that "set alongside the immeasurable positive aspects of the movement what few shortcomings there may have been are truly of no significance" (pages 31, 45 and 126). According to Voline, such an "omission" on the movement's flaws was profoundly to be regretted for they "are, in my estimation, more important than its positive sides." That comment encapsulates the general tone: he alternates eulogy with the most acerbic criticism in, say, this thumbnail sketch of Makhno: "He was an extremely complicated personality, 'muddled' would be the right word: a sort of formidable 'raw' genius riddled with boorish as well as refined shortcomings as outstanding as his traces of genius...." "Incontrovertibly he belongs in the Russian revolution to that category of personalities who remain in History forever a little woolly... Enormous positive qualities coexist alongside deep-seated negative dispositions" (page 38).

In an uncompleted chapter entitled "The Nub of the Matter," Voline berates the existence in "Ukrainian peasants as well of course as among peasants (and even among manual workers generally) everywhere, of a sentiment that is a blend of mistrust, contempt and unspoken hostility which can stretch to fits of acute hatred towards intellectuals, 'non-manual [workers]' and 'non-peasants.'" He then complains of the "harmful prejudice very widespread among revolutionary militants"; "concealing as much and as long as possible from the 'public' and indeed from the ordinary party militants, shortcomings, 'blemishes,' faults and failings of the movement." For his part, he had documented with "disheartening and piece-meal slowness," the "dark sides" of Makhno's personality: in

1938, he “*already knew a fair amount,*” but, “*by the conclusion of my work (the end of 1941) I knew a lot more....*” One could marvel at such belated intelligence, for, as he himself admits, although he had spent six months in Makhno’s company in 1919–1920, he had “*known nothing of the personal and intimate life that would have afforded access to the very depths of (Makhno’s) personality.*” Furthermore, the latter “*had never made the slightest move to strike up a more personal friendship with me*”; thus in order to divine his real personality, he was to use as his chief source confidences of Makhno’s spouse Galina Kuzmenko who it seems had been challenged by certain “Makhnovist commanders” living in France (Voline unfortunately refrains from giving their names) who allegedly regarded her as “mismatched” with Makhno.

Voline draws a very eulogistic portrait of Makhno’s qualities: a “*very quick and, I should say, complete grasp of the truth which he managed to unravel from life as a whole.*” ... “*Just and proper attention that never diminished to all that he regarded as important in life, his own or life in general ... possession of an extremely solid and luminous master-thought, that too is a stroke of genius.*” ... “*A boundless daring and rashness in the face not just of combat but of life as a whole... he sought to make life what he wished to see of it*” ... “*a specifically fighting gift, I do not mean military... he never lost his cool head, his boldness and acted with simplicity, precision and at the same time with cold clear tactics until the objective was achieved.*” However, as an “*unbalanced man of genius whose excitability was also beyond the norm,*” the more that Makhno “*displayed signs of genius, the more he knew of its ups and downs*” (pages 58–63). But after these roses come the thorns. Voline notes the temperamental incompatibility between them, so much so that when Makhno had him freed from Chekist jails in October 1920, Voline hesitated before he set off to join him in the Ukraine. Furthermore, Makhno had, according to Voline, the infuriating habit of constantly toying with his revolver even to the extent of threatening his future spouse with it, perhaps to “put her character to the test” (?), as well as members of the Makhnovist movement’s soviet and above all he was wont to gun down deserters from the front, or insurgents guilty of outrages where they stood. He had allegedly killed folk “*without having looked into their case and not knowing if they were innocent or guilty*” (page 138). If well founded, this charge strikes us as the most considerable of Voline’s criticisms, for it seems to us, where the rest are concerned, that we are dealing with a somewhat obsessive fixation on his part, deriving probably from the frictions between them as exiles, both personal (Makhno had accused him of dishonesty) and theoretical (Voline championed the Synthesis, whereas Makhno was a fervent supporter of the Platform).

Let us also take note of some startling inaccuracies in Voline’s data: he has Makhno dying a year later than in fact he did and attributes to him as his real name the pseudonym — Mikhnienko — which he had adopted upon arrival in France. These mix-ups and recriminations can perhaps be explained in terms of Voline’s living conditions at the time when he drafted most of these jottings: it was under the German Occupation in Marseilles where he had everything to fear from the Gestapo and Pétainist militia and was experiencing the rigors and privations of

clandestinity. Yet it seems to us that the key to the animosity between the two men lies in the contrast that we have already mentioned between the peasant activist and the moralistic intellectual disconnected from social practice.⁷ Moreover, Voline seems to have nurtured this rancor for he recalls that in Berlin in 1925, upon seeing Makhno again for the first time in years he told him that he “*an intellectual, Arshinov a worker and Makhno a peasant*” made up a “*team*” and that they should remain “*inseparable*.” Makhno allegedly failed to heed this⁸ and had supposedly “*thrown it all away*” by “*hitting the bottle maybe even more than before*.” His was “*a nature undoubtedly brilliantly gifted, capable of actively and doggedly pursuing an objective that he had set himself, a man who had marvelous expertise and at the same time could plummet from such heights into the lowest depths even to the point of becoming a ‘human wreck’*”(!) (page 75). Likewise, in the Ukraine, he had been unwilling to come under Voline’s “*moral sway*” (page 142) because he was under that of a “*camarilla*” of a segment of the Makhnovist commanders. In spite of all his “*qualities*,” Makhno remained, in Voline’s estimation an “*unlettered, philistine, uneducated man*” (page 60), especially as he had an aversion to “*anything that was not peasant. Being himself a peasant through and through, he had a thoroughgoing understanding of peasant life and went so far as to criticize all that was not peasant. He did not have a lot of confidence in workers because the worker, according to him, was already to some extent depraved by the crazy bad life of towns and of industry where he rubbed shoulders with the bosses. He had even less confidence in intellectuals and poked fun at them. In these conditions, it was very hard to talk to him about the flaws in his organization because he responded with all sorts of ridicule which left you nonplussed and denied you any chance of settling things one way or the other*” (page 134). Also, Voline mentions these character traits of Makhno’s even more clearly: “*blind trust in the peasantry, mistrust of all other classes in society: a certain contempt for intellectuals, even anarchist ones*” (page 49). There is the rub and the thorn in Voline’s side! He strove to act as director of Makhno’s conscience in his capacity as a “*morally irreproachable*” intellectual, so as to steer him onto the “*straight and narrow*.” Instead of which Makhno refused his advice, perhaps mockingly, and surrendered instead to his base “*muzhik*” instincts! And while an émigré in Paris, had not Voline publicly dismissed him as a “*muzhik*” one day (a term of abuse which must have been equivalent for him to “*dreadful idiot*” or something of the sort), until an anarchist honor panel had to get together to smooth out their differences!⁹

In fact, of the 236 pages supposedly dealing with Makhno, only a tiny number touch upon the subject directly, the bulk being merely digressions in every direction. To back up his criticisms, Voline sets out some specific instances in which he purports to have been a witness or protagonist, whereas the rest are mere impression, hearsay and superficial confidences from Makhno’s spouse who seems rather cavalier about the gravity of her accusations. Thus it seems obvious to us that the credence to be placed in this should be measured by the degree of hostility that he bore towards Makhno. He would have been better advised to offer detailed descriptions, not of a

few episodes, but rather of his full term among the Makhnovist insurgents, unless he spent that “cloistered” in his cultural activities and had no desire to mingle with “muzhiks” so as to be able to address them directly and pertinently without having to make use of second hand reports. He could also have recalled the circumstances which had led to his arrival in the insurgent camp: it was Makhno himself who had sent out a detachment to rescue him from the clutches of Petliurist partisans. It was also at Makhno’s suggestion that Voline had been made chairman of the insurgent movement’s Revolutionary Military Soviet for several months and again it was Makhno who had made Voline’s release one of the conditions for honoring the military and political agreement concluded with the Bolsheviks in 1920. Voline also omits to mention the “deposition” that he made before a Chekist examining magistrate, a “deposition” that was, moreover, critical of the Makhnovists to say the least, in that Soviet historians have since used it as a means of damning them.¹⁰

All in all, all these random jottings, swamped by general considerations strike us as more revealing of their author’s personality than of Makhno’s: which probably accounts for their having remained unpublished to date. However, in spite of their blatant exaggeration, these texts deserve to be better known, certain passages being of undoubted value for the times. As for Makhno’s “true” personality, that can be sufficiently divined from all his writings — memoirs and articles — and we need not have recourse to the anarchist “grapevine” in hope of sensational disclosures.

Within the framework of this bibliographical update, let us take note of the oral testimony of a historian of Ukrainian origins, Oleg Koshchuk. His mother was interned in Poland in the same camp as Makhno and remembers that certain Petliurists wanted to assassinate the libertarian, probably on account of some clash in which they had been bested. At which point high-ranking nationalist leaders let it be known that any action against Makhno would be deemed a hostile act against the Ukrainian cause. In spite of political differences, ethnic solidarity thus came into play to bring Ukrainians from both sides of the Dniepr closer together.

A.S. 1984

Notes to the Bibliographical Afterword

1. *Dyelo Truda*, February–March 1928, No. 33-34, pp. 7–9.
2. *Ibid.*, June–July 1928, No. 37-38, pp. 10–12.
3. *Ibid.*, March 1927, No. 22, p. 12.
4. *Ibid.*, July–August 1927, No. 10-12, pp. 10–12.
5. P. Litvinov *Nestor Makhno and the Jewish Question*, 20 type-written pages dated Moscow, June 18, 1982. This essay was published by the magazine *Vremya I My* (Time and Us) in Israel, No. 71, 1983.
6. *A Rivista Anarchica*, Milan, Italy, November 8, 1983.
7. Sixteen page manuscript.

8. Ida Mett, *Souvenirs sur Nestor Makhno*, Paris, 1983, pp. 25–26.
9. Letter to the author, December 27, 1982.
10. Its location is 5 rue Caplat, 75018 Paris.

Afterword

This book was drafted nearly twenty years ago on foot of research begun in 1964. In 1984 we added a bibliographical afterword when we published an anthology of articles by Nestor Makhno, in which we commented upon certain new sources, including some unpublished manuscript materials by Voline.¹ Later, in 1987, we published a lengthy examination of the “Organizational Platform of the Dyelo Truda Group” (of which N. Makhno and P. Arshinov were the main authors) and of the ensuing controversy.² In a way, it amounted to a historical and practical assessment of the Ukrainian insurgent experience and of the part that anarchists played in it. It only remains for us now to look at all the new information dished up since then in a range of publications in the West as well as in Russia and in the Ukraine. Let us begin in chronological order, by harking back to the book by Serge Mamontov referred to in our foreword (*Carnets de route d'un artilleur à cheval 1917–1920*), as it devotes a fair number of pages to his military meanderings through Makhnovist territory and offers us his thoughts on civil war, displaying a rare bluntness and candor:

“Confident that they were beyond punishment, the Reds descended into utter bestiality and lost all human dignity. Not that we were angels either and often we were cruel. Every army has its share of perverse personnel: we had our share in our ranks too (...) Looting is a ghastly thing, one that does an army a lot of harm. All the world's armies pretty much loot (...) There is a rule to be observed in time of war: turn a blind eye to the blood and the tears! I have to laugh when the rules of warfare are cited. War is the most immoral of undertakings and civil war is worse still. Rules governing absence of morality? Is it supposed to be all right to kill and mutilate the able-bodied but forbidden to finish off the wounded? Where is the logic in that?

Notions of chivalry are out of place in warfare. Such talk is merely propaganda for imbeciles. Criminality and murder become heroism. One tries to get the jump on the enemy, under cover of night, from the rear, by ambush, through superiority of numbers. The truth goes

untold. What nobility is there in all that? My thoughts are that an army composed exclusively of philosophers would be a very poor army and I would rather an army of criminals. Better, I reckon, to speak a cruel truth than peddle falsehoods.”³

To this muddled thinking the author adds falsehood when he claims that Makhno had come up with the slogan: “Kill the Jews, save Russia!” Although, he remarks, Makhno himself saved no one and lived high on the hog, with no thought except for “his own pleasure”! Obviously, an adversary portrayed in such colors is good only for extermination, like some “bothersome insect.”

The Whites and the Cossacks

Nicolas Ross’s book, published in Germany in 1982 and dealing with the Crimea under Wrangel, contains unpublished material drawn from the archives of the White generals deposited with the Hoover Institute in Stanford, California. In particular, it records how Wrangel speculated upon the chances of military collaboration with Makhno against the Bolsheviks. In a secret order issued to his units, the Baron-General wrote that “in the name of the sacred goal: wiping out communism” he might just rub shoulders with Makhno and other anti-communist Ukrainian groups. In the fight against the principal enemy of “Holy Russia,” he ordered his commanders to coordinate their operations with all “Russian folk” fighting the Bolsheviks to bring back the “Greater Fatherland”!

Yes indeed, Wrangel had understood nothing of what had been going on in recent times and he carried on denying the Ukrainian character of the insurrections in the land. This attitude is reminiscent of the old Russian saw according to which “there never have been any Ukrainians and never will be”! The specific and distinguishing features of what Muscovites used to dismiss as “Little Russians” are denied utterly. Furthermore, asking Makhno to fight for “Holy Russia” and the “Greater Fatherland” was a crackpot notion. Nicolas Ross reprints in its entirety a letter from General Shatilov, Wrangel’s chief of staff, to “Batko Makhno,” going on about the suffering of “Russian soil” and informing him that “the command of the Russian army is fighting only against the communists and commissars and is wholeheartedly on the side of the Russian people,” its motto being “land to the people, truth to the people; the people alone must determine its own fate [...] We share a common goal.” It is put to Makhno that he should coordinate his military operations and, to that end, organize his detachments into a division, which is to be furnished with arms and munitions on the same basis as other divisions of the Russian army. Makhno is confirmed in his command of that division: the Makhnovist commanders become regimental or brigade commanders: all who would defer to the Russian army are offered guarantees that both their lives and their property will be safeguarded.⁴

An emissary — a Captain Mikhailov, bearing messages from Wrangel — was dispatched to Makhno. A bad move, for this well-intentioned ambassador was recognized as the man who had captured a full company of the Novospassovka Insurgent Regiment in 1919 and who had had 70 insurgents shot and a further 50 hanged, on the grounds that they were on their way to join Makhno! ⁵ He himself was strung up, bearing a placard that read: “No compact between Makhno and the White Guards can or could ever be entered into, and should the White camp send us another emissary, the same fate awaits him.” And that is precisely what befell that second emissary, a colonel.

Yet Wrangel’s pipe-dreams managed to bamboozle several Makhnovist detachments. Cut off from the main body of insurgents, they accepted Wrangel’s claims regarding alliance with Makhno at face value. This was the result of the unspeakable terror enforced by the Cheka and the Reds’ punitive expeditions. The Makhnovist detachments that went over to the Whites were organized into a brigade of several thousand men and dubbed the “Batko Makhno Brigade.” Even so, Wrangel’s “howler” eventually backfired on him in the worst conceivable fashion: the brigade was deployed in the northern Tavrida, directly facing the offensive by the Makhnovist insurgent forces. When the Makhnovist Chaly commanding the brigade discovered that he had been gulled, he sought to redeem himself by handing over to the Makhnovist command all the White officers staffing his brigade. These disclosed the precise locations of White troop deployments. On the basis of which intelligence and with the assistance of the “Batko Makhno Brigade” (now defectors) the Makhnovists routed the enemy’s divisions, thereby breaking through the White front.⁶

Wrangel’s political blandness prompts us briefly to review the Whites’ failures. The godfather of their movement, the prematurely deceased General Kornilov, whilst a great Russian patriot, was a democratic republican and supporter of the Constituent Assembly. He managed to come to an accommodation with the Rada, the elected sovereign assembly of the Kuban Cossacks, thanks to which he was able to register his earliest successes. The Kuban Cossacks, like the Don Cossacks after them, had only gone over to the Volunteer Army because of persecution they had endured at the hands of Red invasion forces.⁷ They had no notion of conquering Russia: they wanted only their own independence under the auspices of US President Wilson’s recently proclaimed right to self-determination. But neither France nor Britain nor any other Entente power was prepared to recognize them. The Entente was only prepared to furnish the Whites with weapons and munitions, the Whites being, to their mind, the heirs of its former ally of 1914, imperial Russia. Driven by the Reds into the arms of the Whites, the Cossacks persistently had to fend off overtures from the White high command which was eager to bring them to heel.

Denikin proved to be not merely a dismal military strategist but also a disaster as a politician. He had no real program other than overthrowing Bolshevism, the downfall of which he regarded as imminent and inevitable, so much so that in September 1919 he circulated commanders of the most forward Volunteer Army units with a questionnaire asking them to indicate what course they would like to see the country follow.⁸ He forbade the Kuban Cossack general Shkuro from capturing Moscow, on pain of court martial.⁹ But he went too far when he covered up the murder of Riabovoy, the chairman of the Kuban Rada (whose father before him had been murdered by the Reds). He then had A. Kalabukhov, a priest and chairman of the Kuban's delegation to the Paris Peace Conference in June 1919, hanged and tagged with a placard that read: "Traitor to Russia"! Such was the impact upon the Cossack units embroiled in fighting in the front lines that not only did they quit the front in droves, but they went further and severed their links with the Whites.

By pulling out, these elite troops, accounting for three fourths of the forces deployed against Moscow, men who had repeatedly driven the Red armies backwards, brought about a caving-in of every one of the White fronts. Worse still, the White high command and Denikin, instead of acknowledging their own strategic and political blunders, blamed the Cossacks. So much so that they refused to see them evacuated from Novorossisk to the Crimea. General Sidorin, the commander of the army of the Don, came close to killing Denikin where he stood, such was the explosive nature of their encounter.

Bereft of all command, Shkuro was obliged to leave the country for exile, whilst General Mamontov was poisoned on the night of January 31, 1920 before the very eyes of his powerless spouse in the hospital where he was recovering from typhus. We cannot be certain who was responsible for this murder but suspicions fell on hard-liners from the Volunteer Army, members of OSVAG, the Denikinist Cheka, who had already eliminated Riabovoy.¹⁰ It should be said that General Mamontov had, on foot of the prerogatives of the Don's sovereign assembly, the Krug, violently opposed Denikin (although he himself was only Cossack by adoption), which just goes to show his democratic leanings. Let us add that he was extremely able and very popular with the Cossacks and could, by himself, have turned the military tide against the Reds.

The dim-witted Denikin deliberately sawed away the limb upon which his entire venture rested. Rejected by his own, forced to flee far from home territory, and after his closest collaborator and friend, General Romanovsky, was cut down practically in front of him at the Russian embassy in Constantinople by an ultra nationalist officer, Denikin turned to the writing of his memoirs, or rather, to a self-serving apologia for all his plans. Many years later, in 1937, he still had learned nothing for in a little pamphlet entitled *Who Rescued Soviet Power from Perdition?* he claimed that the man responsible had been ... Pilsudski, the Polish marshal and president, who had refused in the autumn of 1919 to coordinate his opera-

tions against the Reds with Denikin's.¹¹ He forgot to say that he himself had at no time been willing to recognize Polish independence and intended to absorb Poland back into the Russian Empire (perhaps because his mother and his wife were Poles and he was trying to hold his family together!) In any event, he had unnecessarily made himself an irreconcilable enemy in the shape of the former socialist and rabid Polish nationalist, Pilsudski!

His successor, Wrangel, repeated the same mistakes vis à vis the Cossacks who retreated with him into the Crimea. On April 8, 1920, he had General Sidorin hauled before a court martial on charges of "Cossack separatism." Sentenced to four years' penal servitude, then "pardoned" by Wrangel but denied the right to "wear a uniform," having been discharged from the army, Sidorin emigrated to Prague.¹² Wrangel, who was equally shortsighted in military affairs, was so confident of easy victory over the Reds that he deployed only 40,000 men in the front lines, whilst retaining 300,000 in the rear. In spite of all his efforts, he therefore tasted the same disappointments as his predecessor but at least, to his credit, oversaw the evacuation of all the troops that expressed a desire to place themselves beyond the reach of the Cheka. Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolshevik leadership could scarcely have dreamt of finer nincompoops with whom to grapple.



The fateful year of 1989 — when the Berlin Wall came down — witnessed the first stirrings inside the USSR of revisionism regarding Nestor Makhno. On February 8, 1989, a young investigative journalist, Vassili Golovanov, had a wide-ranging article published in *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, the influential weekly paper of the Writers' Union on *Batko Makhno, the Civil War Werewolf*.¹³ It amounted to a sort of "rehabilitation" of the Ukrainian revolutionary. We immediately contacted this journalist with an eye to the chances of our publishing our works on the subject in Russian. Progress Editions in Moscow, the then specialists in works of the sort, devoted a lengthy review to this present book. Written by N. Silin, the review was rather favorable but — and this was evidence of the critic's plight at being confronted with a long-forgotten past — he scolded us over the omission of Soviet archival sources — when he himself acknowledged that these were inaccessible even to Soviet researchers (!) and for not having dwelt longer on Western sources — oral sources or Makhno's own writings — which were not available in the USSR! The upshot was that our book could never see publication in Russian unless complemented by Soviet archival materials.¹⁴ In point of fact, this delicate refusal amounted to an acknowledgment of the ignorance and powerlessness of official Soviet historians in the face of a mass of data emanating from the West and concerned with a past history consigned to oblivion by single party rule.

The fate of Makhno's wife and daughter

Golovanov's article was the starter's flag for a whole series of sensational publications. We might focus on that from Sergei Seymanov, the last Soviet historian to have shown an interest on the topic, through a mischievous piece back in 1968.¹⁵ Under the title *Underneath the Black Flag, the Life and Death of Nestor Makhno*, he tells of the lengthy correspondence and conversations that he had with Makhno's widow, Galina Kuzmenko, and his daughter, Lucie. He might have been better advised to publish this only in an edition with commentary in the margin, because it is of tortuous construction and endlessly intercut with personal thoughts of the most maudlin sort and the whole thing makes for a difficult read. Even so, let us draw out the substance of it. Following publication of his article, he received a letter dated April 4, 1968 from the town of Dzhabdula in Kazakhstan, from Galina Kuzmenko who gave him a lengthy account of everything that she had been through, not merely as an emigré in France but also inside the USSR to where she had been deported from Germany in 1945, along with her daughter. Let us take a look at the main new information on offer: Galina offers a precise description of Nestor's last days and final hours in the Tenon hospital: she confirms that his real year of birth was 1888, a year earlier than the date shown on the official records, the purpose being to put off his being called to the colors (this being something that played a crucial role in the commuting of Makhno's death sentence to one of imprisonment for life — precisely because of his tender years). She recalls how his father's real surname had been Mikhnienko who, being nicknamed Makhno, had adopted this surname instead and registered all his children under it. Galina confirms the authenticity of her "celebrated diary," seized by the Reds in 1920, wherein she gave a day by day account of the activities of the core Makhnovist group from February 19 to March 26, 1920. Written in Ukrainian, translated into Russian, this text has been reprinted many times over since then. All in all, it has the ring of truth, except in the passages where she has Nestor — a drunken Nestor at that — dancing to his own accordion accompaniment! Remember that Makhno himself challenged this "diary," supposedly kept by his spouse, certain passages of which had been used by Soviet historians to discredit him.¹⁶ As Vassili Golovanov wrote us, only handwriting analysis could establish its authenticity.¹⁷ The main point to emerge is just how extremely severe Makhno and his comrades were, not shrinking from on-the-spot execution of all insurgents guilty of extorting money from or bullying the populace. They were not ones to bandy words about revolutionary ethics!

Seymanov makes a passing reference to the fate of Leon Zadov, "executioner" of many Bolsheviks, bodyguard to Makhno and the man who carried the wounded Makhno in his own arms into Romania. Of Jewish extraction (which puts paid to any charges of anti-Semitism levelled against Nestor, not to mention all of the protracted rebuttals offered Makhno himself or by others!), Zadov was later recruited by the GPU! He worked for the GPU up until 1937 when he was "purged," as

were virtually all protagonists of the civil war. Seymanov notes with amazement that Zadov's son made a glittering career for himself in the Soviet navy under his father's real name of Zinkovsky before retiring with the rank of rear-admiral. Seymanov wonders — without however advancing anything to substantiate his thesis — whether Zadov might not have been “planted” inside the Makhnovist movement right from the outset by the “organs,” which is to say, the Cheka. The argument may be a bit raw but Seymanov argues that the Cheka was capable of anything. Galina continues her tale: with Nestor and a dozen other insurgents she was evacuated to Romania, before moving on to Poland in the spring of 1922, where she was jailed with Nestor for fourteen months in Warsaw, charged with having fomented an armed uprising in eastern Galicia (then part of Poland). There she gave birth to her daughter Elena on October 30, 1922. On their release all three of them moved on to Danzig where they were rearrested by the German authorities on charges of having persecuted German settlers in the Ukraine. She was freed shortly after that and made her way to Paris with her daughter.¹⁸ As for Nestor, he then made his escape “like something out of a novel”: a rope made of torn blankets, bars sawn through with a file, etc. without giving her the full details, in accordance, no doubt “with the rules of revolutionary conspiracy” at that time. Among the other intriguing details offered by Galina — although Seymanov explains that she was cautious in her choice of words, this being in 1968 when she had not yet been “rehabilitated” by the regime and was therefore still “under surveillance” — we have confirmation that Swartzbard, member of a Yiddish anarchist group, was well known to Makhno in Paris. Makhno did not agree with his holding “Petliura responsible for anti-Jewish pogroms carried out in the Ukraine, because Petliura had in fact opposed them,” even though “Makhno had no great liking for him.” Galina stresses that Swartzbard's defence lawyer, Henry Torrès, helped Nestor and her smooth over their “difficulties with the French police” (probably to overturn proceedings to have them expelled from French soil). Their daughter Elena (pet name Lucie in French) was often taken in by French anarchist families, never learned Ukrainian and even forgot her Russian. Galina worked fitfully for a variety of Ukrainian organizations in France. Conscripted under the STO (Compulsory Labor Service) scheme, her daughter was sent to Berlin in 1943 and Galina went with her. On August 14, 1945, they were both arrested by the Soviet authorities and repatriated to Kiev. Galina was sentenced to eight years in a labor camp in Mordovia. Curiously enough, there she met the wives of Yakir — the man who persecuted the Makhnovists back in 1919 — and of General Vlassov (“turned” by the Germans during the Second World War and handed over to Stalin by the British and Americans, before being hanged in Moscow along with Shkuro, Krasnov and other generals). She must have had a hellish time there for she wound up in the “invalids” section of the camp. She was freed on May 7, 1954 and assigned residence in Dzhabdula in Kazakhstan, where her daughter was also assigned. When they met at the railway station they did not

recognize each other, such were the changes in their appearances! It was only later on that they were reunited. Which leads Seymanov, "a young, unassuming citizen" in 1968, "moved" by this picture, to say that Galina was worthy of featuring in a play by Homer, Shakespeare or in *Quiet Flows the Don*.

The impression she made upon Seymanov, after their many encounters, was that of a "strong and extraordinary character"; the ordeals to which she had been subjected had not broken her nor her "dogged common sense," the "suspicion-driven caution" which, according to him, was a legacy from the ghastly times in which she had lived. Seymanov notes here that the "misfortunes she had endured had not steered Galina's spirit in the direction of God" and that she was, from her younger days through until she breathed her last, a "dyed-in-the-wool atheist" as well as a "genuine, robust revolutionary." He was not afraid that this might not quite square with his "graphological" reading of Galina's handwriting which identified "ambition, bordering even upon despotism," plus a degree of "dissimulation" discernible in the formation of the letters a, o, b and ! As we see it, the overriding impression was that she had remained true to herself, to Nestor and to the movement in which she had played a large part. Hats off! (She died in 1978.)

Seymanov also offers us information as to the fate of Lucie (Elena) Makhno. Banished to the middle of the Asian steppes, under police surveillance, she was only able to survive by turning her hand to a range of exacting manual trades: canteen worker, factory worker, piggery employee, etc. from which she was often fired once the identity of her father was discovered, and this went on for many a long year. When Seymanov met her in 1968 she was not yet married nor a mother but was living with a civil aviator. She had reluctantly agreed to the rendezvous: she was "edgy, irritated and trusted no one." To him she seemed still young and elegant with her dark eyes and dark hair and bore a stunning resemblance to her father. He found her very much the "Parisienne," as he imagined one at any rate. Her Russian was still heavily overlaid with a French accent. In her mother's presence, she declared to Seymanov that she had always despised politics, that she remembered her father well and recalled that his house had always been filled with people and newspapers. Way back then she had pledged that she would take no interest in politics or newspapers. She reckoned that she had no homeland and could not bring herself to regard either France or Russia as such [...] Many men had shown an interest in her but on learning whose daughter she was they had promptly made themselves scarce, sometimes properly, sometimes in a cruder or more craven fashion, thereby exposing their own true natures. "I never wanted children. Bring more wretches into this world? So that they might share the same fate as me? When I was in France I knew nothing of my father's part in your history. When I found myself incarcerated in Kiev, one of my fellow prisoners, discovering whose daughter I was, asked me if he was the renowned bandit? I took offence at that and slapped her."

At the end of their meeting, she asked Seymanov to send her some French newspapers as they just could not be had where she was living.

It has to be said that Seymanov in no way retracts any of the comments regarding the negative views expressed in his 1966 study of the Makhnovist movement. Quite the opposite. His text closes bizarrely with his imploring “the Lord to forgive his servants Galina and Nestor, for they knew not what they were doing,” and calling upon Him to “forgive all of us poor sinners” [he probably means all Russians]. As for himself and in spite of the belated onset of compassion, he never lifted a finger to help Galina and her daughter back in 1968. What hypocrisy. Lucie (Elena) Makhno died an untimely death in 1993 at the age of 71, still confined to Dzhambula. We can only suppose that she had had to grapple with the straits caused by the break-up of the Soviet empire and visited upon the Russian and Ukrainian minorities by the Kazakh nationalist authorities.

Belash's key book

Scenting the dangers of an “historical and political” rehabilitation of Makhno, the ideologues of the Communist Party of the USSR, while they still held absolute power, urgently commissioned a negative study of the subject. One V. N. Volkovinsky published *Makhno and his Downfall* in Moscow in 1991.¹⁹ Rehashing all the old Leninist clichés and relying upon a one-sided critical apparatus, he delivered the latest anathema upon the Ukrainian insurgents. Alas, the USSR (so-called) met its own spectacular “downfall,” whereby the Party-State’s right of imprimatur over historical publications evaporated. Whereupon a whole series of works much more favorably disposed towards the subject saw publication. We shall dwell upon the most significant of these, Viktor Belash’s memoirs (to which we have referred earlier).

Seymanov wrote that in 1976 he had had a visit from Belash’s son who had given him some information about his father: released by the Reds, he had been banished to Krasnodar in the Kuban where he worked as a mechanic in the workshops of the Hunters’ Union (!). In December 1937 he was arrested and sentenced to face a firing squad. On April 29, 1976, he was posthumously rehabilitated on the basis of “insufficient evidence.”



The published book contains the full text of his self-justifying memoirs, drafted in a Cheka jail and fleshed out by his son through the addition of a large number of documents. In spite of our reservations about passages in which the author claims that he was always a passionate advocate of honest alliance with the Reds and offers the occasional criticism and reproach directed at Makhno — it was this that earned him his “freedom” (one thinks here of the *Confession* that Bakunin wrote for the Tsar and which also earned him his freedom and facilitated his escape from Siberia) — the book as a whole represents an important source of information. For our purposes,

we shall make do with rehearsing the main items of information from Belash which present our monograph in a new light.

Take for a start, the Gulyai-Polye anarcho-communist group in the aftermath of 1905. It had fifty active — activist — members, each of them in touch with a further four sympathizers. It was in close contact with local and regional anarchist groups, having a supply-line to libertarian literature and arms from Ekaterinoslav and Moscow, through Voldemar Antoni, the group's founder and leader. (He was of Czech origin). The group's members got together with Antoni on an almost daily basis in order to familiarize themselves with the thought of Proudhon, Stirner, Bakunin and Kropotkin. The reforms of Stolypin, the tsarist prime minister — reforms that destroyed the rural commune — were fiercely criticized (p. 13). In 1905 the group passed a resolution attacking "any trespass against the physical integrity" of any member placed under arrest by the authorities: such trespass would be answered by implacable "revenge." Let us leap forward in time to a full reprint (see pp. 73–89 of Belash's book) of the minutes of the 2nd Congress of Insurgents on February 12, 1919, which we ourselves have reprinted in part in our book (see Chapter 14 and the documentary appendices). This, a document of the greatest significance, was drawn first from the archives by Belash's son. It records the composition and affiliations of the 13 elected members of the revolutionary military soviet: three Left Social Revolutionaries, three Bolshevik-Communists, and seven anarchists (Belash, p. 88). For good measure, Belash's son also reprints (p. 96) the minutes of the 3rd All-Ukrainian Congress of Soviets controlled by the Bolsheviks. Also included is the resolution from the congress of the Makhnovist revolutionary military soviet which drew delegates from 32 districts of the region (pp. 104–105) and which issued a call for a united front of revolutionaries: it recognized the authority of freely elected soviets: it repudiated any party dictatorship: it called for the death penalty for looters, bandits and counter-revolutionaries to be closely supervised by the local revolutionary military tribunal: for immediate abolition of the Cheka: for all unit commanders to be elected: for freedom of speech, press and assembly for all left-wing organizations, without any repression whatsoever: there was an insistence that there be no national persecution within the revolutionary army: and a strict fraternal discipline rooted in awareness of revolutionary duty was introduced. This text was omitted from both Arshinov's book and my own book here. The Belashes, father and son, cite several Bolshevik memoranda and reports on frictions between the insurgents, the anarchists and Communist political commissars, offering the occasional interesting and unexpected detail — for instance, that two wagon-loads of literature and appeals meant for the inhabitants of Berdyansk and Mariupol and escorted by anarchist and Social Revolutionary agitators, were sent out in March 17, 1919, provoking the wrath of the political commissar author of the report, for they included an appeal from Makhno denouncing the parasites arriving to talk down to and order people around (p. 109). Look at the resolution from the Nabat (Tocsin) anarchist congress of the Ukraine: the one from the 3rd regional congress

of insurgent soviets, held in Gulyai-Polye on April 10, 1919. Belash gives a detailed breakdown of the military deployment on each front, which affords us some idea of the part played by the Makhnovists. He reprints numerous appeals and proclamations from Makhno (pp. 196–197, 222–226, 230–231, etc.) as well as other articles or texts lifted from the insurgents' newspapers and now made available for the first time. Precisely what Makhno did not have at hand when he came to write the remainder of his movement's history (having stopped at December 1918).

A secret order (pp. 238–239) from Trotsky that "the Makhnovschina be mopped up without prevarication or hesitation and with all firmness and severity," also drawn from the archives, deserves to be publicized, as do other (hitherto unpublished) orders along the same line (pp. 238–239 et seq.). This amounts to a veritable indictment of Trotsky who stabbed the insurgents in the back and had them gunned down whilst they were trying, with scarcely any arms or munitions, to hold the line against the White offensive: Trotsky's responsibility here is exposed with plenty of supporting evidence. It is also a terrific indictment of the Bolshevik regime as a whole, which opted to surrender the front to the Whites rather than allow an autonomous popular movement to spread.

Viktor Belash drafted his memoirs on the basis of his staff notes and campaign diary. They offer us a highly detailed picture of insurgent numbers, their organization, the military operations in which they engaged and the outcome thereof.

Apropos of the crucial battle with the Whites in Peregonovka in September 1919, he cites the figure of 18,000 Whites slain — a considerable toll in terms of the numbers committed. Nearly 7,000 others were eliminated, including 2,500 Chechens, near Alexandrovsk and in the ensuing fighting, etc. At that point the Makhnovists numbered 100,000 men: 250,000, if we count the unarmed reserves in their rear! Their units completely smashed the White rearguard, cutting them off from ports, arms and munitions supply lines in the rear. Denikin was obliged to pull troops out of front line service against the Reds in order to send in his best troops to halt the Makhnovist onslaught. What we have now are detailed figures regarding what we already knew about the crucial significance of the famous encounter at Peregonovka in terms of the outcome of the civil war.

It should be stressed that Belash claims the credit for having dispatched numerous units to all four corners of the territory in order to reap maximum benefits from this victory and this contrary to the opinion of Makhno who allegedly upbraided him for weakening the insurgent army. Among other interesting items, he cites the distribution of wheat to the peasants, free of charge: a 50 percent prior deposit was paid on clothing orders placed with workshops and garment-factories, even though the insurgents were often in no position to pick up those orders on account of the fluid military situation. There are intriguing statistics regarding the social extraction of the insurgents: 25 percent were farmhands or landless peasants, 40 percent were medium-sized or poor peasants, 10 percent were well-to-do peas-

ants owning no land of their own, 10 percent were landless peasants who earned a living from fishing, 5 percent were drovers, 7 percent industrial and transport workers and, finally, 3 percent were petit bourgeois. Broken down according to age, it transpires that 80 percent of insurgents were aged between 20 and 35. As a result, many had been participants in the 1914–1917 war.

Their geographical provenance is similarly intriguing: 50 percent were from the Ekaterinoslav province, 25 percent from the Tavrida and Kherson, 7 percent from the Don, 8 percent from Poltava province and the remaining 10 percent were drawn from several other regions (Belash, p. 346). In October 1919 the front manned by the Makhnovists covered 1,150 kilometers from end to end (when the Whites' entire front facing the Reds covered 1,760 kilometers).

Note that in the wake of the second agreement with the Red Army, nearly 8,000 partisans refused to accept this accommodation and left the main body of the army. Even so, the latter fielded 13,000 insurgents along the lines facing the Whites — where they played the telling part of which we know.

One of the most important statistics quoted by Viktor Belash relates to the movement's political persuasion: of the 40,000 partisans in the insurgent army, in November 1919 — 35,000 of whom were laid low by typhus — 70 percent were Makhnovists and sympathizers, 5 percent of whom were anarchists; 20 percent were sympathetic to the Social Revolutionaries and Petliura; and only 10 percent were former Red Army soldiers, 1 percent of them Bolshevik-Communists (Belash, p. 362).

In short, the Belash's book represents a crucial source on the Makhnovist movement. Not merely on account of the statistics cited and the minute descriptions of operations mounted but also because of its reprinting of lots of texts lifted from the archives. It is a splendid book and we look forward to seeing it translated and published in French.

The archives and the Makhno publishing “boom”

From the use made of them by the younger Belash, it is plain that there are lots of archival materials available, especially in the Ukraine itself. The State Archives in Kiev appear to be the best equipped, but every town of any significance has its own archival collection as well. We salute the archives in Dniepropetrovsk (formerly Ekaterinoslav) which in 1993 published a pamphlet reproducing a number of documents and drawing up a detailed listing of its holdings on Makhno and the Makhnovist movement. Unfortunately, access is not easily come by for a variety of different reasons, in the immediate term at any rate. Be that as it may, there must be materials there on the basis of which a number of other facets of the Makhnovist movement can be explored further.

is only right as far as a matter of this significance is concerned, because in the 20th century — an age of calamity upon calamity — the Makhnovist experiment and that by the Spanish comrades in 1936–1939 represent the only attempts to install a society wherein human liberation might be something more than mere empty rhetoric.

— A.S. Paris, 2001

Notes to the Afterword

1. See Nestor Makhno, *The Struggle Against the State and Other Essays* (AK Press, 1996).
2. Alexandre Skirda, *Facing the Enemy* (AK Press, 2002), Chapters XV and XVI.
3. Op. cit. pp. 7, 148 and 156.
4. Nicolas Ross, *Wrangel in the Crimea* (in Russian), Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany 1982, pp. 255–262.
5. Belash, op. cit. pp. 421–422.
6. Belash, op. cit., pp. 462–468, and N. Makhno, *the Makhovschina and its Erstwhile Allies, the Bolsheviks*, op. cit. pp. 50–52, as well as Chapter 23 of this book.
7. Belash quotes a directive signed by Sverdlov and Trotsky and dated January 29, 1919, which amounted to an outright call for genocide of the Don Cossacks, which could scarcely have done other than prompt them to revolt en masse.
8. *The Kornilov Shock Regiment* (in Russian), Paris, 1936, p. 142.
9. See Chapter 18 above and the author's interview with Don Cossack colonel Dubentsev in February 1986 in Courbevoie (the Cossack Museum). Dubentsev confirmed to us that Denikin had dispatched an officer from his general staff, by plane, to instruct Shkuro to turn around.
10. See the account by Mamontov's widow in the Don Cossacks' organ *Rodimoy Kraiy* (Native Region), Paris, No. 52, May-June 1964.
11. General A.I. Denikin *Who Rescued Soviet Power from Perdition?* (in Russian), Paris 1937, p. 16.
12. He was an active contributor to a Cossack review and his articles were collected into an anthology under the title *The Cossacks' Tragedy* (in Russian), Paris, 1936–1938.
13. Translated in its entirety by ourselves and serialized in *Le Monde libertaire*, No. 746, April 6, 1989 to No. 748, April 20, 1989.
14. "Social thought abroad" (in Russian) in *Bulletin bibliographique critique*, No 5, May 1991, pp. 54–58.
15. See above, Chapter 32.
16. S. Seymanov, *Underneath the Black Flag*, (Moscow 1990), 70 pages.
17. Letter to the author, October 5, 1998.
18. N. Makhno, *The Makhnovschina and its Erstwhile Allies*, op. cit. p. 30.
19. V.N. Volkovinsky, *Makhno and his Downfall*, Moscow 1991, p. 246.

KATE SHARPLEY LIBRARY

Comrades and Friends —

No doubt some of you will be aware of the work of the Kate Sharpley Library and Documentation Centre, which has been in existence for the last eight years. In 1991 the Library was moved from a storage location in London to Northamptonshire, where we are now in the process of creating a database of the entire collection. At the same time, a working group has been formed to oversee the organisation and running of the Library. The catalogue of the Library material will be published by AK Press (Edinburgh).

The Library is made up of private donations from comrades, deceased and living. It comprises several thousand pamphlets, books, newspapers, journals, posters, flyers, unpublished manuscripts, monographs, essays, etc., in over 20 languages, covering the history of our movement over the last century. It contains detailed reports from the IWA (AIT/IAA), the Anarchist Federation of Britain (1945–50), the Syndicalist Workers Federation (1950–1979) and records from the anarchist publishing houses, Cienfuegos Press, ASP and others. Newspapers include near complete sets of *Black Flag*, *Freedom*, *Spain and the World*, *Direct Actions* (from 1945 onwards), along with countless others dating back 100 years. The Library also has a sizeable collection of libertarian socialist and council communist materials which we are keen to extend.

The Kate Sharpley Library is probably the largest collection of anarchist material in England. In order to extend and enhance the collection, we ask all anarchist groups and publications worldwide to add our name to their mailing list. We also appeal to all comrades and friends to *donate* suitable material to the Library. *All* donations are welcome and can be collected. The Kate Sharpley Library (KSL) was named in honour of Kate Sharpley, a First World War anarchist and anti-war activist — one of the countless “unknown” members of our movement so ignored by “official historians” of anarchism. The Library regularly publishes lost areas of anarchist history.

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THE KATE SHARPLEY LIBRARY

The phenomenal life of Ukrainian peasant Nestor Makhno (1888–1934) provides the framework for this breakneck account of the downfall of the tsarist empire and the civil war that convulsed and bloodied Russia between 1917 and 1921. As in the days of history's great chivalric tales, crucial 20th century clashes were fought through stunning cavalry charges and bitter hand-to-hand, saber-wielding combat. Combatants were drawn from several camps: Budyenny's Red cavalry, the Don Cossacks and Kuban Cossacks (allied with the Whites), Ukrainian nationalists and Makhnovist partisans. Makhno, a formidable strategist characterized by exceptional daring, headed an army of anarchist insurgents — a popular peasant movement which bore his name.

Makhno and his people were fighting for a society "without masters or slaves, with neither rich nor poor." They acted towards that ideal by establishing "free soviets." Unlike the soviets drained of all significance by the dictatorship of a one-party State, the "free soviets" became the grassroots organs of a direct democracy — a living embodiment of the free society — until they were betrayed, and smashed, by the Red Army.

Delving into a vast array of documentation to which few other historians have had access, this study illuminates a revolution that started out with the rosiest of prospects but ended up utterly confounded. *Nestor Makhno: Anarchy's Cossack* brings to life this dramatic turning point in contemporary history.

More than just the incredible exploits of a guerilla revolutionary par excellence, Skirda weaves the tale of a people, and the organizations and practices of anarchism, literally fighting for their lives.

Historian and translator Alexandre Skirda (born in 1942 to a Ukrainian father and a Russian mother) is a specialist in the Russian revolutionary movement. His edited collection of Nestor Makhno's writings, The Struggle Against The State And Other Essays, and his seminal history of anarchism, Facing The Enemy: A History Of Anarchist Organization From Proudhon To May '68, are both published by AK Press.

Paul Sharkey has, amongst a huge body of work, translated many of Skirda's works into English.



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