

**THE MAKHOVSHCHINA, 1917-1921**

**ideology, nationalism, and peasant insurgency  
in early twentieth century Ukraine**

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## ABSTRACT

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The peasant partisan movement led by the Russified anarchist Nestor Makhno in left-bank Ukraine from 1917 to 1921 has been claimed by libertarians as a rare example of anarchism in practice. But peasant discontent in Ukraine, an area of developing capitalist agriculture, was neither ideologically monolithic nor monocausal. It was differentiated both by class and region, and while the Makhnovshchina, strongest in the provinces of Ekaterinoslav, Kherson and the Tauride, certainly included anarchists, it is unclear whether the ideology of the leaders was widely shared by the rank and file. Indeed, an analysis of the class composition of the movement is difficult empirically and theoretically.

Ukrainian nationalists have also claimed Makhno as one of their own. But while the partisans twice allied themselves with the Red Army, they never moved beyond occasional tactical truces with the various separatist Ukrainian groups which were then active. The relatively high level of class consciousness of the leadership may have been the decisive factor here.

Internal developments within the Makhnovshchina also present theoretical difficulties for the libertarian viewpoint. Makhno's highly authoritarian style was, his supporters have argued, justified in a military leader faced with the confused circumstances of the Russian Civil War. But after the Makhnovists were expelled from Russia in 1921, the debate over leadership led to a split between anarchist fundamentalists and supporters of an "organisational platform." This apparently obscure controversy among exiled Russians and Ukrainians has had repercussions in West European anarchism down to the present, and was particularly important in the French student movement of 1968.

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I.           **THE MAKHNOVSHCHINA: PEASANT INSURGENCY IN UKRAINE**

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*Characteristics of Ukrainian Nationalism*

The story of the sustained peasant resistance to foreign invasion, Bolshevism, and right-wing reaction in Ukraine during the revolution and civil war presents problems both of narration and of interpretation.<sup>1</sup> This thesis focuses on one aspect of that resistance, the partisan movement led by the Russified anarchist Nestor Makhno, and centred around Guliai-Pole in left-bank Ukraine from 1917 to 1921.<sup>2</sup> The *Makhnovshchina* began as a non-ag-

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1. In his important study of the peasantry in Samara, Saratov, Simbirsk and Penza provinces during the civil war, Orlando Figes has put forward the first systematic analysis of the real political options open to peasants in *Russia*. He argues that the "village democracy" of 1917 was too weak to resist the "gentry reaction," and the peasantry therefore reluctantly acceded to the construction of a powerful centralised state apparatus, under the pressures of a social disintegration provoked by the civil war. It remains to be seen whether this interpretation holds for Ukraine, where the character of the peasant political economy differed significantly from that of most of European Russia (*Peasant Russia, civil war: the Volga countryside in revolution, 1917-1921* [Oxford, 1989], p.354-356).

2. The left bank of a river is on your left as you stand in the middle looking downstream. Thus, the left bank of the south-flowing Dnepr is to the east.

gressive attempt by the local peasantry to run their own lives.<sup>3</sup> Over four years, in response to social, military and political pressures, it changed into a dynamic and highly organised guerrilla campaign against intruders of every political persuasion. The pressures that helped to effect this change came from three main sources, the Bolsheviks, the Whites and the Ukrainian nationalists.

The particular conditions of the south-eastern periphery of the Russian empire dictated the nature of the Ukrainian revolution. These conditions were ideologically, as well as socially and economically peculiar. Nationalism developed later in Ukraine than in the rest of central eastern Europe, and possessed several special characteristics. Among these were the late emergence of a distinctive Ukrainian literary language and the division of Ukrainian national territory between Russia and Austria-Hungary. Anxious to foster national consciousness, Ukrainian intellectuals tried to reclaim Kiev Rus from the Muscovite historical tradition, and attempted to confirm it as a Ukrainian state. They elevated the Zaporozhian Sich, before its forced assimilation into the Russian empire, to a similar status.<sup>4</sup>

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3. The Russian suffix *-shchina*, attached to a personal or place name, carries, among other meanings, that of "movement" or "organisation".

4. Most non-Soviet Ukrainian historiography has remained more or less openly nationalist in character. See, for example, M. Hrushevs'kyi, *A history of the Ukraine* (New Haven, 1941); *Ukraine: a concise encyclopaedia* (Toronto, 1963- ); M. Antonovych, *Istoriia Ukrainy*, 2nd ed. (Winnipeg, 1966); O. Subtelny, *Ukraine: a history* (Toronto, 1988).



There is something to be said in favour of these claims to nationhood, as the achievement of independence by Ukraine in late 1991 has shown. Few informed Western Europeans would now dispute the national individuality of Ukraine, or argue that its language is merely a "Little Russian" dialect. But in Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century, as now, such attitudes were found on all sides and in the most unexpected places. Trotsky for instance, grew up in Ukraine, and writes in his autobiography: "[At school] I learned that scores of words which seemed beyond question at home were not Russian but Ukrainian jargon."<sup>5</sup> A later biographer commented: "To Lyova Bronstein [Trotsky], all his life, as is revealed in his autobiography written in 1929, the Ukrainian tongue was no language, but a peasant 'dialect' or 'jargon'." <sup>6</sup> This prejudice almost certainly coloured his judgement later, when it came to dealing with the Ukrainian nationalist movement in 1919.

In the nineteenth century it was the Imperial government which disputed the existence of a Ukrainian nation. The autocracy repressed the emergent Ukrainian national culture, even though it appealed only to a minority of intellectuals. At the same time, it failed to solve Ukraine's social and economic problems, many of which were common to the whole empire. That the population was made up largely of broad ethno-religious groupings was to the nationalists' advantage. These groups could be - and sometimes were

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5. *My life* (Harmondsworth, 1975), p.4

6. B. Wolfe, *Three who made a revolution* (Harmondsworth, 1966), p.210.

- crudely interpreted as class strata, namely the Russian *pomeshchiki*, the Jewish merchants, and the Ukrainian peasantry. Modern revisionist scholarship has continued to accept this broad equivalence of social "nationality" with economic class as a characteristic of Ukrainian society, especially on the right bank, where Russians were the bureaucrats, Poles were the landlords, Jews were the merchants and Ukrainians were the peasants to an overwhelming degree.<sup>7</sup> This Orthodox peasantry, the vast majority of the population, were united around a common hatred of landowners, Polish Catholics, and Jews: these last two groups being regarded as foreign in a way in which the Orthodox fellow-Slavs, the Russians, could never be.<sup>8</sup>

German romantic ideas of *Volkstum* (national character) exercised a powerful influence over the self-conscious Ukrainian intellectuals, based mainly in Western Ukraine, who led the nationalist movement. They attached great significance to the distinctive costume, folk-songs, proverbs, and other ethnological paraphernalia of the Ukrainian peasantry. This was partly because Ukraine lacked a distinctive bourgeois culture, and partly because nationalist militants accurately perceived that their natural constituency consisted largely of peasants. Their programmes were,

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7. See, for example, R. Suny, "Nationalism and class in the Russian revolution: a comparative discussion," in E. Frankel, J. Frankel and B. Knei-Paz (eds.), *Revolution in Russia: reassessments of 1917* (Cambridge, 1992), p.226.

8. For a harsh assessment of the political implications of this for Ukrainian nationalism, see E. H. Carr, *The Bolshevik revolution* (Harmondsworth, 1966), vol.1, p.295-312.

therefore, populist and opportunist, with strong elements of anti-Russian and anti-Jewish chauvinism, which later proved ineradicable.<sup>9</sup>

The Ukrainian impetus towards statehood in the early twentieth century was defeated, temporarily as it has turned out, by a Bolshevik revolution imported on the bayonets of the Red Army. The national recognition implicit in the seventy years of existence of the Ukrainian SSR has proved to be, in the end, a small and inadequate consolation.<sup>10</sup>

Internal weakness and a failure to muster peasant support for the nationalist project were the main causes of the collapse of the Ukrainian governments of 1918 and 1919. If those governments, the Rada and the Directory, had successfully coopted the *atamans* and their peasant bands, or welded them into a cohesive military force, then they might have had a chance of repulsing the Red Army.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps they might even have established a distinctively

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9. J. Armstrong, *Ukrainian nationalism*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1963), p.5-9.

10. Ironically, both in Ukraine and Belarus, it was the Soviet period which fostered cultural nationalism, especially in the 1920s. See J. Reshetar, *The Ukrainian revolution* (Princeton, 1952), p.331; A. Adams, *Bolsheviks in the Ukraine* (New Haven, 1963), p.401; O. Fedyshyn, *Germany's drive to the east and the Ukrainian revolution* (New Brunswick, 1971), p.260; on Belarus, see e.g. Steven L. Guthier, "The Belorussians: national identification and assimilation, 1897-1970," *Soviet Studies* vol.29, no.1 (January 1977), p.37-61.

11. *Rada*, "council", is the Ukrainian equivalent of the Russian *soviet*.

Ukrainian social democracy.<sup>12</sup> At the least they would have freed their troops for action against the Russians alone. In the event, for much of the time the peasant bands waged open warfare against the nationalists.

Makhno, for example, never moved closer towards such an alliance than an edgy armed neutrality while he dealt with other enemies. Yet the *Makhnovshchina*, although never nationalist, was initially a specifically Ukrainian response to the German and Austro-Hungarian invasion of 1918. The Russian-speaking Makhno thought of himself as a Ukrainian, and there is some evidence of national feeling among his rank-and-file.<sup>13</sup> Why, then, did he always turn for help to the Bolsheviks, and never to the nationalists?

### ***Peasant Resistance in Ukraine***

When the February revolution brought down the autocracy, it released the pent-up resentments of the nationalities of the empire against Russian political and cultural chauvinism. The Ukrainian intelligentsia was quick to seize its opportunity.

On 7/20 March 1917, in Kiev, representatives of various parties

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12. A brief opportunity occurred during the elections to the Constituent Assembly in November 1917, when peasant support for nationalist groups was apparently at a high point: 55 percent of the rural vote in Ukraine went to the Ukrainian SRs (the UPSR) and to the Ukrainian Peasant Union (Suny, op.cit., p.228).

13. See, for instance, *Vol'nyi Golos* (19 February 1919), p.4.

and cultural professional groups formed themselves into the Central Rada.<sup>14</sup> Although technically the Rada was not a government, it rapidly assumed the character of a provisional administration in Ukraine, dedicated to the establishment of an independent Ukrainian state. None of the left-leaning parties that made up its membership had devoted much thought to the peasants' problems. None of them had a concrete programme, or even the personnel to put the mildest reforms into effect.

Throughout the spring and summer of 1917 the Rada was busy with pressing political and constitutional questions. Its First Universal, issued on 11/24 June 1917, referred in passing to the nationalisation of land. It was not until 7/20 November that the Rada actually abolished private land ownership in Ukraine. Once the details of the decree emerged, it appeared that the Rada was merely capitulating to pressure from the Bolsheviki, who had seized power on 25 October/7 November 1917.

The Rada's lack of an effective land policy did not inhibit the peasants from taking action for themselves. From August onwards, the peasants of Guliai-Pole with the encouragement of the anarchist-dominated local soviet, were organising themselves into self-governing communes on the estates of the dispossessed *pomeshchiki*. They simply ignored the Rada, its policies, and its

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14. Before the calendar reform of 1/14 February 1918, Russia used the Julian calendar, which is 13 days behind the Gregorian calendar used in the West. I follow convention by indicating both dates.

decrees.

The Rada's relations with the Russian Bolsheviks deteriorated steadily, and in January 1918 communist forces under the command of Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko invaded Ukraine. On 9/22 January the Rada, unable to reach agreement with the Bolsheviks, formally declared Ukraine's independence in the Fourth Universal. Ukrainian forces put up some resistance to the Russian invader, but the lack of solid popular support told against them, and on 8 February 1918 the Russians drove the Rada from Kiev.

Ironically, it was on 9 February that the Rada's representatives at the peace talks taking place between Russia and the Central Powers in the border town of Brest-Litovsk, reached agreement with the Germans. The treaty would have been disadvantageous to the Ukrainians even had they been in effective control. Having just been expelled from their capital, they inevitably became German puppets. On 1 March 1918 German troops occupied Kiev, expelling the Bolsheviks and returning the Rada to power. By the end of the month the Germans and Austrians, with a little help from Rumania, had informally partitioned Ukraine, dividing the spoils of occupation between them.

Most of Ekaterinoslav province fell within the area allotted to Austria, whose main concern was to remove as much grain as possible. The Central Powers took control of Ukraine with speed and efficiency, and drove out both Bolsheviks and anarchists. The rapaciousness of their policy towards the peasants caused them

considerable extra difficulty. The Germans soon tired of the woolly socialism of the well-meaning Rada. On 29 April, in a bloodless coup d'etat, they restored the mediaeval Ukrainian monarchy in the person of *Hetman* Pavlo Skoropadskii, a former tsarist officer with German family connections.

By the summer of 1918 the Ukrainian peasantry was in a fighting mood, and armed bands were roaming the countryside. The Germans, who had long-term plans for their Ukrainian satellite, had been unable to prevent the former landlords from revenging themselves on the peasants. Nor could they ensure that Austrian grain-requisitioning proceeded at a tolerable pace. Fighting was breaking out in many different areas.

In Guliai-Pole Makhno had to choose, consciously or unconsciously, between organising a guerrilla force or abandoning his plans for an anarchist revolution on the left bank. Despite the theoretical problems of reconciling anarchist individualism with military effectiveness, he chose to fight.

Meanwhile, the fate of Ukraine was resolved, not in Kiev or Berlin or even Moscow, but on the western front. Germany's defeat by the Allies, and the hurried evacuation by the Central Powers of their occupied eastern territories left a military and political vacuum in Ukraine. On 14 December 1918 the forces of the Directory, a reincarnated Rada, occupied Kiev and brought down the Hetmanite monarchy of Skoropadskii.

Unfortunately the Directory suffered from the same fatal flaws of policy and administration as the Rada had done, and eventually succumbed for much the same reasons. The Directory's army swept into Kiev on a massive wave of popular support. It lacked the land policy and the cadres to ensure that the basis of that support, the poor peasants, remained loyal. United only in their opposition to the Hetman, the Directory's activists and most of its soldiers melted away once it had seized power. In addition the nationalists split disastrously into a centrist group, with Petliura the dominant figure, and a leftist faction that differed from the Bolsheviks only on the national question.

While the Directory was consolidating power in the northwestern Ukraine, other forces were gathering, ready to move into the areas abandoned by the Germans and the Austrians. In the southeast Krasnov's Don Cossacks and Denikin's Volunteer Army were poised in the Caucasus. There, they threatened to invade the Donets Basin, with its iron and steel mills, its manganese and its coal. In the north, in Russia itself, were the Bolshevik forces. Once more under the command of Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko, they were preparing to march into Ukraine for the second time, in support of Ukrainian communism. In the centre of Ekaterinoslav province, in control of a large area of rich steppe farmland, was Makhno's Insurgent Army. Battle-hardened against the Austrians, these partisans were already making contact with Denikin's forward patrols.



After a first clash between the Makhnovites and the Directory in Ekaterinoslav in late 1918, both sides withdrew into armed neutrality, to deal with more immediate threats. The Bolshevik advance into northern Ukraine in early 1919 was swift and successful, and on 5 February the Directory evacuated Kiev and retreated to the northwest. Simultaneously, the Bolshevik left flank made contact with Makhno. His forces extended along a thin line running northeast from the Sea of Azov, and an alliance was clearly in his interest.

By early spring 1919, the insurgents had agreed to be incorporated as a brigade into the Red Army. After some initial success in pushing Denikin back, the Makhnovites began to find Bolshevik political interference increasingly irksome. They were running short of ammunition and other supplies into the bargain. In the middle of May Denikin launched a counter-attack in the sector where Makhno's brigade secured the right flank of the 13th Red Army. On the first day of the offensive the Whites broke through, and in ten days had pushed the insurgents back for 100 kilometres, exposing the 13th Army's flank and rear. By the end of May the Bolsheviks were in full retreat northward along the whole front.

Recriminations for the disastrous collapse of the front flew back and forth between the Bolsheviks and the Makhnovites. On 29 May Makhno withdrew from the Red Army and returned to Guliai-Pole to convene a peasant congress. The Bolsheviks banned the congress

and attacked and destroyed the anarchist communes; they launched a campaign of vilification against Makhno, calling him a traitor and a counter-revolutionary. By July Denikin was driving hard towards Moscow, and Makhno was still retreating westwards across Ukraine. His retreat continued through August in a series of inconclusive engagements with the Whites, who continued to pursue and harass the exhausted insurgents.

In late September Makhno's column reached Uman' in northwest Ukraine, which was still in the hands of the remnants of the Directory. Handing his wounded over to the nationalists, Makhno turned near Peregonovka and fought a pitched battle against the Whites, routing them and breaking through to the east. Eleven days later he had covered the 660 kilometres from Uman' to Guliai-Pole, and his units began to harass Denikin's rear.

Denikin had underestimated Makhno, a misjudgement that some writers have claimed cost him Moscow and victory. First, Denikin's forces were defeated near Uman'. Then, the Makhnovites destroyed the White artillery depot at Berdiansk. Last, he lost his tenuous hold on the cities and villages in his rear. All this decisively weakened Denikin's forward momentum. The Red Army held its defensive line before Moscow, counter-attacked, and eventually, by the end of 1919, bottled Denikin up in the Crimea.

In December 1919 the Bolsheviks ordered Makhno's Insurgent Army, still operating in its home territory and badly hit by a typhus epidemic, to the Polish front. Makhno, well aware that if he

evacuated Guliai-Pole yet again he stood little chance of reestablishing a basis of popular support, refused point-blank to obey the command.

The newly-independent Poles felt that the Whites under Denikin and Kolchak, with their ideas of a great and indivisible Russian empire, were a greater threat than the Bolsheviks. Relations between Soviet Russia and the new Polish republic were strained, but not seriously so. But once it became obvious that Denikin could not win, the Poles could restrain themselves no longer and marched into Ukraine, an area that they had coveted for centuries. They advanced rapidly, and by 6 May 1920 they were in Kiev.

The Ukrainian nationalists made an alliance with the Poles, but only succeeded in losing much of their remaining domestic support. The Polish attack had aroused strong patriotic feeling among both Russians and Ukrainians: former tsarist officers flocked to join the Red Army. The Poles quickly lost the initiative after their early successes, and by August the Red Army had pushed them back to the gates of Warsaw. It seemed as if the revolution was on its way westwards to Germany. This see-saw struggle had little effect on Makhno in left-bank Ukraine. At the beginning of the year the Soviet authorities declared him an outlaw. Through the spring and summer he fought fiercely against their Lettish and Chinese detachments, selected to prevent fraternisation and further infection of Red troops with the germ of

*partizanshchina.*

The communist drive on Warsaw was a failure, and the Poles pushed the Red Army back in its turn. The Russians and Poles signed an armistice agreement at Riga on 12 October 1920. The end of hostilities meant the end of the hopes of the Ukrainian nationalists. They had shown themselves to be irredeemable opportunists by attempting to align themselves with any likely source of foreign support. These included the Germans in 1918, the French, whose navy had occupied the Black Sea ports in December 1918, and from whom the Petliurists sought help in January, and the Poles, traditional foes of Ukrainian independence, in 1920.<sup>15</sup> After the Directory's remaining troops made a couple of sorties across the border from Poland, their former allies in Warsaw disarmed and interned them.

The Russo-Polish war gave the Whites in Crimea the opportunity to regroup. The Bolsheviks regarded the White front as secondary, but they had to keep troops stationed there that they badly needed in Poland. At the beginning of June, Wrangel, who had replaced Denikin as White commander, took advantage of Soviet weakness and mounted a successful drive into the northern Tauride. After his three sea-borne descents on the Kuban to the east all failed, he decided to try to push further northwestwards across the Dnepr.

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15. For a detailed analysis of the French role, see T. L. Smart, "The French intervention in the Ukraine, 1918-1919," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Kansas, 1968). See also J. Rakowsky, "Franco-British policy toward the Ukrainian revolution, March 1917 to February 1918," (Ph.D. dissertation, Case Western Reserve University, 1974).

His objective was to join the Poles, who were still advancing. He also sent cavalry patrols northeastwards, well into Ekaterinoslav province.

Makhno was still operating independently, and in June he indignantly rejected an offer of cooperation from Wrangel, hanging the unfortunate messenger. He was in a precarious position, as White troops controlled parts of his territory, and he was fighting on two fronts against greatly superior numbers. In October he again accepted the integration of his force into the Red Army, under the command of M. V. Frunze. On 28 October the communists went on the offensive, smashing Wrangel's forces and driving them back into the Crimean peninsula. By 11 November the Red Army had stormed the narrow Perekop isthmus that connects the Crimea to the mainland. The White cause was a lost one. From the wreckage of his army Wrangel managed to evacuate 145,000 people by sea, including many civilian refugees.

The Bolsheviks immediately turned on Makhno, simultaneously attacking his troops in the Crimea and his territory in Ekaterinoslav. They executed several members of his staff. The Cheka began to arrest anarchists in the Ukrainian cities, although many of them had nothing to do with the *Makhnovshchina*. The remnants of the Insurgent Army, now faced with a single and determined enemy, began a series of raids all over southern Russia and Ukraine. They covered vast areas, ranging from Kursk to the Don, harassing in particular the grain requisition detachments. The peasants had

reached the limits of their endurance. Many were starving and few were willing to join a cause that all could see was hopeless. Gradually Makhno's forces dwindled, his raids became more desperate, his escapes from encirclement more costly. In August 1921, with about 250 men, he retreated across the Dneestr into Rumania, where the authorities promptly interned him. He was to spend the rest of his life in exile.

It is now widely accepted that the revolution of 1917 took place in the context of an emerging grass-roots political culture that was both radical and broadly democratic, in a populist sense. The expression of Russia's political pluralism was effected mainly through the mechanisms of the soviets and the factory committees in the towns and cities, and through rural soviets and village committees in the countryside, and these political structures reached their high point, in terms of independent activity and influence, in late 1917 and early 1918. With the outbreak of the civil war, however, the grass-roots structures were gradually weakened, and the centre of power shifted decisively to the organs of an increasingly *dirigiste* state framework, characterised quite early on by its highly bureaucratic nature.

It is relatively easy to see how this process took place, and even to argue that the conditions of the civil war made such a process, if not inevitable, at least necessary for the short-term survival of the Soviet government. But a key question remains whether the autocratic nature of the post-civil war political system, and especially of Stalinism, was a result of the experi-

ence of war conditions, or whether it was rather a logical consequence of the Marxist and later Marxist-Leninist ideological positions espoused by the Bolshevik party.<sup>16</sup> It was not only the political system as a whole which changed from relative openness in 1917 to authoritarianism. The Bolshevik party itself, which despite Lenin's prescriptions in *What is to be done?* (1902) was not in 1917 a particularly well-disciplined or centralised organisation, was well on the way to becoming so by 1921.<sup>17</sup>

Interestingly, the *Makhnovshchina* also displayed this characteristic pattern of change, starting with the anarchists' active participation in the Peasant Union, the Committee for the Defence of the Revolution, and the *Obshchestvennyi Komitet* in 1917, through to the establishment of the free communes in February 1918. As Orlando Figes has pointed out in connection with the Volga region, such committees and assemblies enabled the peasantry to articulate their grievances and aspirations in a focused way. Their functioning taught the peasants how to "do politics"

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16. This question has exercised many historians since it was first raised in an explicit form by Roger Pethybridge in 1974. See especially S. Fitzpatrick, "The civil war as a formative experience," in A. Gleason, P. Kenez and R. Stites (eds.), *Bolshevik culture: experiment and order in the Russian revolution* (Bloomington, 1985), p.57-58. Fitzpatrick also asks whether the Bolsheviks may not have in some sense *chosen to provoke* the civil war, as an extension of class warfare which they welcomed, and the socio-economic costs of which they may have been willing to bear (*ibid.*, p.74).

17. For an overall account of this process, see R. Service, *The Bolshevik party in revolution, 1917-1923: a study in organisational change* (New York, 1979); and the two earlier and pioneering local studies by A. Rabinowitch, *Prelude to revolution: the Petrograd Bolsheviks and the July 1917 uprising* (Bloomington, 1968); and *The Bolsheviks come to power: the revolution of 1917 in Petrograd* (New York, 1976).

at the local level in the vacuum left by the collapse of the Tsarist state. They were also able to seize the political initiative in many areas, and to organise and legitimise the *Chernyi Peredel*, the seizure of private lands from the landlords and its redistribution through the village communes.<sup>18</sup> Something like this was clearly happening in Guliai-Pole and its environs until the arrival of the occupying Austro-Hungarian forces in March 1918 put an abrupt end to the process.

This study will show that the increasing militarisation of the *Makhnovshchina* throughout 1919 and 1920 was accompanied by sporadic attempts to return to some sort of grass-roots political process, which was often incompatible with the urgent strategic needs of the moment. These attempts may also have been, at least partly, a result as much of the influence of urban anarchist intellectuals on the movement as of a desire by poor peasants to implement democratic practice. It is difficult to estimate the real influence which the various Makhnovite conferences and congresses actually had, despite the fact that the movement obviously retained significant popular support among peasants well into 1921.<sup>19</sup> But as Barrington Moore Jr. warned in the 1960s:

Naturally the peasant movement will not find its allies among the elite, though it may draw upon a section of it, especially a handful of discontented intellectuals in modern times, for its leaders. The intellectuals as such can do little politically unless

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18. Figes, *op.cit.*, p.40.

19. Figes terms Russian peasant traditions of social organisation "quasi-anarchist." In that case, loyalty to such traditions might have been a factor in the *Makhnovshchina*'s popularity (*op.cit.*, p.355).



they attach themselves to a massive form of discontent. The discontented intellectual with his soul searchings has attracted attention wholly out of proportion to his political importance, partly because these searchings leave behind them written records and also because those who write history are themselves intellectuals. It is a particularly misleading trick to deny that a revolution stems from peasant grievances because its leaders happen to be professional men or intellectuals.<sup>20</sup>

Figes argues that the later peasant revolts of the Volga region aimed for the most part to restore the "localised village democracy of the [1917] revolution, which had been lost as a result of the civil war and the emergence of the Bolshevik state."<sup>21</sup> But it is unclear whether this explanation, with its emphasis on democracy, so much as, for example, hatred of the grain requisition detachments, was the main motive force behind such revolts as Antonov's in Tambov Province in 1921, or the Ukrainian uprisings of Grigor'ev, Zeleny, Struk and Angel'.

Within the *Makhnovshchina* increased militarisation led inevitably to increased authoritarianism, in an ironic parallel to the process undergone by the both the Bolshevik party itself and the nascent Russian and Ukrainian states. But just as a return to the autonomous countryside of 1917 was impossible in the circumstances of civil war, so the survival of the militarised *Makhnovshchina* after 1921 was inconceivable. The huge and battle-tested Red Army, once it turned its full attention to the small groups of Makhnovite partisans, was impossible to defeat strate-

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20. Barrington Moore Jr., *Social origins of dictatorship and democracy* (Harmondsworth, 1966; 1973 repr.), p.480.

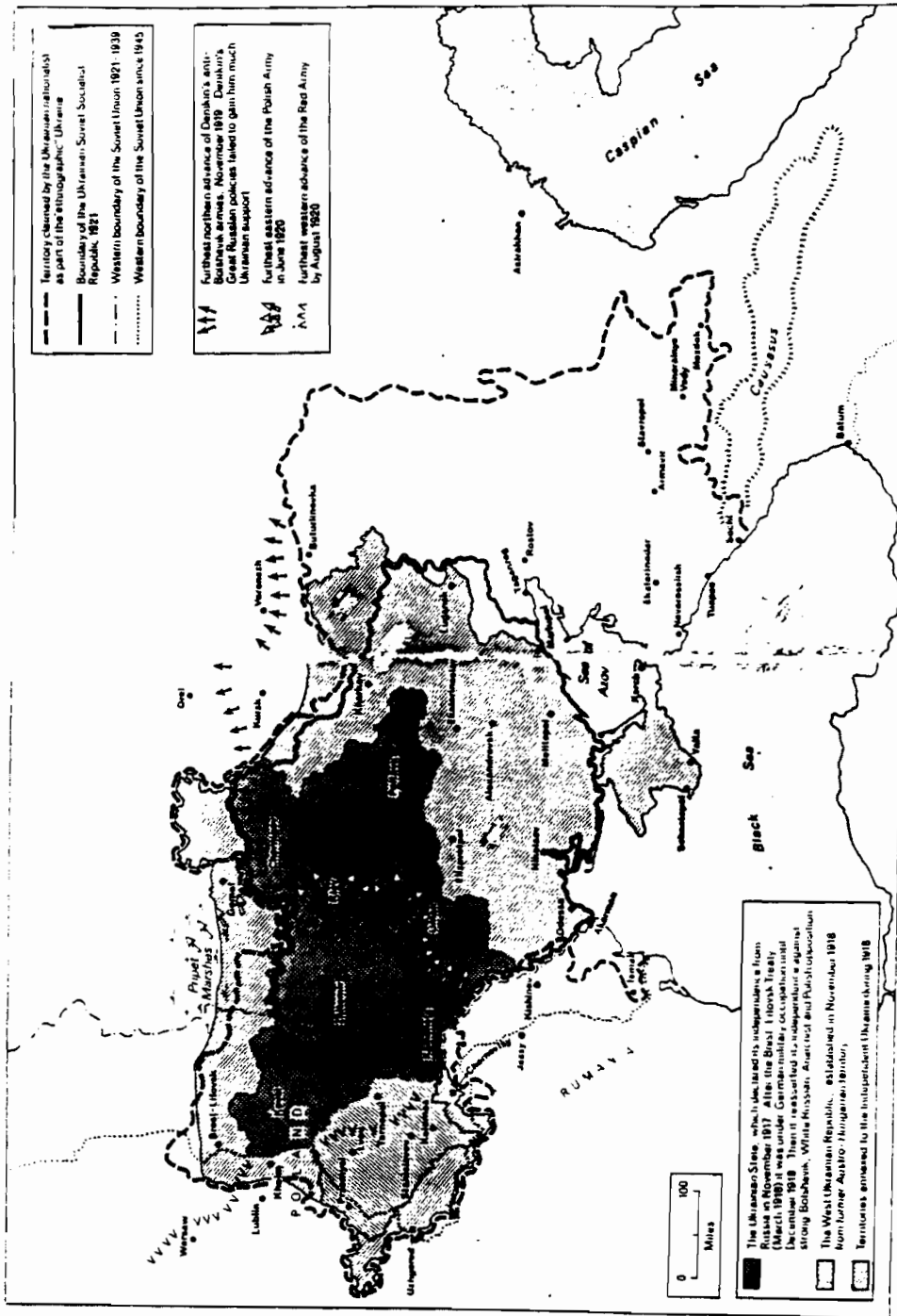
21. Figes, *op.cit.*, p.322.

gically, however many tactical victories the guerrillas might gain. With the retreat from war communism in 1921, peasant antipathy towards the Bolsheviks weakened significantly, and with it the strength of support for Makhno. It may be, as some historians have argued, that the real achievement of the *Makhnovshchina* and other peasant revolts all over Russia, Ukraine and Siberia was precisely to have helped to force the end of war communism and the introduction of NEP.<sup>22</sup> But the defeat of the semi-anarchist *Makhnovshchina* was nevertheless, just as much as similar peasant defeats in Siberia, on the Volga, and in Tambov, a defeat for traditional peasant aspirations towards autonomy, and a victory for the centralised and authoritarian state which was emerging from the "formative experience" of the civil war.

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22. Figes supports this view (*ibid.*, p.354). But caution is needed: the application of NEP measures in Ukraine did not begin until the autumn of 1921, that is to say *after* the defeat of the *Makhnovshchina*, so the process could not have been a linear one of cause and effect (*Istoriia Ukrain's'koi RSR* [Kiev, 1967], vol.2, p.178).

MAP 1  
UKRAINE, 1917-1921



Source: Martin Gilbert, *Russian history atlas* (London, 1972), map 97.

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## II. THE LITERATURE OF THE MAKHNOVSHCHINA.

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In the forty years or so from the end of the Second World War until the mid-1980s, Soviet history was a terrain contested largely between a quasi-Stalinist orthodoxy on one side, and a Western "Sovietology" on the other, which assumed as a "given" the totalitarian nature of the system with which it was dealing. For participants in this latter enterprise, as Sheila Fitzpatrick has pointed out, "the two key questions were how did the totalitarian system work and what were the origins of totalitarianism."<sup>1</sup> In a kind of reverse teleology, these scholars discovered the roots of the assumed totalitarian system first in early Leninist ideological constructs (principally the 1902 volume *What is to be done?*), and second in a particular interpretation of the events after 1917. In this view, since the Bolsheviks were following an ideological schema of their own, the emergence of the Stalinist dictatorship was inevitable, and questions regarding such issues as

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1. S. Fitzpatrick, "The legacy of the civil war," in D. Koenker, W. Rosenberg and R. Suny (eds.), *Party, state and society in the Russian civil war: explorations in social history* (Bloomington, 1989), p.385. This article is a detailed discussion of the general historiography of the civil war up to the mid-1980s, with an excellent summary of the "totalitarian" and "revisionist" models.

the nature of early Soviet democracy were by-and-large irrelevant.

But as more detailed research on the Bolsheviks before the revolution and in 1917 got underway in the 1970s and later, it became increasingly clear that this "totalitarian model" was both overly deterministic and conceptually inadequate. Scholars argued that the early Soviet state manifested at least two major and contradictory tendencies - the dictatorial face of War Communism and the Civil War, and the propitiatory face of pragmatism in the NEP period.<sup>2</sup>

In this way, the civil war became historiographically much more significant. It was no longer merely an extension of the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks, nor an interlude before they could get down to the serious business of constructing a monolithic power system. On the contrary, revisionist scholars began to look to the civil war *for explanations* of subsequent developments - to search, indeed, for the origins of Stalinism there.

At the same time, the war began to attract the attention of a generation of Western social historians - including some Marxists - searching for answers to their own type of questions about the dynamics of *social* change in the Soviet system after 1917. Detailed research results on the Communist Party itself, on factory

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2. Ibid., p.386. Fitzpatrick points to Stephen Cohen, Moshe Lewin and to a lesser extent Robert C. Tucker as leaders of this new interpretative trend.

committees and their workings, on labour policy and most recently on the peasantry have all showed that the hitherto conventional picture of the revolution as instigated by a disciplined group of professional revolutionaries was far too static. The Bolsheviks were as often controlled by events as vice versa, and in vast areas of Russian life were only able to exert a gradual and uncertain influence.

In this context, the old historiography of the civil war seen as in some sense a purely military and political event above society, in which an all-powerful party apparatus is projected backwards into the past, has been largely discarded. But although it can be argued that the broad outlines of the military history of the war are indeed now established, it is much less obvious that this is the case in the borderlands. The fighting between the Whites and the Reds is a well covered terrain, but much work remains to be done on local wars, peasant revolts and the like.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Problems with Earlier Accounts*

In the context of much of this new historiography, the literature of the *Makhnovshchina* looks distinctly old-fashioned. Despite claims for Makhno's historical importance from his ideological supporters, who have included libertarians and anarchists from

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3. See for example O. Figes' detailed summaries of the revolts on the Volga in his path-breaking *Peasant Russia, civil war: the Volga countryside in revolution, 1917-1921* (Oxford, 1989), p.321-353.

various countries, the most balanced serious account has, until recently, remained the thirty-year-old politico-military essay by the British historian David Footman.<sup>4</sup> The publication in the late 1980s of two new synthetic military histories of the Civil War as a whole, by the American historian W. Bruce Lincoln and the British scholar Evan Mawdsley, raised expectations that the Makhno movement might at last receive the serious treatment that it deserves.<sup>5</sup> These hopes were disappointed. Mawdsley devotes only a page or two to the subject, and Lincoln's treatment, while longer, also fails to raise or to deal with the major historiographical and ideological questions of the *Makhnovshchina* - leave alone social history in general.

From the mid-1920s onwards a series of articles and books about Makhno's exploits appeared in the emigre Russian and Ukrainian press, including some self-serving contributions by Makhno himself.<sup>6</sup> At least one serious full-length study was also published

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4. *Civil War in Russia* (London, 1961), p.245-302. For examples of the mythologising line of analysis, see Max Nomad, *Apostles of revolution* (London, 1939); and D. and G. Cohn-Bendit, *Obsolete communism: the left-wing alternative* (Harmondsworth, 1969). See also my comments below on the books by Palij, Malet and Skirda.

5. W. Bruce Lincoln, *Red victory: a history of the Russian civil war* (New York, 1989); E. Mawdsley, *The Russian civil war* (Boston, 1987). Before these two useful studies were published the only recent general treatment of the war as a whole had been J. Bradley's extremely sketchy *Civil war in Russia, 1917-1920* (London, 1975). A new Russian account also appeared in the 1980s: N. N. Azovtsev et al. (eds.), *Grazhdanskaia voina v SSSR* (Moscow, 1980-1986), 2 vols.

6. See, inter alia, the three volumes of autobiography, *Russkaia revoliutsiia na Ukraine* (Paris, 1929), also available in French as *La révolution russe en Ukraine* (Paris, 1970); *Pod udarami kontr-revoliutsii* (Paris, 1936); and *Ukrainskaia revoliutsiia* (Paris, 1937), the last two published posthumously.

in the Soviet Union in this period, as well as several shorter memoirs in historical and popular journals.<sup>7</sup> The two key volumes in the creation of the Makhno myth were produced in exile by Petr Arshinov and Volin, both former members of his entourage. These works are available in English and French, as well as other languages.<sup>8</sup>

No other partisan or insurgent movement in Ukraine - or in Russia - has received a fraction of this attention. The peculiarity of Makhno's movement was that as an anarchist, with contacts among the anarchist circles of Moscow dating back to his prison days, he could attract intellectuals to his cause. Both Arshinov and Volin joined him in Ukraine from Moscow. These same intellectuals, in the closed world of exile politics, began to use their experiences with Makhno to create the epic history with which we have become familiar.

After a minor resurgence of interest in the 1970s, two more-or-less well-documented studies of the *Makhnovshchina* appeared in

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7. M. Kubanin, *Makhnovshchina: krest'ianskoe dvizheniia v stepnoi Ukraine v gody grazhdanskoi voiny* (Leningrad, 1927).

8. P. Arshinov, *Istoriia makhnovskogo dvizheniia 1918-1920 gg.* (Berlin, 1923), available in English as *History of the Makhnovist movement, 1918-1921*, translated by L. and F. Perlman (Detroit, Chicago, 1974); Volin, *La révolution inconnue* (Paris, 1947 and reprints), available in a partial English edition (of Book 3) as *The unknown revolution (Kronstadt 1921, Ukraine 1918-21)* translated by H. Cantine (London, New York, 1955).



the early 1980s.<sup>9</sup> But none of these clarified the more contentious issues concerning Makhno. The publication of Michael Malet's doctoral dissertation had been awaited with interest by those still concerned with this particular episode of Soviet revolutionary history, but in the event it was far from being the definitive account. Similarly, the French text of Alexandre Skirda posed some serious problems to a proper understanding of *Makhnovshchina*. Both Skirda and Malet were sympathetic to Makhno's beliefs, in some instances almost romantically so. Skirda writes, for instance, that

[...] the struggles and exemplary actions conducted by Makhno and the Ukrainian insurgents - trying to maintain the gains of the revolution of 1917 - have shown, for the first time in contemporary history, the validity of the libertarian communist project and represent by virtue of this a precious contribution for the international revolutionary inheritance.<sup>10</sup>

Malet also declares his "sympathy with Makhno and his ideals."<sup>11</sup> Their partisanship, unfortunately, reinforces a tendency in both authors to accept unsupported evidence from interested parties as fact. More seriously, their moralistic problematic avoids questi-

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9. In the early 1970s a Canadian scholar published an interesting study making extensive use of interviews with Ukrainian emigrés in North America (V. Peters, *Nestor Makhno* [Winnipeg, 1970]). M. Palič, *The anarchism of Nestor Makhno, 1918-1921* (Seattle, 1976) was the first study in English to fully exploit Ukrainian published sources. Michael Malet, *Nestor Makhno in the Russian civil war* (London, 1982) is based on a doctoral dissertation; see also Alexandre Skirda, *Nestor Makhno, le cosaque de l'anarchie: la lutte pour les soviets libres en Ukraine, 1917-1921* (Paris, 1982).

10. Skirda, op.cit., p.427.

11. Malet, op.cit., p.ix. Much of the analysis that follows is based on the author's review essay, "The myth of Nestor Makhno," *Economy and Society* vol.14, no.4 (1985), p.524-536.

ons of class struggle and political economy as much as possible. Both authors, for instance, refer to the Zaporozhian Sich to clarify the rebelliousness of the Ukrainian peasantry in 1917, when the growth of capitalist relations between rural classes provides a much more convincing local explanation.<sup>12</sup>

Both authors present, in essence, three claims about the nature of the *Makhnovshchina* and the character of its leader, two of which need to be carefully examined; the third is not an historical question in quite the same way. The first two claims are that the anarchists in power were able to organise communes for agricultural production, providing an object lesson in practical anarchism; and that the economic, social and military decisions of the movement were taken according to a coherent revolutionary ideology which the Makhnovites maintained in a principled way.

What the third claim amounts to is that Makhno was an honourable revolutionary twice betrayed by an unscrupulous and ruthless opponent, the Bolshevik party. It is almost impossible to adjudicate such a argument in moral terms, since it arises out of a subjective view of abstract ethical questions. However, it is possible to demonstrate, at least, whether the factual basis on

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12. Colin Darch, "Nestor Makhno and peasant anarchism in southern Russia during the revolution and civil war, 1917-1921," (Paper presented to the History Dept. Seminar, University of Dar es Salaam, 1978), p.15.

which such a perception is based is sound or not.<sup>13</sup> Let us examine these claims one by one.

The collapse of civil administration and the chaos of military occupation and civil war gave the *Makhnovshchina* a couple of brief intervals in which to try to organise productive communes along anarchist lines. The first of these opportunities occurred in February 1918, when a system of communes got under way for a few weeks, before the Austro-German invasion destroyed for the time being all hope of social revolution.

Makhno's writings contain little information on the organisation of the communes, despite their centrality to anarchist claims that he made a peasant revolution. Nobody would maintain that Makhno was an important anarchist theoretician; the importance of his military role in 1919 is undeniable.<sup>14</sup> But if Makhno is to be studied as anything more than a guerrilla leader, his anarchist practice must be taken into account as well.

In this first period of experimentation little can have been done before the arrival of the Austrian invaders. In the only description we have, Makhno makes far-reaching claims. The redistribution of livestock and farming equipment was undertaken by demobilised soldiers, under the supervision of a committee of anar-

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13. Subjective evaluations of individual motive need to be based on some kind of concrete evidence of the actor's state of mind and intentions. Such evidence, in Makhno's case, is lacking.

14. Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.231-232.

chists.<sup>15</sup> The goods were placed in a communal fund, but the dispossessed kulaks were generously left with two pairs of horses, one or two cows, and a plough, a mower, a seeder and a pitchfork, and land to work as well; this in an area where the kulaks already owned over 90 per cent of the mowers, and about half the land under crops. The former landlords' estates (which in this area averaged four times the size of those in Russia), were occupied by groups of peasants.

On the internal organisation of the communes, Makhno unfortunately concentrates on the eating arrangements. Apparently the kitchens and dining rooms were communal, but individuals or families who wanted to eat separately could do so. Similarly, anybody could absent themselves from communal work simply by notifying his or her colleagues. Management was in the hands of a general meeting of the members of the commune, which assigned tasks.

Makhno claims that there were four communes within 15 kilometres of Guliai-Pole, and others in the district, each one consisting of ten households, or 100 to 300 individuals. He alleges that there was at least some conflict over the division of livestock and equipment between the communards and other local peasants.<sup>16</sup>

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15. This is interesting in itself. The Black Redistribution of 1917 normally involved *land*, but specifically not livestock or equipment. See M. Dobb, *Russian economic development since the revolution* (London, 1928), p.340.

16. Makhno, *Russkaia revoliutsiia na Ukraine*, p.173-175.

Malet quotes selectively from this passage, but omits the principal details of organisation, such as they are.<sup>17</sup> He concludes that "the Makhnovist movement is proof that peasant revolutionaries can put forward positive, practical ideas." They certainly can, but missing from this account, as from others of the later period, is any indication that this was a process of production.<sup>18</sup> There is nothing on social relations of production, on the division of labour, on crop selection, on the labour process, on marketing, on the distribution of surplus; simply three hundred undifferentiated anarchists and peasants in a communal canteen, taking a day off whenever they felt like it. These few weeks in spring were to serve as the basis for a social revolution.

Makhno's second, and more prolonged opportunity to set up agrarian communes came when the Central Powers, defeated on the Western front, began to withdraw their forces of occupation from Ukraine in late 1918. The Russian communists had signed an agreement with the Ukrainian nationalist government in Kiev, promising non-interference in the affairs of the Ukrainian republic. In the complex political and military situation of late 1918 and early 1919 the agreement broke down, and the Ukrainian Directory declared war on Soviet Russia, hoping for support from French forces in Odessa. The French conditions for assistance were so humiliating that agreement was never reached, and the Bolshevik

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17. Malet, *op.cit.*, p.120.

18. Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.85-86.

armies occupied Kiev.

The fall of the Directory offered the *Makhnovshchina* another relatively calm period in early 1919. There was peaceful coexistence with the Bolsheviks of Ekaterinoslav, and the Red Army was busy occupying major urban centres in northern Ukraine. The Directory itself no longer had a military presence in the south-east.<sup>19</sup> The peasants started to return to the system of communes that they had adopted in 1917-1918. Anarchist commentators are careful to distinguish these working or free communes, from the traditional *obshchina* or from Bolshevik communes, but do so in the vaguest of terms.

"These were real working communes of peasants [...]" wrote Arshinov, "[...] each found there whatever moral and material support he needed. The principles of brotherhood and equality permeated the communes. Everyone - men, women and children - worked according to his or her abilities [...]. It is evident that these communes had these traits because they grew out of a working milieu and that their development followed a natural course."<sup>20</sup>

Again, there were few of these communes. One was named after Rosa Luxemburg, and grew from a few dozen members to about 300, but was finally broken up by Bolshevik forces in June 1919, after the split between Makhno and Trotsky.<sup>21</sup> Similar communes were scattered about near Guliai-Pole, in a radius of perhaps twenty

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19. Makhno, *Ukrainskaia revoliutsiia*, p.168.

20. Arshinov, op.cit., p.85-86; translation by L. and F. Perlman, from the English edition (Detroit, Chicago, 1974).

21. Volin, op.cit., p.543.

kilometres; yet the sketch map of Makhno's area of operations printed by Arshinov claimed for the "central Makhnovite area" a radius from Guliai-Pole of about 120 versts, or 128 kilometres.<sup>22</sup> Skirda repeats this description of the Rosa Luxemburg commune without comment, in a brief discussion of the agrarian policy of the Makhnovites.<sup>23</sup>

Malet is even less convincing on the vexed question of the class composition of the Makhnovite movement. He accepts at face value the conciliatory Makhnovite line that "given time, the kulaks would be won over to the equalitarian [sic] redistribution of the land brought on by the revolution in general."<sup>24</sup> In attempting to argue against the idea put forward by Soviet analysts that the *Makhnovshchina* relied on the support of the kulaks and richer peasantry, Malet fails to consider the specific class structure of the region where Makhno's operations were based. He is aware that Ukraine and southern Russia were areas in which peasant capitalist relations were highly developed, but his brief and unnuanced account of the late nineteenth century political economy of Ukraine is not called on in his discussion, over 100 pages later, of the nature of peasant support for Makhno's "united villages."<sup>25</sup> It is easy to see why richer peasants might prefer a movement that proposed that "the ways and means of the new method

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22. Arshinov, op.cit., p.84-85.

23. Škirda, op.cit., p.115.

24. Malet, op.cit., p.118.

25. Malet, op.cit., p.xvii-xx and p.117-125.

of land organisation should be left to the completely free and natural decision and movement of the entire peasantry," to the Bolsheviks with their emphasis on the sharpening of class conflict at the expense of the rural bourgeoisie.<sup>26</sup>

In discussing Makhno's attitude to workers, Malet falls back on the defence that Makhno "genuinely believed" in the worker-peasant alliance, but did not occupy any towns long enough to establish good relations.<sup>27</sup> It does not seem to have occurred to him that systematic commodity exchange between industry and agriculture is the economic basis for the alliance, and that this cannot be established by bartering train-loads of grain whenever the peasants happen to have a surplus.<sup>28</sup> The problem is precisely that it is the kulaks who are most likely to benefit from such an exchange, since it is they, with their large-scale capitalist production, who regularly dispose of sufficient marketable surplus to take part in such an arrangement on a contractual basis.<sup>29</sup>

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26. Ibid., p.118, quoting Kubanin, op.cit., p.112. This is a complex issue. If the Black Redistribution of 1917 included, in Makhnovite areas, reallocation of livestock and equipment, then kulak support for the *Makhnovshchina* would be surprising. No libertarian writer seems to have spotted this point.

27. Ibid., p.125.

28. Ibid., p.119-120.

29. This is another complex question. Poorer peasants marketed surpluses, and a distinction needs to be made in the terminology between surplus over consumption (which the kulaks disposed of); marketed surplus at the expense of consumption, and surplus in the strictly Marxist sense of the economic resources necessary to reproduce given production relations. Even this last type of surplus may be disposed of at the cost of consumption.



Turning to the second claim, the idea that the anarchism of the Makhnovites was a coherent political ideology, we confront similar problems. The inherent contradictions of anarchism have been amply dealt with by thinkers from Marx onwards, and there is no need to rehearse them here. Anarchist theorists such as Bakunin and Kropotkin could and did, nevertheless, think and act in a coherent way politically. By contrast, both in theory and practice, the ideology of Makhno and his followers generally was confused and inchoate.

There is as little concrete information on Makhnovite political administration as there is on the communes. The role of the soviets was defined in a draft basic statute on the free workers' Soviet, and Skirda translates another document on the Makhnovite concept of the soviets.<sup>30</sup> According to the first of these texts the soviet should be non-partisan, egalitarian and should include only workers. The soviets should not have executive power.<sup>31</sup>

The document printed by Skirda is a speech given at a meeting of the "free soviet of Guliai-Pole." It defines the free workers' soviet as free because it is independent of central authority, and as a workers' soviet because it includes only workers, serves their interests, and allows of no other political influence. The

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30. Volin, op.cit., p.542; Arshinov, op.cit., p.176. Skirda, op.cit., p.471-473.

31. Volin, op.cit., p.542; Arshinov, op.cit., p.80.

speaker continues, revealingly:

In other, calmer circumstances, one must believe that this same movement would have led finally to the laying of the foundations for a truly free workers' society.

But to our regret, these are currently only dreams, for the hard reality presents a very different aspect.<sup>32</sup>

It is this tendency to blame adverse conditions for the failure of the anarchist dream that gives the game away. In other circumstances we should have done better; if we could only have occupied the towns for longer we should have won the workers over; if the war had not destroyed the communes, we would have convinced the kulaks.

Makhno was a dreamer in precisely this sense, as he reveals in an extraordinary theoretical work that was published in German under the title "The ABC of the Revolutionary Anarchist":

Anarchism is not the teaching of a theory, nor of programmes artificially built on the basis of such a theory to undertake the attempt to conceive of and grasp the life of man as a whole. Anarchism is a teaching of life, real life, in all its healthy manifestations, of a life that which grows beyond and will not be pressed into artificial norms [...] What is unchangeable in scientific anarchism is its natural being, which basically expresses itself in the negation of all chains and every enslavement of mankind.<sup>33</sup>

At all levels of policy except the military, Bat'ko Makhno showed

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32. Skirda, op.cit., p.473.

33. *Das ABC des revolutionären Anarchisten* (Berlin, 1926), p.1. The Russian original of this work is not known to me. I am grateful to Gottfried Wellmer for the translation from German.

himself ill-equipped to deal with practical problems. He declared all currencies, Red or White, Ukrainian or Russian, to be legal tender, and distributed the contents of banks to the population. Malet charitably describes this as "blissful ignorance of [...] the vicious cruelty of high-rate inflation."<sup>34</sup> There was no attempt to impose price controls, and when the Makhnovites occupied a town food and money were distributed without question until they ran out. Transport questions, industrial relations, financial policy - any economic problem above the level of family agriculture - were treated in the same cavalier fashion.

For Malet and Skirda, these are not crippling weaknesses. Malet concludes that if the Makhnovites "helped to create confusion [...] they also alleviated it by generous grants to those in need, with a minimum of red tape [...]"<sup>35</sup> Skirda quotes with apparent approval the remark made by Volin that "the anarchists are not seeking power, [...] the 'masses' must act on their own account.[...]"<sup>36</sup> Volin also claimed that the Makhnovite partisans exerted no pressure on the peasants, but confined themselves to propaganda in favour of free communes.<sup>37</sup> Thus the Makhnovites destroyed the existing economic structures of their region, and disclaimed responsibility for the consequences.

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34. Malet, *op.cit.*, p.112.

35. *Ibid.*, p.113.

36. Skirda, *op.cit.*, p.394.

37. Volin, *op.cit.*, p.544.

The idea that Makhno was an honourable revolutionary betrayed by less scrupulous opponents has also played an important part in the building of his historical image. Unhappily, like other elements in that image, it is compounded of a mixture of half-truths. A case in point is the question of Makhno's break with the Red Army in late May 1919, which showed at least a certain lack of responsibility on his part.

On 14 May the 2nd Red Army, which included Makhno's brigade, and the 8th and 13th Armies, began a long-expected attack on the Donbass, and liberated Lugansk.<sup>38</sup> Units of these Armies also moved deep into the White rear, capturing Kuteinskovo railway station. In reply Denikin moved Shkuro's cavalry corps from the front of the Red 9th Army to face the 13th Army.<sup>39</sup> He aimed the blow at the sector where the Makhnovites held the right flank of the 13th Army. Makhno's forces had been enfeebled by the campaign against Grigor'ev, a partisan rebel.<sup>40</sup>

In the days between 16 and 19 May Shkuro's cavalry broke through Makhno's sector. On 22 May Shkuro took three villages from Makh-

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38. The Donets River Basin, or Donbass, was an important industrial centre with factories and mines in eastern Ukraine on the border with the Don Cossack region.

39. *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine 1918-1920: sbornik dokumentov i materialov* [hereafter *GVU*] (Kiev, 1967), vol.2, p.786.

40. Both Malet and Skirda deal with Grigor'ev at some length (Malet, *op.cit.*, p.138ff.; Skirda, *op.cit.*, p.161ff.)

no. Initial attempts to counter-attack failed.<sup>41</sup> In the space of one day the White cavalry advanced 45 kilometres. The Whites exploited their success against the Makhnovite partisans, and within three days opened a gap 35 kilometres wide and 100 kilometres deep in the sector. By the end of the month the Makhnovite rout had exposed the right flank and rear of the 13th Army and thrown the whole front into retreat.<sup>42</sup>

The abandonment of the front by the Makhnovites, and the subsequent loss of Ukraine to the Bolsheviks remains controversial.<sup>43</sup> Some anarchist accounts claim that Trotsky, who had arrived in Ukraine in mid-May, made it hard for the anarchists to defend themselves, both by disseminating propaganda, and by starving them of supplies and equipment. Although Malet does not make much of this argument, Skirda rehearses it with some bitterness.<sup>44</sup> Certainly Trotsky's dislike of the insurgent groups led him at times to express himself in violent terms. He called for the "radical and merciless liquidation" of the partisan movement, and appointed a new commander to the 2nd Army, sending reinforcements

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41. *GVU*, vol.2, p.786.

42. See *GVU*, vol.2, p.786; and A. I. Denikin, *Ocherki russkoi smuty* (Paris, Berlin, 1921-1926), vol.5, p.104. Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.124, says the breakthrough occurred on Makhno's left flank. Malet, *op.cit.*, p.37, refers to another Soviet source which allegedly confirms this, but without citing it.

43. See variously Cohn-Bendit, *op.cit.*, p.222-223; D. Guerin, *Anarchism from theory to practice* (New York, 1970), p.101. Compare E. Yaroslavsky, *History of anarchism in Russia* (New York, 1937), p.69-71: "Makhno retreated far into the rear, where his men spent their time disarming, robbing and murdering Red Army men."

44. Skirda, *op.cit.*, p.120-125.

from Khar'kov to help control Makhno's troops. This was to be done by removing the commanders and disciplining the rank-and-file.<sup>45</sup>

Makhno's anarchism was only kulak banditry in fancy dress, believed Trotsky; he is alleged to have told his commanders that it would be better to lose Ukraine to Denikin than to Makhno.<sup>46</sup> While these political attacks continued, Trotsky's field commanders tried to plug the gap, ordering infantry and artillery reinforcements to take over Makhno's former position.<sup>47</sup> Nonetheless, on 27 May the Red Army was forced out of Lugansk, which it had captured only two weeks earlier.

Skirda follows Arshinov and other anarchist writers in suggesting that the Bolshevik commanders deliberately starved the insurgents of weapons so that they might be more easily neutralised; but they had not realised how strong the Volunteer Army actually was, and were not expecting such a heavy attack. Skirda argues that "this supplying by drip-feed [was] premeditated"; Arshinov cites the unfulfilled promise by a visiting Bolshevik in early May to have ammunition sent from Khar'kov forthwith.<sup>48</sup>

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45. J. M. Meijer (ed.), *The Trotsky papers* [hereafter cited as *TP*] (The Hague, 1964-1971), vol.1, p.460-463.

46. The sources for this are all anarchist: Volin, *op.cit.*, p.562; Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.124; A. Berkman, *The Bolshevik myth: diary 1920-1922* (London, 1925), p.189.

47. *GVU* vol.2, p.78-79.

48. Skirda, *op.cit.*, p.121; Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.115-117.

The case remains hard to prove. The Red Army did not have an adequate supply system or a clear chain of command; a Bolshevik failure to deliver supplies in these circumstances is unsurprising. The repeated calls for reinforcements in Makhno's sector, from Bolsheviks to Bolsheviks, belie any particular desire to see the Insurgent Army annihilated. The Bolsheviks simply did not trust the Makhnovites, and both sides seized on any excuse to justify the lack of trust.

On 29 May the Makhnovite headquarters sent the commander of the front a telegram announcing that they had decided to create an independent army, led by Makhno. Arshinov fails to mention this. On the same day the Bolsheviks ordered Makhno's arrest.<sup>49</sup> If the Bolsheviks did indeed order Makhno's arrest on 29 May, the date of his resignation becomes an academic question, unless the motive for the arrest order was Makhno's intention to create his own army. But if the arrest was a preventative measure, then "betrayal" by the Bolsheviks may not be too strong a term.

At this point it is interesting to compare Skirda and Malet, for the chronology of events becomes important. Malet prints a chronology in which he gives the date of Makhno's resignation as 9 June, although in his text he writes that the first telegram was

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49. V. A. Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski o grazhdanskoi voine* (Moscow, 1924-1933), vol.4, p.307-308.

sent in late May.<sup>50</sup> The Bolsheviks knew of Makhno's resignation by the 30th at the latest.<sup>51</sup> If Makhno did split away from the Red Army in May, then subsequent Bolshevik actions can hardly be seen as treacherous. Malet wisely skirts around this issue, but Skirda is not so cautious: he writes that "up to this point the insurgents [had] scrupulously respected the military alliance which had been concluded," and that the Bolsheviks wanted to "prevent the revolutionaries from making the revolution!"<sup>52</sup>

In the meantime, the insurgents decided to call an extraordinary congress for 15 June to discuss the White breakthrough and the crisis in relations with the Reds. The call which was issued was addressed to all the districts of two provinces, to all insurgents, and provocatively to all Red Army troops in the area.<sup>53</sup>

The Bolshevik reaction was harsh. The Whites had captured Bakhmut, north-east of Guliai-Pole, on 1 June. The Bolsheviks accused Makhno of seeking the protection of the Soviet flag, and of then attacking the political organisation of the Red Army and the Soviet government, while trying to consolidate his power. On 4 June Trotsky issued Order No.1824, a document Arshinov prints as proof of Bolshevik perfidy. Skirda also quotes the provisions, if

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50. Malet, op.cit., p.xii.

51. *TP* vol.1, p.486-487.

52. Skirda, op.cit., p.146, 153.

53. Arshinov, op.cit., p.117-118.



not the preamble.<sup>54</sup> In the circumstances, the order was reasonable; it banned the Congress as an incitement to another anti-Soviet revolt and the further opening up of the front.

Despite the exaggerated claims made by Makhno's admirers, two things should be said about Nestor Makhno and his followers, modest points in their favour that are clear from the evidence, and tell us something about the kind of political movement we are dealing with. The first is that the leadership twice allied itself with the Red Army to fight the counter-revolutionary forces of Denikin in 1919 and Wrangel in 1920; they refused to contract any such alliance with the counter-revolution against the Bolsheviks for tactical advantage. This shows at least a rudimentary understanding of the class forces at play in those critical years. Secondly, and all the serious writing about Makhno is unanimous on this, the accusation of systematic anti-Semitism against the *Makhnovshchina* is a canard. Both Malet and Skirda are right to emphasise that Makhno struggled to eliminate anti-Semitism at all levels among his followers, with considerable success.<sup>55</sup>

### *Historiography and Ideology*

The writing of the history of the *Makhnovshchina* has been largely left to historians of libertarian or Ukrainian nationalist lean-

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54. Skirda, op.cit., p.151.

55. Malet, op.cit., p.168-174; Skirda, op.cit., p.395-402.

ings. But the central point of interest, apart from military history, is arguably the failure of the Bolsheviks to mobilise the poor peasantry effectively in precisely that part of the country most heavily exploited by capitalist export agriculture, and bordering on the Donbass, a major industrial area. The history of the Bolshevik suppression of Ukrainian peasant resistance raises theoretical issues not only regarding the nature of Ukrainian nationalism today, in the post-Soviet period, but may well also carry implications for theories of relations between the state and the peasantry in the Third World in the 1990s.<sup>56</sup> It is not the intention of this thesis to explore such issues explicitly, but rather to allow them to emerge in the course of the narrative and its argument.

Students of rural revolt in the Third World have long debated whether classical Marxist political theory provides an adequate framework for the analysis of national revolutions made by the peasantry.<sup>57</sup> The Russian and Ukrainian green movements provide a fascinating early case-study of peasant revolt, and of the origins of late Marxist-Leninist attitudes towards the worker-peas-

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56. The working class in eastern Ukraine today, for example, remains largely Russian-speaking: patterns of support on the independence issue in 1991 did not, however, reflect simple language categories.

57. See, for example, E. Wolf's now classic comparative study on *Peasant wars in the twentieth century* (London, 1971).

ant alliance in practice.<sup>58</sup>

These rebellions have not received the kind of attention that they deserve from the left. This is partly because of methodological difficulties. Although the basic source material for the history of the Civil War is becoming accessible, it will be years before it can be fully assimilated. The reworking of such a wealth of primary source material in order to produce an historiography reflecting the preoccupations of the late twentieth century - towards a gender-conscious history of the Civil War, for example - will take some time.<sup>59</sup> Meanwhile, the documents and memoirs that are already available in published form are as polemical and unreliable as the ordinary run of historical sources.

A libertarian historiography has largely staked out this terrain and is reflected in a mystified version of the specific history

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58. This use of "green" to characterise peasant insurgencies has nothing to do with the use of the term in modern ecological politics. In the context of the struggle between "Reds" and "Whites", it seems that peasant bands were either called "green" (*zelënyi* in Russian) because of their habitat in the forest, or as a punning reference to the name of the Ataman Zeleny, who operated mostly in Kiev and Poltava provinces (A. Berkman, *The Bolshevik myth: diary 1920-1922* [London, 1925], p.161; W. Allen, *The Ukraine: a history* [Cambridge, 1940], p.314). "Greens" was also the nickname of Tsarist frontier-guards along the Polish border, because of the colour of their badges (J. Pilsudski, *The memoirs of a Polish revolutionary and soldier* [London, 1931], p.49).

59. A shift of emphasis away from the military and political and towards the social history of the civil war - and indeed of modern Russia - has been taking place since the late 1980s, and this has included work on gender issues. See, for example, B. Farnsworth, "Village women experience the revolution," in A. Gleason, P. Kenez and R. Stites (eds.), *Bolshevik culture: experiment and order in the Russian revolution* (Bloomington, 1985), p.238-260; and B. Evans Clements, "The effects of the civil war on women and family relations," in D. P. Koenker, W. G. Rosenberg and R. G. Suny (eds.), *Party, state and society in the Russian civil war: explorations in social history* (Bloomington, 1989), p.105-122.

of these revolts that has gained wide acceptance. Thus we see repeated as fact in the footnotes to which histories of the Russian revolution and Civil War consign the *atamanshchina*, a series of claims about Nestor Makhno, for example, which can at best only be considered unproven.

The consensus among Western historians at least, has been that Makhno's movement is important for four reasons.<sup>60</sup> First, although bourgeois intellectuals attached themselves to the movement in its middle stages, they were never leaders or contributed anything more than advice. The *Makhnovshchina*, therefore, might have been a genuine example of a spontaneous uprising of the toiling masses. Second, in 1917 and 1919 Makhno tried to put his social and economic ideas into practice in the region that he controlled. This is a rare example of anarchism in practice. Third, Makhno was an outstanding guerrilla leader, and in September 1919 played a decisive role in the defeat of Denikin's advance on Moscow. Fourth, his movement, directed by and consisting almost entirely of toilers, genuinely represented the Russian peasants and their aspirations, in a way that other movements did not.

These claims are open to several objections. There is no conclusive proof that the movement's membership consisted mainly of

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60. See, inter alia, Footman, *op.cit.*, p.245; W. Chamberlin, *The Russian revolution* (New York, 1965), vol.2, p.232-239; E. H. Carr, *The Bolshevik revolution* (Harmondsworth, 1966), vol.1, p.307-310; J. Reshetar, *The Ukrainian revolution* (Princeton, 1952), p.249-252; M. Nomad, *op.cit.*, p.302-341.

poor peasants. There are grounds for supposing that a principle<sup>al</sup> motive behind the *Makhnovshchina* was the highly developed sense of property among the Ukrainian rural population. If this is the case, then the Soviet charge that the movement was a kulak one might be partly justified.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, Makhno's "anarchism" was unorthodox, and his leadership was at times authoritarian in the extreme. To what extent the anarchist ideology of the leaders and fellow-travellers permeated the rank-and-file of the movement remains an open question. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish what might be termed "self-conscious anarchism" from the peasant's nostalgia for the mythical past, when he was master of his affairs. Makhno's success as an outstanding guerrilla fighter depended on a well-developed tactical instinct, and countless tricks and ruses. He lacked strategic sense, and relied on a single base, Guliai-Pole, in the middle of the open steppe. He often banked heavily on luck and the goodwill of temporary allies. For much of the time he was not fighting guerrilla warfare at all, but a conventional war of movement with cavalry and *tachanki*.<sup>62</sup> His victory at Peregonovka was a regular action.

Last, the Ukrainian peasants during the first quarter of this century differed from their Russian counterparts not only linguistically and ethnographically but also economically. In Uk-

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61. *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, [hereafter cited as *BSE*], 2nd or 3rd eds., s. v. "Makhnovshchina", "Makhno".

62. The *tachanka* is a horse-drawn cart. Makhno mounted Lewis machine-guns on them and used them as mobile gun-platforms.

raine commercial farming was dominant, and the system of repartitional tenure was not in widespread use. The contrast between rich and poor peasants was more sharply marked than in Russia. Generalisations about the aspirations of the peasantry of the Russian empire are unlikely to withstand examination, if they depend solely on the behaviour of the Ukrainian *partizanshchina*. In 1905, peasant uprisings were most violent in provinces where repartitional tenure was dominant. This pattern fails to predict such persistent unrest in those parts of Ukraine where it was sustained in 1917-1921.<sup>63</sup>

To contemporaries and to historians alike the Makhnovite movement offered and still offers a wealth of opportunities for controversy. Outside the former Soviet Union there is little surviving documentation - a few proclamations and newspapers of unknown provenance scattered across Europe and America.<sup>64</sup> Published document collections from the Soviet period must be used with caution, for they probably represent only a fraction of the material in the Russian archives. The specialist in any historical period must treat his sources with respect. Yet the student of the Russian Civil War probably encounters more than his share of polemic and self-serving reminiscence. Many of the participants in the Civil War, and their descendants, considered all their lives that the issues that they fought over years ago were still in dispute.

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63. G. T. Robinson, *Rural Russia under the old regime* (Berkeley, 1960), p.153.

64. The Institute for Social History, Amsterdam, The New York Public Library, and the Bibliotheque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine, Nanterre, all contain relevant materials. See Bibliography for details.

It is necessary to allow for these tendentious versions of the story of the *Makhnovshchina* when evaluating primary or secondary accounts. The main polemical versions may be characterised as the Ukrainian nationalist interpretation, the Soviet interpretation of the Stalin period, and the anarchist interpretation. The White guards, although active participants in the events described here, were always weak at political analysis. They appear to have devoted little effort to discovering the causes of peasant opposition. At any rate, no significant statements about the Makhnovite movement emerged from the defeats of either Denikin or Wrangel.<sup>65</sup>

Many Ukrainian nationalists hold the view, for which there is something to be said, that

"Makhno's primary failure was his unwillingness to coordinate his activities with other partisan groups, or with the Ukrainian armed forces in fighting common enemies during such a critical period of Ukrainian history."<sup>66</sup>

His lack of a positive goal "either as a Ukrainian or as an anarchist,"<sup>67</sup> and his isolation from the national revolution were contributory factors in his downfall. Only by accepting the uni-

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65. The only White theorist of any stature was the proto-fascist P. B. Struve. See S. Utechin, *Russian political thought* (London, 1964), p.270-271.

66. M. Paliy, "The peasant partisan movement of the anarchist Nestor Makhno" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Kansas, 1971), p.339.

67. *Idem.*

fied leadership of the nationalists, to continue this line of argument, could Makhno have participated in the setting up of a Ukrainian state independent of Russia. Makhno's courage and military prowess were not enough: he did not become "a constructive national factor in the Ukrainian national revolution."<sup>68</sup>

Makhno possessed a limited awareness of nationalist currents, conditioned by his long stay in prison in Russia, by his ignorance of the Ukrainian language, and by his anarchist outlook. This last factor reflected the views of the Russians Bakunin and Kropotkin. Despite his lack of knowledge of the positions adopted by nationalist figures such as Hrushevs'kyi and Vynnychenko, Makhno regarded himself as a Ukrainian. He regretted his inability to speak the language properly, and would have published his memoirs in Ukrainian had he been able.<sup>69</sup> He objected to the use of the term "south of Russia," and accused the Bolsheviks of chauvinism in using it in preference to "Ukraine."<sup>70</sup> Ukrainian nationalism found expression on the right-bank in the movement led by Petliura and Vynnychenko. According to this interpretation, it was channelled on the left bank into the partisan movement, fighting the same enemies. As the ranks of Makhno's army filled with nationalists, the ideological character of the movement changed.

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68. Ibid., p.340.

69. N. Makhno, *La révolution russe en Ukraine* (Paris, 1970), p.16.

70. Makhno, *Pod udarami kontr-revoliutsii* (Paris, 1936), p.132.



One source of pressure on Makhno to adopt a more explicitly nationalist outlook may conceivably have been his wife Halyna Kuz'menko. A former teacher of Ukrainian, she maintained an interest in cultural questions.<sup>71</sup> She became an active member of the Association of Ukrainian Women Teachers when she and Makhno were internees in Poland. It is unclear how much weight Makhno attached to his wife's views. Kuz'menko was apparently both emotionally and politically unstable. The long scar that Makhno bore in later years on his right cheek, running almost to the corner of his mouth, allegedly resulted from her attempt to kill him in his sleep during their stay in Poland. At the time she was the mistress of a Petliurist officer. In 1926 she applied for permission to return to the USSR, but this was refused. During their exile Makhno repeatedly separated from her. She was "at heart a Petliurist, and not a revolutionary."<sup>72</sup>

The main objection to the nationalist line of analysis is Makhno's record of vigorous hostility to the Rada and the Directory. He maintained this position from the beginning of his political activity, and repeatedly expressed a complete lack of interest in the idea of a Ukrainian state. The only example of anything approaching cooperation with the nationalists was in September

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71. E. Goldman, *Living my life* (New York, 1970), vol.2, p.150. Both Palij. op.cit., p.154, and Peters, op.cit., p.103, advance this argument.

72. Ida Mett, "Souvenirs sur Nestor Makhno," ([Paris], 1948), p.3-4. An alternative and more probable explanation for the scar is that it resulted from a bullet wound sustained on 22 August 1921, during Makhno's escape to Rumania (Arshinov, quoting a letter of Makhno's, op.cit., p.200).

1919. Just before the battle of Peregonovka, Makhno handed his wounded over to the Petliurists for treatment. He found Petliura's opportunism and anti-Semitism repellent, and objected to any form of state authority on principle. Both the nationalists and the anarchists had other enemies to deal with. The armed neutrality that existed between them, and Makhno's recognition of his national background, hardly seem sufficient grounds for supposing him to have been a Petliurist *manqué*.

Makhno is, of course, something of a hero to anarchists, many of whom have made extravagant claims on his behalf. To many of the French student rebels of 1968, the *soixante-huitards*, for example, "Makhno's defeat spelled the defeat of the Revolution; Trotsky's victory, the victory of the bureaucratic counter-revolution."<sup>73</sup> To an earlier admirer he was a gifted general, a fiery agitator, an experienced military organiser, a leader and theoretician of the peasants, a fearless warrior, a steadfast anarchist, a knight surrounded by an aura of romance, a legendary hero, and a publicist. By his strength of will and loyalty to his ideas he saved Moscow. He brought anarchism to life in the minds of millions, and set an example of selfless and heroic struggle for liberation from laws, property and government.<sup>74</sup>

Not all anarchist writing about Makhno is so frankly hagiographi-

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73. Cohn-Bendit, *op.cit.*, p.224.

74. A. Nikolaev, "Kratkaia pamiatka o Nestore Makhno," *Probuzhdenie* no.76-77 (1936), p.31.

cal. Even Arshinov and Volin, the "official" historians of the *Makhnovshchina*, permit themselves the occasional word of criticism. There have been several attempts by anarchists or their sympathisers to interpret the Makhno revolt using a three-stage periodisation of the Russian revolution and Civil War. The first of these stages, from February to October 1917, limited itself to simple objectives - the overthrow of the autocracy, an end to the war, the provision of enough food. The second stage, beginning with the Bolshevik coup in October, began with the failure of the Provisional Government to provide land, peace, or bread. The third revolution, a stage that the Bolsheviks repressed by force of arms, was an attempt to carry out a revolution against the parties. It was initiated by the masses, in pursuit of their class objectives. The historical manifestations of this revolution were the Makhno movement in Ukraine, the Antonov rebellion in Tambov province, and the revolt at Kronstadt.<sup>75</sup>

The best-known of these is undoubtedly the Kronstadt revolt. The expression "the third revolution" appeared in the Kronstadt manifesto *Za chto my boremsia* (What we are fighting for) in March 1921.<sup>76</sup> The rebels demanded new elections to the Soviets, the rights of free speech and a free press, the liberation of political prisoners, and an authentic policy of land to the tiller. Much of the content of the Kronstadt programme can be attributed

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75. I. Mitchell, "Thoughts on the third Russian revolution," *Anarchy* no.72 (February 1967), p.60-64.

76. P. Avrich (ed.), *The anarchists in the Russian revolution* (London, 1973), p.160.

to anarchist agitation capitalising on Bolshevik incompetence; in 1921 material conditions in Russia were bad. There is little evidence of social experimentation at Kronstadt, apart from some co-operative market gardening and recycling of metal waste in 1917; the fortress was under heavy military pressure in 1921, and there were no opportunities for reorganisation.

The Antonov rebellion in Tambov province consisted of limited terrorism and the sharing out of land among the peasants. The revolt was at its height only from January until April 1921, when it was crushed.<sup>77</sup> Makhno had more time and more space to experiment in, and he attempted more. He set up communes in Guliai-Pole and its environs, printed manifestos and programmes, established contact with urban workers, sent grain to the cities in exchange for manufactured goods, tried to establish a libertarian school system, and held conferences and congresses to plan for the future.

The crisis of the left opposition to War Communism came in March 1921, during the 10th Congress of the Communist Party. Fractions within the party put forward no fewer than seven programmes, including the syndicalist Workers' Opposition platform. Peasant insurgency was then at its height, not only in Tambov, Ukraine and Kronstadt, but also in Daghestan and western Siberia. Yet these manifestations of opposition lacked both coordination and a sin-

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77. Chamberlin, *op.cit.*, vol.2, p.437-439.

gle programme. One by one the Soviet government dealt with them, and by the end of August the crisis was over. Antonov was dead, the Kronstadt ringleaders were in Finland, Makhno was in Rumania, the Workers' Opposition had been outmanoeuvred, and the New Economic Policy had replaced War Communism.

In the three revolts cited in support of a three-stage periodisation, closer examination shows that there was either a gradual transformation of a limited movement into a general insurrection, or a major change in the circumstances of the rebels themselves. The Tambov insurgents started off as an obscure terrorist band, which became the focus for peasant resentment against the grain requisitions of the War Communism period. Antonov was short on ideas, but called himself a Socialist Revolutionary. His personal similarities to Makhno were superficial. Makhno's movement in Ukraine, as we shall see in succeeding chapters, followed a clear line of development from communal libertarianism to military autocracy. In this process, the political views of individual members were not of crucial importance. In Kronstadt, Ukrainian peasant recruits were brought in as reinforcements for the naval garrison. They brought with them from the countryside both libertarian tendencies and resentment of Bolshevik authoritarianism. The Kronstadt garrison of 1921 was even more strongly anti-authoritarian than the "Red Kronstadt" of 1917.<sup>78</sup>

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78. On Kronstadt in 1917 see P. Z. Sivkov, *Kronshtadt: stranitsy revoliutsionnoi istorii* (Leningrad, 1972); on the revolt, P. Avrich, *Kronstadt 1921* (Princeton, 1970). A more recent study looks at Kronstadt as a democratic model: I. Getzler, *Kronstadt, 1917-1921: the fate of a Soviet democracy* (Cambridge, 1983).

It is difficult to see these revolts, even with their many common features, as part of a creative, forward-looking "third revolution." Rural and undisciplined, they were an expression as much of the limited nature of peasant demands, as of a mass desire to push the revolution further. The urban proletariat mostly remained loyal to the parties. In the main, the peasants were not interested in the problems of the towns, or of reorganising industrial production. They were not alienated from the existing social structure. They wanted to modify it, not to overthrow it, to return to a "purer" form of the society that they already knew. They wanted the land, and they wanted to be rid of the *pomeshchiki* and the grain requisition detachments.

The Makhnovite movement, because it attracted literate supporters from the anarchist intelligentsia, is the best-documented of the "green" rebellions led by atamans such as Zeleny, Struk, or Angel'. Historically, anarchism has often been the political expression of resistance adopted by social classes whose position is undermined by the historical trend of their times. Typically, anarchist revolutionaries are rural aristocrats - Bakunin, Kropotkin, Tolstoy - or wealthy peasants; rarely are they involved in centralisation or industrialisation. Anarchists are not so much anti-nationalist as pre-nationalist. They look back to the community that preceded the centralised nation-state. Their fu-

ture is firmly rooted in an idealised past.<sup>79</sup>

The formal objectives of anarchists such as Volin or Arshinov, and those of the mass of the Ukrainian peasantry were similar. The peasants demanded that the social structure should function properly. They aimed, not to establish a future Utopia, but to restore a remembered order to a social framework disrupted by war and invasion and over the years by the depredations of the large land-owners. The generalised land-hunger made allies of rich and poor peasants in the countryside, an alliance made all the easier to build when both could benefit at the land-owners' expense.<sup>80</sup> An apparent coincidence of ideology and objective superimposed a rudimentary anarchism on that section of the peasant revolt that fell under Makhno's influence. It is perhaps a mistake to attempt to interpret the *Makhnovshchina* through its ideology, for even Makhno admitted that most of his followers were not anarchists. Nor is it satisfactory to look at the movement as nationalist, with roots in nineteenth-century romanticism. The peasants showed little interest in the establishment of a Ukrainian state whose

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79. Cf. G. Woodcock, *Anarchism* (Harmondsworth, 1963), p.444-445; B. Moore Jr., *Social origins of dictatorship and democracy* (Harmondsworth, 1973), p.478; G. Johnson, *Revolution and the social system* (Stanford, 1964), p.40-43. But for an opposing view on the possibility of a *forward-looking* anarchism, see P. Marshall, quoting the writings of Tom Nairn (*Demanding the impossible* [London, 1993], p.547).

80. The *Chernyi peredel* or "Black Repartition", which started in February 1917, and which took place in Russia and Belarus as well as Ukraine, involved the use by the peasantry as a whole of the village commune as a mechanism for land redistribution. It was an adjustment, not a complete redistribution, and by 1919 the number of landless peasants had dropped by half. See G. Littlejohn, *A sociology of the Soviet Union* (London, 1984), p.44 ff; for more detail, D. G. Atkinson, "The Russian land commune and the revolution," (Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1971), *passim*.

economic demands on them would have been identical to those of the Russians or the Germans.

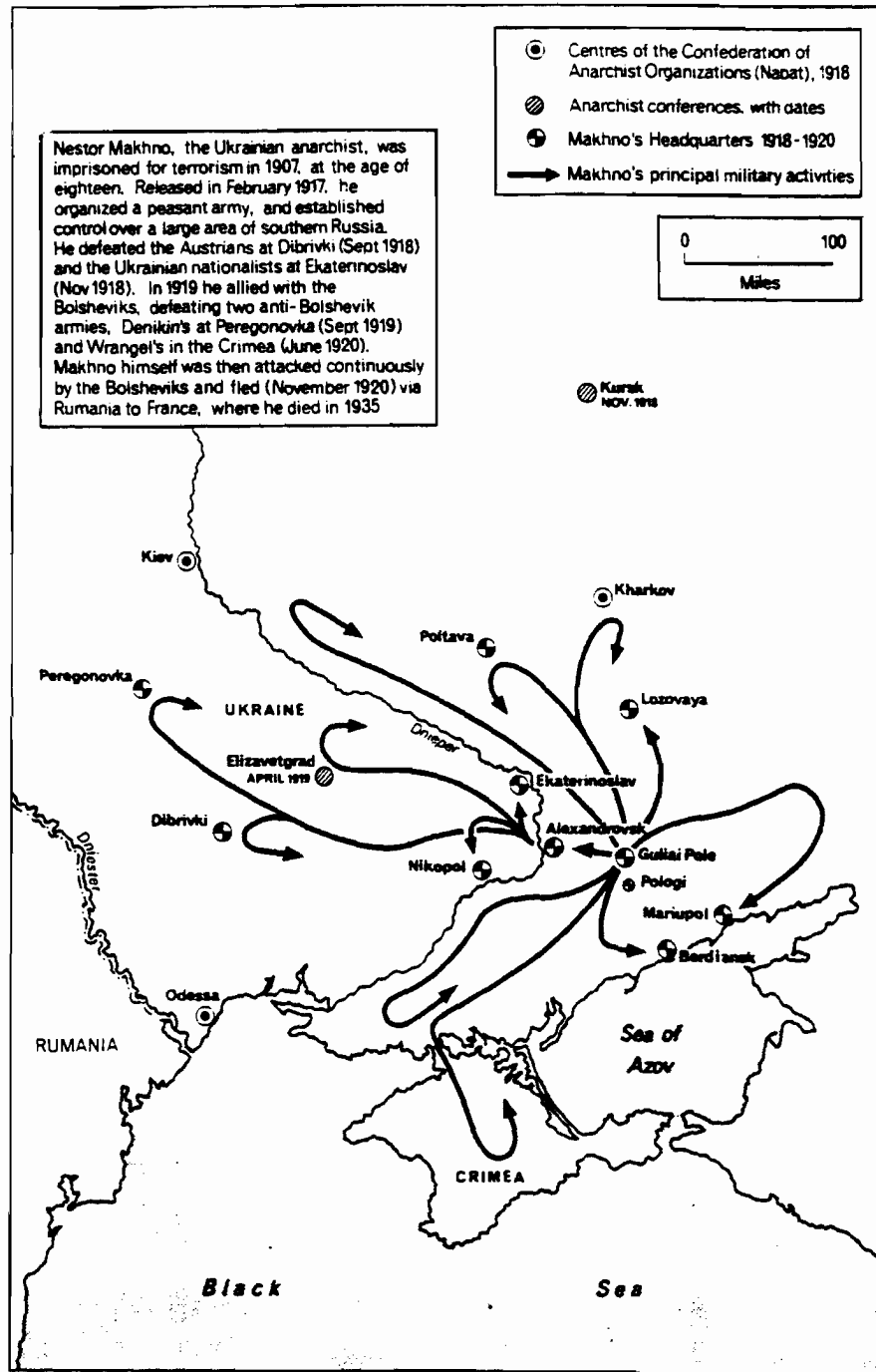
Makhno's military role was, perhaps, crucial on one or two occasions. His throwing his weight into the balance on the Bolshevik side may, just possibly, have saved the revolution. It was Makhno's revolutionary integrity that prevented pogroms, that refused alliance to the White Guards. Grigor'ev, who led a peasant movement so similar to the *Makhnovshchina* that it was completely absorbed by it after his assassination, was not so principled, and his men committed atrocities of conspicuous brutality against the Jews.

*Makhnovshchina* was a coalition of two trends, both resentful of change and both likely to decline in influence in a modernised society. The petty-bourgeois anarchists made common cause with various strata of the Ukrainian peasantry, which were generally not capable of constructive action or solidarity except under extreme pressure. Together they fought a rear-guard action against a revolution which they feared, perhaps unreasonably, might rob them of everything. The perception, rather than the living reality, was the determinant motive. The third element, the catalyst, was the extraordinary and unstable personality of Nestor Makhno. His recklessness, his uncompromising revolutionary fervour, his tactical sense, and his gift of leadership were the qualities demanded by the moment. The contradictions between anarchism and the revolution that the Bolsheviks were making, and between the



aspirations of peasants and anarchists, could be forgotten or ignored in the excitement of the struggle under such a leader.

MAP 2  
Makhno and the anarchists, 1917-1920



Source: Martin Gilbert, *Russian history atlas* (London, 1972), map 95.

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**III.****NESTOR MAKHNO: THE MAKING OF AN ANARCHIST**

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The Ukrainian village of Guliai-Pole, in Aleksandrovsk district, Ekaterinoslav province, dates from Russia's expansion to the south in the eighteenth century. The settlement sprawls across the river Gaichur, about seven kilometres from the railway line to Ekaterinoslav, the nearest city of any size. The flat plain of the steppe proper is broken only by gullies and ravines and by the ancient mounds of the Scythians. It stretches away southwards to the cliffs and lagoons of the Sea of Azov and eastwards to the Donets ridge. The wooded steppe in the northwest slopes gently down to the south and east, drained by the Dnepr, the Bug, and the Dnestr. These turbulent but slow-moving rivers are shallow through the summer but overflow in the spring thaws, when the gullies fill with water, dotting the endless plain with ponds and lakes.

The early thaws, hot summers, and long dry autumns of the Ukraine contrast sharply with its severe winters, especially in the east. There, climatic conditions range over extremes of heat and cold. The rich black soil with its thick layer of loess covers perhaps

two-thirds of the Ukraine, making it one of the world's most fertile grain-producing areas.

In the typical settlement pattern of the southern steppes Guliai-Pole had grown by the end of the nineteenth century to a town of over 30,000 people. It was about eight kilometres in length, with cobbled streets and brick buildings. The growing bourgeoisie had built banks, a post and telegraph office, and two Orthodox churches. The bazaars and markets of the town were the source of a modest fame; there was a police station, a hospital, the *volost'* administration building, and several schools. This prosperity rested on the output of a few iron-foundries, flour-mills, and a farm-machinery factory dotted along the ribbon development between the river and the railway.

The beginnings of industrialisation had created a small proletariat, peasant workers at most a generation away from the land. Mill-workers came seasonally from Poltava or Chernigov in the north, to live in barracks on the outskirts of the town. Others worked in the factories or foundries, or in the homes of the middle-class as domestic servants.<sup>1</sup> Jews, Great Russians, and German settlers lived in the area, but the peasants were overwhelmingly

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1. Anatol' Hak (pseud.), *Vid Huliai-Polia do N'iu-Iorku* (Neu Ulm, 1973), p.21; Victor Peters, *Nestor Makhno* (Winnipeg, [1970]), p.16-18; *BSE* 2nd ed., s.v. "Guliai-Pole". Peters' chapter on Makhno's early life was substantially based on information provided by Hak (Ivan Antypenko), an emigre native of Guliai-Pole who subsequently published his memoirs.

Ukrainian, many of them former serfs.<sup>2</sup>

One such was Ivan Mikhnenko, born a serf on the estate of a landowner called Shabel'skii, in the village of Shagarov, about seven kilometres from Guliai-Pole.<sup>3</sup> When the emancipation of 1861 freed Mikhnenko, along with millions of others, he continued to work as a groom and ox-herd for his former master. When his wife was expecting her fifth child, Mikhnenko left his job and entered service with a Jewish merchant. This man, Kerner, owned a factory in Guliai-Pole, a shop and over 500 hectares of land.<sup>4</sup> After nearly a year as Kerner's coachman Ivan Mikhnenko died, leaving his wife to bring up five small sons by herself.<sup>5</sup>

The youngest, Nestor Ivanovich, had been born on 27 October 1889, and never knew his father, who had died when he was only 11

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2. The 1897 census showed a population mix in Aleksandrovsk district of 82.5 percent Ukrainians, 6.9 percent Russians, 5.1 percent Jews and 5.2 percent Germans. M. Kordouba, *Le territoire et la population de l'Ukraine* (Berne, 1919), p.94-95.

3. The family name was Mikhnenko, but they also used the alternative form Makhno, either alone or hyphenated as Mikhnenko-Makhno. In exile in the 1920s Makhno reverted to the less widely-known form. Ida Mett, "Souvenirs sur Nestor Makhno," ([Paris], 1948), p.1; Volin, "Nestor Makhno", *Delo truda* no.82 (1934), p.4.

4. Hak, op.cit., p.24n.

5. Nestor Makhno, "Zapiski," *Anarkhicheskii vestnik* no.1 (1923), p.16-17; Hak, op.cit., p.28 mentions only four sons.

months old.<sup>6</sup> His earliest memories were of deprivation and the struggle to make ends meet. The family lived in a little hut near the market square, on the edge of town. They were too poor, in a semi-rural community, even to afford to keep pigs or chickens.<sup>7</sup>

As an infant, Nestor was given out for adoption to a neighbouring landowner. His mother took him back when she felt that he was not being given enough attention.<sup>8</sup> Only when the little boys were old enough to work did things begin to improve financially. By the age of seven, Nestor was already herding oxen and cattle for local farmers.<sup>9</sup>

At the age of eight his mother sent him to the elementary school in Guliai-Pole for two years. According to his own testimony, he was an apt pupil, and studied hard at first. When winter came and the river froze over, he would play truant with the other boys for weeks on end, spending his time skating. He would set off for

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6. Makhno, op.cit., p.16-17. Makhno's year of birth is given as 1884 by N. V. Gerasimenko, "Makhno", *Istoriik i sovremennik* vol.3 (1922), p.151, followed in-ter alia by BSE 1st and 2nd eds., s.v. "Makhnovshchina", *Sovetskaia Istoriicheskaia Entsiklopediia*, s.v. "Makhno, N. I.", and *Ukrains'kyi Radians'kyi Entsyklopedychnyi Slovyk*, s.v. "Makhno". Makhno himself, his wife Halina Kuz'menko, in "Vidpovid' na stattiu Pomer Makhno v Novii Pori vid 9-ho serpnia 1934 roku, hor. Detroita, Mich." *Probuzhdenie* no.50-51 (1934), p.17; and P. A. Arshinov, *Istoriia makhnovskogo dvizheniia* (Berlin, 1923), p.49 all agree on 1889. S. N. Semanov, "Makhnovshchina i ee krakh," *Voprosy istorii* no.9 (1966), p.38n, gives 1884 with the comment "according to some sources 1889." In his more recent article in BSE, 3rd ed., s.v. "Makhno", Semanov accepts 1889.

7. Hak, op.cit., p.28.

8. Makhno, "Mon autobiographie, [no.1]" *Le Libertaire* (19 March 1926), p.2.

9. Arshinov, op.cit., p.49.

school with his books, and return home tired and hungry, not from study but from his vigorous games. This truancy lasted until Shrove-tide, when the young Nestor, playing with one of his friends by the river, fell through the melting ice and almost drowned. He was afraid to go home, and ran instead to his uncle's house, arriving in a state of near-collapse.

Of course, the uncle informed Makhno's mother. After the boy had been given a rubbing-down with alcohol, he received a beating that prevented him from sitting at his studies for some time. From then onwards he became a diligent pupil. He passed the winters in study and the summers as a hired labourer for a rich farmer, tending his sheep and cows. At threshing time he drove the farmer's bullock carts, earning 25 kopeks a day.<sup>10</sup>

By 1899, when he was ten, Makhno's elder brothers had married, and had children, and even the youngest son had to go to work. After his two years in the elementary school he had a series of jobs as a farm boy, and as an apprentice in a dye factory. Later, when he had grown bigger and stronger, he worked in the Guliai-Pole iron foundry, painting and repairing machinery; he also worked in the smelting section.<sup>11</sup> His contact with the foundry workers may have had some influence on the formation of his political outlook, for metal-workers were well-known for their radical ac-

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10. Makhno, "Zapiski", p.17-18.

11. Idem.; Kuz'menko, op.cit., p.17; Hak, op.cit., p.28.

tivism.<sup>12</sup>

Makhno resented the conditions of grinding poverty in which he grew up. Much later he wrote,

"It was at this time that I began to feel a kind of anger, of malice, even of hatred, for the landlords and above all for their progeny; against the young idlers who passed me by, all plump, hale and hearty, well-dressed, smelling of perfume, whereas I was dirty, in rags, barefoot, and stinking of the dung heap, busy mucking out the cattle sheds."<sup>13</sup>

It is tempting to try to reconstruct from our fragmentary knowledge of Makhno's early years, a picture of deprivation and injustice that left him with no choice but to become a revolutionary. The poverty of his home and the sight of his mother struggling alone to feed and clothe her children must have affected his later outlook. His attachment to his mother was very strong. Even as an adult he continued to harbour a grudge against a policeman who, many years before, had slapped her during a house-search. When he encountered the man in Guliai-Pole after his release from prison in 1917, Makhno refrained from shooting him on the spot only with the greatest difficulty.<sup>14</sup>

The oppression of the peasantry by the Russians and the German colonists, and the harsh working conditions on the farms and in

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12. P. I. Lyashchenko, *History of the national economy of Russia* (New York, 1970), p.693.

13. Makhno, "Mon autobiographie, [no.2]," *Le Libertaire* (26 March 1926), p.2; see also Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.49.

14. Makhno, *La révolution russe en Ukraine* (Paris, 1970), p.34.



the factories aroused his resentment. However, many others had the same experiences and did not become anarchists, or even revolutionaries. To attribute, for instance, the partisan reign of terror in Mennonite settlements during the Civil War, by a simple chain of cause and effect, to Makhno's desire for revenge for injustices suffered in his youth, is to ignore the colonists' position in the class structure of Russo-Ukrainian society. It is to parody by overstatement the role of the individual in history.<sup>15</sup> The influences that turn rebellious instinct into revolutionary maturity are more complex. The transformation of the village leader into the insurgent general of 1920 cannot be explained away only in terms of his youthful suffering. Makhno's dislike of his former employers, like his ability as a military leader, may well have influenced the pattern of events in 1919 and 1920 in important ways. However, it was only because he held an influential position as a peasant chieftain, that his predilections and resentments (those characteristics which Plekhanov called the "accidents of private life"), become historically important.<sup>16</sup>

The development of economic and social relations in the southern borderlands of the Russian Empire created the conditions for a man such as Makhno to become a significant historical figure. Those relations provided the foundation for the general trend of

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15. Frank Epp makes exactly this point in his "Mennonites in the Soviet Union", in Richard H. Marshall (ed.), *Aspects of religion in the Soviet Union, 1917-1967* (Chicago, 1971), p.290.

16. G. V. Plekhanov, "The role of the individual in history", in his *Fundamental problems of Marxism* (London, 1969), p.157.

events. They defined the ways in which Makhno's personality and abilities could affect the course of the revolution. As we shall see, when the movement that he led pursued ends that were in tune with the general trend, then it was outstandingly successful. When Makhno began to struggle against the modernising revolution of the Bolsheviks, a party of great theoretical and practical sophistication with the ability to adapt its strategy to changing circumstances, he failed. It is a measure of his gifts that his resistance to Bolshevism lasted so long. It is hardly an indication of the viability of the anarchist vision.

Makhno's character was the result of various psychological and environmental processes, some of which showed themselves in his conduct in direct ways. He was small and physically weak, with a pock-marked face and a pasty complexion. As a young man, his features were delicate, almost girlish. He drank excessively, and his health was poor.<sup>17</sup> Gifted with native intelligence, he received only the most rudimentary education. He harnessed his anger towards his oppressors in the service of the romantic and nostalgic ideology of anarchism. Flung into prison, with neither the mental self-reliance of the intellectual nor the class outlook of the proletarian to sustain him, he absorbed the theoretical maxims of anarchism with enthusiasm. Later, he was to apply these great abstractions with the murderous literalness of his

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17. Hak, op.cit., p.29. There have been attempts to deny that Makhno was a lifelong heavy drinker, e.g. Augustin Souchy in *Der Spiegel* no.51 (1969), p.165. But even Volin admitted that Makhno was a compulsive drinker; *La révolution inconnue* (Paris, 1947), p.682.

essentially reductive temperament.

The importance of the "accidents" of private life is relative.<sup>18</sup> They only become historically apparent at the nexus of enormous forces. The economic processes of which man is both collectively the creator, and individually the creature, are the determinants of history, no matter how complex the network of accidents may be. Makhno was the most articulate and the most successful of the peasant insurgent leaders - Grigor'ev, Angel', Zeleny, Struk, Antonov - and crucially he survived to tell his tale. If a gendarme had killed him in 1906, or if he had stayed in Moscow in 1917, the peasants of the Ukraine would still have resisted the Whites and the Bolsheviks without him.

His talents met the needs of his time and his class, and the way was open for him to exercise them. For all his tactical ability and oratorical persuasiveness, he could not at a stroke introduce into the Ukraine, or even into Guliai-Pole, a socio-economic system that contradicted the development of productive forces. Neither Makhno nor any other anarchist could turn the clock back to the crude village communism without authority or the state, which was their only vision of the future.

As a young man Makhno turned his hand to a variety of trades. He may even have served as an apprentice for a time to a haberdash-

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18. Plekhanov, op.cit., p.164. It might also be argued that an "accident" is simply an inadequately theorised historical occurrence.

ery shop in Mariupol' on the Sea of Azov. His indolence and sur-  
liness, so the story goes, led to his dismissal after he had cut  
off his employer's coat-buttons.<sup>19</sup> By the age of sixteen, after  
the revolution of 1905, Makhno's vague hatred of the bourgeoisie  
and the landowners had changed into a desire for action. At first  
he fell under the influence of the Social Democrats and even  
helped them to distribute their pamphlets.<sup>20</sup>

The local *Chernosotentsy*, or Black Hundreds, an arch-reactionary  
anti-semitic organisation, had attempted to foment pogroms in  
Guliai-Pole. They were led by an examining magistrate from Alek-  
sandrovsk, but met strong working-class opposition.<sup>21</sup> Such tac-  
tics by local conservatives, the gradualism of even the most pro-  
gressive members of the Tsarist government, and the empty prom-  
ises of political reform without any attempt to satisfy economic  
demands, only stirred the peasants and workers to intensify the  
struggle. In Guliai-Pole there were some strikes and arson, but  
Cossack units crushed the revolt. The next year, in 1906, at the  
age of seventeen, Makhno joined an anarchist-communist group.<sup>22</sup>

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19. Gerasimenko, op.cit., p.151. This unreliable account was republished in  
the USSR as *Bat'ko Makhno: memuary belogvardeitsa* (Moscow, 1928), and in Po-  
land in instalments by Iu. Petrovych, "Makhno: istoriia odnogo povstanskoho  
vatashka, na osnovi Istorika i Sovremennika", *Nedilia* vol.8, nos.40-46 (1935).  
Cf. Arshinov, op.cit., p.7.

20. Makhno, "Mon autobiographie," *Le Libertaine* (2 April 1926), p.3.

21. Makhno, *La révolution russe*, p.225.

22. Makhno, "Zapiski", p.18; Arshinov, op.cit., p.49.

The anarchist-communists believed that the society of the future would consist of loose confederations of producers' associations, in which agricultural and industrial labour would exist side by side. Distinctions between inferior and superior work, between workers by hand and workers by brain, would vanish. This disappearance of the division of labour would result in a return to an idyllic and organic communal society in which all would work from free will.

The founder of this tendency, the mild and scholarly Prince Petr Kropotkin, had been a disciple of Bakunin, but his doctrine differed from his mentor's on one crucial point. Kropotkin's criterion for the distribution of goods was need, not work. Payment for labour was not to be related to the amount of work done, but to the requirements of the individual doing it. Individuals were even to be the assessors of their own wants, taking whatever they desired from the common store.

Kropotkin had studied social formations in Siberia, and watchmakers' communes in the Jura mountains of Switzerland. His observations led to him to the conclusion that the rise of the state in the post-mediaeval period was an aberration in the general trend of European history. He rejected much of what he saw as Darwin's theory of evolutionary struggle, and pointed instead to cooperative systems among animals and men. The guilds, peasant communes, and autonomous artels of the past were the models for

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his description of the future society.<sup>23</sup>

This anti-authoritarian and anti-centralist doctrine had a strong appeal in the rigidly autocratic Tsarist state. The twin processes of urbanisation and industrialisation in Russia had, by the turn of the century, caused major social changes.<sup>24</sup> These included a shift away from the traditional relationship of the landed aristocracy and the peasantry as the central fulcrum of society. Anarchist-communism promised an end to the process in its contemporary form and a return to the centre of the stage for the peasant and the *pomeshchik*. Whether Makhno at seventeen could articulate his feelings about industrialisation, his whole background must have disposed him to sympathy with such a doctrine. Besides, his brothers were already supporters, if not members, of the local group.<sup>25</sup>

During the Stolypin reaction, from 1906 to 1910, the anarchist-communists saw their immediate task as a struggle against police oppression using terrorist violence. This was a continuation of the tactics adopted during 1905. Southern anarchist groups such as the *Chernoznamentsy* (followers of the Black Flag) had bombed,

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23. These doctrines are expounded at length in Kropotkin's *La conquête du pain* (Paris, 1892), *Fields, factories and workshops* (London, 1899), and *Mutual aid* (London, 1902).

24. For a detailed account of nineteenth century urbanisation, which includes Ukraine, see T. Fedor, *Patterns of urban growth in the Russian empire during the nineteenth century* (University of Chicago, Dept. of Geography Research Paper no.163, 1975).

25. Hak, *op.cit.*, p.28.

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robbed, blackmailed and sabotaged with great energy but little result. Sometimes they killed themselves in the process. Many activists in such groups were youths of Makhno's age.<sup>26</sup> After the 1905 revolution, the sectarianism of these groups of fanatics, and pressure from the forces of reaction, significantly weakened the anarchist movement, which had always been numerically unimportant. Most of the militants were dead, in gaol, or exiled, and the survivors were isolated.

The Guliai-Pole organisation called itself the "Peasants' Group of Anarchist-Communists," and through a Russified Czech propagandist called Vol'demar Antoni maintained links with the anarchist-communist group in Ekaterinoslav.<sup>27</sup> The group's specifically "peasant" character showed itself in the focus of its terrorist activity, almost exclusively against the rural bourgeoisie and the district police.<sup>28</sup>

The core of the group consisted of a dozen or so members, most of whom were peasants, with a much larger fringe of hangers-on. The members held political classes in each other's homes or in the open air. They used code-names, and even had a period of probation for initiates. Nevertheless, they were tactically and organisationally unsophisticated. They later testified that all their

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26. P. Avrich, *The Russian anarchists* (Princeton, 1967), p.44.

27. G. Novopolin, "Makhno i guliai-pol'skaia gruppa anarkhistov, po ofitsial'-nym dannym," *Katorga i ssylka* no.34 (1927), p.71; cf. Hak, op.cit., p.25.

28. Novopolin, loc.cit.

actions were strictly political. Their activities were governed entirely by the notion of freedom for the people.<sup>29</sup>

There was some degree of overlap with the Ekaterinoslav group, with which relations were close. The group was very much influenced by a prominent local anarchist, the army deserter Aleksandr Semeniuta, who was one of its leading members. Most of the expropriations and assassinations of the group, which was active between September 1906 and July 1908, were carried out locally.<sup>30</sup>

Makhno's role in the group remains unclear. According to one account the other members did not trust him because he was an habitual drunkard. In such a condition, he was aggressive and talkative, and liked to pick fights.<sup>31</sup> He was also technically incompetent. On one occasion the saucepan that he had used while making a bomb exploded on his mother's stove.<sup>32</sup>

The first robbery carried out by the group was very modest. On the evening of 5/18 September 1906 three men smeared with soot appeared at the home of a merchant called Pleshchiner and demanded money, threatening him with revolvers and a bomb. The trader gave them 163 rubles, some rings, and a gold watch. On 10/23 October, four masked men, armed with revolvers and daggers, carried

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29. Ibid., p.75.

30. Ibid., p.71.

31. Hak, op.cit., p.29.

32. Mett, op.cit., p.1.



out a similar robbery. They demanded money for the starving from their victim, and escaped with 151 rubles.<sup>33</sup> With the money the group bought a hectographic printing machine. They began to produce leaflets and tracts attacking the Stolypin land reforms, and calling for mass struggle against the kulaks.

The third expropriation was more significant - not least in its choice of victim. The target was the merchant and manufacturer Mark Kerner, nicknamed the Croesus of Guliai-Pole, the former employer of Ivan Mikhnenko. He was robbed by three assailants whose faces were smeared with mud. The expropriators locked an electrician who happened to be present into an office, and after a search got away with 425 rubles and an ingot of silver. Meanwhile, Kerner's wife had sent her maid to fetch help, but the robbers had stationed guards in the kitchen and outside, and her ruse failed. According to Kerner's later testimony there were seven members of the gang, who all seemed very nervous, for he noticed that their hands were shaking.

Two days after this incident, on 15/28 November 1906, to rub salt into the merchant's wounded self-esteem, the expropriators sent him a letter. They expressed their regret and irritation that they had taken so little money from him. The "detachment of armed workers," as they styled themselves, told Kerner that they knew that he had informed the police of the robbery. They warned him

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33. Novopolin, *op.cit.*, p.72.

that if the investigations continued his home would be bombed.<sup>34</sup> It is probable that the robbers singled out Kerner, who was among the richest men in the area, for this particularly vindictive treatment because of his wealth. It is tempting nonetheless to hypothesise that there may have been a connection between Ivan Mikhnenko's death in Kerner's employ, and his son's membership of the group that later harassed the local "Croesus." Vol'demar Antoni was also an employee of Kerner's.<sup>35</sup>

Makhno was probably already under surveillance by the local police, although they did not yet connect him with the expropriations. In late 1906 he was arrested for the first time, on suspicion of the murder of a rural police constable. He was acquitted and released immediately.<sup>36</sup>

After the attack on Kerner the anarchists lay low for the rest of the winter and through the spring. In August 1907 they attempted a fourth expropriation, this time in the Gaichur settlement, a suburb of Guliai-Pole near the railway station. Four armed men, well-dressed but disguised with dark glasses, burst into the house of a merchant named Gurevich late one night. They demanded money in the name of the anarchist-communists. This was the first occasion on which the group had identified itself during a robbery. Unfortunately for the expropriators, Gurevich's nephew re-

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34. *Idem.*

35. *Ibid.*, p.73.

36. Makhno, *op.cit.*, p.18.

fused to be intimidated and raised a hue-and-cry. The four seized a post-office wagon near the railway station and galloped away, shooting as they went to discourage pursuit. The wagon was later found abandoned.<sup>37</sup>

This fiasco did not, apparently, deter the group. On 19 October/1 November 1907 they ambushed a post-office cart in a ravine between the station and the village. They raked the cart with gunfire, killing a postman, a village constable, and a horse. The cart driver managed to escape on the surviving beast. When he returned with the authorities, they discovered that the mail had not been tampered with.

The series of robberies baffled the local police, who had not discovered any clues to the identities of the members of the group. Immediately after the ambush of the postal cart the anarchists' luck turned for the worse. A prisoner in Ekaterinoslav gaol, one Iakov Brin, informed the police during an interrogation that he knew the names of the ambushers. According to Brin, a fellow-prisoner named Nazarii Zuichenko had confided to him in Aleksandrovska district prison that he had taken part in the attack. He named his companions as Konstantin Pukhilo, Ivan Levadnyi and others. The assault had been largely the brainchild of Vol'demar Antoni, who had provided the assailants with their weapons. Zui-chenko later changed his story and denied that he had participat-

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37. Novopolin, op.cit., p.72.

ed in the ambush. He did admit that he was an anarchist and an agrarian terrorist, and had set fire in the past to the properties of the *pomeshchiki*.<sup>38</sup> Makhno and Antoni, claimed Zuichenko, knew and trusted him, and had confided in him.<sup>39</sup>

More evidence was soon forthcoming. The police questioned two peasants named Tkachenko and Prokopenko. Tkachenko testified that Makhno, Anton Bondarenko and Prokopii Semeniuta had all taken part in the ambush of the postal wagon. Semeniuta had also taken part in the earlier robberies. The peasant Prokopenko testified about the gang's activities, naming Makhno, Cherniavskii, and Tkachenko, as well as several others. In late 1907, the police arrested Makhno again, on suspicion of having committed political murders and expropriations. Again, they could not prove the charges, and had to release Makhno after a short while, this time on the surety of a local factory-owner.<sup>40</sup> The police stepped up their harassment of the group.

The anarchists were active despite the police investigations. On 10/23 April 1908 Ivan Levadnyi, Naum Al'tgauzen, and two or three others set off from Guliai-Pole towards Bogodarovsk settlement in Aleksandrovsk district, some 42 kilometres away. Later in the day a merchant called Levin was robbed of 600 rubles and some gold by five armed men whose faces were smeared with soot. There was some

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38. Ibid., p.73; the term used by Novopolin is *uchastnik agrarnogo terrora*.

39. Ibid., p.72-73.

40. Makhno, op.cit., p.18.

shooting. On 13/26 May the merchant Shindler was the victim of an attempted robbery, during which his daughter received a gunshot wound. In the confusion the expropriators made their escape, but without any money. It was a familiar pattern. On 9/22 July the group attacked the government wine-shop in Novoselovke, near Gul'iai-Pole, and shot and killed D'iachenko, a shop-assistant. D'iachenko's wife at once raised a terrible cry, and the assailants took to their heels in alarm.

By 28 July/10 August the police were ready to move against the anarchist group. They tracked down several members at a meeting in Levadnyi's house, and in the ensuing gun-battle Prokopii Semeniuta and a police constable, Lepetchenko were killed.<sup>41</sup> When the police showed Semeniuta's clothing to D'iachenko's widow, she confirmed that one of the men who had killed her husband had worn the same garments. The police arrested Zuichenko, Klim Kirichenko, Sergei Zablodskii, Petr Onishchenko and the Bondarenko brothers, and they were all exiled by administrative order. Antoni served a one-month gaol term.<sup>42</sup>

The detective in charge of the investigations into the group was a local policeman named Karachentsev. To expose the group and its activities, he had resorted to the standard weapon in the armoury of the Tsar's security forces, the agent provocateur. He had in-

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41. Hak says that Makhno did not kill Lepetchenko himself as some writers have claimed, and that he was not even present at this meeting (op.cit., p.29).

42. Novopolin, op.cit., p.73-73.

filtrated his men into membership of the group, where they played an active part in the series of assaults and robberies. The anarchists exposed and executed at least one of these agents. From information provided by the others, Karachentsev compiled a provisional membership list for the organisation. He discovered that its nominal leader and supplier of weapons was Vol'demar Antoni.<sup>43</sup>

It was the lack of concrete evidence which hindered Karachentsev most. He knew who he wanted, but could prove nothing against them. After the death of his agent Kushnir, Karachentsev decided to take direct action himself. He had heard that Aleksandr Semeniuta was in hiding in Ekaterinoslav. So, disguised in the clothes of a former member of the group, he set off for the city. By a series of accidents he discovered the man he suspected of Kushnir's murder, a certain Khshiva. Khshiva had on his person a Browning pistol that had belonged to the police constable killed at Levadnyi's house. From this beginning Karachentsev tracked down other members of the group in another part of Ekaterinoslav, and he arrested Lisovskii, Levadnyi, Zuichenko and Al'tgauzen.

Levadnyi was the first to break under interrogation. He described

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43. The members were: Aleksandr Semeniuta, Prokopii Semeniuta, Nestor Makhno, Vol'demar Antoni, Ivan Levadnyi, Nazarii Zuichenko, Klim Kirichenko, Petr Onishchenko, Anton and Igor Bondarenko, Filipp Cherniavskii, Ivan Shevchenko, and Sergei Zablodskii, all residents of Guliai-Pole; and Sergei Ivanov, Efim Orlov, Naum Al'tgauzen, and Ol'khov, temporary residents. They were all peasants except Al'tgauzen, who was a bourgeois (*meshchanin*). There were several fringe members including two other bourgeois and a girl, Mariia Martynova. Not all those brought to trial were core members. Ibid., p.71, p.74.

the whole series of robberies and killings, starting with Pleshchiner and continuing through the ambush of the post-office wagon up to the shooting of Lepetchenko. Al'tgauzen confessed to participation in the robberies from Shindler and Kerner.<sup>44</sup> In later years Makhno was to hold Al'tgauzen responsible, as an agent provocateur, for the downfall of the group. In the event he was indicted with the others.<sup>45</sup> Zuichenko also confessed. Karachentsev arrested more anarchists, including Shevchenko, and Lisovskii's mistress Mariia Martynova.

Zuichenko's testimony provided Karachentsev with the detailed evidence he needed to bring the suspects to trial. Antoni, the group's first leader, had fled to Belgium. He maintained his contacts with the group, acting as a supplier of weapons and explosives. The local man with responsibility for armaments was Shevchenko. After Antoni's flight, Aleksandr Semeniuta had become the dominant figure in the organisation. Zuichenko described the group's meetings, which took place most often at Levadnyi's house, but also at Shevchenko's and Onishchenko's, where they planned the expropriations and assigned tasks. He revealed that they had planned to assassinate Karachentsev, and to shift their centre of activity to Ekaterinoslav. This was the reason for Semeniuta's removal to the suburb of Amur.

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44. Ibid., p.74.

45. Ibid., p.71; Makhno, op.cit., p.18.

After his success in Ekaterinoslav, Karachentsev telegraphed to his colleagues in Guliai-Pole with instructions to arrest Nestor Makhno, Onishchenko, Cherniavskii, Gorelik and Ol'khov. Throughout August 1908 a series of confrontations, confessions, accusations and counter-accusations took place as the group fell apart and its members tried to save their skins. Khshiva betrayed Gorelik and Ol'khov; Al'tgauzen betrayed Makhno and Cherniavskii; Levadnyi and Zuichenko joined in. Through it all Makhno refused to admit anything.<sup>46</sup>

On 1/14 September the police intercepted a note from Makhno to Levadnyi, telling him to "take the matter into [his] own hands."<sup>47</sup> The prosecutor later made much of this. Makhno explained it simply as an exhortation to Levadnyi not to attempt to shift his guilt onto the shoulders of the other members of the group. The authorities produced another note from Makhno at the trial, referring in guarded terms to the planning of a possible escape attempt.<sup>48</sup>

By now the police had found more witnesses in Guliai-Pole. Shevchenko's brother was willing to testify that he had been hiding bombs in the courtyard, and that the group had held meetings at his house. He claimed that he had seen them in possession of

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46. Novopolin, *op.cit.*, p.75.

47. *Idem.*

48. *Ibid.*, p.76; Makhno, *loc.cit.*



large sums of money and of arms. <sup>49</sup>

Aleksandr Semeniuta had escaped to Belgium. He sent Karachentsev an insulting letter, addressing him as "the spotted devil," and inviting him to come to Belgium, "where there is freedom of speech, and one can talk freely."<sup>50</sup> In the autumn of 1909 Semeniuta came back to Guliai-Pole to seek revenge for the death of his brother Prokopii. He ambushed Karachentsev outside a local theatre, shooting him dead and escaping. In 1911 he returned, this time in the company of a young girl, also an anarchist. Makhno's brother let the couple stay at his house, and removed himself to his mother's. An informer spotted the pair and told the police, who surrounded the house. In the gun-battle that followed the police set fire to the building. Semeniuta refused to surrender and shot himself; the girl was wounded.<sup>51</sup>

At a preliminary hearing Zuichenko, Khshiva and Al'tgauzen retracted their earlier statements, alleging that they were made under duress, by beatings and threats. Makhno continued to deny membership of any kind of association, and repeated his explanation of the note to Levadnyi. He disclaimed the message about the planned escape; he had found it in the toilet. But Zuichenko again confessed to everything and betrayed them all.

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49. Novopolin, op.cit., p.75-76.

50. Ibid., p.76.

51. Hak, op.cit., p.30-31.

Khshiva was hanged on 17/30 June 1909 by order of a court martial. Levadnyi died of typhus in the prison barracks.<sup>52</sup> Antoni and Ol'khov had escaped abroad. The charge against the others alleged that

"in the autumn of 1906, in Guliai-Pole, Aleksandrovsk district, Ekaterinoslav province, in an area declared to be under a state of special security, [they] did join, organise and direct a criminal association which had as its declared aim open violence against and assaults on the lives and personal security of private and well-to-do persons, in the realisation of which aim the association had at its disposal explosive projectiles, and Nagana, Mauser, and other types of revolver; that they did organise meetings in the homes of the several members, where they worked out plans for the various successive robberies and assaults and for the assignment of various roles to the participants in such assaults; and that there the allocation of arms belonging to the association was supervised and took place in due order."<sup>53</sup>

In addition, the arraignments accused Makhno and the others, except Lisovskii and Martynova, of the expropriations from Bruk, Kerner and Gurevich, under articles of the penal code that carried the death penalty.

The prisoners stayed in custody in Aleksandrovsk for a year, while the police completed their investigations. During the winter they established contact with members of the group who were still at large. They planned an escape for 5/18 January 1910, when they were to be transferred to Ekaterinoslav. They abandoned the attempt when their escort recognised their contact at the

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52. Hak says that Levadnyi escaped and died of exposure in a blizzard (op.cit., p.29).

53. Novopolin, op.cit., p.76-77.

railway station. The prisoners' chances of survival in a temperature of 27 degrees below zero would have been slim at best.<sup>54</sup>

The case came up at the Odessa District Court Martial.<sup>55</sup> A temporary court in Ekaterinoslav heard it in March 1910, and found Makhno guilty, sentencing him to death by hanging. He lived as a condemned prisoner for fifty-two days, until the authorities commuted his death sentence, partly thanks to his youth (he was not 21 until October), and partly thanks to his mother's efforts on his behalf.<sup>56</sup> In July 1911 Makhno started to serve a term of twenty years hard labour in the notoriously brutal Butyrka prison in north-west Moscow.<sup>57</sup>

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The Tsar had founded the Butyrka in the 1770s to house the captured rebels of the Pugachev peasant insurrection. It consisted of four large barracks clustered round the Pugachev tower, where the peasant leader Emilian Pugachev had spent his last days before his execution in 1775. Most of the buildings dated from the 1870s; the exercise yards were spacious and the cells "adequately

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54. Makhno, "Mon autobiographie, no.6" *Le Libertaire* (23 April 1926), p.3.

55. Novopolin, op.cit., p.77; Kuz'menko, op.cit., p.17.

56. This fact would support the 1889 birth date (see above, note 6). Mett, op.cit., p.1; Kuz'menko, op.cit., p.17; Makhno, "Zapiski", p.18; Arshinov, op.cit., p.49-50; Makhno, *La révolution russe*, p.226. Arshinov dates the trial in 1908. *BSE*, 1st ed., and 2nd ed., both put it in 1907 "for robbing the Berdiansk treasury".

57. Novopolin, op.cit., p.77; Makhno, "Zapiski", p.18, and Kuz'menko, op.cit., p.17, both say life imprisonment. See also Arshinov, op.cit., p.50; and I. Teper, *Makhno* (Moscow, 1924), p.22.

ventilated."<sup>58</sup> Feliks Dzerzhinskii, later head of the Cheka and an implacable enemy of *Makhnovshchina*, was Makhno's fellow-prisoner from September 1916 to March 1917. He complained that although "the manual labour revitalises me to a certain extent," still "life is monotonous and empty."<sup>59</sup> Despite Dzerzhinskii's relative contentment the regime of the prison was severe. Prisoners were often harshly punished for breaches of the regulations.

The years that Makhno spent in prison for this series of ill-planned and inconsequential political crimes changed the course of his life. It was in gaol that he met Petr Arshinov, the man who was to "confirm him in the faith of Bakunin and Kropotkin," support him throughout the Civil War, and follow him into exile.<sup>60</sup> A native of Ekaterinoslav, Petr Andreevich Arshinov was two years older than Makhno, and had been a Bolshevik before his conversion to anarchism in 1906. He had worked as an itinerant metal-worker on the railways, and had contributed to the Bolshevik newspaper *Molot* (The Sledgehammer). After becoming a militant anarchist, Arshinov received a death sentence for terrorist activities, but managed to escape to France, and subsequently went to Austria-Hungary. The Austrian police caught him trying to smuggle subversive literature into Russia and extradited him to Russia. After a second trial he was sentenced to hard labour, and

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58. Feliks Dzerzhinskii, *Journal: lettres à ses proches* (Moscow, 1959), p.282.

59. Ibid., p.280.

60. Avrich, *op.cit.*, p.209.

in 1911 he joined Makhno in the Butyrka.<sup>61</sup>

When the two men met, Arshinov had already experienced the hard life of the professional agitator and political exile. A resourceful man, he had gone to some lengths to improve his education, and he now took the trouble to improve Makhno's. His younger fellow-prisoner, commented Arshinov, "showed great perseverance, and studied grammar, mathematics, literature, cultural history and economics. Prison was the school where Makhno learned the history and politics that were to help him in his subsequent revolutionary activity."<sup>62</sup> He concentrated especially on three subjects - history, geography and mathematics. He used the prison library, and devoured both illegal and legal literature, reading Lermontov, Kropotkin, Belinskii, and many others. Nor was he above picking the brains of better-educated fellow-prisoners.<sup>63</sup>

In 1912, Makhno was to write later, he experienced a personal crisis which convinced him that he must find his salvation through individual effort.

"At the end of [the crisis], I no longer felt the slightest respect for the so-called 'distinguished politicians' or for their opinions," he wrote, "I reached the conclusion that as far as vital, concrete problems were concerned these men were nothing but children, like myself."<sup>64</sup>

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61. Arshinov, *Dva pobega: iz vospominanii anarkhista 1906-9 gg.* (Paris 1929), passim; Arshinov, *Istoriia*, p.12-15.

62. *Ibid.*, p.50.

63. Makhno, "Zapiski", p.18.

64. Makhno, "Mon autobiographie, no.14", *Le Libertaire* (9 July 1926), p.3.

Makhno was far from being an easy companion or a model prisoner. He was often in trouble with the authorities. He spent long periods in irons, or in the cold and damp of the solitary confinement cells, where he contracted the pulmonary tuberculosis that eventually killed him.<sup>65</sup> He had already spent time in the prison hospital in Ekaterinoslav with typhoid fever, and his health continued to deteriorate. He fell ill with pleurisy, and then with tuberculosis, spending more time in hospital. He was always on the lookout for opportunities to escape.<sup>66</sup> His fellow-inmates, with whom he argued continuously about politics, sarcastically dubbed him *skromnyi*, or the modest one.<sup>67</sup>

This period of Makhno's life left him with an enduring hatred of prisons. A few years later, at the height of his power, whenever he captured a town he would release all the prisoners from the local gaol. Then he would blow the building up or set fire to it.<sup>68</sup>

The entry of the Russian empire into the war in 1914 divided the political prisoners in the Butyrka, as it divided their comrades

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65. Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.50; Z. Iu. Arbatov, "Bat'ko Makhno", *Vozrozhdenie* no.29 (1953), p.114.

66. Makhno, "Zapiski", p.18.

67. Makhno, *La révolution russe*, p.71.

68. Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.153; see also H. Limbach, *Ukrainische Schreckenstage* (Berlin, 1919), p.78.

outside, into two camps. Makhno read in *Russkie viedemosti* that Kropotkin had taken a pro-war position, and despaired at the news.<sup>69</sup> He conducted vigorous polemics from the defeatist position, opening one tract with the words, "Comrades! When will you stop being such scoundrels?" Some Socialist-Revolutionary prisoners were indignant enough at this to want to hold an enquiry into the authorship of the anonymous pamphlet.<sup>70</sup> But the time for mere prison politics was over.

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69. Makhno, "Mon autobiographie, no.18," *Le libertaire* (13 August 1926), p.3.

70. Mett, *op.cit.*, p.2.

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IV. FEBRUARY 1917: ANARCHISM IN PRACTICE?

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Outside the prison the war was straining the fabric of the Tsarist autocracy to the limit. In February 1917 the reformist Provisional Government overthrew the autocracy without great difficulty. The Allied powers had wanted the Tsar to abdicate in favour of his son, who refused to succeed him. In the circumstances, given that the monarchy had lost most of its popular support after the urban hunger of 1916, a republic was the only alternative. In March, under pressure from the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, the Provisional Government issued a declaration of general amnesty for all agrarian, military or terroristic crimes. The amnesty enumerated articles from the Code of Laws covering religious crimes, offences against the Tsar, and actions outside the scope of authorised political activity. It specifically included

"all acts prohibited by criminal laws perpetrated during the commission of one of the acts mentioned in the present section."<sup>1</sup>

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1. R. P. Browder and Alexander Kerensky (eds.), *The Russian Provisional Government 1917: documents* (Stanford, 1961), vol.1, p.196-197.



Makhno, together with Arshinov, obtained his freedom under the terms of this amnesty, as a political prisoner. His sudden liberation after more than seven years in gaol came like a "crash of thunder."<sup>2</sup>

Arshinov decided to stay in Moscow, where he was for a time active in the Moscow Federation of Anarchists. Makhno made his way back to Guliai-Pole, the village's only returning political prisoner.<sup>3</sup> He was well aware that he lacked experience in practical politics. However, he was not going to miss his opportunity to create, as he put it,

"the means by which the old system of servitude can be overthrown, and by which a new society can be established where slavery will not exist, and authority will have no place."<sup>4</sup>

Makhno's prestige in Guliai-Pole was considerable, and the local anarchists and their sympathisers greeted him with enthusiasm. Some of his old comrades had survived, but there were many faces that he did not know.<sup>5</sup> The police persecution before the war had decimated the original group. The few remaining members had reconstituted themselves as a new organisation in May 1916. Only workers or peasants could become members. Makhno's return may

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2. Makhno, "Zapiski," *Anarkhicheskii Vestnik* no.1 (1923), p.19.

3. P. Arshinov, *Istoriia makhnovskogo dvizheniia, 1918-1921 gg.* (Berlin, 1923), p.50.

4. Makhno, *La révolution russe en Ukraine* (Paris, 1970), p.21.

5. *Ibid.*, p.23.

well have saved the group from collapse through lack of support.<sup>6</sup> He perceived at once that the group lacked system and structure, and he immediately delivered a vigorous call for coordinated action. His speech summed up the development of his idiosyncratic political ideas, and attacked the sectarianism of Russian anarchism:

"A tactic which is not based on coordination is doomed to remain impotent - it is incapable of turning to account the strength of the workers and the enthusiasm of the masses during the destructive stage of the revolution [...] In order that we may suppress government institutions, and set aside in our region all rights of private ownership in land, factories, mills and other enterprises, we must, taking account of the anarchist movement in the cities, draw near to the peasant masses so as to secure for ourselves the steadfastness of their revolutionary enthusiasm on the one hand, and so as to let them know, on the other, that we are beside them, winning them over permanently to the ideas to which we expose them in the assemblies and meetings. This is all the more important for us since our group is the only one which has remained in contact with the peasant masses for eleven years. As far as I know, there is no other group in the vicinity. Those in Aleksandrovsk and Ekaterinoslav consist of only a few survivors, and besides, nobody knows exactly where they are to be found - some are in Moscow, and nobody knows when they will return; others have emigrated to Switzerland, France, or America, and nobody hears from them. So we can rely only on ourselves [...] Without delay we must begin to organise a Union of Peasants, and put at its head a peasant from our group. This act has two aspects - we shall prevent those hostile to our political ideas from establishing themselves; and besides we can constantly keep the Union abreast of events, and thereby arrive at a complete understanding between it and our group."<sup>7</sup>

Makhno had learned the lessons of 1906, and realised that his organisation's only chance of survival lay in the closest possible alliance with the peasant masses, to seize control of non-revolu-

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6. *Biulleten' osvedomitel'nogo biuro anarkhistov Rossii* (15 December 1917), p.4-5; according to this report the group had only 8 active members even by the end of 1917.

7. Makhno, *op.cit.*, p.24-25.

tionary organs, and to set up institutions. Isolation would be fatal, as it had been during the Stolypin reaction.<sup>8</sup>

Some purists, to whom any form of organisation that was not completely spontaneous was anathema, objected to this tactic, arguing that propaganda was the only legitimate activity. Makhno countered this point of view with the argument that the peasants would see that the anarchists did not want to impose their opinions, but merely to present them.<sup>9</sup> At the time the effective government of Guliai-Pole was military: a regiment, supported by a machine-gun detachment, was garrisoned there. An officer had been elected president of the *Obshchestvennyi komitet*, or Social Committee.<sup>10</sup>

The Provisional Government in Petrograd could not enforce its will in the provinces. Makhno quickly realised that he had an excellent opportunity to step into the power vacuum before the SRs or the other parties. At a meeting of the *skhod*, a type of traditional town assembly with a strong appeal to the peasants, Makhno attacked the idea that the Social Committee could be chaired by someone from outside the community, who was not accountable for his actions. He proposed that the different sections of the town

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8. Ibid., p.38.

9. Ibid., p.25.

10. Sometimes translated less accurately as "Public Committee."

should choose representatives to study the question.<sup>11</sup>

As the end of March the representatives reconvened to discuss the election of a new Social Committee. An SR took the opportunity to propose, with some eloquence, the formation of a Committee of the Union of Peasants. Makhno seized on the suggestion as a pretext for presenting a proposal of his own. He contemptuously dismissed the "game of chance" that the political parties were playing among themselves. He urged the peasants to concern themselves with the immediate consolidation of revolutionary gains through communal ownership of land, mills, and factories. On such a basis they could build a new life for themselves without worrying about such irrelevancies as the Constituent Assembly.<sup>12</sup> The meeting set up a Union of Peasants, with 28 members, and chose Makhno to chair it.<sup>13</sup> Within a few days the new Union had enrolled all the peasants in Guliai-Pole except the kulaks. Makhno and the secretary of the Union made a tour of the district, setting up branches in nearby villages. Impressed by the revolutionary mood of the peasantry, Makhno returned more determined than ever to try to channel the impulse for social change in an anarchist direction.

Meanwhile, the preparations for the election of a new Social Committee were complete. Makhno won a seat on this body as well, al-

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11. Ibid., p.26-27.

12. Ibid., p.29-32.

13. Disingenuously, he describes his unanimous election membership and to the chair "despite my repeated protests. I was actually very busy at that time setting up a bureau for our group and drafting our manifesto" (ibid., p.31).

though he was unsure whether, as an anarchist, he should participate in what amounted to bourgeois local government. More importantly, he felt that his role should be to help to destroy peasant reliance on and faith in organisations like the local committees. Instead he found himself an elected member of one. Altogether, the village picked six members of the Union of Peasants as members of the Social Committee. Under the guidance of Makhno and the anarchist group, the six adopted aggressive tactics. They sat as a bloc, to gain control of the Committee's agrarian section, and to replace it with autonomous agrarian committees.<sup>14</sup>

The period from his release in early March until the end of May was critical for Makhno. He understood the weakness of the tactics formerly adopted by anarchist-communist groups. His charisma as the only returned political prisoner in the area enabled him to persuade his comrades that his unorthodox ideas on organisation were not only justifiable in theory but essential in practice. After he had established a broad base of support in the Union of Peasants, and had neutralised the essentially bourgeois Social Committee, he rapidly became the most powerful political figure in Guliai-Pole. His analysis of the situation and the measures it demanded was extremely accurate. He worked unceasingly at recruiting new members into the Union, and at propagating anarchist ideas. He was not above using force to attain his ends. At least one of his opponents died violently, and when the anar-

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14. Ibid., p.37-44.

chists gained access to the police archives in the town, and discovered the names of informers and provocateurs, they planned several executions.<sup>15</sup> Makhno must be credited with the energy, ruthlessness, and analytical intelligence necessary to carry through his particular local coup d'etat.

This was a period of considerable confusion in the political sphere, during which the old institutions, in Trotsky's telling phrase, awaited only "a sweep of the broom of history." Events in a small provincial town in Ukraine were of little interest in Petrograd. Anyway, it was unlikely that such local news would reach the capital in time for action to be taken. It was difficult enough for the Provisional Government to keep abreast of developments in the major cities of European Russia, and impossible for it to control them.<sup>16</sup> Neither the local bourgeoisie nor the central state authority was strong enough to prevent Makhno from consolidating his power, or from guiding the revolutionary enthusiasm of the peasants into the paths he had prepared. The slow and inexorable development of economic and social forces had rendered the old social and political structures obsolete, and they were collapsing. In Guliai-Pole at least, Makhno was ready to hand with a plan for the new edifice.

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15. Ibid., p.33-35.

16. For a pioneering description of the way in which events in Petrograd impacted on the provinces during the revolutionary period, see R. Pethybridge, *The spread of the Russian revolution* (London, 1972), p.176-214. Pethybridge was one of the earliest scholars to tackle the social history of the revolution and civil war, and has had a strong influence on revisionist approaches over the last two decades. See also his *The social prelude to Stalinism* (London, 1974).

He met with little opposition at first from SRs or Social Democrats, who accepted the broad outlines of his revolutionary strategy and his Union of Peasants. There were no Bolsheviks to speak of. In Kiev, several developments affecting Makhno's chances of success had taken place since the fall of the autocracy. In late March a group of petty-bourgeois intellectuals led by Professor M. Hrushevs'kyi had founded the *Ukrains'ka Tsentral'na Rada* (Ukrainian Central Council). Its initial objectives were to coordinate the national movement and to demand from the Provisional Government the right to print books and newspapers in Ukrainian and to establish Ukrainian schools. By April the Rada's demands were no longer limited to educational and linguistic questions; they wanted national autonomy, and summoned an All-Ukrainian National Congress to discuss it.<sup>17</sup> About 1,500 delegates attended. They confirmed the demand for autonomy within a federation of Russian republics, and authorised the Rada to take the initiative to reach such an objective. There followed a rash of conferences and congresses, as new Ukrainian newspapers and political parties emerged. A numerically small group of Ukrainian liberal intellectuals in Kiev dominated most of this activity.<sup>18</sup> Although the Rada was reformist in its social policies - and included in its membership radical Social Democrats such as Vynnychenko - it was not in any sense a Ukrainian government. It

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17. Kiev, 17-21 April 1917.

18. J. S. Reshetar, *The Ukrainian revolution, 1917-1920* (Princeton, 1952), p.50-51.

lacked support from either the landowners or the peasants, and it lacked the will to power, still believing in a federal solution and in calling the Constituent Assembly. Nor was the Rada recognised by the Provisional Government as having a popular mandate. Relations between the two bodies deteriorated steadily.

The Rada was aware of its need to drum up support among the peasantry, who constituted the vast majority of the ethnic Ukrainian population. There were a few supporters in the villages, but not enough to overcome the peasants' apathetic attitude towards the nationalists and their organs. The Rada's main objective was to replace the Russian and foreign bourgeoisie with a Ukrainian one of a more liberal cast of mind. The peasants just wanted to own the land. "Get off the rostrum! We'll have nothing to do with your government!" they shouted at one unfortunate nationalist who tried to arouse their feelings against the *katsapi* in Guliaipole.<sup>19</sup>

Makhno knew that he needed to mobilise not only the peasantry but the proletariat as well, in support of his idea of an autonomous regional revolution. Throughout May he worked feverishly at consolidating his political position in the various committees and unions of Aleksandrovsk and Guliaipole. He put his interpretation of events before the peasants. By the beginning of June he

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19. "Billy-goats," in Ukrainian, a derogatory expression used by the Ukrainian peasants to describe the Russians, with reference historically to their habit of wearing beards (Makhno, op.cit., p.63-64).



could turn his attention to the workers, concentrated in a few small factories in the two towns. His opportunity came when he received an invitation from the Aleksandrovska anarchists, to a conference at which they hoped to form a single federation for their area.<sup>20</sup> Makhno seized the chance eagerly. He ignored what he felt was a purely formal division between the anarchist-communists and the anarchist-individualists, and helped to set up the federation. He discovered with pleasure that some workers had already reached the same conclusions as he had on industrial questions. They asked for his assistance in organising a general strike. The strikers demanded wage increases of between 80 and 100 percent. They elected Makhno to the chairmanship of the trade union and of the benevolent fund. The strike was a great success. After some resistance all the employers caved in and granted the wage increases.<sup>21</sup>

For several months, Makhno had lost contact with the mainstream of the Russian anarchist movement. He had written to Moscow to ask whether it was permissible for an anarchist to join a Social Committee. He wrote to P. A. Kropotkin after the latter's return from exile, asking for advice. In neither case did he receive a reply. Although things were going well enough in Guliai-Pole and its environs, Makhno was suspicious of the urban anarchists, who were taking few initiatives of their own. The peasants were refusing to pay rent to the landlords, and were demanding the ex-

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20. Ibid., p.51.

21. Ibid., p.51-55.

appropriation of the large estates. Yet the anarchists in Petrograd and Moscow seemed uninterested in such developments, which augured well for their ideas. In August Makhno attended the Ekaterinoslav provincial Congress of Soviets as a peasant representative. The only result was a lengthy debate and a decision to rename the Union as a "Soviet."<sup>22</sup>

Makhno had been establishing himself and his group as the dominant political force in the district with considerable success. But he was unable to initiate the social revolution that he wanted to see through political action alone. The news of the outbreak of counterrevolution in late August provided the stimulus for renewal of the class struggle in Guliai-Pole, and again Makhno showed himself equal to the opportunity. In July Aleksandr Kerenskii had appointed General Lavr Kornilov to the post of Supreme Commander of the Russian army, probably because of his reputation as a decisive and strong-willed campaigner. Kornilov was, like many Russian officers, a political innocent, and he soon found himself assuming the role of champion of the right-wing and the conservatives.<sup>23</sup> The left's defeatism horrified him, and he had successfully demanded autonomy in military affairs before his appointment. Inevitably he came into conflict with Kerenskii, os-

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22. Ibid., p.67-73.

23. Kornilov, "a charismatic war hero of humble origins who had actively opposed the Left in 1917 and become the darling of the Right" was killed in battle in 1918. See E. Mawdsley *The Russian civil war* (Boston, 1987), p.20; W. Bruce Lincoln, *Red victory: a history of the Russian civil war* (New York, 1989), p.19.

tensibly over the restoration of the death penalty within the army.

By August, when Kerenskii moved to dismiss him from his post, Kornilov was already plotting a coup d'etat. This was aimed especially at the Bolsheviks and at the Soviets, which he believed to be peppered with German agents. Kornilov refused to step down and appealed over the heads of the Provisional Government to the Russian people for their support. He then ordered his troops to march on the capital. With the help of Bolshevik agitators, Kerenskii succeeded in persuading the advancing soldiers of the counterrevolution's futility, and defeated the coup almost without bloodshed.

In late August the Executive Committee of the Soviet in Petrograd issued an appeal to revolutionaries in the countryside to form Committees for the Defence of the Revolution.<sup>24</sup> This request was made as Kornilov unequivocally threatened the peasantry's revolutionary gains. It provided the anarchists of Guliai-Pole with the means of mobilising the mass of the poor peasants against the landowners and the local capitalists, to deliver what they hoped would be the final blow against the old order. At the height of the crisis Makhno set about expropriating the estates. He met with the landowners and kulaks and seized their deeds and certificates of ownership, using this documentation as the basis for an inventory of bourgeois property. At a meeting of the local sovi-

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24. Ibid., p.79.

et, the peasants decided that the listed land and livestock should be divided equally. The kulaks and *pomeshchiki* should be permitted to take a share.<sup>25</sup>

Meanwhile, the villagers set up the requested Committee for the Defence of the Revolution, and Makhno became its chairman.<sup>26</sup> He viewed the new committee as primarily executive in function, and used it to disarm and dispossess the bourgeoisie, the colonists, the kulaks, and the landowners.

Makhno argued that the Kornilov counterrevolution was the most immediate of several threats to the revolution, and that the Provisional Government and its member parties also constituted a danger. It was essential that the power of the capitalist class should be broken as soon as possible. This line of argument met with an enthusiastic response from the peasants. The impulse for expropriation came from the mass of the peasants themselves. Makhno was to write later of this period that

"an instinctive anarchism showed through all the designs of the toiling peasantry of Ukraine at that time, revealing an undisguised hatred for all state authority coupled with a desire to free themselves from it."<sup>27</sup>

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25. Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.51; confirmation that the landlords were permitted to take a share is contained in a letter from a Mennonite emigre to Victor Peters, quoted in his *Nestor Makhno* (Winnipeg, 1970), p.32.

26. Makhno, *op.cit.*, p.79.

27. Makhno, "Le grande Octobre en Ukraine," *Autogestion et socialisme* no.18-19 (1972), p.245.

The process of seizing the land, factories, mills, and livestock was generally peaceful, although any attempt by the burghers to hide the extent of their wealth usually met with violent retribution. Clearly the expropriation marked the beginning of a real change in social relations in the area, and the Provisional Government's local representatives became sufficiently alarmed to visit Guliai-Pole in an attempt to advise caution. The peasants unceremoniously warned them off. Makhno had little patience now with the organs of bourgeois power. The anarchist-communists, together with the metal-workers' and carpenters' union, called a regional Congress of Soviets, aiming to formally deprive the Social Committees of all but their advisory functions. This, Makhno argued, would permit the anarchists to operate without hindrance, and would accustom the peasants to the idea of a libertarian society.<sup>28</sup>

The capital of Russia in 1917 lay in the extreme northwest of an empire that stretched from the German border to the Pacific ocean, and from the Arctic to the Caspian. Almost every nineteenth-century traveller through Russia remarked on the contrast between the aristocratic glories and proletarian wretchedness of Petrograd, and the abject misery of the countryside. Less than 1.5 percent of the country's total population lived in the city, which nevertheless included the largest concentration of factory

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28. Makhno, *La révolution russe*, p.82-83; M. I. Kubanin, *Makhnovshchina* (Leningrad, [1927]), p.31-32. Peters, op.cit., p.32-34, quotes unpublished emigré accounts of this period.

workers and soldiers in the empire. There were perhaps 400,000 workers and 160,000 soldiers in the city and province in early 1917, out of a total population of two millions. Bolshevik strategy concentrated on winning these over, almost to the exclusion of any others. Since conditions in the capital had deteriorated rapidly during the war, Bolshevik agitation was notably successful. Petrograd was close to the fronts, enclosed on three sides by marshland, a lake and the Baltic sea. It was particularly vulnerable to transport interruptions, since the only approaches were from the south. The nobility, maintaining their ostentatious style of living unabashed by the sufferings of the working masses, provided a vivid illustration of the bankruptcy of Tsarism as proclaimed by the Bolsheviks.<sup>29</sup>

The political trends that led to the seizure of power by Lenin and the Bolsheviks in October 1917 were, therefore, in many senses, extremely localised phenomena. Although revolutionary convulsions had seized both the capital and the provinces throughout the year, it was far from inevitable that Petrograd would be followed by the rest of the country. The response to the news of the October revolution in Gulliai-Pole was one of mild interest only, and similar reactions occurred elsewhere. For one thing, it was not immediately clear exactly what had happened. The slogans "Land to the peasants" and "Factories to the workers" seemed unobjectionable, although Makhno was unhappy that elections to the Constituent Assembly were to go ahead. The events in

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29. Pethybridge, *op.cit.*, p.180 et seq.

*Speculations*  
Petrograd seemed to the peasants of Guliai-Pole to be merely a copy, on a grander scale, of the social revolution that they had initiated in their region in the preceding months.

"During the October days," wrote Makhno,

"the proletariat of Petrograd, Moscow, and other large cities, as also the soldiers and peasants in the towns, under the influence of the anarchists, Bolsheviks and left SRs, were only putting in order and expressing with greater precision the objectives for which the revolutionary peasantry of numerous Ukrainian regions had been struggling since August, but in conditions that were very favourable from the urban proletariat's point of view."<sup>30</sup>

Chronologically, "Great October" was a step that the Ukrainian peasantry had already taken.

In fact, the revolution in Guliai-Pole had not gone as far as Makhno would have wished. Although the policy of expropriation had aroused the enthusiasm of the poor peasants, they were less keen on forming anarchist communes. Nor were the land-seizures completed or unopposed by October. The peasants were still felling hectares of forest and seizing grain in the face of disciplinary action by Cossack troops.<sup>31</sup> In December the local nationalists attempted to call in Ukrainian troops from Aleksandrovsk against Makhno, but the commander had other matters on his mind

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30. Makhno, "Le grande Octobre", p.246.

31. *Velikaia oktiabr'skaia sotsialisticheskaia revoliutsiia na Ukraine* (Kiev, 1957), vol.1, p.621; vol.2, p.115.

and the move failed.<sup>32</sup> It was not until February 1918 that the system of communes got under way on a significant scale. They were to last only a month before the Austro-German invasion destroyed all hope of social revolution while the war lasted.

In his memoirs Makhno devotes little space to the organisation of the communes, although they are the real basis for the far-reaching contemporary and subsequent anarchist claims for the peasant revolution in his region. In this first short period of experimentation it seems unlikely that the anarchists accomplished much before the invaders arrived. Still, since it is the only description we have, Makhno's account is worth quoting extensively.

"The months of February and March were a time for distributing the livestock and equipment seized from the landowners in the autumn of 1917 and for dividing up the landed estates among the volunteers, the peasants and workers organised in agricultural communes. That this was a decisive moment, both in the construction of a new life and in the defence of that construction, was apparent to all the toilers of the district. Former front-line soldiers, under the leadership of the Revolutionary Committee, were occupied with the transfer into a communal fund of all the equipment and livestock from the landlords' estates and from the wealthy small-holders, leaving their owners two pairs of horses, one or two cows (depending on the size of the family), a plough, a seeder, a mower and a pitchfork, while the peasants went into the fields to finish the job of redistributing the land begun the previous autumn. At the same time, some of the peasants and workers, having already organised themselves into rural communes in the autumn, left their villages with their families and occupied the former landlords' estates [...]

The agricultural communes were in most cases organised by peasants, though sometimes their composition was a mixture of peasants and workers. Their organisation was based on the equality and solidarity of the members. All members of these communes - both

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32. Iu. Mahalevs'kyi, "Bat'ko Makhno", *Kalendar-Al'manakh Dnipro* vol.7 (1929) p.67.



men and women - applied themselves willingly to their tasks, whether in the field or the household. The kitchens and dining rooms were communal. But any members of the commune who wanted to cook separately for themselves and their children, or to take food from the communal kitchen and eat it in their own quarters, met with no objection from the other members of the commune.

Every member of the commune, or even a whole group of members, might arrange matters of food as they thought best, as long as they informed the commune in advance, so that all the members would know about it and could make the necessary preparations in the communal kitchen and storehouse. From experience it was necessary for the members of the commune to rise in good time in the morning to tend the oxen, horses, and other animals, and to perform other kinds of work. A member could at any time be absent from the commune as long as advance notice of this was given to the comrades with whom the member worked most closely on communal tasks, so that the latter could cope with the work during the member's absence. This was the case during working periods. But during periods of rest (Sunday was considered a day of rest) all members of the commune took it in turns to go off on trips.

The management of each commune was conducted by a general meeting of all its members. After these meetings, each member, having his appointed task, knew what changes to make in it and so on [...]

There were four such agricultural communes within a three- or four-mile radius of Guliai-Pole. In the whole district, however, there were many. But I shall dwell on these four communes because I myself played a direct part in organising them. In all of them the first fruitful beginnings took place under my supervision, or, in a few cases, in consultation with me. To one of them, perhaps the largest, I gave my physical labour two days a week, during the spring sowing in the fields behind a plough or seeder, and before and after sowing in domestic work on the plantations or in the machine shop and so on. The remaining four days of the week I worked in Guliai-Pole in the Group of Anarchist-Communists and in the district Revolutionary Committee. This was demanded of me by members of the group and by all the communes [...]

In all of the communes there were some peasant anarchists, but the majority of the members were not anarchists. Nevertheless, in their communal life they felt an anarchist solidarity such as manifests itself only in the practical life of ordinary toilers who have not yet tasted the political poison of the cities, with their atmosphere of deception and betrayal that smothers even many who call themselves anarchists. Each commune consisted of ten families of peasants and workers, totalling a hundred, two hundred or three hundred members. These communes took as much land as they were able to work with their own labour. Livestock and farm equipment were allotted by decision of the district congresses of land committees.

And so the free toilers of the communes set to work, to the tune of free and joyous songs which reflected the spirit of the revolu-

tion and of those fighters who prophesied it and died for it or who lived and remained steadfast in the struggle for its 'higher justice', which must triumph over injustice, grow strong, and become the beacon of human life. They sowed their fields and cultivated their gardens, confident in themselves and in their firm resolve not to allow the return of those who had never laboured on the land but who had owned it by the laws of the state and were seeking to own it again.

The inhabitants of the villages and hamlets bordering on these communes, who were less politically conscious and not yet liberated from their servility to the kulaks, envied the communards and repeatedly expressed the desire to take away all the livestock and equipment that they had obtained from the former landlords and distribute it among themselves. 'Let the free communards buy it back from us,' they would say. But this impulse was severely condemned by an absolute majority of the toilers at their village assemblies and at all the congresses. For the majority of the toiling population saw in the organisation of rural communes the healthy germ of a new social life which, as the revolution triumphed and approached its creative climax, would grow and provide a model of a free and communal form of life, if not for the whole country, then at least for the hamlets and villages of our district."<sup>33</sup>

Clearly, this type of independent organisation could not go on for very long. There were too many outside forces interested in the rich prize of Ukraine, with its fertile soil and its concentration of mines and metallurgical industries. In Kiev the Rada was mustering its strength for the struggle against the Bolsheviki, whose policy in Ukraine was one of extraordinary complexity. Lenin's nationalities policy emphasised the legal right of nations to self-determination coupled with an advocacy of close associations of states.<sup>34</sup> He had arrived at this stance along a

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33. Makhno, *La révolution russe*, p.187-190 (*Russkaia revoliutsiia na Ukraine* [Paris, 1929], p.173-175). Translation adapted from Paul Avrich (from the Russian), in *The anarchists in the Russian revolution* (London, 1973), p.130-132.

34. E. H. Carr comments "On this somewhat nebulous foundation the October revolution was left to build its theory and its practice in the burning issue of national self-determination." *The Bolshevik revolution* (Harmondsworth, 1966), vol.1, p.435.

tortuous and polemical route and over a long period, during which the party often changed its position. At least three factions within the Ukrainian Bolshevik movement vigorously opposed the party's programme as finally adopted. The left wing feared a Ukrainian secession that would weaken both the Russian and the Ukrainian proletariats. The right wing, based in industrialised eastern Ukraine, supported national self-determination. However, they feared that they would be overwhelmed by the Ukrainian-speaking peasant masses of the west. The national-communists opposed the close association of states with its implications of assimilation, and proposed the creation of a Ukrainian state and a Ukrainian communist party.<sup>35</sup>

The failure of the divided Ukrainian Bolsheviks to follow the example of Petrograd by seizing power in an armed uprising led to a dual policy towards the nationalist Rada. In areas where the Provisional Government had been strongest - Lugansk, and other towns of the Donbass - the Bolsheviks seized power locally and refused recognition to the Rada. In other areas, including Khar'kov and Ekaterinoslav, they collaborated with both Ukrainian and Russian left parties and recognised the Rada. In this piecemeal fashion they hoped to gain control of Ukraine. Relations between the Rada and the Bolsheviks of Kiev were marked by extreme hostility. Despite this, the Bolsheviks were, for a short time, members of the

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35. M. Luther, "The birth of the Soviet Ukraine," (Ph. D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1962), p.55-92; see also Luther's introduction to Serhii Mazlakh and Vasyl' Shakhrai, *On the current situation in the Ukraine* (Ann Arbor, 1970), p.v-xxx.

so-called "Small Rada", a committee that sat in continuous session and made important decisions when the full Rada was in recess.

The beginning of the White counterrevolution in the southeast complicated the struggle between the Bolsheviks and the Rada. It was there that General A. M. Kaledin had declared an independent Don Cossack state on the day after the Bolsheviks had taken over the capital. In December Lenin assigned Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko the task of crushing this centre of opposition and counterrevolution. By January the Bolsheviks were at war with the nationalists of the Rada as well. In the early days of the Civil War there was rapid movement along railway lines, light casualties, and small forces controlling large areas. The ferocious and pervasive violence of the later stages was not yet in evidence.

When Makhno visited Ekaterinoslav for the Provincial Congress he found in the city a microcosm of the confusion in Ukraine as a whole. The Bolsheviks and Left SRs dominated the Soviet. The Rada controlled some armed battalions. Some sailors from Kronstadt on their way to the southeast to fight Kaledin were billeted in the town. There was even a bourgeois "neutralist" faction.<sup>36</sup>

On 10 January 1918, after Makhno had returned to Guliai-Pole with arms for his Defence committee, Soviet forces entered Ekaterinos-

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36. Makhno, *op.cit.*, p.118-119.

lav on the way to Kiev. They were moving along a narrow front that missed Guliai-Pole altogether. It was impossible to remain neutral. The anarchists and poor peasants of Guliai-Pole recognised the negative attitude of the Rada towards their local revolution. They decided to support the Bolsheviks, forming a class alliance between the workers and the poor peasants against the nationalist petty-bourgeoisie and the conservative elements backing them.

When Makhno's detachment reached Aleksandrovska the fighting was over and the Bolsheviks were in control. Makhno busied himself releasing prisoners and trying in vain to blow up the gaol.<sup>37</sup> Soon afterwards the partisans received the news that several train loads of Cossacks were passing through the district to join Kaledin. Makhno and his forces seized the Kichkas bridge over the Dnepr at Ekaterinoslav, to prevent their passage. After some negotiations, Makhno appropriated the Cossacks' weapons, but left them their horses and let them go. The Bolsheviks immediately seized the unarmed Cossacks at Aleksandrovska, confiscated the horses, and sent the soldiers back to Khar'kov.<sup>38</sup>

This incident was the first of several that increased Makhno's natural suspicion of Bolshevik intentions. Since Soviet forces had arrived there had been even more arrests than under the Rada.

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37. Ibid., p.131-140.

38. Makhno later described this action as jesuitical - "promising something and not performing it" (ibid., p.151).

Makhno resigned in disgust from the Aleksandrovsk Soviet and returned to Guliai-Pole with his detachment.<sup>39</sup>

The revolution in Guliai-Pole faced a financial crisis, which the anarchists resolved by the simple expedient of exerting pressure on the local bank. They felt, however, that reliance on such outmoded economic procedures as money-exchange was hindering the implementation of anarchist social organisation. A delegate went to Moscow and other cities to arrange direct exchange of commodities with interested groups of workers; surplus grain for manufactured goods. Some Moscow trades unions showed interest, and sent their officials to Guliai-Pole to complete the deal. The villagers duly sent grain off to Moscow, where the workers dispatched a consignment of textiles and other items in return, only to be held up by the Bolsheviks in Aleksandrovsk. The peasants were outraged at this interference with their almost-successful anarchist economic experiment, and threatened to march on Aleksandrovsk and to disperse the Soviet. The Bolsheviks released the goods.<sup>40</sup>

From March 1917 until February 1918 was probably the period of Makhno's greatest *political* success. However, most accounts concentrate on his *military* exploits in 1919 and 1920, when he only had time for fighting.

Certainly any claim that *Makhnovshchina* was a revolutionary move-

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39. Ibid., p.153-161.

40. Ibid., p.175-184. See also above, Chapter II, note 24.

ment of the toiling masses can only start from an analysis of its achievement in the political and social spheres. Such an analysis must focus on the year 1917, and on the period between November 1918 and June 1919, when Makhno operated without undue military interference. His accomplishments were impressive in terms of the rural communes considered in isolation. But he was unable to accommodate to the needs of a complex developing economy based on industrialisation and urbanisation. In short, Makhno's theories left out of account a substantial part of the Ukrainian political economy. The initial popularity of his practical measures was less than firmly rooted.

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V.                    **ECONOMIC ROOTS OF PEASANT DISCONTENT**

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The purpose of this chapter is not to argue for a simple economic determinism, nor to privilege a mechanistic class analysis in the investigation of *Makhnovshchina* and peasant insurgency in Ukraine during the civil war. On the contrary, given the inadequacy of the available data on the social composition of the *Makhnovshchina*, it is difficult to point to the social or economic causes of the rebellion, except in general terms.<sup>1</sup>

It may not be especially helpful to point out that the socio-economic disruption of the civil war period created conditions in which peasant insurgency could flourish. A grasp of the concrete peculiarities of Ukrainian political economy is nonetheless important, in order to understand what it was that was disrupted. This chapter will try to sketch the outlines of the social relations of production in agriculture within Ukraine, and the specificities of peasant social differentiation in those left-bank

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1. An earlier version of the argument of this chapter was presented in C. Darch, "Nestor Makhno and peasant anarchism in southern Russia during the revolution and civil war, 1917-1921," (Paper presented to the History Dept. Seminar, University of Dar es Salaam, 1978).



provinces where the *Makhnovshchina* flourished.

### ***Household and commune in the Russian Empire***

"Civilisation," wrote Trotsky, "has made the peasantry its pack animal. The bourgeoisie in the long run only changed the form of the pack."<sup>2</sup> There is a long tradition of the study of class differentiation among the Russian and Ukrainian peasantry, analysing regional variations in economic conditions, and taking into account the impact of industrialisation on rural life at the turn of the century.<sup>3</sup> It is now widely accepted even among non-Marxist writers that the writings of Engels and Lenin have played a seminal role in this tradition.<sup>4</sup> Lenin's *The development of capitalism in Russia* has been especially important in this regard.

From the 1960s onwards, analysis of the Russian peasantry made major advances in Britain and the United States, with translations and detailed studies of the work of the neo-populist Alek-

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2. Trotsky, *The history of the Russian revolution* (Ann Arbor, 1957), vol.2, p.3.

3. In English, the works of Robinson, Blum and Vucinich are rich in data for the peasantry of pre-revolutionary Russia. See G. T. Robinson, *Rural Russia under the old regime* (Berkeley, 1960); J. Blum, *Lord and peasant in Russia* (Princeton, 1961); W. Vucinich (ed.), *The peasant in nineteenth century Russia* (Stanford, 1968). Also of interest is S. Grosskopf, *L'alliance ouvrière et paysanne en URSS (1921-1928): le problème du blé* (Paris, 1976).

4. See, for example, the comments of Mark Harrison, "Resource allocation and agrarian class formation: the problem of social mobility among Russian peasant households, 1880-1930," *Journal of Peasant Studies* vol.4, no.2 (January 1977), p.127-129.

sandr Chaianov by Daniel Thorner, Basile Kerblay and R. E. F. Smith, and of the Agrarian Marxist L. N. Kritsman by Terry Cox and Gary Littlejohn. Important contributions have also been made by Teodor Shanin, Athar Hussein and Keith Tribe, among others.<sup>5</sup>

In the words of Mark Harrison, this work in its turn

"[...] has drawn upon the work of a number of Russian pioneers working in the field in the period 1900-30. The works of Lewin and Shanin would not have become obligatory reading without their careful collation of evidence and interpretations from contemporary observers, Marxists, Populists and others, themselves devoted to the study of the peasantry for its own sake."<sup>6</sup>

The details of Chaianov's long-lived theory of a homogeneous peasantry (the "peasant economy"), without permanent class stratification need not detain us here.<sup>7</sup> The argument which is to be ad-

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5. See, for example: A. Hussein and K. Tribe, *Marxism and the agrarian question. Vol.2: Russian Marxism and the peasantry, 1861-1930* (London, 1981); T. Shanin, *Late Marx and the Russian road: Marx and 'the peripheries of capitalism'* (London, 1984); *Russia as a developing society. Vol.1: The roots of otherness: Russia's turn of the century* (London, 1985) and *Vol.2: Russia 1905-07: revolution as a moment of truth* (London, 1986); T. Cox, *Peasants, class and capitalism: the rural research of L. N. Kritsman and his school* (Oxford, 1986)

6. Harrison, *op.cit.*, p.128. The works referred to are M. Lewin, *Russian peasants and Soviet power* (London, 1968), which devotes two whole chapters to the problem of class stratification; T. Shanin (ed.) *Peasants and peasant societies* (Harmondsworth, 1971); and T. Shanin *The awkward class - political sociology of peasantry in a developing society: Russia, 1910-1925* (Oxford, 1972).

7. In the mid-1960s, Thorner, Kerblay and Smith edited an influential translation of Chaianov's major theoretical work, together with another text (*The theory of peasant economy* [Homewood, Ill., 1966]). This attracted the attention of development economists, particularly those working on India. See especially Mark Harrison, "The peasant mode of production in the work of A. V. Chayanov," *Journal of Peasant Studies* vol.4, no.4 (July 1977), p.323-336, and Utsa Patniak, "Neo-populism and Marxism: the Chayanovian view of the agrarian question and its fundamental fallacy," *Journal of Peasant Studies* vol.6, no.4 (1979), p.375-420. For a summary of the arguments, see Gary Littlejohn, "Chayanov's theory of the peasant economy," *Studium Generale* (Wageningen)

vanced in this and later chapters rests on a detailed analysis of regional and class differentiation among the peasantry of left-bank Ukraine, under conditions of commercial agricultural production. However, it must be recognised that some scholars still maintain that peasant political action has no basis in any observable stratification *within* the peasantry. Shanin, for example, has argued that a careful examination of what he terms "so-called kulak rebellions" shows that they are almost always general peasant uprisings. Indeed, he goes so far as to assert that in the revolts of Makhno, Antonov and others "all strata of the peasantry seem to have risen by localities with remarkable unity and with no trace of internal class division."<sup>8</sup>

Brief  
dismissal  
of  
argument

Kritsman and his Agrarian Marxist school of analysis adopted a different methodology to Chaianov's, with a cautious approach towards the importance of emerging class differentiation, and due emphasis given to regional and geographical factors such as access to local markets.<sup>9</sup> Such regional distinctions were, as we shall see, particularly marked in the commercial agricultural areas of left-bank Ukraine at the turn of the century. But before moving on to the specific peculiarities of this area, let us look

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no.89 (May 1987), p.22-35.

8. Shanin, *The awkward class*, p.147.

9. See Terry Cox and Gary Littlejohn, "Kritsman and the Agrarian Marxists," special issue of the *Journal of Peasant Studies* vol. 11, no.2 (January 1984), which includes a condensed translation of Kritsman's "Class stratification of the Soviet countryside. For a summary see Littlejohn, "L. N. Kritsman: the Russian peasantry, 1920-1930," *Studium Generale* (Wageningen) no.89 (May 1987), p.1-21.

at the common features of the agricultural political economy of the Russian empire at the turn of the century.

Russian peasants in general had more than bourgeois oppression to deal with. They faced the harsh climate of the steppes, the isolation of the tiny settlements in the vast distances of the Russian plain, enforced idleness in winter and long days of back-breaking labour in the summer. These factors often turned the *mu-zhik* into a surly and suspicious misanthropist, far removed from the romantic misconceptions of nineteenth century populists.<sup>10</sup>

"Where," asked Maxim Gorky rhetorically,

"is the good-natured thoughtful Russian peasant, indefatigable searcher after truth and justice, who was so convincingly and beautifully depicted in the world of nineteenth-century Russian literature? In my youth I searched for such a man across the Russian countryside and did not find him."<sup>11</sup>

According to Gorky, the "half-savage, stupid, heavy people of the Russian village" had mostly forgotten even Emilian Pugachev, the leader of the last of the great peasant rebellions of pre-modern

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10. The growth and decline of the idealisation of the peasant as reflected in the drama is documented in A. Donskov, *The changing image of the peasant in nineteenth century Russian drama*, *Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae, Series B*, vol.177 (Helsinki, 1972). Donskov argues that disillusionment set in as early as 1873. Cf. D. Fanger, "The peasant in literature" in Vucinich, op. cit., p.231-262. Another romantic period followed the revolution, in the 1920s: see K. Clark, "The city versus the countryside in Soviet peasant literature of the twenties: a duel of utopias," in A. Gleason, P. Kenez and R. Stites (eds.), *Bolshevik culture: experiment and order in the Russian revolution* (Bloomington, 1985), p.175-189.

11. "On the Russian peasantry" in T. Shanin (ed.) *Peasants and peasant societies*, p.370.

Russian.<sup>12</sup>

Socially, the *muzhiks* were isolated for the most part from the civilisation of the cities. They based their hopes not on revolt, but on a sense of tradition and ritual. Peasant ceremonies reflected the immutable passage of the seasons and reinforced the social order, providing a stable framework within which individual hostilities or amities could be contained.<sup>13</sup>

According to many rural sociologists, the *muzhiks* submitted willingly to the elements, whether natural, economic or personal, which they recognised as ruling their lives. Such perceived fatalism was their means of controlling arbitrary forces by recognising their power in formal terms. They traditionally rebelled, if they rebelled at all, within the social system. Such a revolt might be against violations of the system from above, in an attempt to restrain landlords or kulaks who had overstepped the permissible bounds of exploitation.<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, from the peasant's point of view, his revolt was often even more disruptive of the traditional order than the violations against which they were protesting.

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12. The four major revolts were those of Bolotnikov (1606-1607), Razin (1667-1671), Bulavin (1707-1708) and Pugachev (1773-1775). Strictly speaking they were Cossack rather than peasant in character.

13. E. Wolf, *Peasants* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1966), p.98-99.

14. A general point made by Marx in e.g., "The eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," in *Selected Works* (Moscow, 1969-1970; hereafter cited as SW) vol.1, p.479-480; as well as by many non-Marxist scholars e.g. Wolf, "On peasant rebellions" in Shanin, op.cit., p.270; C. Johnson, *Revolution and the social system* (Stanford, 1964), p.31-34.

Two distinctive features characterised the social organisation of the Russian peasantry in the nineteenth century. They were the *obshchina* or *mir* (the commune), with its system of repartitional land tenure, and the *dvor* (the household), which was at the very centre of peasant society.<sup>15</sup>

It is a platitude of peasant economy that the family merges into the agricultural enterprise, so that labour costs cannot be estimated in monetary terms without great difficulty. This was true of much of Russian agriculture into the early years of the twentieth century. The *dvor*, as farm or as family, was not supposed to employ much outside labour. It formed a loose structure, without defined roles, around the *bol'shak* (the head of the household), existing as a self-sufficient extended unit. A peasant's minimum requirements can be defined as enough food to stay alive on, and enough left over to support the ceremonies of the social order - feasts, wedding, and funerals.<sup>16</sup> It was the *dvor* that tried to satisfy these needs.

The second characteristic feature of peasant society was the com-

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15. T. Shanin, "A Russian peasant household at the turn of the century," in Shanin, *op.cit.*, p.30-36. See also the detailed discussion of the *mir* and the *dvor* in Shanin's *The roots of otherness*, vol.1, p.66-102.

16. Wolf, *Peasants*, p.4-9.

mune.<sup>17</sup> In both Ukrainian and Russian, a widely-used word for commune is *mir*, which also means "the world, everybody."<sup>18</sup> This semantic point reveals the exclusive attitude of its members towards the commune, and towards the landlords and the city, outside their world.<sup>19</sup> The *mir* at its simplest was the institution through which most peasants held land. At its most complex it was a vital and self-renewing social organisation of impressive resilience.<sup>20</sup>

The essential feature of the system was that it divided the land into strips, in open fields that several households held in common. In theory the *mir* allocated strips to the various households at regular intervals, making allowance for the labour available within each family. Since a three-field system was popular, allowing for a fallow period in the cycle, the interval between re-partitions was often a multiple of three. In practice adjustments

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17. The village commune was resurrected virtually single-handedly as an object of study in the post-war USSR by V. P. Danilov, who also argued that the kulaks were not numerous enough to be considered a distinct class (see his *Rural Russia under the new regime*, translated by O. Figes [London, 1988]).

18. Yet another meaning is "peace". Grace Atkinson, commenting on exactly this point, aptly describes the word as "a semantic gem" (D. G. Atkinson, "The Russian land commune and the revolution," [Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1971], p.320-329). See also her book *The end of the Russian land commune, 1905-1930* (Stanford, 1983).

19. Erik H. Erikson makes much of this in a discussion of Russian peasant psychology in *Childhood and society*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1963), p.361. But this approach via cultural anthropology can be criticised as idealist, since peasant culture(s) are by no more immutable over time than peasant political economies.

20. For a somewhat static view of the membership and organisation of the *mir* in the 1870s see D. Mackenzie Wallace, *Russia* (New York, 1970 repr.), p.118-137; cf. G. V. Plekhanov's account of its disintegration in "Our differences" in his *Selected philosophical works*, 2nd ed. (Moscow, 1974- ), vol.1, p.240ff.

were often made at intervals somewhere between seven and nine years, but some communes waited as long as 20 years or more.<sup>21</sup> The whole community held the land, in the same way that the whole community met its traditional obligations to the landlord in cash, in kind, or in compulsory labour. This "repartition" of land and obligations within the commune ensured, at least in theory, that each household worked an optimum share of land and did not pay excessive taxes. The individual peasant was cushioned, although inadequately, from ruin through the vagaries of chance or the depredations of the *pomeshchik*.

Communal organisation was never static or rigid, but was continually being modified under the pressures of economic change and of geography. In the nineteenth century the Tsarist government left the *mir* alone, except to collect taxes, and it developed in its own way, and appeared to flourish. The government and its agents did not interfere directly in the process of allotment and reallocation of communal land. They were generally ignorant of the methods adopted by different communes. One English observer even commented in the 1870s that the village communes were "capital specimens of representative Constitutional government of the ex-

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21. Full repartitions were based on "revisions" (or censuses) and were normally undertaken about 20 years apart, the interval between Imperial Russian censuses. If partition was based on the more complex *tiaglo* (labour unit) system, repartition could be more frequent. Partial redistribution or adjustments, sometimes voluntary, could occur even more often (Atkinson, "The Russian land commune," p.15).



treme democratic type."<sup>22</sup>

In the 1870s even sympathetic observers were predicting that the commune could not survive the impact of industrialisation on rural society for much longer.<sup>23</sup> Despite the populists' faith in peasant communalism, the *mir* was only an imperfect mechanism for preventing or controlling domination of the group by the individual in a period of capitalist growth. Often it became the battleground between rich and poor peasants. Although they needed each other to make the traditional system work, their interests could only advance at each others' expense, through irreconcilable courses of action. The group solidarity, egalitarianism and close personal contact between members that had helped the *mir* to survive political assaults in the past, hindered its response to changing economic conditions. The communes were conformist and inflexible, they undervalued individual initiative, they rejected modern values. After the emancipation of the serfs in 1861, these contradictory tendencies grew until the communes were seething with discontent and frustration.<sup>24</sup> Government policy discouraged repartition except under stringent conditions in an attempt to avoid excessive fragmentation of land holdings, and even the 20

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22. Wallace, *op.cit.*, p.126. But Marx had earlier perceived "the *non-democratic* but *patriarchal* character of the commune management." Letter to Engels (7 November 1868), in K. Marx and F. Engels, *Selected correspondence*, 3rd ed. (Moscow, 1975), p.204.

23. Wallace, *op.cit.*, chapter 9.

24. Wolf, *Peasant wars of the twentieth century* (New York, 1969), p.65.

year cycle was decreasingly adhered to.<sup>25</sup>

Between 1826 and 1861, there were 1,186 reported peasant uprisings in the empire, a proportionately large increase over the number in the last quarter of the eighteenth century.<sup>26</sup> The emancipation of the serfs in 1861 may have been in part a reaction to this widespread unrest. Tsar Alexander II sought to leave the peasant his land and to avoid creating a western-style proletariat. But the landowners could not resist seizing the opportunity to off-load their least productive land onto the peasantry. In addition, the peasants had to pay part of the cost of their freedom, while the government paid the remainder.

In the south many peasants received smaller allotments of land than they had been working on before 1861, although their legal rights were strengthened. The commune became an instrument of government, collecting the excessively heavy taxes for the state. Many peasants could not meet their tax obligations from the income of their smaller allotments. Although they were permitted to make extended payments over many years, they had to take on "temporary obligations" to make ends meet.<sup>27</sup> The result of the emancipation, in the end, was to combine notional freedom with real

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25. Atkinson, *op.cit.*, p.28.

26. P. I. Lyashchenko, *History of the national economy of Russia* (New York, 1970), p.370-371; for the period 1775-1800 see p.280.

27. Lenin demonstrated this in 1903 in his "K derevenskoi bednote," in his *Polnoe sobranie sochinenie*, 5th ed. (Moscow, 1958-1965), vol.7, p.129-203 (hereafter cited as PSS).

poverty, and to bind the peasantry to the commune with a different set of chains.

In late nineteenth-century rural Russia the redistributive commune occupied a paradoxical position. It was an agent of the state, as the basic fiscal, economic and social unit of organisation in the countryside. The emancipation preserved the juridical form of the *obshchina*, and sealed the peasantry inside it for political reasons of expediency. Decrees and legislation could not protect the commune's underlying social and economic relations from the impact of the developing money economy. Communal small-scale agriculture retarded technical advance and inhibited economic efficiency. Although the population density of European Russia was high, the area under cultivation per head of population was small. It was only a quarter of the comparable figure for the United States and under half that for Denmark in the 1890s.<sup>28</sup> The pressure of population, the shortage of land and the government's taxation policies together contrived to overbalance the whole artificial structure in 1905.<sup>29</sup>

Russian Marxists agreed that the commune's apparently healthy exterior disguised profound and irreversible changes, and that

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28. M. Dobb, *Soviet economic development since 1917*, 6th ed. (London, 1966), p.39. Dobb's figures are: population density of European Russia excluding Poland, 53.5; of the U.S., 31. Average area of cultivated land per head of agricultural population in Russia, 3 acres; in the U.S., 13 acres; in Denmark, 8 acres. The northern Ukraine, with 1.5 acres per head, was roughly equivalent to India's average. But on average, only around 11 percent of the territory of the Empire was arable, and much of it had erratic rainfall.

29. Atkinson, *op.cit.*, p.320-329.

those changes would not benefit the peasantry. "The history of capitalism," wrote Trotsky later, "is the history of the subordination of the country to the town," and the impact of commodity production and the money economy on the *mir* bore him out.<sup>30</sup> In 1884 Plekhanov was arguing that the development of rural capitalism had doomed the commune. In the anti-Narodnik tract *Nashi raznoglasia* he quotes an account of a peasant family headed by an old woman of 70, who would traditionally have received and redistributed the income of the household members. It is interesting to note that women could indeed head households, although most research in this area until recently has not been particularly sensitive to gender issues, especially the sexual division of labour.<sup>31</sup> A new road ran past the village, and soon a barrel of cabbage could be sold to the passing carters for more than the value of a year's work on plough land by one man. One son became a coach-driver in St. Petersburg, where he earned more in one night than his sister at home could in a whole summer. He began secretly to keep some of his earnings aside for himself. The family continued to observe the external ritual of the old woman's authority, but such formalities no longer reflected any internal reality. Her impending death would mean the end of their *dvor* as

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30. *Itogy i perspektivy* (Moscow, 1919), p.43.

31. Researchers have now begun to look more closely at the sexual division of labour among the Russian, if not yet the Ukrainian peasantry in the 19th and early 20th centuries. See, for example, R. Glickman, "Peasant women and their work," in B. Eklof and S. Franks (eds.), *The world of the Russian peasant: post-emancipation culture and society* (Boston, 1990), p.45-63. For a study of the impact of male migration on women, see B. Engel, "The woman's side: male out-migration and the family economy in Kostroma province," in *ibid.*, p.65-80.

a social unit in the traditional sense.<sup>32</sup>

Plekhanov argued that the pressures of the growth of money economy in the countryside did not produce immediate external change in the *obshchina*. Cumulative internal changes would lead to its final collapse. This process of internal transformation - and the rise of individualism - was dividing the peasantry into proto-classes of the exploiters and the exploited. It provided the conditions for an eventual agrarian revolution and for true emancipation, after the rural proletariat had analysed the conditions that led to their enslavement and recognised the necessary conditions of freedom. It was the late development of the money economy in rural Russia, and not some mystical virtue of the *muzhik*, that explained the long-lasting stability of the commune.<sup>33</sup>

Lenin felt that Russian capitalism was unforced and indigenous, with roots in the rural economy. It was not a foreign imposition as the *narodniki* argued. Capitalism had a dual role to play in

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32. G. Ivanov, *Otechestvennie zapiski* (September 1880), p.38-39, quoted in Plekhanov, *op.cit.*, p.241-242.

33. *Ibid.*, p.242-243. In 1894 Engels commented that "nowhere has agrarian communism, come down from the tribal system, ever evolved anything out of itself except its own disintegration." *SW* vol.2, p.402. Cf. Marx's letter to Vera Zasulich (8 March 1881) in which he states that "the analysis given in *Capital* does not provide any arguments for or against the viability of the village community, but the special research into this subject which I conducted, and for which I obtained the material from original sources, has convinced me that this community is the fulcrum of Russia's social revival, but in order that it might function in this way one would first have to eliminate the destructive influences which assail it from every quarter and then to ensure the conditions normal for spontaneous development." K. Marx and F. Engels, *Selected correspondence*, p.320. These destructive influences were not eliminated. (The full texts of the early drafts of this important letter have been published in English by Shanin in his *Late Marx and the Russian road*, p.97-133).

Russian society; to concentrate production in large units, and to "socialise labour." Even in the villages the formation of a rural proto-bourgeoisie and a proto-proletariat was hastening the disintegration of the old relations of production. Land was becoming a commodity and agriculture an entrepreneurial activity.<sup>34</sup> In the south, allotment land was declining in importance among the poor peasants because they had to lease out their land. Among the rich peasants, it was scarce because rented or purchased land predominated heavily in the total area under cultivation.<sup>35</sup>

Antagonisms in the countryside did indeed reflect real class stratifications within the peasantry in the late nineteenth century, yet the nature and extent of differentiation is difficult to discern. Lenin, in an analysis which has been criticised for placing too heavy an emphasis on class stratification *per se*, and not enough on mobility between classes and geographical differentiation, nevertheless distinguished four categories among the peasants.<sup>36</sup> At the bottom of the ladder were the *batraki*, the landless peasants who hired out their labour. The *bedniak*, a peasant with land but no horse, lived only marginally better than a *batrak*, and might even leave his strips to seek employment from

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34. Lenin, "Razvitie kapitalizma v Rossii," in *PSS*, vol.3; English translation, *The development of capitalism in Russia*, 2nd ed. (Moscow, 1974).

35. *Ibid.*, p.81.

36. Lenin, "Agrarnye vopros v Rossii k kontsu XIX veka," in *PSS* vol.17, p.57-137; written in 1908, using data from his "Razvitie kapitalizma v Rossii." See also *PSS* vol.16, p.193-413.

time to time.<sup>37</sup> The *seredniak* was theoretically a peasant with a horse and land, and should therefore have been self-sufficient. The lines between these groups were so blurred that even some peasants classified as *bedniaki* on other grounds owned draught animals. Some later theoreticians divided the *seredniaki* into *malomoshchiny* (weak) and *zazhitochny* (better-off). The *zazhitochny seredniaki* tended to shade off into the fourth class of *kulaks* (fists), the rural capitalists, the peasants who employed others to work their land.<sup>38</sup>

Party analysts had considerable trouble with these categories, for they were extremely fluid. Apart from difficulties of definition, some researchers argued that the categories had no class content anyway. The available data were so inadequate and unreliable that it was risky to try to base a theory on them.<sup>39</sup> The analysts also disagreed on concrete questions. They argued about such statistics as the total number of livestock, and about how

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37. In his "K derevenskoi bednote," written in 1903, Lenin included peasants who sold their labour and also those who rented their allotments out, in the category of rural proletarians. This early work marks the beginning of the development of Lenin's ideas about the peasantry, and is crucial for the understanding of his later arguments (E. Kingston-Mann, "Proletarian theory and peasant practice: Lenin 1901-04," *Soviet Studies* vol.26 (1974), p.526n).

38. M. Lewin, *op.cit.*, p.43. P. Eidelberg, a specialist on Rumania, has argued for caution and subtlety, pointing out that in that country the terms "rich peasant" and "poor peasant" relate primarily to liquid capital and agricultural inventory rather than land area (*Times Literary Supplement* [14 February 1975]).

39. This was true into the 1920s: see, for example, the journal *Na agrarnom fronte* (1925- ). In no.1 (1930) p.96-97, Gaister (quoted by Lewin, *op.cit.*, p.49) argued that the term *zazhitochny* was empty of class content. In the 1920s at least seven government agencies were collecting data from the countryside, but by modern standards their results were crude, unreliable and meagre. See also T. Cox, *Peasants, class and capitalism*.

to define peasant ownership or rental of land and machinery. The furthest that they could safely go was to regard the *batraki* and *bedniaki* as the "social support" of the revolution in the countryside. This meant that they were analogous to but less politically trustworthy than the proletariat, where the hard core of party support consisted of unskilled workers who had least to lose from the overthrow of the existing social and economic order. The results of this party distrust of the peasantry in left-bank Ukraine will be described in later chapters.

Difficult as it may be to define the exact nature of peasant class distinctions, the emancipation of 1861 undoubtedly strengthened the rich at the expense of the poor. The proverb "the man with a full belly cannot understand the hungry man" pithily expressed the gulf between them.

#### *Household and commune in Ukraine*

The Ukraine is among the most fertile grain-growing areas in the world, and is described in the conventional cliché as the granary of Europe. It was a crucially important agricultural zone within the Russian empire. Immediately before the revolution there were about 36 million hectares under cultivation in Ukraine, constituting just over 40 percent of the total planted area of the em-



pire.<sup>40</sup> On a world scale, in the early twentieth century, Ukraine produced 43 percent of the world's barley, 20 percent of its wheat, and 10 percent of its corn.<sup>41</sup>

Ukraine was in many ways distinct from the rest of the Russian empire in the pattern of its economic and agricultural development.<sup>42</sup> Additionally, there were sharp distinctions between the physical geography and the agricultural economies of different areas within the country.

Except in right-bank Ukraine, the fertility of the black earth belt that runs across the region was offset by the aridity of the climate. The too-rapid thaws of the spring times prevented the moisture of the snows from penetrating the earth. The sudden rushes of water vanished as they cut ravines and gullies deep into the fertile soil. In Galicia the annual rainfall is around 70 mm. On the southern steppe it drops to 40 mm., and on the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov the littorals receive an average of only 27 mm. of rain per year.<sup>43</sup>

Left-bank Ukraine had evolved a tradition of landholding peculiar

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40. Lyashchenko, *op.cit.*, p.730; *Soviet Ukraine* (Kiev, [1969]), p.289-290; M. L. Freishyn claims that up to 65 percent of the total area of ethnic Ukraine is arable land (*The Ukrainian economy* [New York, 1965], p.17).

41. Orest Subtelny, *Ukraine: a history* (Toronto, 1988), p.265.

42. For an interesting general account of early twentieth century Ukrainian society, see chapters 1 and 2 of B. Krawchenko, *Social change and national consciousness in twentieth century Ukraine* (London, 1985).

43. Dobb, *op.cit.*, p.40; Freishyn-Chyrov's'kyi, *op.cit.*, p.16.

to itself; it was not exactly communal, nor yet entirely private. The settlers who moved south in the 1600s and 1700s had originally been few enough in number to have unlimited access to as much land as they wanted or could profitably use. A system developed in which peasant obligations to the landowners were paid in labour in Ukraine (*barshchina*), as opposed to the Russian obligations, which were payable in cash or kind (*obrok*). As the population increased, a system evolved in which each large family unit (*siabr*) received an allotment or fixed share of the total land, but without rights to any particular piece. As the family grew and divided it could split the share, sell it to another *siabr*, or even, under certain conditions, to an outsider. Since this system was not redistributive it cannot be called communal. Since land holdings were not defined in specific physical or territorial terms, and therefore could not be sold with complete freedom, it was not exactly a system of private property either. Allotments in Ukraine remained unequal.<sup>44</sup>

Ukrainian commercial agriculture was critically important to the Russian economy. In 1912 the country's agricultural businesses accounted for 21 percent of the Tsarist government's income, but Ukraine benefited from only 12 percent of central expenditure, contributing 306 million more rubles to the exchequer than it got

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44. Atkinson, *op.cit.*, p.18.

back.<sup>45</sup> In 1914 more than half Russia's exports consisted of cereals and other foodstuffs - one-third of the wheat imports of Western Europe came from the Russian empire, and nearly 90 percent of the empire's wheat exports came from the Ukraine.

Even so, although wheat was the empire's major export commodity, it was not Ukraine's primary cash crop. On the right bank, Polish, Russian and Jewish sugar barons prospered from large-scale sugar-beet production from the 1840s onwards, while on the left-bank tobacco accounted for over half imperial production. Ukraine was also a major source of distilled alcohol.<sup>46</sup> Although the empire exported substantial quantities of cash crops, raw materials and semi-manufactures, it depended heavily on chemical, metal, and machinery imports. These made up about 33 percent of total imports.<sup>47</sup>

The government actively encouraged grain exports. The state bank granted credits, and calculated rail-freight rates for long-distance haulage of grain to Western Europe on special favourable scales. In Ukraine, the system depended in part on the existence of large numbers of poor peasants, who flooded the market with cheap wheat surpluses in return for cash with which to pay off

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45. I. Feshchenko-Chopivs'kyi, *Ekonomichna heohrafiia Ukraini* (Kiev, 1923), p.161, quoted in K. Kononenko, *Ukraine and Russia: a history of the economic relations between Ukraine and Russia, 1654-1917* (Milwaukee, 1958), p.238.

46. Subtelny, loc.cit.

47. Russia continued to import chemicals and machinery from Germany after the outbreak of war in 1914 (Dobb, op.cit., p.37).

back-taxes and debts incurred for seed. Between 1894 and 1914 production of wheat (the export grain) rose by 75 percent; production of rye (the grain of domestic consumption) increased hardly at all.<sup>48</sup> The Russian Minister of Finance summed up this policy with the words "We may go hungry, but we will export."<sup>49</sup>

Ukrainian farming was thus much more commercial than in the north.<sup>50</sup> Capitalist farming, in the sense of large-scale enterprise employing wage labour, had a specific regional character in Ukraine. It was widespread in Novorossia (Tauride, Kherson and Ekaterinoslav) even in the 1880s.<sup>51</sup> Communally-held land was a small proportion of the whole. In Great Russia itself over 95 percent of agricultural land was held through the *mir*. The proportion diminished rapidly as one moved southwards and westwards. In Novorossia, (including Bessarabia and the Don, the commercial farming zones on the right bank), only 14 percent of total peasant landholdings were communal.<sup>52</sup>

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48. Dobb, *op.cit.*, p.37-38.

49. W. Blackwell, *The beginnings of Russian industrialization* (Princeton, 1968), p.26, quoted by Subtelny, *op.cit.*, p.264.

50. In the early years of the century, the peasants' reaction to the emergence of a capitalist form of agriculture, on the right-bank at least, has been shown to have been to adopt forms of resistance usually associated with urban workers, e.g. strikes. See R. Edelman's misleadingly titled but detailed study of the right-bank, based on archival research, *Proletarian peasants: the revolution of 1905 in Russia's southwest* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1987).

51. Lenin, *The development of capitalism in Russia*, p.77-78.

52. K. R. Krachkovskii, *Russkaia obshchina*, 2d ed. (Moscow, 1906), p.74. Figures are for 1892.

In 1905, according to a government source, 29 percent of the land and 23 percent of households in the Trans-Dnepr region were in the *mir*. On the southern steppe the figures were 94 percent for land and 98 percent for households.<sup>53</sup> Nearly two-thirds of the peasant population were *batraki* or *bedniaki*, and 45 percent of peasant households had no draught animals. Although the poorer peasants owned 57 percent of the farms in Ukraine, they occupied only 12 percent of the land. One peasant in six had no land at all.

Class differentiation and impoverishment among the Ukrainian peasantry sharpened from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, especially after the emancipation of 1861. The kulaks (in Ukrainian *kurkuli*) made up about 15 percent of the peasantry, and held on average around 26 to 30 hectares of land. The *seredniaki* were around 30 percent and the poor peasants (*bedniaki* and *batraki*) a good half of the village population.<sup>54</sup>

The three provinces of the Tauride, Ekaterinoslav and Kherson, were early recognised as a distinct case. Collectively nicknamed "the Troika," they were the object of one of the first analytical

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53. Tsentral'nyi Statisticheskii Komitet, *Statistika zemlevladieniia 1905 g. Svod dannykh po 50 guberniiam evropeiskoi Rossii* (St. Petersburg, 1907), p.174-175, quoted by Atkinson, *op.cit.*, p.4.

54. Subtelny, *op.cit.*, p.263.

treatments of *zemstvo* statistics, by V. Postnikov.<sup>55</sup> However, since Postnikov's detailed analysis focuses on the Russified *uezds* of Berdiansk, Melitopol' and Dnepr, his book is not as useful for an overall analysis of the Troika as it might at first appear.

In these three provinces, two-fifths of the *dvors* (and about three-tenths of the population) owned one-eighth of the crop area. Another 40 percent, the households of the middle peasants, supported themselves on their land. The kulaks (one-fifth of the households; three-tenths of the population) owned approximately half the total crop area. Their farming heavily favoured commercial crops. Over half their harvested grain was surplus, providing them with steady incomes of between 574 and 1,500 rubles per year.<sup>56</sup> Just as a few hands controlled a high proportion of alienable land, so they controlled allotment land, livestock and implements. The rural bourgeoisie (20 percent of the *dvors*) owned 93 percent of mowing machines. The natural consequence of this concentration of land and capital was that the agricultural technology of commercial farming was the most advanced. Productivity per unit of expenditure was correspondingly higher, ensuring the continuing dominance of this type of production.<sup>57</sup>

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55. V. Postnikov, *Iuzhno-russkoe krest'ianskoe khoziaistvo* (Moscow, 1891). This book is the subject of a favourable review in the earliest surviving text by Lenin, "New economic developments in peasant life," written in 1893, in his *Collected Works* (Moscow, 1960-1971), vol.1, p.11-73.

56. Lenin, *The development of capitalism in Russia*, p.72-76.

57. *Ibid.*, p.75.

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page.

The growth of commercial farming and of industrialisation in the cities resulted in increasing numbers of younger sons leaving the land for longer and longer periods. This exodus deprived the *dvor* of labour, and therefore, under the system of reallocation, eventually of land. The rate of emigration was a clear reflection of the level of land hunger and of dissatisfaction with the system. Between 1896 and 1906 over 1.6 million Ukrainians left their homeland for the Far East, and by 1914 there were 2 million Ukrainians resident there, mainly around the Amur basin.<sup>58</sup>

The reforms implemented in 1906 by the Tsarist minister and landowner Stolypin went further than any previous administrative measures in attempting to dismantle the commune and to create and strengthen a peasant bourgeoisie - a capitalist class in the countryside.<sup>59</sup> In summary, the *ukaz* decreed that land of non-reallocating communes (defined as those that had not conducted a general partition for at least 24 years) passed into the ownership of the peasants who held it, unless they did so through rental. The peasants in those communes which still practised re-allocation could have their land allotment under the system transferred to them, at any time, as private property. Such a provision clearly and deliberately favoured those who had more

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58. Subtelny, *op.cit.*, p.262. At the same time, large numbers of West Ukrainians from the Austro-Hungarian empire were migrating to Canada for similar reasons.

59. Stolypin allegedly lacked an adequate understanding of the nature of the commune, and did not personally either initiate or formulate the reform, the *ukaz* of 9 November 1906 (*Atkinson, op.cit.*, p.50-51).

land than the average at the time of separation. Stolypin's so-called "wager on the strong" aimed to establish a stable system of commercial agriculture. Unfortunately, the commune, even at its most degenerate, still protected those peasants who needed its stability because they lacked the capital to set themselves up in commercial enterprise. The attack on the *mir* weakened it further for those who remained, and there were feelings of resentment on both sides. The commune held back agricultural advance, but just the same, only a few peasants could afford to risk leaving before conditions improved.<sup>60</sup>

For technical reasons it is difficult to calculate the actual number of households that left the communes because of *Stolypinshchina*. It seems likely that the figure for the whole empire over a ten-year period was about 4 million households, of which perhaps half were in Ukraine.<sup>61</sup> The peasants seized the opportunities offered by Stolypin's measure with enthusiasm in right-bank Ukraine, where rural capitalism was already highly developed. Something like half the communal land passed into private ownership. In the southern steppe (including Ekaterinoslav, the Tauride and Kherson) average holdings in 1906-1908 were 8.9

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60. Cf. Atkinson, *op.cit.*, p.320-329.

61. Atkinson gives a brief summary of the technical difficulties: she concludes that 4 million households left the *mir* between 1905 and 1915. In 1915 there were 10.2 million households out of a total of 15.5 million still in the commune. The number of households in communes in 1915 was higher than in 1905, although it was a smaller percentage of the total number of households in the empire. Communal households remained in a majority of about 2:1 (*op.cit.*, p.61-64).



hectares. Land prices were around 158 rubles per hectare, five times higher than in the border provinces and over twice as high as prices in central Russia.<sup>62</sup> It seems likely that the development of the money economy with an expanding market provided good conditions for such rationalisation. If repartition had continued with a growing population, holdings could only have decreased in size; commercialisation reversed the trend.<sup>63</sup> Nonetheless, even after Stolypin's reform, fully one-third of Ukrainian households farmed less than one hectare: 90 percent of grain production was wheat. The emphasis on one crop, the economic inefficiency of the mass of tiny holdings, and an agricultural technology in the family sector that was unchanged in its essentials since the days of Peter the Great, had disastrous results.

In the southern steppes a rotation system that only left one-fifth or one quarter of the soil fallow contributed to inefficiency. The unbalanced relationship between pasture, arable land and hay land created problems. The shortage of pasture caused in turn a shortage of manure fertiliser. The amount of manure used per hectare was about 10 percent of contemporary levels in eastern Germany. The attraction of commercial wheat growing for export was the direct cause of this situation; by 1917 nearly 75

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62. I. V. Mozhukhin, *Zemleustroistvo v Bogoroditskom uезде Tul'skoi gubernii* (Moscow, 1917), p.34, quoted by Atkinson, op.cit., p.68.

63. It also intensified the contradictions *within* the Ukrainian peasantry. In September and October 1917 one quarter of all reported seizures and destructive activity in the Empire occurred in south-western Ukraine (Dobb, op.cit., p.76).

percent of farm land was arable.<sup>64</sup>

Such advances as peasant farming could make were the result of harder work, not of improved techniques. The wooden plough, sowing by hand, and reaping with scythe and sickle remained. In the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century the yield-to-seed ratio had improved by only 6 percent.<sup>65</sup> Even into the twentieth century the average grain yield in Russia itself was only one-quarter of that in Denmark, France or Germany.<sup>66</sup> Nevertheless, average yields in Ukraine were consistently higher than they were in Great Russia. Between 1907 and 1917 the average yield per hectare in Ukraine was higher than in Russia in wheat, rye, barley, oats, and markedly higher even for potatoes.<sup>67</sup>

Ekaterinoslav province, the centre of the Makhnovite rebellion, can be grouped with Kherson and the Tauride as an area of rapid growth in commercial farming. Between 1860 and 1913 the three provinces experienced an increase of over 100 percent in the area under cultivation.<sup>68</sup> The new land increasingly fell into fewer hands. By 1905 the average landlord's holdings were over 800 hec-

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64. On the *pereleg* system, see Dobb, *op.cit.*, p.40-41.

65. Lyashchenko gives the ratio as 3.5 fold in 1801-1810 and 3.7 fold in 1861-1870 (*op.cit.*, p.324).

66. *Ibid.*, p.735.

67. Feshchenko-Chopivs'kyi, *op.cit.*, p.36, quoted by Kononenko, *op.cit.*, un-paged introduction. The figures, in metric cwt. per hectare, are 12 to 7.8 for wheat; 10 to 8.7 for rye; 10 to 9.7 for barley; 11.8 to 9 for oats; and 85 to 80.7 for potatoes.

68. Lyashchenko, *op.cit.*, p.451.

tares, compared to a figure of between 200 and 600 hectares for the central provinces of great Russia. The population was much less homogeneous than elsewhere in Ukraine, including not only Ukrainians, Russians and Jews, but also Bulgars, Greeks, Tatars, Germans and others.<sup>69</sup> The pattern of agriculture was different from that of northern Ukraine - for example, in Kiev province, which followed the rye-growing pattern of Great Russia. The warmer "Troika" was an area of spring wheat and barley.<sup>70</sup>

This was a part of the Russian empire where the poor peasants' lot was extremely hard. The commune was disappearing, the kulaks were increasing their wealth, the *bedniaki* could only produce smaller and smaller harvests.<sup>71</sup> The increasing poverty of the peasants contrasted sharply with the potential fertility of the black-soil regions and with the enrichment of the few kulaks and *pomeshchiki*.<sup>72</sup> It was not surprising that the peasants of Ukraine and especially the Troika had a history of violent rebellion, robbing and burning estates and cutting down the landlords' for-

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69. M. I. Kubanin, *Makhnovshchina* (Leningrad, [1926]), p.27; cf. M. Kordouba, *Le territoire et la population de l'Ukraine* (Berne, 1919), p.94-97.

70. Lyashchenko, *op.cit.*, p.731 (map); *Sbornik statistiko-ekonomicheskikh svedenii po sel'skomu khoziaistvu Rossii i inostrannykh gosudarstv* (St. Petersburg, 1916), p.15-16, quoted by Kubanin, *op.cit.*, p.10.

71. Lyashchenko, *op.cit.*, p.748.

72. In Kherson, for instance, between 1883 and 1895 the real increase in redemption payments was 40 per cent; land allotments diminished 27 per cent in the same period (F. M. Watters, "The peasant and the village commune," in Vucinich, *op.cit.*, p.154 ff.)

ests.<sup>73</sup> Such revolts joined together a mixture of the landless, the poor, and criminals, protesting against the loss of the *mir's* protection and the growing power of agrarian capitalists.<sup>74</sup>

After the Decree on Land in 1917, the amount of land under peasant control increased sharply. In Ukraine the increase was from 56 to 96 percent of the total.<sup>75</sup> The mechanism to which the peasantry turned to control the distribution of this reclaimed land was, not surprisingly, the commune. The anarchists of the Makhno movement interpreted this use of the mechanism to show that the peasantry was in sympathy with their ideas about social organisation. We shall see in later chapters that the revival of the *form* of the *mir* could not reestablish in Ukraine the economic basis for its vitality. Conditions for communal organisation no longer existed, and could not reemerge.

### *Industrial development in Ukraine*

The position of Ukraine in relation to Russia was, like the position of Russia in relation to western Europe, essentially that of a subordinate colony to an imperialist centre. Lenin himself com-

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73. Lyashchenko, *op.cit.*, pp.371 and 373 (maps).

74. See the account of the Potapenko uprising in Chernigov province in 1905 in E. J. Hobsbawn, *Primitive rebels* (New York, 1965), p.27; for a chronology of such revolts see A. V. Shapkarin (ed.), *Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie v Rossii, iiun' 1907 g.-iiul' 1914 g.* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1966), p.492-623.

75. Dobb, *op.cit.*, p.81.

mented in the April 1917 introduction to his *Imperializm, kak no-veishii etap kapitalizma* that he had originally used Japan as an example when discussing annexation, to evade the censorship. However,

"the careful reader will easily substitute Russia for Japan, and Finland, Poland, Courland, the Ukraine, Khiva, Bokhara, Estonia or other regions peopled by non-Great Russians, for Korea."<sup>76</sup>

The typical characteristic of the epoch of monopoly capitalism is the export of capital itself to the territories of the periphery.<sup>77</sup> This was true of the Russian empire. In the two decades from 1894 until the outbreak of the World War, Russia's capital imports averaged 200 million rubles a year.<sup>78</sup>

The great mining and metallurgical region of southern Russia, the Donets River Basin (or Donbass), lies to the north and north-east of the Troika, partially enclosing it. It borders Ekaterinoslav in the west, Khar'kov in the north, Lugansk in the east, and Taganrog and Rostov in the south. With major reserves of peat, soft coal, anthracite, oil, iron and manganese, it was an early area of concentration for Russian and foreign capital. By 1914 half the capital invested in the coal industry of the Donbass came from abroad, and about 80 percent of capital in the mining, metallurgical and oil industries. British, French and German capital

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76. Lenin, "Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism," in his *Selected works in three volumes*, rev. ed. (Moscow, 1975), vol.1, p.635.

77. Ibid., p.678 ff.

78. Dobb, op.cit., p.38.

was dominant, with investments totalling over two billion gold rubles for the whole empire.<sup>79</sup> Only one blast furnace in the pre-revolutionary Donbass was completely Russian-owned.<sup>80</sup>

By the end of the nineteenth century the Donbass was already an area of major industrial importance. The dense concentration of industry and its rapid growth are often disruptive elements in the most stable society. Russian and Ukrainian rural areas were in a state of some unrest. The rate of development in the Donbass had been rapid. Coal production grew at an average of 13 percent per annum between 1870 and 1900.<sup>81</sup> In 1885 only 32,000 tons of iron were smelted, but by 1900 the figure had increased to 800,00 tons, one quarter of the total output of the Russian empire.<sup>82</sup>

After the turn of the century the importance of the Donbass to the economic well-being of the empire continued to increase. In 1913, on the eve of the World War, 67 percent of pig-iron smelting, 57 percent of iron and steel production, and 71 percent of coal production in the empire took place in what one Soviet economic historian has called the progressive south.<sup>83</sup> Factories were larger and output per worker was generally higher in the Donbass than elsewhere. The concentration of labour was a charac-

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79. *Idem.*

80. S. I. Potolov, *Rabochie Donbassa v XIX veke* (Moscow, 1963), p.88-89.

81. From 250,000 tons in 1870 to 10.8 million tons in 1900.

82. Potolov, *op.cit.*, p.80-81.

83. Lyashchenko, *op.cit.*, p.688-689.

teristic of Russian industry - in 1912, 53 percent of Russian workers worked in factories with over 500 hands, a higher concentration of labour than in Germany or the United States.<sup>84</sup> The tendency continued in the Troika. In 1912, 17 percent of Ukrainian mines and metallurgical companies were in the three provinces, employing over half the workers in those industries.<sup>85</sup> The pattern varied in different sectors, however. In foodstuffs the Troika accounted for 13 percent of the businesses, only 3 percent of the workers, and 11 percent of the production.<sup>86</sup>

Many skilled workers were Russians, Bulgars or Greeks; in 1897 there were even 370 English in Ekaterinoslav province.<sup>87</sup> Only 22 percent of the labour force in the coal mines was Ukrainian, and only 20 percent in the metallurgical industry.

The rapid development and concentration of industry in the south made Ekaterinoslav a natural strike centre and a base for both legal and illegal Bolshevik activities. The great mass of unskilled factory workers was willing to listen to the Bolshevik

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84. *Statisticheskii ezhegodnik za 1914 g.*, p.199, quoted by M. Gordon, *Workers before and after Lenin* (New York, 1941), p.354; cf. Isaac Deutscher in the *New Cambridge Modern History*, vol.12, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 1968), p.405.

85. *Materialy po raionirovaniu Ukrainy* (Khar'kov, 1923), p.136, quoted by Kubanin, op.cit., p.23.

86. Kubanin, op.cit. p.24, quoting the same source.

87. *Pervaia vseobshchaia perepis' naseleniia Rossiiskoi Imperii, 1897 g.* (St. Petersburg, 1905), vol.2, p.23. Demographic trends for the period 1900-1930 are described in *Ukraine: a concise encyclopedia* (Toronto, 1963- ), vol.1, p.214-222.

argument that revolution was the only way to improve their conditions. The Ekaterinoslav mines lost nearly 250,000 working days altogether between June 1914 and February 1917, in 107 strikes by over 55,000 men. The metal-workers of the province were involved in 52 strikes, mostly economic, with the loss of over 500,000 working days.<sup>88</sup> The metal-workers were the nucleus of the radical labour movement, the most politically conscious and the best organised. After 1912 they participated in 84 percent of political strikes.<sup>89</sup> Their union looked to the west, and even sent to Germany for material on the organisation of trades union activities.<sup>90</sup> Petr Arshinov, Makhno's prison tutor and later his apologist, had been a metal-worker in his early days as a Bolshevik.

Between 1905 and 1916, the rate of increase in the number of strikes in Ekaterinoslav was noticeably slower than in St. Petersburg, so it is important not to overestimate the radicalism of the south in comparison with the north.<sup>91</sup> Only about one-twelfth of the workers was organised. In the elections to the Second Duma they supported Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries at least as enthusiastically as they supported Bolsheviks.

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88. That is, in a large number of small strikes (Iu. M. Kir'ianov, *Rabochie iuga Rossii, 1914-fevral' 1917 g.* [Moscow, 1971], p.282).

89. Lyashchenko, *op.cit.*, p.693.

90. I. Merinkov et al., "Brianskii zavod v 1905 g." *Litopys revoliutsii* no.3-4 (1926), p.126, quoted by D. Lane, *The roots of Russian communism* (Assen, 1969), p.172n.

91. Kir'ianov, *op.cit.*, p.286.



Ekaterinoslav was nonetheless an important centre for Bolshevik activity, and acted as a kind of detonator for the surrounding area. During the years immediately before the revolution the Party operated illegal presses and distribution centres for its literature, organised party centres and committees, and held two conferences.<sup>92</sup>

### ***The collapse of the economy, 1917-1921***

The impact of the First World War on the industry and agriculture of the Russian empire was direct and disastrous. Between August 1914 and the middle of 1917 about 14 million men were mobilised, most of them peasants. Between one-third and one-half of rural households were left with no male labour. The Tsarist government adopted a policy of diverting all possible industrial production into war channels. The metal shortage became so severe that even the village smithies ran out. Falling import earnings could not compensate for production losses in farm machinery. The government mobilised horses without any thought for the needs of agriculture. In the first eighteen months of war the peasantry lost 26 million head of cattle to requisition or enemy occupation. Food grain harvests dropped by 21 percent and fodder harvests by 48 percent between 1914 and 1917. The importation of fertiliser

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92. *Istoriia Kommunisticheskoi Partii Sovetskogo Soiuza* (Moscow, 1966), vol.2, map facing p.588.

came to a halt.<sup>93</sup>

The peasantry lost interest in selling the little surplus grain that existed, as inflation robbed the paper ruble of most of its value. Even in 1915, when there were no exports of food, the drop in production and marketing was greater than the saving in non-exported foodstuffs. The cities and even the army felt the shortages. The government bought nearly all the commercially available grain at fixed prices, and just before the February revolution was preparing to enforce compulsory purchase measures enacted in December 1916.<sup>94</sup>

The civil war was even more disruptive, for it was fought entirely within the territory of the former empire. Its effects could not be avoided. One American commentator wrote that to find parallel conditions of urban and economic decay it was necessary to go back to the later days of the Thirty Years War.<sup>95</sup> In 1916 there were 65 blast furnaces operating in Ukraine; by 1920 there was only one.<sup>96</sup> This explains why Ukraine, which produced 3 million tons of pig iron in 1913, could produce only 15,000 tons in 1920. The production of essential raw materials also fell off sharply, iron ore from nearly 6.5 million tons in 1913 to zero in

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93. Lyashchenko, *op.cit.*, p.765-766.

94. *Ibid.*, p.767.

95. H. H. Fisher, *The famine in Soviet Russia, 1919-1923* (New York, 1971 repr.), p.259.

96. V. Holubnychy, *The industrial output of the Ukraine, 1913-1956* (Munich, 1957), p.32.

1920, and coal from 24.6 million tons to 4.5 million. Steel production fell from 2.4 million tons to 48,000 in the same period.<sup>97</sup>

The spectacular collapse of the industry and agriculture of Ukraine during the civil war was a central factor in the rise of the *Makhnovshchina*. In normal or near-normal circumstances the peasantry could react to excessive outside pressure in two ways, if they did not emigrate. By increasing their output and competing in the market place a minority of the better-off peasants could win some degree of economic independence. The kulaks made exactly this kind of step up the social ladder, emerging in a time of religious decline and weak central government. Any peasant willing to ignore social obligations, and who could avoid taxes, might commit all his surplus to the market and strengthen his position in a money economy. The alternative was to withdraw into self-sufficiency and to market no surplus at all. To curtail consumption to retain individual autonomy was a precarious business. The Bolsheviki found that many peasants were willing to try any strategy, rather than hand over grain to yet another central government. This was especially true after they had received land:

"The peasantry reasoned thus: it was Soviet power that gave land to the peasants [...] it was the Bolsheviki that did it. But the power that carried out the grain requisitioning did not give all the landowners' land back to the peasants: it built *Sovkhozy*, it built communes - it is a commune power, not Bolshevik but Com-

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97. *Ibid.*, p.8-9, 14, 20, 22.

munist [...] we are for the Bolsheviks, but against the Communists."<sup>98</sup>

The peasants who supposed that there must be two separate parties of "Bolsheviks" and "Communists" were using a particular logic, consistent with their aim of seizing the land. The course of events in Ukraine after the October revolution - the invasion by the Central Powers, the fight against Denikin and Wrangel, the Polish War, and the struggles of the various nationalist groups against outside forces - prevented the peasants from following for long even the strategy of withdrawal from the market.

The land seizures after 1917 - the "Black Repartition" - gave the *bedniak* more land, but they did not usually provide him with the tools or the draught animals he needed to work it. Later, as the Bolshevik campaign against the kulaks began to take effect, the landless labourers lost even their chance of employment on the farms of the rich peasants. They were worse off.

The revolution and the civil war were also great levellers, and during the period after 1917 the *mir* spontaneously revived. Twelve million peasants in uniform had been politicised by their experiences in the war against Germany. As they poured back to the countryside they began to channel their fellow peasants back into the communes, cutting short the growth of rural capitalism.

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98. Kubanin, op.cit., p.63; cf. Lenin, "Report on work in the countryside, March 23, 1919," [to the 8th Congress of the RCP(b)] in his *Selected works*, vol.3, p.148.

The commune was the only mechanism available to the peasantry through which they could redistribute the land that they seized. Land seizures in the Russian empire increased a hundredfold between March and July 1917. Thirty percent of individual peasant land holdings were taken and pooled in the *mir*.<sup>99</sup> The communes eventually came to rival the local soviets as centres of power in the countryside, and by the late 1920s they were outdoing them. But that is another story.

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99. D. Mitraný, *Marx against the peasant* (New York, 1961), p.231-232.

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VI. THE GERMAN OCCUPATION OF UKRAINE

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In an ad hoc response to the revolutionary events in 1917, Germany adopted a policy of active subversion in Ukraine. It had its origins in objectives pursued by the German government even before the outbreak of war in August 1914.<sup>1</sup> Of the Central Powers, Austria-Hungary was the most immediately concerned with the Ukrainian question, by virtue of the inclusion of L'vov and western Ukraine within the borders of the Hapsburg empire. In the summer of 1914 the Austrian government and the German Foreign Office had jointly sponsored the creation of a "League for the Liberation of Ukraine." This had turned out to be well to the left of its benefactors. The embarrassed Austrians, considering the dangers of infecting western Ukraine with radical nationalist ideas, soon withdrew their support from the League's "revolutionary" programme.

The Central Powers later attempted to segregate and propagandise

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1. F. Fischer, *Germany's aims in the First World War* (London, 1967), p.136-137; O. Fedyshyn, *Germany's drive to the east and the Ukrainian revolution* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1971), p.18 ff.

Ukrainian prisoners. This enterprise was doomed to failure by Austria's loss of L'vov and Galicia to the Russian armies early in the war. German public interest in Ukraine quickened, and this may have prepared opinion for the invasion that was to take place in 1918.

Early in January 1918 the Central Powers recognised the independence of Ukraine under the Rada, and accepted its right to a separate peace treaty. Trotsky, negotiating at Brest-Litovsk for the Russian Bolsheviks, protested vigorously but in vain. Under a treaty concluded and signed on 9 February, the Central Powers recognised the Ukrainian republic. They ceded to it the area around Kholm to the north of L'vov, and granted autonomy to the Ruthenian (i.e. Ukrainian) parts of Galicia. In return the Ukrainians agreed to supply 100,000 carloads of cereals, grains and oil-seeds to Germany and Austria by June 1918.<sup>2</sup> The Austrians especially were experiencing grave food shortages, and the promise of bread was particularly tempting to them. The Germans made little effort to conceal their eagerness to exploit these newly-available resources. "There are more supplies in the Ukraine than we can transport," the German Foreign Secretary, von Kuhlmann, told the Reichstag.<sup>3</sup> He had incidentally pointed to a major problem that the Germans were to encounter, for the road and rail network

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2. R. H. Lutz (ed.), *The fall of the German empire* (Stanford, 1932), vol.1, p.802-805; Fedyshyn, *op.cit.*, p.271-280. The annexation of Kholm never took place.

3. Lutz, *op.cit.*, vol.1, p.815.

was not geared to moving goods to the west.<sup>4</sup> The Germans were optimistic, for their estimates foretold considerable wheat surpluses.<sup>5</sup> As an additional benefit, what was to be made available to Germany was to be denied to Russia. Ukraine provided 39 percent of the Russian empire's grain exports, 80 percent of sugar exports, 65 percent of her coal production and 65 percent of her iron output. It was the economic artery of the Russian empire.<sup>6</sup>

The Germans had few illusions about the real strength of the "free and sovereign" Ukrainian state with which they were dealing. The Rada was never in effective control of the whole area that it claimed to govern. Bolshevik forces from the north had driven it from the Ukrainian capital on the eve of the conclusion of the treaty on 9 February. Clearly, if Germany was to benefit from an agreement described by von Kuhlmann as "for the Austrians [...] necessary, for us [...] advantageous," then military intervention was becoming imperative.<sup>7</sup> On 18 February the German army, with some support from Ukrainian prisoner-of-war units, but with none from the Austrians, moved forward into Ukraine. The advance was rapid and easy, and within a few weeks, with minimum casualties, the Germans had driven the Bolsheviks from Ukraine. On 1

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4. There were plans to build a westward-oriented rail network on the German gauge, with capital provided by German private interests. Fischer, *op.cit.*, p.542-543.

5. Lutz, *op.cit.*, vol.1, p.816-817.

6. Gustav Streseman to the Reichstag, 20 February 1918 (*ibid.*, p.813).

7. Fedyshyn, *op.cit.*, p.74; von Kuhlmann used a similar phrase in a speech to the Reichstag. Cf. Lutz, *op.cit.*, vol.1, p.824.



March, they occupied Kiev and reinstated the Rada as a puppet government. By this time the Austrians had realised that they would have to come themselves to collect the foodstuffs that were essential to their survival. The occupation became a bipartite one.

The German forces found a chaotic situation in Ukraine. Neither the Rada nor the Bolsheviks had succeeded in establishing effective centralised administration. The countryside was parcelled up into tiny fiefdoms ruled by local atamans and bandits. The peasants were mainly for the Bolsheviks as far as German intelligence could tell; and the Rada's power "rested chiefly on German bayonets."<sup>8</sup>

On 15 March the reinstated Rada asked the German forces to "liberate" eastern Ukraine as well. The provinces of Khar'kov, Ekaterinoslav, Tauride, Poltava and Kherson had all remained under Bolshevik control. The Germans pushed well beyond these limits towards the Black Sea coast and the Donbas industrial region, and eventually into the Don and Georgia.<sup>9</sup> The Austrians, although hesitant, were reluctant to see Germany establish exclusive hegemony over Ukraine. They insisted on control of certain areas (including the port city of Odessa, to the great irritation of the German commanders). By this time Germany was considering the pos-

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8. German intelligence report. The author probably over-estimated the extent of rural support for the communists (J. Bunyan [ed.], *Intervention, civil war and communism in Russia* [Baltimore, 1936], p.4-5).

9. Fischer, *op.cit.*, p.534.

sibilities of the Ukrainian market for its own manufactured goods. Successful exploitation of this market would require, for maximum profitability, an exclusively German orientation of Ukraine. The Austrians, on the other hand, wanted only to expropriate grain as rapidly and in as large quantities as possible. So bad were relations between the two powers over this divergence of interest, that they were unable to agree even on the demarcation of their zones of influence until after 28 March.

The agreement as finally concluded was between Army commands. It allotted Germany the lion's share of territory. Austria gained control of half of Volhynia, with Podolia, Kherson and Makhno's province of Ekaterinoslav.<sup>10</sup> Events soon overtook the agreement, and although Austrian troops remained in Ekaterinoslav until November 1918, it was the Germans who were in actual control of the collection and distribution of Ukraine's resources for the military effort of the Central Powers.<sup>11</sup>

The Central Powers' relations with the Rada were strained. The Rada was still attempting to base its policies on the 3rd Universal that it had issued six months previously.<sup>12</sup> The Rada had enacted a policy of land to the tiller without compensation for the landlords. It had also attempted to introduce an 8-hour day in

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10. Fedyshyn, *op.cit.*, p.103.

11. *Ibid.*, p.103-104.

12. J. Bunyan and H. Fisher (eds.), *The Bolshevik revolution* (Stanford, 1934), p.435-437.

the factories, had granted amnesty to political prisoners, and had proclaimed freedom of speech, strikes and assembly. To German officers these measures seemed indistinguishable from Bolshevism, but most of the Rada's policies existed only on paper. The land programme, on the contrary, was an attempt to legalise a situation that had already become a reality through peasant expropriations.

What seemed to the Central Powers to be over-hasty socialist experimentation alarmed them. They felt it would hamper production and lower output by diverting the energies of workers and peasants into politics. Many poor peasants and landless labourers lacked the horses and implements with which to work the estates that they had taken over. More importantly, they lacked seeds. On 6 April General Hermann von Eichhorn, the German commander-in-chief, issued, without the knowledge of the Rada, a land cultivation order. It decreed that the harvest would belong to the tiller, whether peasant or landlord. The price of grain would be fixed, and peasants who failed to cultivate seized land would be severely punished.<sup>13</sup>

The order was not only directly opposed to the Rada's stated policy, but was a flagrant intervention in the domestic affairs of a sovereign ally. It reflected German preoccupations and the reality of the relationship between the two states. Von Eich-

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13. P. Khrystiuk (ed.), *Zamitky i materialy do istorii ukrains'koi revoliutsii* (Vienna, 1921-1922), vol.2, p.201-202.

horn's action in issuing the order revealed differences between German officers in the field and the policy of the Foreign Office in Berlin. The soldiers on the one hand wanted to deal directly with the *pomeshchiki* who stubbornly would grow only enough grain for their needs. If there was a surplus, complained one officer, the peasants hid it away on top of scaffolding in the marshes, or used it for schnapps, which the Germans could not provide. The landlords would sell to the Germans only in return for protection for their property.<sup>14</sup> The Foreign Office on the other hand wanted to work through the puppet Rada as far as possible, for appearance's sake. This course of action involved making some concessions to Ukrainian socialism.<sup>15</sup>

On 9 April the Germans and Austrians signed an agreement with the Ukrainians in Kiev that made explicit the colonial nature of their relationship. Ukraine was to supply over a million tons of bread cereals, fodder, and oil-seeds. For April, the quota was fixed at 150,000 tons, 240,000 tons in May, 320,000 tons in June and 310,000 tons in July. The fixed price was 310 rubles per ton

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14. Bundesarchiv, Kl. Erwerbungen Restnachlass von Dr. Rohrbach, Bd.2, Nr.253/2: Lt.-Col. Bach to Dr. Paul Rohrbach, 7 July 1918. Rohrbach was a journalist and Ukrainophile who was used as an unofficial contact-man by the German government.

15. Fischer, *op.cit.*, p.539.

for rye and 372 rubles for wheat.<sup>16</sup> Between 23 and 25 April the two sides signed a further series of agreements, which regulated the collection of the harvest through the State Monopoly and the German Purchasing Agency. In return the Germans promised to supply badly needed plows, scythes and other agricultural implements.<sup>17</sup>

In fact these solemn agreements were to prove valueless. The Germans saw that the Rada could easily be disposed of at little inconvenience to themselves, and they accordingly disposed of it. There was already considerable discontent among the population, and agitation against the German occupation was widespread. On 26 April General von Eichhorn placed Kiev under martial law, partly because of the agitation and partly to expedite a German-inspired coup d'etat.<sup>18</sup> The coup took place on 28 April, when an armed detachment of German troops marched into the Rada's council chamber. They arrested two of the members present. The next day the Germans finally dispersed the Rada.<sup>19</sup> On the same day as the arrests the Union of Landowners, at its congress in Kiev, proclaimed General Pavlo Skoropadskii *Hetman* of Ukraine. *Hetman* was

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16. Figures converted from Russian *puds*. Lutz, *op.cit.*, vol.1, p.828. Fedyshyn argues that these prices were based on an over-valuation of the Ukrainian currency (*op.cit.*, p.117-118). But the fixed prices were lower than the market prices: e.g., wheat, fixed at 5.80 rubles per pud, fetched 20 rubles on the open market; sugar, fixed at 44 rubles, fetched 130. M. Luther, "The birth of Soviet Ukraine," (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1962), p.220.

17. Fischer, *op.cit.*, p.539; Fedyshyn, *op.cit.*, p.118.

18. Bunyan, *Intervention*, p.7-8.

19. J. Reshetar, *The Ukrainian revolution* (Princeton, 1952), p.127-129; Fedyshyn, *op.cit.*, p.143 ff.

the ancient title of the Ukrainian monarchs; the last person to hold it had been Kyryl Rozumovs'kyi from 1750 to 1764, when Catherine II abolished the title. Skoropadskii's claim to the revived Hetmanate was twofold. He was a collateral descendant of Ivan Skoropads'kyi, *Hetman* from 1708 to 1722; but more importantly he was related by marriage to the commander-in-chief of the German army of occupation, General Hermann von Eichhorn.<sup>20</sup> He was wealthy, had pursued a moderately distinguished career in the Russian army, and fervently opposed the Rada's mixture of socialism and nationalism.<sup>21</sup> He regarded Vynnychenko as a communist.<sup>22</sup>

Skoropadskii had agreed on certain conditions with the Germans even before the coup took place. He was to recognise the treaties of Brest-Litovsk, postpone elections, and form a Ukrainian puppet army with the agreement of the German High Command. He was to dissolve the soviets and land committees, adopt legislation on the compulsory delivery of grain surpluses, and establish a free-trade agreement with Germany. Most important, he was to restore property rights, permit private ownership of land, pay compensation for seized estates, and preserve the large estates "in the interests of agriculture."<sup>23</sup> A quasi-monarchist, authoritarian

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20. Reshetar, *op.cit.*, p.145-146; M. Palič, "The peasant partisan movement of the anarchist Nestor Makhno," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Kansas, 1971) p.77.

21. Reshetar, *op.cit.*, p.146.

22. Bundesarchiv, Nr. 82, Nachlas Solf, Amtliches und Politisches im Ruhes-tande, Bd.5, Fol.110.

23. Bunyan, *op.cit.*, p.6; Fischer, *op.cit.*, p.540.

regime was a much more suitable instrument than the Rada for the Germans to use in their attempt to establish a stable client state in Ukraine. Ludendorff wrote that "in *Hetman Skoropadskii* we found a man with whom it was very easy to get along."<sup>24</sup> By this time some German officials were planning to model puppet Ukraine after the British dominions, with a civilian government of dependable, like-thinking local notables.<sup>25</sup>

In Guliai-Pole, over 500 kilometres from Kiev, the importance of the German treaty of 9 February with the Ukrainian republic was not immediately recognised. There were some nationalists in the village, and they continued to agitate in favour of the Rada. Makhno and the anarchists remained contemptuously opposed to these "Ukrainian chauvinists, allied to the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie."<sup>26</sup> They regarded the supporters of the Rada as "informers, spies and provocateurs," forming part of a network that extended over the whole of Ukraine.<sup>27</sup> In view of the incompetence and ineptitude of the Rada in nearly all its undertakings, the

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24. E. Ludendorff, *Meine Kriegserinnerungen* (Berlin, 1919), p.502.

25. Fischer, *op.cit.*, p.541.

26. N. Makhno, *La révolution russe en Ukraine* (Paris, 1970), p.123. Unfortunately almost the only source for most of Makhno's activity in 1918 is his own memoirs, in three volumes, of which only the first was published in his lifetime. The account is rambling and crammed with minutiae; vol.2, for example, takes 160 pages to cover three months. The story breaks off at the end of 1918. Ida Mett-Lazarevich, in an unpublished typescript in the BDIC at Nanterre, accuses Volin, the editor of the two posthumous volumes, of suppressing documentation after Makhno's death in collaboration with his widow ("*Souvenirs sur Nestor Makhno*," [Paris, 1948], p.6-7). See also N. Makhno, *Po povody 'raz'iasneniia' Volina* (Paris, 1929).

27. Makhno, *op.cit.*, p.195.

anarchists were probably crediting it with greater deviousness than it possessed.<sup>28</sup> Although they overestimated the Rada, not a day passed without a meeting at which the nationalists urged the workers to abandon the revolution, or even more specifically the anarchists.<sup>29</sup>

The local organisation of the Socialist-Revolutionaries (SRs) attracted particular anarchist hostility. The SR leaders were petty landowners and former army officers, who publicly described the anarchists as thieves and brigands. They pointed to other regions in which the redistribution of land had taken place in an orderly fashion, and where anarchists had not seized control. At a major meeting they argued that to resist the German military machine, which was by this time inside Ukrainian national territory, was futile; conversely, cooperation with the Rada and its allies would bring material benefits - sugar, textiles and shoes, which were all scarce. If the peasants fought against the Germans their villages would be burned, one prisoner in ten would be shot, and the population enslaved. After Makhno himself addressed the meeting, the peasants, unconvinced by SR rhetoric, took a massive vote in favour of armed resistance.

The SRs, led by Pavlo Semeniuta-Riabko, refused to let the matter rest. They demanded another vote to decide under whose flag this

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28. Their dealings with the Bolsheviks erred in the other direction.

29. Idem.



armed struggle should be conducted. Their tactic succeeded in splitting the assembly into three, supporting the Right SRs, the Left SRs and the anarchists. To Makhno's surprise and chagrin the Left SRs aligned themselves with Semeniuta-Riabko. The two groups together were still in a minority, and the anarchists' line of armed struggle against the invaders carried the day. At the end of the meeting Semeniuta-Riabko unwisely mounted the rostrum again and warned the crowd that they would regret their decision, for the Rada and the Germans would prove too strong for them. The same day Makhno requested the Revolutionary Committee to consider whether any action should be taken against the SR leader for his threatening words. The Committee decided that no importance should be attached to his speech. The anarchists disregarded this decision and declared a campaign of terror against all who dared "now or after some future counter-revolutionary victory to persecute anarchism or its anonymous defenders."<sup>30</sup> Under this sweeping formula they then summarily shot the unfortunate Semeniuta-Riabko.

Makhno had serious reservations about the wisdom of unleashing anarchist terror at this time. Under the auspices of the Revolutionary Committee, he tried to negotiate with the SRs. Although the new SR leader, Dmitrenko, not surprisingly dissociated himself and his group from Semeniuta-Riabko's remarks, the anarchists remained suspicious. Makhno was unable to persuade his comrades to renounce the terror, and consoled himself with the

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30. Ibid., p.196-201.

thought that this at least showed their independence of mind.<sup>31</sup>

By late March the troops of the Rada and the Central Powers had crossed the Dnepr to the left bank. They met no serious resistance from Red Guards. The German soldiers entering Ekaterinoslav found an orderly bourgeois town with inns, hotels, parks, schools, museums and white-painted churches.<sup>32</sup> The burgers themselves, however, were walking about unshaven and wearing caps and overalls, a disguise that the Germans attributed to the terrors of the just-ended Bolshevik regime.<sup>33</sup> The invading troops heard tales of hair-raising atrocities from the newly-liberated bourgeois. The Bolsheviks at least had satisfied themselves with taking the capitalists' money and with emptying the banks. The anarchists had visited their victims at home, and had tortured them with knives or burning candles until they had revealed where their treasures lay hidden. Apart from their cruelty, as far as the merchants and landowners could tell, there was little difference between the Bolsheviks or anarchists and professional burglars.<sup>34</sup>

The anarchists had been powerful in Ekaterinoslav. They drove openly through the streets in armoured cars or in carriages, de-

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31. Ibid., p.203.

32. H. Tintrup, *Krieg in der Ukraine* (Essen, 1938), p.66-67.

33. Ibid., p.71.

34. H. Limbach, *Ukrainisches Schreckenstage* (Berlin, 1919), p.75-76.

spite the presence of the Red Guards in the town in considerable strength. Many members of the Red Guards had cooperated with the anarchists in expropriating the bourgeoisie, emptying the shops and carting away the contents of safes. To add to the chaos, the anarchists had opened the town prison and released all the inmates.<sup>35</sup>

Bolshevik resistance to the German advance amounted to little more than a series of holding actions. They were conducted with a marked lack of enthusiasm from demoralised communist troops. The southeastern periphery of the former Russian empire had fragmented into a series of autonomous Soviet republics - the Don, the Crimea, the Kuban, Odessa, and Ukraine - over which there was no effective unified military command. The Ukrainian Bolshevik movement had split into a left and a right wing over the question of the relationship of the Ukrainian party to the Russian one.<sup>36</sup> In addition, while Lenin and Trotsky were trying first to realise and second to maintain a workable peace with the Central Powers, it made no sense for them to start fighting all over again in the south. With only 20,000 troops at the Bolsheviks' disposal, the enemy outnumbered their armies by ten to one. Anyway, the soldiers mainly wanted to participate in the dividing up of the estates. In many areas, anti-communist feeling fed on the insist-

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35. Ibid., p.77-78.

36. As late as 17 March the Ukrainian Bolshevik fractions used the 2nd All-Ukrainian Congress of Soviets to argue out their differences on the invasion, on relations with Soviet Russia, and other issues. Luther, *op.cit.*, p.189-192. The texts of the resolutions are given in *Velikaia oktiabr'skaia sotsialisticheskaia revoliutsiia na Ukraine* (Kiev, 1957), vol.3, p.323-325.

ence of Bolshevik factions on defending Ukraine against such overwhelming odds.<sup>37</sup>

While the Ukrainian Bolsheviks argued among themselves and the SRs counselled acceptance of the inevitable, Makhno's group began to organise their tiny army. The Germans reached Aleksandrovsk, only 85 kilometres from Guliai-Pole, and there encountered unusually stiff opposition from a group of Red Guards and Left SRs. The rapidity and ease with which the Germans drove back the revolutionary forces inevitably had a negative effect upon even the most optimistic of the anarchists. Lengthy discussions took place in Guliai-Pole between the Revolutionary Committee, the Soviet of Workers' and Peasants' Deputies, the trade unions, and the anarchist group. Makhno insisted that these organisations issue a joint communique explaining the gravity of the situation to the workers and appealing for volunteers to defend the revolution against the invaders. The population responded enthusiastically to this appeal. According to Makhno young and old alike flocked to the local soviet to enrol in the volunteer battalions.<sup>38</sup> Guliai-Pole managed to raise six companies of 220 men each, one company recruited from the local Jewish community. The anarchist group formed a detachment of a few hundred men armed with rifles, revolvers and sabres. About half had saddle-horses. A local doctor, a Jew named Abraham Loss, began to organise a field hospital

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37. Luther, *op.cit.*, p.177-178.

38. Makhno, *op.cit.*, p.210.

and medical teams.

Meanwhile, Makhno was demanding weapons from the Red Guard reserve commander, whose headquarters were nearby. Not content with vague promises, Makhno took him on a tour of Commune No.1, showed him the peasants at work, and allowed him to question them. Impressed, the commander allotted two howitzers, four field-guns, 3,000 rifles and several carloads of ammunition to the Makhnovites.<sup>39</sup> The anarchists were delighted, but later discovered that the artillery pieces lacked gun sights.<sup>40</sup>

The Bolshevik line in the Aleksandrovska sector was giving way under German pressure, and on 8 April the Bolsheviks appealed for help. The anarchists sent a large detachment to the front as reinforcements. Ironically, while communist and anarchist fought side-by-side in defence of the revolution in Ukraine, Bolsheviks were taking stern action against anarchists in Moscow. On the night of 11 April the Moscow Cheka disarmed and arrested several hundred anarchists, some of whom were probably little more than armed hooligans. The raid was a response to the theft of the car of the United States Red Cross representative.<sup>41</sup> There was some fierce fighting, but the Cheka was inevitably victorious. Trot-

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39. Ibid., p.211-212; N. Gerasimenko, "Makhno," *Istoriia i sovremennik* vol.3 (1922), p.154-161. Gerasimenko seems to date most events in 1918 two or three months early.

40. Makhno, op.cit., p.215.

41. *Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, 1918: Russia* (Washington, 1931), vol.1, p.497.

sky, bitterly contemptuous of anarchists and anarchism, was delighted.<sup>42</sup>

Throughout the Civil War, ambivalence and double-dealing on both sides characterised the relationship between Makhno and the Bolsheviks. Ideologically, the Reds and anarchists were close enough to make cooperation possible when the pressure of a common enemy made it essential. When that pressure lifted, the differences that remained were sufficient to preclude any lasting alliance.

The SRs were silent, and the Guliai-Pole detachments were ready to give battle. Makhno tried to contact the Bolshevik headquarters to obtain new gun sights for his artillery pieces, but he could get no reply. Later he discovered that Dmitrenko, the SR leader, had cut the telephone wires. The SRs renewed their campaign of sabotage and agitation. A short time after this incident they issued a proclamation calling on the peasants to welcome and help the fraternal armies of Germany, Austria and the Central Rada. Rumours were reaching Guliai-Pole confirming that the advancing armies were destroying any villages whose inhabitants resisted them, but were providing those who cooperated with sugar, textiles and other essentials. The faint-hearted among the townspeople of Guliai-Pole began to weaken. Makhno even heard that a delegation had gone to meet and presumably to try to appease the advancing Germans. He responded with a proclamation dramatically

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42. J. Sadoul, *Notes sur la révolution bolshevique* (Paris, 1971), p.306.

headlined with the words "The soul of a traitor and the conscience of a tyrant are both as black as a winter's night!"<sup>43</sup>

During yet another meeting, held to stiffen the resolve of the waverers and to counteract the effect of nationalist propaganda, Makhno received a telegram telling him to report to Bolshevik headquarters near Verkhonii Tokmak. On his way to the headquarters, a summons to Commune No.2, where a dozen drunken Bolshevik sailors were terrorising the inhabitants, diverted him. After persuading them to leave the villagers alone, he caught the train for Verkhonii Tokmak. Makhno's self-imposed role was clearly an impossibly difficult one. His attempts to deal with every crisis in person and single-handedly were doomed to failure. His supporters lacked the numbers and the discipline necessary for military survival. The Bolsheviks were both demoralised and, as allies, demoralising. The approach of the German army was encouraging vigorous opposition to the anarchists from the local landowners and bourgeoisie. Finally, at this crucial moment Makhno left the front-line on what turned out to be a fool's errand.<sup>44</sup>

In mid-journey Makhno heard that the headquarters had moved to the east, and that even the commander of the Bolshevik reserves had lost contact with his commander-in-chief. Doubts tormented him. Should he return to Guliai-Pole, or continue to try to find

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43. Makhno, *op.cit.*, p.215-216.

44. *Ibid.*, p.217.

the headquarters as ordered? The reserve commander declared that it was his duty to continue his journey. As he pursued the elusive headquarters eastwards, he arrived at each destination only to discover that it had moved again. Makhno also tried to keep in touch with Guliai-Pole by telegraph, but with no success. A rumour reached him that the village had treacherously surrendered to the enemy. Finally he received a letter from Boris Veretel'nikov, dated 15 April, urging him to hurry back.<sup>45</sup> There was great confusion, there was a suspicion that an attempt was to be made on his life, and the Germans were expected hourly. Distraught, Makhno at once turned in his tracks and set off homewards.<sup>46</sup>

The chaotic conditions prevented rapid movement, and Makhno was trying to travel against the stream of traffic. The train was delayed for four hours, and when he eventually reached a village called Tsarekonstantinovka he received another note from Veretel'nikov:

"On the night of 16 April, by means of a forged command from you the anarchist detachment was ordered to Chaplino and disarmed on the way. All our comrades in Guliai-Pole and all the members of the Revolutionary Committee and of the Soviet of Workers' and Peasants' Deputies have been arrested and are waiting to be handed over to the German military authorities and the Rada to be executed. We were betrayed by the chauvinists [...] The Jewish company was on guard-duty. The miserable traitors compelled the Jews, by means of a trick, to perform this foul deed [...] All the peasants are downhearted, and hatred of the Jews is widespread [...] Come

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45. Sometimes called Veretel'nik or Veretennikov. Cf. P. Arshinov, *Istoriia makhnovskogo dvizheniia* (Berlin, 1923), p.221; *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine* (Kiev, 1967), vol.1, pt.2, p.362.

46. Makhno, *op.cit.*, p.217-218.



quickly, with whatever forces you can muster, and deliver us."<sup>47</sup>

Makhno and Mariia Nikiforova, who led an anarchist group from Aleksandrovsk, tried to recruit the help of retreating Red Guards for a counter-attack on Guliai-Pole. Although two armoured cars were available, the Bolsheviks were unwilling to help.<sup>48</sup> A small detachment of mixed cavalry and infantry from Siberia was the only force that could be rallied. Makhno and Nikiforova planned an operation to rescue the imprisoned anarchists and to prevent their abandoned weapons from falling into German hands. While feverish preparations were underway for the sortie, a third letter from Veretel'nikov arrived. Pressure from the peasantry had resulted in the release of the anarchists, he wrote. The bourgeoisie and most Jews had fled. The released anarchists were preparing to go underground, and Veretel'nikov now advised Makhno not to return - "for the time being, be cautious."<sup>49</sup>

For once in his life Makhno, normally reckless to the point of folly, heeded the advice of his friends and decided to call off the counter-attack. Events had overtaken him, and he had lost touch with the centre and source of his power, Guliai-Pole. He met some of his comrades, who told him the story of the betrayal with great emotion. To make matters worse, it turned out that one

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47. Ibid., p.219.

48. Nikiforova, a farmer distillery worker, was probably about 21 or 22 at this time; she had been exiled in Siberia and had escaped via Japan to the United States (Palij, op.cit., p.159).

49. Makhno, op.cit., p.221.

of the traitors had been an anarchist, Lev Shneider. Reluctantly, Makhno realised that he had no choice but to join the general eastward movement towards Taganrog, in the hope of collecting any followers that he could find along the way.<sup>50</sup>

When, in despondent mood, he arrived in Taganrog, he found the city crowded with refugees and deserters. The local authorities, encouraged no doubt by the example of the Cheka's operation of 11 April in Moscow, began to harass the anarchist groups. Mariia Nikiforova was arrested on a charge of robbery and her group disarmed. On 20 April she went on trial, but the court acquitted her, thanks in part to an intensive campaign of publicity and agitation on her behalf by Makhno and other anarchists. Antonov-Ovseenko himself sent a cable endorsing her revolutionary spirit.<sup>51</sup> It was not an isolated case. On 23 April the Cheka moved against the anarchist clubs in Petrograd, and by May it had broken up most groups in Russia. Even anarchist members of the soviets were not immune from arrest, and in Samara, where the anarchists and the SRs controlled the soviet, Bolshevik repression was especially fierce.<sup>52</sup> There was some truth in the Bolshevik charge that the black banner was often merely a flag of convenience for hooligans and robbers, but what the regime wanted was

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50. Ibid., p.222-223; Makhno, *Pod udarami kontr-revoliutsii* (Paris, 1936), p.11.

51. Ibid., p.16-17; Makhno, "Pechal'nye stranitsy russkoi revoliutsii," *Rassvet* vol.16 (29 January-18 February 1932), p.6.

52. P. Avrich, *The Russian anarchists* (Princeton, 1967), p.184-185; Bunyan and Fisher, *Bolshevik revolution*, p.584.

to silence the bitter opposition to the treaty of Brest-Litovsk from anarchist and leftist journals and newspapers. The anarchists in Moscow and Petrograd had been useful allies in October, but now they were proving to be a considerable and noisy liability. "It is [...] particularly clear to us," wrote Lenin in *Pravda* on 28 April,

"how correct is the Marxist thesis that anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism are *bourgeois* trends, how irreconcilably opposed they are to socialism, proletarian dictatorship and communism [...] elements of disintegration cannot "reveal themselves" otherwise than in an increase of crime, hooliganism, corruption, profiteering and outrages of every kind. To put these down requires time and requires an iron hand."<sup>53</sup>

Despite a residue of fellow-feeling among some of the Bolsheviks for the anarchists, the Party took the necessary steps to silence them. When law and order broke down completely in the summer of 1918 it was obvious that Lenin and Trotsky had been right. Despite the wave of arrests in the spring, the campaign of assassinations attributed to the SRs and anarchists struck even at Lenin himself.<sup>54</sup>

Makhno and his little band of survivors discussed the disaster of Guliai-Pole at length at an impromptu conference held in late April in Taganrog. The Jewish company was in the end absolved of

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53. *Marx, Engels, Lenin: anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism* (Moscow, 1972), p.287-288.

54. It has been alleged but never proved that the British and/or United States intelligence services were somehow involved in the attempt on Lenin. Perhaps the opening of former Soviet archives will shed light on this question: better still would be unrestricted access to Western sources.

deliberate treachery. Makhno expressed concern about the anti-semitic feeling that developed after the unfortunate involvement of the Jews in the fall of the village.<sup>55</sup> The meeting agreed that no action should be taken to organise resistance to the occupation in the region until the end of the harvest in June and July, when it would be easy to mingle with the peasants in the fields. Cells of five to ten men would be organised in the area and used for assassinations and for a terrorist campaign against the German officers and the *pomeshchiki*. They would try to collect weapons in preparation for a general uprising. Meanwhile Makhno would tour Russia to study conditions for himself and to try to contact what remained of the Russian anarchist movement.<sup>56</sup>

The activists who formulated these plans were, in April 1918, an unrepresentative group. Many peasants still had possession of the land they had seized, and they stayed on it. The nationally-conscious members of the intelligentsia welcomed the Rada as a government of an independent Ukrainian republic; the landowners saw a possibility of regaining their lost land and power through the German army. It was only when it became clear exactly how indifferent the Germans were both to the peasants' feeling for the land and to the intellectuals' feeling for the nation that opposition to them became widespread.<sup>57</sup> When the tide turned, it car-

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55. Makhno, *Pod udarami kontr-revoliutsii*, p.19.

56. *Ibid.*, p.20-22.

57. D. Footman, "Makhnovshchina," (Oxford, 1956), p.20-21.

ried the Makhnovites along on a wave of peasant dissatisfaction that was not of their own making. The anti-Semitism that persisted in the Makhnovite ranks, and the general lack of military discipline, clearly indicated the popular origins of the movement. Often the anarchists could not even control peasant unrest, much less foster it. In April, as the Germans rolled across the Ukrainian steppe unopposed by the populace, the anarchists' future looked bleak.

As Makhno set off on his journey from Taganrog he reflected that the Bolsheviks were unreliable allies. They only wanted to use the anarchists as cannon-fodder in the front-lines of the battle against the counter-revolution.<sup>58</sup> He had learned a hard lesson, which he was to learn again.

He headed east, towards Rostov-on-Don. The city was under pressure from the White forces approaching along the eastern coast of the Sea of Azov, and from invading German and Austrian armies in the west. He found that the local anarchists had disappeared and their newspaper *Anarkhist* had closed down. He came across a group publishing another paper called *Chernoie Znamia* (The Black Banner), but after reading it he became suspicious and broke with them. He stayed in Rostov for only a short time. As soon as he could, he made arrangements to go to Tsaritsyn, nearly 400 kilometres to the northeast and away from both Germans and Whites. He travelled by train with an artillery unit of Red Guards whose

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58. Makhno, op.cit., p.14.

commander had permitted him to ride with them. During this period there was often considerable rapport between anarchists and Bolsheviki in the field, for attitudes had not yet hardened. Some Red Guard commanders were themselves anarchists. Shortly before he left Rostov, for example, Makhno heard that a Cossack commander had allotted the Guliai-Pole group some railway wagons. He was unable to get hold of them in the chaotic conditions.<sup>59</sup>

Even travelling with the Red Guards was a dangerous business, as Makhno discovered. In a small town just north of Rostov, a local soviet had him arrested while he was helping to requisition food for the troops on the train. Fortunately he had documentary evidence that he had been chairman of the Revolutionary Committee in Guliai-Pole, which probably saved him from being shot.<sup>60</sup> Further on, a Hungarian cavalry troop made up of former prisoners-of-war and which was looking for anarchists, surrounded the train. Again Makhno was in luck, for the commander assured them that there were none on board.<sup>61</sup>

In Tsaritsyn, the Bolsheviki were making a belated attempt to organise and integrate into an army the motley collection of semi-partisan gangs that had collected there in the general retreat. Not all the bands were willing to be disarmed and broken up, and

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59. Ibid., p.26-32.

60. Ibid., p.32-35.

61. Ibid., p.40-44.

some of them received harsh treatment at the hands of the Bolsheviks. The detachment of Siberians who had earlier volunteered to help Makhno in his hasty scheme for a counter attack on Guliaipole fell victim to this policy. The Bolsheviks were nervous and the Siberians obstinate, and fighting broke out. During negotiations a short time later the Cheka arrested and shot the commander of the detachment, disarmed his troops by force, and dispersed them in other units. Makhno had intervened on the side of his old friends, and had even advised them to try to capture the town prison. He had also made representations on their behalf to the Revolutionary Committee.<sup>62</sup> Fearing that he might be arrested as well, Makhno prepared to leave for Saratov.

At the railway station he encountered some friends from Guliaipole, including a girl who was pregnant by him, living in some railway trucks.<sup>63</sup> He managed to find them some suitable accommodation outside the city, and settled them there. He stayed with them for a few days, making fiery political speeches to keep up their spirits. At the beginning of May he left Tsaritsyn by Volga riverboat to travel upstream to Saratov.<sup>64</sup>

In Saratov Makhno finally heard the news of the overthrow of the Rada and of the restoration of the old Ukrainian monarchy by the

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62. Ibid., p.47-61.

63. Mett-Lazarevich, op.cit., p.3, writes that Makhno was married in 1917 and had a child who was killed during the occupation. His wife remarried in his absence, thinking him dead.

64. Makhno, op.cit., p.66-71.

Germans and the landowners. This strengthened him in his opposition to Lenin's policy towards Germany. "All this information confirmed once again the correctness of my position concerning the Central Rada," he wrote later:

"But the guilty ones in what had been accomplished in Ukraine in favour of the monarchist movement were the Bolsheviks and the Left SRs: the first for their policy of the treaty of Brest-Litovsk; the second for not breaking their coalition with Lenin's government, for not leaving VTsIk, for not ordering armed struggle, side-by-side with the masses, against the occupation of Ukraine by the German counter-revolutionaries [...]"<sup>65</sup>

The Ukrainian peasants would have made any sacrifice in defence of their revolution, felt Makhno, but Lenin's defeatism had thrown the opportunity away. He tried to propagate his views in the local anarchist newspaper *Golos Anarkhii* (The Voice of Anarchy). The situation of the anarchist movement in Saratov was as bad as it had been in Tsaritsyn. Gangs of sailors roamed the town fighting with the local Cheka, and a group calling itself the Detachment of Odessa Terrorists was refusing to allow the Cheka to disarm it. Saratov was coming under pressure from across the Urals, and the military authorities were trying to organise an offensive to the west.<sup>66</sup> Again Makhno felt it was wise to move on, and he set off southwards for Astrakhan.

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65. Ibid., p.72. VTsIK stands for Vserossiiskii (later Vsesoiuznyi) Tsentral'nyi Iсполnitel'nyi Komitet or All-Russian (All-Union) Central Executive Committee.

66. *Velikaia oktiabr'skaia sotsialisticheskaia revoliutsiia v Kazakhstane* (Alma-Ata, 1967), p.418-419; Makhno, op.cit., p.73-79.



Astrakhan was an important port and manufacturing centre controlling the mouth of the lower Volga. There had been some fighting there against officers and cadets in 1917. By January 1918 it was firmly in Bolshevik hands and remained so, at the end of an enormously elongated salient reaching to the Caspian Sea, throughout the Civil War. The local Soviet was strong and confident, and was busily preaching Bolshevism to the non-Russian Muslim population of the Volga valley.<sup>67</sup> Makhno was running short of money for his journey to Moscow and he applied to the soviet for a job, keeping quiet about his anarchist affiliations. He received an assignment to an agitation section. Meanwhile he secretly contacted the local anarchist group, whose newspaper *Mysli samykh svobodnykh liudei* (Reflections of a most free people) printed one of his poems over his prison nickname, *Skromnyi* (The Modest One), which many anarchists remembered.<sup>68</sup> It was his first publication.

The libertarian content of his speeches to the masses aroused the suspicions of his employers, and for the third time he had to move on.<sup>69</sup> Travelling up the Volga by steamer was agonisingly slow at the best times, but it was cheap.<sup>70</sup> The boat passed

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67. *Velikaia oktiabr'skaia sostialisticheskaiia revoliutsiia*, p.377.

68. The poem, "Prizyv," (The summons), was reprinted in *Probuzhdenie* no.50/51 (1934), p.16. Makhno's return to Guliai-Pole was reported in the *Biulleten' osvedomitel'nogo biuro anarkhistov Rossii* (15 December 1917), p.4-5, using the nickname *Skromnyi*.

69. Makhno, *op.cit.*, p.80-86.

70. From Astrakhan to Nizhnii Novgorod took about five days and cost the equivalent of £0.90 in 1970s prices. R. Pethybridge, *The spread of the Russian revolution* (London, 1972), p.3.

through Tsaritsyn and Makhno felt tempted to disembark to visit his newborn son or daughter. His anxiety to get to Moscow prevailed over sentiment, and he continued upstream to Saratov.

Fighting had continued there since his departure, but by the beginning of June the Bolsheviks had overcome the naval gangs and had disarmed the Odessa anarchists. The party headquarters had been razed in the struggle. Makhno read newspaper stories about the repressive and brutal *Hetman* regime in Ukraine, and about the revolt of the Czech Legion on the Trans-Siberian railway on 25 May. This force of about 40,000 men had been in the middle of an evacuation via Vladivostok. By late June they controlled most towns along the line, and anti-Bolshevik governments were springing up, notably at Samara and Omsk.<sup>71</sup> Although the news was ominous, Makhno's plans remained unaltered. It was not yet time to return to Ukraine. He managed to get a ticket to Moscow by producing his identity card as chairman of the Guliai-Pole Revolutionary Committee, and set off by train.

The Czech revolt was the spark that ignited the Civil War. Until autumn 1918, moderate democrats and socialists had led the counter-revolutionary movement. Ruthless and reactionary authoritarians like Kolchak, Denikin and Wrangel rapidly pushed these well-meaning but ineffectual men aside during the struggle. The Czechs themselves played no role, beyond triggering the rebellion of the

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71. See F. Popov, *Chekho-slovatskii miatezh* (Moscow, 1932); W. Chamberlin, *The Russian revolution*, new ed. (New York, 1965), vol.2, p.1-23.

bourgeoisie and the landowners against the new regime. The revolt forced the Bolsheviks to create an effective army that would fight in an efficient and disciplined manner against reaction. This required the reversal of four years of revolutionary defeatism and agitation among the former Imperial troops.

Even by rail the journey from Saratov to Moscow was slow, for the train kept running out of steam. Wild rumours were flying about concerning the whereabouts of the Czechs, who were said to have cut the line. There was a delay of over 24 hours in Tambov, but the train eventually reached Moscow without further serious incident.<sup>72</sup>

Makhno's arrival went unnoticed in the capital. He was still to make his name as a partisan leader. Although the anarchist press had mentioned him once or twice, he had published no theoretical articles, had been working far from the centre, and had been unceremoniously expelled from his village. In June 1918 Bolshevik fortunes were at a low ebb. The Reds were threatened by the Germans in the west and the south, the Whites in the Caucasus, and the Czechs and Whites across the Urals. They lacked an effective army and were running short of food. The railway workers in Moscow were becoming increasingly restless, and on 19 June shooting broke out at a union meeting. The Mensheviks and Right SRs had been expelled from VTsIK on 14 June, primarily because of their involvement in the so-called "democratic counter-revolution"

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72. Makhno, *op.cit.*, p.86-92.

against which Soviet Russia was then struggling for its existence. A split with the Left SRs over the treaty of Brest-Litovsk was imminent.

On 24 June the Left SRs decided to use terrorism against German diplomats. The 5th All-Russian Congress of Soviets opened in Moscow on 4 July, and the SRs, outnumbered three to one by the Bolsheviks, mounted a noisy demonstration against the German occupation. Two days later the German ambassador to Moscow, Count Mirbach, was assassinated in his chancellery by two SRs disguised as Chekists. One of the assassins, Nikolai Andreev, subsequently died in action fighting for the *Makhnovshchina*.<sup>73</sup> On 30 July, a left SR assassinated General von Eichhorn, commander-in-chief of German forces in Ukraine, in Kiev. The campaign reached a climax when the SRs turned against the Bolsheviks themselves, killing V. Volodarskii and M. Uritskii in Petrograd and seriously wounding Lenin in Moscow on 20 August. The result of the military, political and economic pressure on the regime was the unleashing in the autumn of 1918 of a systematic class-based terror, which permitted the unarmed and disorganised anarchist groups of the cities no room for manoeuvre. The Cheka's role, frankly admitted, was not to judge, but to strike. It was a mechanism for the defence of the revolution, and it lumped all types of anarchist in with gangsters and bandits, and simply crushed them.<sup>74</sup>

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73. V. Serge, *Year one of the Russian revolution* (London, 1972), p.399; Chamberlin, *op.cit.*, p.52-53. But see also above, footnote 53.

74. E. H. Carr, *The Bolshevik revolution* (Harmondsworth, 1966), vol.1, p.175.

The anarchists quibbled over points of theory while the Bolsheviks entrenched themselves behind the power of the Cheka. Their apparent lethargy shocked Makhno, who arrived in Moscow as the crisis was peaking. He contemptuously described Moscow as "the capital of the paper revolution", producing only slogans and manifestos.<sup>75</sup> His experiences there confirmed his dislike of the city. He could find nowhere to sleep, and when he went to a restaurant, he could only buy poor-quality bread at an exorbitant price. He visited most of the leading figures in the movement and found them for the most part to be discouraged and unwilling to fight. Even Petr Arshinov seemed uninterested in returning to Ukraine, and others for whom he had a high regard, such as the poet Lev Chernyi, were cooperating with the regime. For three weeks Makhno spent his time at meetings and conferences, reading and making contacts. He associated with non-anarchist groups, attending the All-Russian Congress of Textiles Unions and meetings of the Left SRs. Although these groups meant well he felt that they lacked the strength to redirect the revolution into its correct course.<sup>76</sup>

Among the people Makhno most wanted to meet was the elder states-

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75. Makhno, op.cit. p.93.

76. Ibid., p.115-116.

man of Russian anarchism, P. A. Kropotkin, then aged 75.<sup>77</sup> He had bitterly disappointed Makhno by supporting the war in 1914, but Makhno retained great admiration for the learned old man. In 1917, when the anarchists of Guliai-Pole received the news of Kropotkin's return from forty years in exile "an indescribable joy" had taken hold of the group. They had eagerly sent off a letter asking for practical advice.<sup>78</sup> Later, when Kropotkin was in need, the Makhnovites sent flour and other foodstuffs to him at his home in Dmitrov.<sup>79</sup> Makhno went to see Kropotkin in Moscow in a similarly reverent frame of mind, evidently expecting the answers to all his questions. He had difficulty making an appointment, and when he finally succeeded the meeting was inconclusive. Kropotkin, the *ideinye* anarchist, insisted that only Makhno could solve his own problems. As Makhno was leaving Kropotkin remarked:

"One must bear in mind, dear comrade, that there is no sentimentality in our struggle - selflessness and strength of heart on the path to the goal one has chosen will conquer everything."

Makhno later wrote that this remark stayed in his mind and sustained him through his long struggle - an indication both of his

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77. A Soviet life is N. M. Pirumova, *Petr Alekseevich Kropotkin* (Moscow, 1972): more sympathetic is G. Woodcock and I. Avakumovic, *The anarchist prince* (London, 1950). For a revisionist account of Kropotkin's thought, arguing for a positive attitude towards organised labour and offering a subtle reinterpretation of his concept of revolutionary action, see C. Cahm, *Peter Kropotkin and the rise of revolutionary anarchism* (Cambridge, 1989).

78. Makhno, *La révolution russe en Ukraine*, p.67-68.

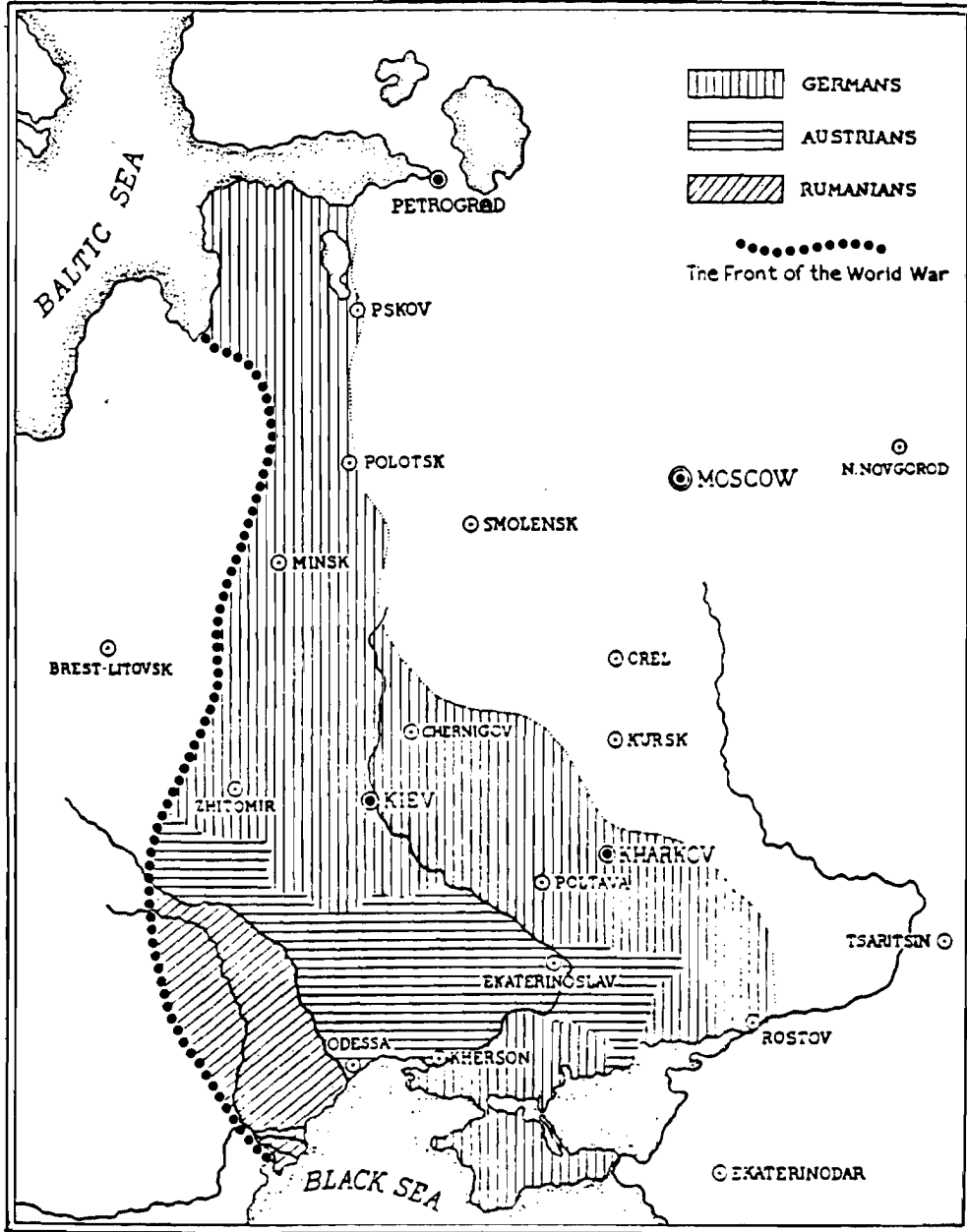
79. E. Goldman, *Living my life* (New York, 1970), vol.2, p.769; A. Berkman, *The Bolshevik myth* (London, 1925), p.75.

profound respect for the grand old man of Russian anarchism, and of the voluntarism of Makhno's own political thought.<sup>80</sup>

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80. Makhno, *Pod udarami kontr-revoliutsii*, p.107-108.

Map 3  
The German and Austrian Occupation of Ukraine, 1918



Source: W. H. Chamberlin, *The Russian revolution* new ed. (New York, 1965) vol.2, p.9.



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VII.           MAKHNO'S MEETING WITH LENIN AND THE RETURN TO UKRAINE

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Did Makhno really meet Lenin and Sverdlov?<sup>1</sup> Whether or not he did so, we have only one account of such a meeting, written by Makhno himself and published posthumously in the second volume of his memoirs, edited by Volin. As we have seen, Makhno had little confidence in the bespectacled intellectual Volin, who has been accused of tampering with documentary evidence after Makhno's death. What, then, is the status of this "account" of this "meeting"? Can we agree with Louis Fischer, who wrote that

"[t]here is no mention in the great library of literature by and about Lenin of the leader's talk with Makhno in June 1918. Many peasants, singly and in delegations, came to see him; it was his way of taking the pulse. Perhaps no record was kept. Perhaps the

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1. No reference to such a meeting appears in the sixth and relevant volume of G. N. Golikov et al. (compilers) *Vladimir Il'ich Lenin: biograficheski khronika* (Moscow, 1970-1982; 12 vols.), by far the most detailed day-by-day chronicle of Lenin's doings available. Lenin received many peasant visitors; but in the vast mass of published Leniniana there is no mention of a meeting with Makhno between 14 and 29 June 1918. Arshinov, who was actually in Moscow at the time, describes Makhno's visit but is curiously silent about an encounter with Lenin (op.cit., p.52). S. N. Semanov, in a presumably authoritative article, mentions only that Makhno held discussions with the Moscow anarchists ("Makhnovshchina i ee krakh," *Voprosy istorii* no.9 [1966], p.39). M. Kubanin, who made extensive use of archival material, does not discuss the visit (*Makhnovshchina* [Leningrad, 1927]). It is possible that Makhno, who was unknown before the end of 1918, was granted a casual audience with the Bolshevik leaders: Sverdlov was obviously unaware even that Makhno was an anarchist.

censors have suppressed it. Makhno provides the account and there is no reason to question his veracity."<sup>2</sup>

or should we treat it as an ideological construct of "Makhno-Volin" whose true status will probably never be unravelled? The text is absorbing and merits lengthy quotation, even if its conventional use as evidence remains ambiguous.

After a time the continual problem of finding somewhere to sleep, together with a desire to meet the Bolshevik leaders, drove Makhno to the Kremlin in search of a billet-card. The long corridors were empty and silent, but eventually he found his way to the offices of VTsIK. The secretary looked at his papers and asked him if he had come from the "south of Russia."

"Yes," replied Makhno, "I've come from Ukraine."

"You were already chairman of the Committee for the Defence of the Revolution in Kerenskii's time?"

"Yes."

"Then you are a Socialist-Revolutionary? Have you - or did you have - ties with the Communist Party in your area?"

"I was on personal terms with many Bolshevik militants,"

replied Makhno evasively, naming several communist officials from Ekaterinoslav. After some more questions, still using the slighting expression "south of Russia", the secretary made a telephone call. He invited Makhno to come to the office of Iakov Sverdlov, president of VTsIK.

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2. L. Fischer, *Life of Lenin* (London, 1965), p.363.

Makhno's friends in Ukraine had told him that the Bolshevik leaders were like demigods, surrounded by bodyguards and formalities, impossible of access. He wrote later that the ease with which he gained a hearing amazed him. Sverdlov himself opened the door of his office, and with a warm smile ushered Makhno to a chair.

"So, you have come from the tormented south. What work were you doing there?" asked Sverdlov.

"The same work as the revolutionary toiling masses of the Ukrainian countryside," answered Makhno. "After playing an active part in the revolution, they are trying to attain complete liberation. You might say that I was always in the front rank in that direction. Now, because of the retreat of the Ukrainian revolutionary front, I am temporarily stranded in Moscow."

"What are you saying, comrade?" interrupted Sverdlov, "The peasants in the south are mostly kulaks or supporters of the Central Rada."

Makhno burst out laughing, and described the peasants' opposition to the occupation and to the Rada. Sverdlov was surprised and remarked that intelligence in the capital was that the peasants, infected with Ukrainian chauvinism, had welcomed the Germans and the Rada as liberators.<sup>3</sup> Many peasants were suspicious of outsiders who came to take land or grain, and by late summer this suspicion had hardened into downright hostility; but neither Makhno nor Sverdlov apparently made any allowance for the complexity of the peasants' reactions. Still, as Makhno pointed out, he had been in command of several hundred peasant volunteers, many of

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3. Makhno, *Pod udarami kontr-revoliutsii* (Paris, 1936), p.120-122. All following quotations from the conversation with Sverdlov are taken from the chapter in this volume which recounts the meeting (p.119-126).

whom had seen action, although he had not. The Red Guards had fought their battles along the railway lines. At the first reversal, they had rapidly pulled out by train, abandoning large areas to the enemy and leaving the peasants isolated in their villages. There was little contact between the Red Guards and the peasants, and they mistrusted each other. The peasants were willing to defend the revolution in order to rid themselves of the landlords and the kulaks and to gain control of their affairs.

"I think you are right about the Red Guards," said Sverdlov, "and we have reorganised them into the Red Army, which is in the process of building up its strength. If the peasants in the south are really as full of revolutionary spirit as you describe, there is a good chance that the Germans will be beaten and that the *Hetman* will soon fall; then Soviet power will triumph in Ukraine as well."

"That will depend," replied Makhno, "on the clandestine work that is conducted in Ukraine. For my part, I think that action is more essential now than ever, as long as it is organised and takes a militant form to encourage the masses to rise openly in the towns and the countryside against the Germans and the *Hetman*. Without a rebellion - a revolutionary uprising - inside Ukraine we cannot force the Germans and Austrians to leave the country and we cannot lay hands on the *Hetman* or his supporters or force them to flee with their masters. Do not forget that because of Brest-Litovsk and other external political factors which the revolution has to take into account, it is inconceivable that the Red Army will mount an offensive."

Sverdlov, who had been making notes while Makhno talked, expressed agreement. Then he asked

"But what are you - a communist or a Left SR? One can tell that you are Ukrainian by the way you speak, but not which party you belong to."

Since April Makhno had become suspicious of Bolshevik intentions towards the anarchists, and he was reluctant to admit that he was

one. Nor did he want to tell a lie. He deflected the question by referring to his papers, which showed him to have a sound revolutionary record as an organiser of the peasants and a fighter against the counter-revolution. Sverdlov apologised at once, and assured him that he trusted him. His expressions of regret encouraged Makhno to admit that he was an anarchist-communist "of the Bakunin-Kropotkin tendency".

Sverdlov was astonished and seized at once on Makhno's unorthodox ideas about organisation and discipline. Throughout the period of their activity in Ukraine and during their later exile, the contradiction between libertarian theory and the exigencies of military action troubled anarchists involved in the *Makhnovshchina*. Like many political leaders before him, Makhno had become adept at saying one thing while doing another. Sverdlov asked him

"What sort of anarchist-communist are you, comrade, that you permit the organisation of the toiling masses, and leadership in the struggle against the power of capital?"

"Anarchism is too realistic a doctrine not to understand the modern world and the events taking place in it," replied Makhno. "You can see the part that the anarchists have played in those events."

Anarchists, he continued, made allowances for trends that they must follow in action, and for the means that they must employ.

"I can see that you are not like the anarchists of Moscow,"

observed Sverdlov, and was about to continue when Makhno interrupted him to protest against the Bolshevik repression of the an-

anarchist groups in April. Sverdlov murmured an inaudible reply, and then, rising, said to Makhno,

"You are obviously familiar with what has happened since our retreat from Ukraine, and above all with the state of the peasants' morale. Il'ich - comrade Lenin - would certainly be happy to see you. Would you like me to telephone him?"

Makhno was not particularly enthusiastic, but Sverdlov was already on the telephone. He arranged a meeting for one o'clock in the afternoon of the following day. When Makhno left he had a pass for the Kremlin but still lacked a billet, so again he had to beg accommodation from his anarchist friends.<sup>4</sup>

The next day Makhno returned to the Kremlin at one o'clock and met Sverdlov, who immediately took him to Lenin's office. Lenin greeted him warmly and all three sat. Lenin instructed his secretary that they were not to be disturbed, and at once began to cross-question Makhno.

"What region are you from?" he asked, "How did the peasants there react to the slogan 'All power to the Soviets'? How did the enemies of the slogan react - especially the Rada? Have the peasants in your region risen against the Austro-German invaders? What should be done to turn such peasant uprisings into a general rebellion and to coordinate it with the Red Guard units?"

Makhno replied briefly to the barrage of questions, which Lenin insisted he respond to point by point. The peasants, said Makhno, took the slogan "All power to the local Soviets" to mean that power over their affairs must rest with the workers themselves.

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4. Ibid., p.122-126.

They reasoned that the Soviets were, at all levels, simply cogs in the revolutionary machine for the struggle against the bourgeoisie and its lackeys and for economic self-management.

"Do you think that this is the correct interpretation of the slogan?" asked Lenin.

"Yes," answered Makhno.

"In that case the peasants of your region have caught the contagion of anarchism," exclaimed Lenin.

"And is that a bad thing?"

"That is not what I meant - on the contrary we should be glad, since it will hasten the victory of communism over capitalism."

Makhno protested at this transparent piece of flattery, but Lenin insisted that he meant what he said, adding that peasant anarchism was not spontaneous, but resulted from anarchist propaganda and would soon disappear. Since the counter-revolution had overrun the peasantry before they could organise themselves, he continued, it had probably disappeared already. Makhno replied that a political leader should not seem pessimistic or skeptical.

"So, according to you it is necessary to encourage these anarchist tendencies among the masses?" asked Sverdlov.

"Your party will not encourage them," replied Makhno.

"And why should they be encouraged? Once divide the revolutionary force of the proletariat, clear the way for the counter-revolution, and in the end we will mount the scaffold side-by-side with the workers," said Lenin.

Nervously Makhno protested that the anarchists were not counter-revolutionaries and were not leading the workers towards counter-revolution.

"Is that what I said?" asked Lenin. "I wanted to say that the anarchists lack mass organisations and are not in a position to organise the workers and the poor peasants and so to arouse them to defend, in the broad sense, that which we have all won and which we value."

Lenin questioned Makhno closely about the performance of the Red Guards in the defensive actions in Ukraine.<sup>5</sup> Their lack of success obviously worried him. Makhno noticed his emotional commitment to final victory over the hated social system that he had overthrown, and which was now fighting back.

"I participated in the disarming of dozens of Cossack units which had retreated from the German front in late 1917 and early 1918," said Makhno, "and I am well acquainted with the 'revolutionary morale' of the Red Guard units, and especially their commanders. It seems to me, comrade Lenin, that you have accepted exaggerated second- and third-hand reports."

This surprised Lenin, but Makhno continued with a detailed indictment of Red Guard tactics.

"The Red Guard units showed courage and revolutionary spirit, admittedly, but not as much as you have described. The Red Guards had moments when their revolutionary spirit and courage in the struggle against the Rada's *haidamaki* and above all against the Germans were shown to be very poor - as were the actions of the troops and their commanders. I would certainly agree that in many cases there are grounds for blaming the haste with which the Red Guard detachments were formed, and their employment of tactics

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5. The Red Guards, the first Bolshevnik military units, consisted of volunteers and some sailors. Compulsory mobilisation was out of the question in 1918, when a major attraction of Bolshevism was its peace platform. Discipline was lax, training minimal, and equipment sparse and poorly maintained. These units were completely ineffective against regular troops or superior numbers. The disastrous performance of the Red Guards led eventually, with some opposition, to the acceptance of Trotsky's policy of using the "bricks" of the old Tsarist structure (i.e. the officers) to build a new edifice, the Red Army. D. Footman, *Civil war in Russia* (London, 1961), p.135-141.



which were neither partisan nor regular. You should know that the Red Guards, whether in large numbers or not, mounted their attacks on the enemy by travelling along the railway lines. For ten or fifteen kilometres around a railway track the terrain is empty: both sides can move freely there. For that reason surprise attacks succeed nearly every time. It was only at railway junctions, at towns and villages with railway stations, that the Red Guards organised a front and launched their attacks. But the rear, and the immediate neighbourhood of an area under threat by the enemy was left undefended. The revolutionary offensive suffered a counter-blow. The Red Guard units had barely finished distributing their proclamations in a region when the counter-revolutionary forces would turn to the offensive - and often obliged the Red Guards to beat a retreat once again in their armoured trains. And so the country people never even saw them, and consequently could not support them."

"What are the revolutionary propagandists doing in the countryside?" asked Lenin. "Have they not managed to get the rural workers ready to reinforce Red Guards in their vicinity, and to hold their positions until the end of the fight against the counter-revolution?"<sup>6</sup>

Makhno pointed out that there were few agitators in the countryside and that they could do little. Every day hundreds of supporters and agents of the Rada were arriving in the villages. The revolutionaries should not just wait for the agitators to stir up opposition to the enemy, but must take decisive action.

"To ignore this, above all in Ukraine, is to allow the counter-revolution to muster behind the *Hetman*, to develop in freedom, and to consolidate its power," he concluded.

Sverdlov watched the exchange between the two men with lively attention. Lenin pondered a moment and remarked that Makhno's news was highly unfortunate. Turning to Sverdlov, he added that the

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6. Lenin was able to take only a general interest in military affairs in 1918 and 1919; Trotsky was left to build the Red Army more or less to his own specifications. The interview with Makhno is not the only example of Lenin's surprise at detailed military intelligence about his own forces. Cf. L. Trotsky, *My Life* (Harmondsworth, 1975), p.464-465.

Bolsheviks were correct in their policy of reforming the Red Guards into the Red Army, which would bring final victory.

Returning his attention to Makhno, Lenin asked him what work he would do in Moscow. Makhno answered that he would not stay long in the city, but intended to return secretly to Ukraine in July as the anarchist conference in Taganrog had agreed. Again Lenin turned to Sverdlov:

"The anarchists are always self-denying - they are ready for any sacrifice. But they are blind fanatics and ignore the present for the sake of the distant future."

Then he told Makhno that this did not apply to him:

"I consider that you, comrade, are a man with a sense of the realities and necessities of our times. If only a third of the anarchists in Russia were like you, we communists would be prepared to work with you - on certain conditions - towards a free producers' organisation."<sup>7</sup>

Makhno records that he felt the beginning of a feeling of deep respect for Lenin, the man he had recently held responsible for the annihilation of the Moscow anarchist groups, and who had authorised similar persecutions in other cities. He was ashamed of his feelings and, groping for words, he could only reply that the anarchist communists were true revolutionaries. Lenin interrupted him, laughing:

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7. Trotsky confirms this: "Lenin and I seriously considered at one time allotting certain territories to the Anarchists, naturally with the consent of the local population, and letting them carry on their experiment of a stateless social order there" (*Stalin* [London, 1947], p.337).

"We know the anarchists as well as you do. For the most part they have no conception of the present - or at any rate they do not trouble themselves with it. Now, the present situation is so serious that for a revolutionary to ignore it, or to fail to take a positive stand, is more than shameful. Most anarchists turn their thoughts to the future and devote themselves to their writings, without trying to understand the present: that is what separates us from them."

Rising from his chair and pacing across the room, Lenin continued:

"Yes, the anarchists are strong on ideas about the future; as for the present, they have not got their feet on the ground. Their attitude is pitiful, and because of their empty fancies they lack any real connection with the future."<sup>8</sup>

Sverdlov turned to Makhno with a malicious smile:

"You cannot argue with that. Vladimir Il'ich's reflections are correct."

"Have the anarchists never recognised their own lack of realism?" asked Lenin.

Makhno was at a disadvantage in a theoretical debate with a political mind as sophisticated as Lenin's, but he tried bravely to defend the anarchist position.

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8. These were not entirely new criticisms, but variations on a critical theme already expressed by earlier Marxists. In 1905 Lenin had written that anarchist views "express, not the future of bourgeois society, which is striding with irresistible force towards the socialisation of labour, but the present and even the past of that society [...]" (*Marx, Engels, Lenin*, p.205). In September 1917 he wrote of the period from 1871 to 1914 that "the anarchists were then (as they are now) fundamentally wrong [... they] misjudged the character of the times, for they failed to understand the world situation" (*ibid.*, p.267). In *The state and revolution* Lenin argued convincingly that the anarchists' most serious error was their dismissal of state power as an *instrument of revolution* ([Moscow, 1965], p.56 and *passim*).

"I am only a semi-literate peasant," he told the two Bolsheviks (with perhaps a hint of irony), "and I cannot argue with the learned opinion of Lenin about the anarchists. But I can tell you, comrade Lenin, that your assertion that they do not understand the present and that they have no real contact with it, is fundamentally wrong. The anarchist-communists of Ukraine (or the "south of Russia", since you communists are trying to avoid the word Ukraine) have already given ample proof that they are on a level with the present. The whole struggle of the revolutionary Ukrainian village against the Central Rada has been conducted along the ideological line of the anarchists - and partly of the SRs, who, to tell the truth, were pursuing their own objectives. There are no Bolsheviks to speak of in the villages; if there are, their influence is minimal. Almost all the communes and peasant associations of Ukraine were formed on the initiative of the anarchist-communists, and the armed struggle of the working people against the counter-revolution both generally and in the form of the invading Austro-German armies has been conducted under the exclusive organisational and ideological direction of the anarchists. It may not be in your party's interests to credit us with all this, but those are the facts and you cannot gainsay them. I imagine that you know perfectly well the strength and fighting capacity of the revolutionary units in Ukraine. You are right to refer to the bravery with which they defend our revolutionary gains - at least half of them fought under the anarchist flag. Commanders Mokrusov, M. Nikiforova, Cheredniak, Garin, Cherniak, Lunev, and too many others to mention - all were anarchists. I do not speak of myself, of the group that I belong to, nor of all the other groups and the volunteer battalions that we formed for the defence of the revolution, and which the Red Guard command surely knew about. All this shows very well, comrade Lenin, the falsity of your assertion that we anarchists do not have our feet on the ground, that our attitude to the present is pitiful, that we think too much of the future. What I have told you during this conversation cannot be doubted because it is the truth. It contradicts your conclusions about us, and everybody, you understand, can see the proof that we are firmly based in the present; we are working towards the future that we want - and about which we think very seriously."<sup>9</sup>

At this point Makhno glanced at Sverdlov, whose face was flushed.

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9. The Ukrainian Bolshevik movement, apart from its lack of ideological unity, consisted predominantly of Russians and Jews from the town: in 1922 only 23 percent of the KP(b)U membership was ethnically Ukrainian (Chamberlin, *The Russian revolution*, new ed. [New York, 1965], vol.2, p.240). Their record of work with the peasantry was, as a result, even worse than that of the Russian party. Makhno's defence ignored the role of the strong sense of property among the Ukrainian peasants, and their anti-Russian and anti-Jewish feelings.

He was watching him with a fixed smile. Lenin merely commented:

"I could be mistaken."

"Yes, in the circumstances, comrade Lenin, you have been too hard on us anarchists, because you are badly informed about the Ukrainian situation and the role we have played there."

After his impassioned defence of the anarchist partisans, Makhno's confidence began to seep away. Lenin noticed this and tried to put him at his ease again. Makhno felt too intimidated by what he knew to be a unique opportunity to put his case. The discussion lost its momentum and ended inconclusively. Lenin changed the subject by asking:

"So you intend to return illegally to Ukraine?"

"Yes."

"Do you want help?"

"Yes indeed."

Lenin told Sverdlov to telephone to the official in charge of infiltrating militants into Ukraine. While he was doing this, Lenin tried to convince Makhno that the communists were not as hostile as they seemed to anarchist aspirations.

"We were forced to take energetic measures to dislodge the anarchists from the building that they had occupied in Malaia Dmitrovka, where they were hiding both local and transient gangsters. The responsibility was not ours but theirs. Do you know that they have been authorised to occupy another building nearby and are free to work as they like?"

"Have you any evidence that the anarchists at Malaia Dmitrovka were harbouring bandits?" asked Makhno.

"Yes, the Cheka has collected and verified the evidence. Otherwise the party would not have authorised the measures that we have tak-

en," replied Lenin.<sup>10</sup>

Meanwhile Sverdlov had arranged things. Lenin told Makhno to come back in a few days, when he would be given all he needed to get back to Ukraine in secret, including an itinerary for the frontier crossing. Makhno was surprised. He had not heard of a border between Russia and Ukraine. Lenin told him that German troops were guarding the new frontier.

"And do you still consider Ukraine to be the "south of Russia"?" asked Makhno, his Ukrainian national feeling still aroused.

"To consider is one thing, and to see reality is another," retorted Lenin, ambiguously.<sup>11</sup>

Makhno's attitude towards the Bolsheviks was ambivalent. He could admit his feelings of awe in the presence of Lenin's magnetic personality. Yet he wrote later that he could think of no political leader less sincere or more hypocritical.<sup>12</sup> Although he railed at the Bolsheviks, as he did at the Whites, the SRs, the Ukrainian nationalists and even the city anarchists, for their verbosity, indecisiveness, lack of spirit and treachery, the only

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10. In fact not only criminals but counter-revolutionary officers were taking advantage of the open house kept by anarchist clubs. According to a prominent anti-Bolshevik general there were 60 or 70 officers living incognito in the clubs at the beginning of April just before the raids. (K. Goppers, *Tschetri sabrakumi* [Riga, 1920], quoted by Serge, *Memoirs of a revolutionary, 1901-1941* [London, 1963], p.215).

11. Makhno, op.cit., p.126-135, for all quotations from the alleged conversation with Lenin. The armistice between Soviet Russia and the Ukraine was concluded on 14 June 1918.

12. Makhno, "K desiatoi godovshchine revoliutsionnogo povstanshestva na Ukraine - Makhnovtsy" *Delo truda* no.44-45 (1929), p.3.

alliances he was ever to contract were with the Red Army. He did not represent the mainstream of the Russo-Ukrainian anarchist movement when he argued that he had his feet on the ground, but he was speaking the truth about himself. Clearly, from his later actions and writings, his views on military and political organisation were often un-anarchist. While far from accepting the democratic centralism of the Bolsheviks, he recognised the necessity for tight control in defending the revolution from its enemies. Ideological squabbles could be left for later.

A few days after the conversation with Lenin the Bolsheviks provided Makhno with a passport and other necessaries, and on 29 June 1918 he left Moscow by train for the south. Arshinov was at the station to see him off.<sup>13</sup> The journey was as slow as the others he had undertaken, and the train crowded, but Makhno was happy to be leaving Moscow at last. He had read in the newspapers of increasing unrest among the Ukrainian peasantry and he was anxious to get back to Guliai-Pole and to active politics again. The trip was a risky one. His bad Ukrainian attracted attention - he had disguised himself as a Ukrainian officer. Once the Austrians arrested him with a suitcase full of anarchist literature. An old acquaintance paid his bail. The last 27 kilometres of the journey had to be covered on foot.<sup>14</sup>

The severity of the German treatment of the peasantry had suc-

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13. Makhno, *Pod udarami kontr-revoliutsii*, p.140; Arshinov, *Istoriia makhnovskogo dvizheniia, 1918-1921 gg.* (Berlin, 1923), p.52.

14. Makhno, *op.cit.*, p.149; Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.52.

ceeded where Makhno's oratory had failed in stirring up village resentments to the point of armed rebellion. After the restoration of the Hetmanate German repression intensified. Commissions set up to assess damage to the seized estates forced the peasantry to pay compensation to their former landlords. They held each community responsible for payments by individual members, and enforcement was strict.<sup>15</sup>

Peasant opposition to the German occupation and to the Skoropadskii regime moved rapidly from the passing of congress resolutions to armed insurrection.<sup>16</sup> The first groups of "Forest Brothers" were formed in Kursk, Kiev and Chernigov provinces in early May, and attracted vigorous and brutal repressive action from the occupying forces. The scale of these guerrilla actions escalated quickly, and by June artillery was in use on both sides. The worst hit provinces were Podolia, Khar'kov and Ekaterinoslav, where the partisans slaughtered Hetmanite officials, and the punitive detachments of the German army were almost completely ineffective.<sup>17</sup>

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15. J. Bunyan, (ed.) *Intervention, civil war and communism in Russia, April-December 1918: documents and materials* (Baltimore, 1936), p.27.

16. The 2nd All-Ukrainian Congress of Peasants passed anti-Hetman and anti-German resolutions, 8-10 May 1918. P. Khrystiuk, *Zamitky i materialy do istorii ukrains'koi revoliutsii, 1917-1920 rr.* [Vienna, 1921-1922], vol.3, p.15.

17. Bunyan, op.cit., p.22-23. However, A. Lamis has argued that Ukrainian nationalism was both patriotic and reformist. The anti-German uprising, Lamis contends, was in fact nationalist in character even though the peasants did not support the Directory ("Some observations on the Ukrainian national movement and the Ukrainian revolution, 1917-1921," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* vol.2, no.4 [1978], p.525-531).



For the first time the peasants began to turn against the German Mennonite colonists, suspected with good reason of helping German occupation forces.<sup>18</sup> The industrious, pious and stolidly bourgeois Mennonites had established their communities in Ukraine during the reign of Catherine II (1762-1796). They had been influential in introducing commercial farming and new agricultural methods in the nineteenth century. Their settlements were particularly numerous in Ekaterinoslav, Tauride and Kherson. In the whole of Ukraine they owned over 60,000 hectares, and as much again in Russia itself.<sup>19</sup> Not surprisingly they feared the revolution and welcomed the German army with its promise of the restoration of order - and not surprisingly the peasants treated them harshly when the opportunity arose. When the Germans withdrew from Ukraine in the autumn of 1918 they equipped several *Selbstschutz* (self-defence) units. These attempted to resist the raids of the Makhnovites and of other partisan groups. This only increased mutual suspicion between the peasants and the colonists. The Mennonite churches later condemned the armed units both as a tactical blunder that increased hostility towards the Mennonites, and as a violation of the principle of non-violence.<sup>20</sup> There are several Mennonite memoirs of this period

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18. Report in *Novaia Zhizn* (4 July 1918), p.3, quoted by Bunyan, op.cit., p.24.

19. *Mennonite encyclopaedia* (Scottsdale, Pa., 1955-1959) s.v. "Ukraine." Almost all Mennonite memoirs of this period treat peasant resentment of the colonists as incomprehensible.

20. Frank Epp, "Mennonites in the Soviet Union," in R. H. Marshall (ed.), *Aspects of religion in the Soviet Union, 1917-1967* (Chicago, 1971), p.290.

listing the names of the martyrs and enumerating examples of the destruction of German villages, farms and settlements. There is no doubt that the *Makhnovshchina* was responsible for attacks on Mennonite communities from late 1918 onwards. Clearly the colonists, although God-fearing and peaceful, identified themselves with the landlords, the *haidamaki*, and above all with the foreign invaders. By doing so they declared themselves unequivocally for the counter-revolution. The lists of the martyrs contain not a word about the centuries of oppression endured by the Russian and Ukrainian peasantry.<sup>21</sup>

The peasant gangs were also often anti-semitic and would search and plunder Jewish houses while pointedly leaving Russian and Ukrainian homes intact. They also imposed heavy taxes on villagers.<sup>22</sup> With its anti-German and anti-Jewish persecutions, its peasant bandits resisting the grain requisition detachments, and its increasing anarchy in the countryside, the summer of 1918 seemed like a dress-rehearsal for the larger-scale chaos of late 1919 and 1920. Then, the same prejudices and antagonisms were to return to the stage with their violence multiplied tenfold.

The arrival of Nestor Makhno back home went largely unnoticed. He slipped quietly into the village of Rozhdestvenka, 21 kilometres

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21. E.g. *Der Bote* (Saskatoon) (28 December 1965), p.9; D. Navall, *Russian dance of death* (Claremont, Calif., 1930), passim; J.G. Rempel, *Mein Heimatdorf Nieder Chortitza* (Rosthern, Sask., n.d.), p.65.

22. *Novaia Zhizn* (3 July 1918) quoted by Bunyan, op.cit., p.23.

from Guliai-Pole, and immediately went into hiding.<sup>23</sup> Many of his friends were under arrest, and the Austrians had burned his mother's home and shot his brother Emel'ian, a wounded veteran of the German front.<sup>24</sup> After the anonymity of the capital, he had to conduct himself with extreme caution in an area where he was well-known. Nonetheless on 4 July he issued a proclamation, couched in broad terms, exhorting the peasants to expel the invaders and establish a free society. He made 10 copies, and circulated them to known peasant sympathisers in the Guliai-Pole region.<sup>25</sup>

The response was depressing. Makhno received a note telling him not to come back to the village, for the Jews were hunting out the radicals, just as they had betrayed the revolution to the Austrians in April. Makhno sent back a warning against sweeping assertions of this kind, but only received a reply reiterating the same accusations. Although he regarded the Jewish bourgeoisie as his enemies it was their class, not their "race" that made them so. Poor Jews were the natural allies of the peasants and workers.<sup>26</sup> It was hard to convince the less politically sophisticated among his supporters of this, and Jews remained scapegoats for the frustrated peasantry throughout the Civil War.

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23. Makhno, *op.cit.*, p.155.

24. Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.52.

25. Makhno, *Ukrainskaia revoliutsiia* (Paris, 1937), p.7-8.

26. *Ibid.*, p.9-10.

Meanwhile, Makhno outlined his plan of campaign to his few followers. Each section of the village would have its nucleus of committed revolutionaries, who would gather round them the most energetic and reckless of their peasant neighbours to form properly organised fighting squads. To begin with, the squads would attack the Austrian patrols and the landowners in isolated areas. With proper timing and coordination a series of these attacks would eventually demoralise the occupying forces sufficiently to permit a full-scale assault on the garrison at Guliai-Pole. It is clear from the outline of this plan that Makhno had from the very beginning a sound grasp of the guerrilla maxim "that strategicaly the partisans should despise all enemies, and tactically take them seriously."<sup>27</sup> In other words they should concentrate their forces and fight only when superior numbers ensure victory.

Unfortunately some of his followers were less perceptive and launched feeble attacks immediately upon receipt of his instructions. The Austrian and Hetmanite authorities coped easily with these disorganised raids and a wave of arrests and house-searches followed. Inevitably they discovered Makhno's presence in the region. Using the passport issued to him by Sverdlov in Moscow he beat a hasty retreat to Ternovka, about 85 kilometres away, where he hid with relatives.<sup>28</sup>

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27. Mao Tse-tung quoted by Chalmers Johnson, *Revolution and the social system* (Stanford, 1964), p.66.

28. Makhno, *op.cit.*, p.25-27.

In Ternovka, for various reasons, the peasants had the fighting spirit that Guliai-Pole's inhabitants had lacked. The main danger to Makhno proved to be from the village radicals, who initially suspected him of being an agent of the Hetmanate and planned to kill him. A revolutionary speech that he delivered in all innocence changed their minds and saved his life.<sup>29</sup> He set about organising the younger men into platoons and lectured them on the dangers of launching a campaign too early. Without careful planning and the mobilisation of popular support no guerrilla action could hope to succeed. Fortunately the Red Guards had abandoned some weapons during their retreat in the spring, and the tiny squad was at least adequately armed. Makhno set off back to Guliai-Pole on a cautious reconnaissance. He discovered that the Austrian punitive detachments were enforcing the rapacious grain requisition policy with such vigour that fighting had already begun. If the Germans could have restrained their Austrian allies and the vengeful *pomeshchiki* from demanding land, grain and compensation all at once, the peasants might conceivably have been willing to pay rent and to sell the harvest. But the landlords took a special delight in beating and even imprisoning the same peasants who, a few months before, had driven them ignominiously from their estates. After the harvest the occupation forces and the *haidamaki* found themselves in a state of war with the population of the countryside. Many peasants had only recently returned from the German front and still carried arms. By this time the

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29. Ibid., p.27-30.

Germans saw the supply of raw materials from Ukraine as essential to their survival.

"From the military point of view," wrote Ludendorff, "we are justified to use our troops there; it would be a mistake to do otherwise."<sup>30</sup>

The occupying forces failed to see that the partisan warfare that they faced was not only essentially political but essentially nationalist. Lt.-Col. Bach, quoted earlier, could write as late as 15 September that

"the bands of partisans which I have encountered so far were not political organisations, but only gangster bands, people too lazy to work."

Later in the same letter he remarks patronisingly of the Ukrainian peasant "[...] the good old dog! Appeased he is a lamb, and incited, a wild beast who tears out eyes, tortures, buries alive!"<sup>31</sup>

The Germans lacked a clear policy towards Ukraine and failed to exploit it economically as they had expected to be able to do. Their attitude towards Ukrainian nationalism in its right- and left-wing manifestations was ambivalent and uncomprehending. The rivalry with their Austrian allies irritated them, and even the German Foreign Office and the Supreme Army Command were unable to

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30. Z. Zeman (ed.), *Germany and the revolution in Russia* (London, 1958), p.135.

31. Bundesarchiv, Kl. Erwerbungen, Restnachlass von Dr. Rohrbach 1869-1956, Bd.2, Bach to Rohrbach.

agree on policy matters.<sup>32</sup> In the circumstances, and given the brutal crudity of the occupation forces' conduct, any well-organised partisan campaign had a good chance of some success.

The initial organising presented Makhno with problems. From Ternovka he issued the slogan "Death to all those who take the conquests of the Revolution away from the peasants, with the help of German-Austrian-*haidamak* bayonets!"<sup>33</sup> He then began to raid the country houses of the *pomeshchiki*. Several landlords and their guards died during these raids, and the subsequent arrival of an Austrian punitive detachment in Ternovka forced Makhno to flee further westwards to the Dnepr, where he fell in for a short time with some demobilised Ukrainians from a unit originally formed by the Germans from prisoners-of-war.<sup>34</sup> Only a few of these men were willing to join him, but Makhno determinedly set off back to Guliai-Pole to resume operations again.

His return coincided with the arrival of some of his anarchist friends from the north. Ukraine had for hundreds of years been a sanctuary for rebels and brigands pursued by the central government of Russia. It had also been a stronghold of the anarchist

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32. O. S. Fedyshyn, *Germany's drive to the east and the Ukrainian revolution, 1917-1918* (New Brunswick, 1971), p.254 ff.

33. Makhno, *op.cit.*, p.33.

34. *Ibid.*, p.35-36; N. Gerasimenko, "Makhno," *Istoriik i sovremennik* vol.3 (1922), p.158-161, dates the earliest attacks in March, and alleges that Makhno made 118 raids between April and June - probably meaning August and September. Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.53, glides over these early problems of recruitment and organisation.

movement in the late nineteenth century and in 1905. It was natural, therefore, for Russian anarchists to flee southwards from persecution in the north.

The year 1918 saw a steady emigration of intellectuals who gradually attached themselves to Makhno's movement and to some extent changed its character. The "Nabat" Confederation of Anarchist Organisations of Ukraine was founded in the autumn of 1918 in Khar'kov. With a network of branches in Ukrainian cities, it was the main result of the anarchist emigration. Dominated by Volin (V. M. Eikhenbaum), Petr Arshinov, and Aron Baron, it attempted without much success to unite anarcho-syndicalists, anarchist-communists and individualists while at the same time permitting them considerable autonomy.<sup>35</sup>

In November 1918 the "Nabat" Confederation held its first Conference in Kursk. The delegates saw great opportunities for propagating anarchist ideas in the Ukrainian situation. They rejected the Bolshevik concept of a "dictatorship of the proletariat" out of hand. The Conference recognised in the Makhno bands the best means of defending the revolution against its enemies, notably the Whites, who they considered to be a more immediate threat than the Red Army or the nationalists. The Conference passed a resolution recommending that "Nabat" should form its own partisan

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35. Avrich, *op.cit.*, p.204-205. Gerasimenko may be referring to these arrivals when he describes Nabat members joining Makhno in June 1918 (*op.cit.*, p.159).



bands, to operate independently of other forces.<sup>36</sup>

The newly arrived comrades were the advance-guard of a formidable group of anarchist intellectuals who were to organise "Nabat". They immediately set about telling Makhno how to conduct his affairs. They felt that it was impractical to mount an uprising at once, and argued that Makhno should wait for Bolshevik help. Makhno was contemptuous of city anarchists and Marxists alike for dismissing the peasantry as reactionary and petty-bourgeois. He suspected that the Bolsheviks were interested in the towns, rather than the countryside, and that they would try to control any uprising that they "helped". Above all he was afraid of losing the initiative if he delayed any longer.<sup>37</sup>

By this time he had recruited about 100 followers, and the most he could hope to do was to attack isolated country estates or small guard posts. He still lacked the forces to raid Guliai-Pole itself and thus throw the Austrians and the *haidamaki* onto the defensive. He had already made three attempts to infiltrate the village and blow up the Austrian headquarters; all had failed.<sup>38</sup>

It was the middle of September before he had built up his forces to sufficient strength to move into the Guliai-Pole area and

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36. *Pervaia konferentsiia anarkhistskikh organizatsii Ukrainy "Nabat"* (Buenos Aires, 1922), p.13-27.

37. Makhno, op.cit., p.37-38.

38. Ibid., p.39-49.

seize the initiative. His campaign opened with several of those strokes of good fortune that successful partisan warfare relies upon in its early stages. On the way to Guliai-Pole he disarmed a troop of *haidamaki* by a lucky ruse, capturing some good horses, enemy uniforms, and weapons. Thus disguised, his men then came upon and routed a militia detachment.<sup>39</sup>

Guliai-Pole was heavily garrisoned by Austrian troops, in a state of alert because of the news of the Makhnovites' earlier exploits. The Austrians took brutal reprisals against villagers who helped the partisans, shooting some and exacting fines on others. Austrian repression joined with the fame of Makhno's deeds to gain him eager followers, some with weapons. The lack of discipline of this insurgent multitude - for it was hardly an army - worked in its favour, for its plans were so vague that it was impervious to Austrian spies. About 400 men eventually followed Makhno in an attack on the garrison of two companies of Austrians and about 80 militiamen. They captured the post office, the railway station and other strategic points. As it turned out most of the Austrians were out on patrol searching for the partisans on the night of the assault.<sup>40</sup>

It is hard to overestimate the importance of this first victory to the insurgents and to Makhno himself. Guliai-Pole was both the

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39. Ibid., p.50-63.

40. Ibid., p.64-70; Makhno, "Zapiski," *Anarkhicheski vestnik* no.2 (1923), p.32.

source of Makhno's strength and of his weakness. Throughout his career it was at the heart of his territory. While his influence might expand or contract with the fortunes of war, and while he might be driven hundreds of kilometres from the village, when the tide turned he always came back.

The object of warfare is the destruction of the enemy's forces. Guerrillas above all must be prepared to abandon territory at any moment if to defend it would interfere with the purpose of annihilation of the enemy.<sup>41</sup> Although Makhno understood this principle, as his abandonment of the village in April 1918 shows, he found it hard to obey. In his attempt to mount an obviously hopeless counter-attack with Nikiforova and the Siberians, he had allowed his emotions to override his naturally sound tactical judgement. Despite his tactical skill, he had a poor grasp of strategy, and although he often seized local advantages, he never really formulated or adhered to a large scale military plan.

Despite the importance of their success in Guliai-Pole as a morale booster, the Makhnovites realised that they could not defend the town against Austrian regulars. They took the opportunity to print as much propaganda as possible on the village press. When they heard from the railway station that two Austrian troop trains were approaching, the insurgents withdrew northwestwards under cover of a well-fought rear guard action. They rested in

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41. The most famous example of this principle in action being the Chinese Long March.

the forest near Dibrovka (Velikaia Mikhailovka, also known as Bol'shaia Mikhailovka). Makhno learned of another partisan force nearby, under the command of Fedor Shchus', a peasant from the area who had been a petty officer in the Imperial navy.<sup>42</sup> After the overthrow of the Tsar, Shchus' had formulated a simple political philosophy that appealed greatly to the peasants. This was that all Tsarist property laws had lost their force and the land was there for the taking.<sup>43</sup> Shchus' had been present at the Taganrog conference, and had met Makhno during the fighting against the Germans in the spring. His crude political views stood in sharp contrast to the elegant theories of Volin and company, but he was to become one of Makhno's most valued lieutenants. His photograph shows him to have been something of a dandy, wearing a hussar's jacket, a sailor's hat and sporting several swords and revolvers. Shchus' and his men quickly agreed to join forces with Makhno.<sup>44</sup>

While the amalgamation of the two groups was taking place, there was a series of meetings to discuss political and military problems. Makhno had begun to hear of the successes of General A. I.

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42. Makhno, op.cit., p.70-71; Arshinov, op.cit., p.225. A lengthy account of Shchus's career in the form of a novel by his relative, the Very Rev. N. Pliczkowski, exists in manuscript form. (Letter to the author, 30 April 1974; V. Peters, *Nestor Makhno* [Winnipeg, 1970], p.10).

43. Peters, op.cit., p.41. quoting a summary of Pliczkowski's work. This was scarcely an original theory; it chimed perfectly with the ideas which underlay the *chernyi peredel* of 1917.

44. Makhno, op.cit., p.73-74. Other large detachments, including those of the partisans Kurilenko, from Berdiansk, and Petrenko-Platonov, from Grishino, joined forces with Makhno at this time (Arshinov, op.cit., p.56).

Denikin's Volunteer Army in the Kuban and the Caucasus. He warned the peasants that this force might prove to be their most dangerous enemy. While the partisans made speeches the Austrians and the *haidamaki* were preparing an attack. On 30 September they set up road-blocks around Dibrovka. They succeeded in isolating Makhno in the forest with a group of 30 men and a machine-gun. The Austrians had a battalion of about 500 men in the village, reinforced by 200 *haidamaki* and auxiliaries. More troops were expected.<sup>45</sup>

Makhno realised that if he stayed in the forest the Austrians would come in force and flush him out. He proposed a desperate measure - a surprise attack on the village. Because the partisans were so few they could approach the village square undetected. Shchus' was extremely reluctant to join in, but after some goading he led the machine-gun detachment to the far side of the village for the onslaught. The Austrian troops were completely unprepared and fled in panic when the insurgents opened fire from both sides of the square. The villagers killed many *haidamaki* as they were trying to escape. It was during this risky and audacious sortie that Makhno probably earned his title of *Bat'ko*. His men gave it to him when they decided to place their fate in his hands and follow his lead against such overwhelming odds.<sup>46</sup> The success of the assault confirmed Makhno's leadership of the band

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45. Makhno, *op.cit.*, p.82; Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.57.

46. Makhno, *op.cit.*, p.84; Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.58. *Bat'ko* is Ukrainian for father (not little father, as many accounts have it), and was used by many Ukrainian atamans.

and its members' confidence in him.

The Austrian inability to deal with Makhno greatly irritated the German general staff, and the Commander-in-Chief in Kiev ordered that Makhno's band should be eliminated.<sup>47</sup> The Austrians were evidently becoming slightly nervous of their opponent's luck. At any rate, they were taking no chances, and brought up an artillery unit. On 5 October they bombarded the village, wounding both Makhno and Shchus' and driving out the insurgents and most of the population. Makhno could make no reply to this kind of attack, and to prevent his force from being encircled again he withdrew altogether from the Dibrovka area. The partisans abandoned the local peasants to the reprisals of the Austrians and the *haidamaki*. The next night, when the partisans were already a day's march from the town, they saw a glow in the sky as the invaders burned the peasants' houses.<sup>48</sup>

In the end, the success or failure of the Ukrainian *partizanshchina* against the Central Powers was not decided on Ukrainian soil. The course of the war on the Western front was the crucial factor. In their spring offensive of 1918 the Germans had forced their way forward on the Western front in two great thrusts that gained them perhaps ninety kilometres. The effort did not break the Allies' resistance, and in addition, by the summer fresh

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47. Gerasimenko, *op.cit.*, p.160.

48. Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.58; Makhno, *op.cit.*, p.96.

troops from the United States were being added to the balance at a rate of 300,000 men a month. Despite the Brest-Litovsk treaty the Germans still had twenty-two divisions tied down in the east, where the soldiers came into contact with the ideas of Bolshevism and the possibilities of revolution. On 15 July Ludendorff launched another offensive across the Marne, which the French stopped, and turned into a rout with their tanks. On 8 August, in the third Battle of Picardy, the German 2nd Army broke under tank attack. The course of the war had turned decisively against the Central Powers; the Allies had superior technology and superior reserves of manpower. By 14 September Austria-Hungary was suing for peace; on the 20th the British broke through the Hindenburg line. On the 27th Bulgaria surrendered to the Allies. Mutinies, strikes and demonstrations were breaking out all over Central Europe. Soldiers refused to fight, or surrendered when a troop of enemy cavalry or a tank appeared. In Germany soviets were founded and the Kaiser abdicated. The Austrian empire began to fall apart as the Czechs declared their independence, followed by the Yugoslavs and the Hungarians. At 11 a.m. on 11 November 1918, with the old order in ruins all over Central Europe and with revolution in the wind, hostilities ceased as the armistice came into force.

As it became clear in the autumn of 1918 that Germany and Austria could fight on no longer, their grip on Ukraine had begun to loosen. Skoropadskii's position was untenable without the support of his German masters. In a frantic last-minute bid to hang on to power, he declared his recognition of the sovereignty of a "Rus-

sian federation" over Ukraine. By doing so he hoped to win the support of General Denikin and the Volunteer Army. He succeeded only in exposing his political bankruptcy and in losing the loyalty of even the most reactionary nationalist elements.<sup>49</sup>

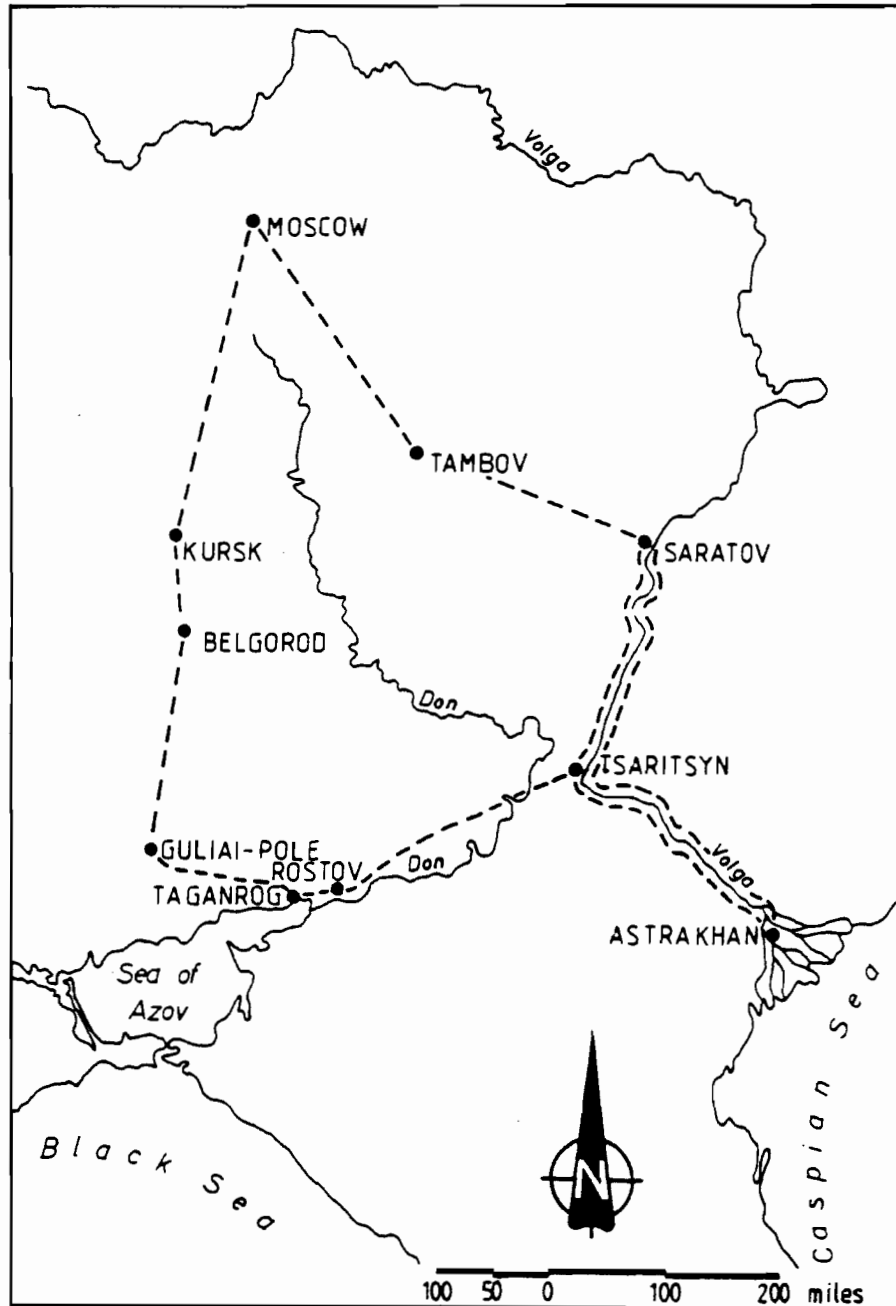
Petliura, Vynnychenko and other former members of the Rada had been forming a new radical nationalist government, under the name of the Directory, since late summer. Skoropadskii's declaration triggered their revolt in November. On 14 December 1918, as the defeated Central Powers finally abdicated responsibility for their eastern satellite, the peasant army of the Directory marched triumphantly into Kiev.

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49. Khrystiuk, *op.cit.*, vol.3, p.120 ff.; Reshetar, *op.cit.*, p.197-198.



Map 4  
Makhno's Journey to Moscow, 1918



(C) 1994. Map drawn by Mr. E. A. McPherson, Dept. of Geography and Environmental Studies, University of the Western Cape, Bellville, South Africa.

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**VIII. THE FIRST ALLIANCE WITH THE BOLSHEVIKS**

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The entry of the Directory's peasant army into Kiev on 14 December 1918 marked the beginning of a short period of success for the Ukrainian nationalism of Semen Petliura and Volodymyr Vynnychenko. Their control never really extended to the countryside, where the political free-for-all between all kinds of groups competing for peasant support continued. Ukrainian nationalism was essentially a movement of the urban bourgeoisie, of school teachers, journalists and professors. Their political views encompassed a wide spectrum from the right to the left, but this diversity merely diffused the impact of nationalism, and did not guarantee a broad base of support among all classes, as they hoped. For this was a revolutionary situation, and most nationalists still nursed an obsession with the juridical forms of bourgeois democracy - with issuing *Universals*, debating issues, holding congresses. They offered the peasants little except the removal of Skoropadskii's oppressive regime that had requisitioned their grain.

The Directory's programme was progressive in the broad sense. On

26 December it proclaimed the abolition of the repressive police machinery of the Hetmanate, and recognised trade unions and the right to strike.<sup>1</sup> The Directory declared itself to be the Revolutionary Provisional Government of Ukraine, and roundly accused the bourgeoisie and the landowners of bringing ruin on their country. The revolutionary tone of the Directory's programme was largely the result of Vynnychenko's influence.

The Directory soon proved unstable. Petliura and many right-wing Social Democrats in the nationalist movement felt that Vynnychenko's ideas approached dangerously close to Bolshevism. The government was unable to control the Galician Sharpshooters, who were more interested in a strong, independent and unified Ukrainian state than in the progressive notions of the intelligentsia. The broadly-based Directory could not compete effectively for the allegiance of radicals with the rival Bolshevik provisional government-in-exile. The Reds had founded this "government" in Moscow in November 1918, under the leadership of the Ukrainian-born Georgii Leonidovich Piatakov. An extreme internationalist and a "left communist," Piatakov had a record of opposition to nationalism. He had even opposed Lenin's formulation of the principle of self-determination. He resisted all Ukrainian nationalist tendencies as counter-revolutionary, and demanded the subordination of workers' parties of the peoples of the former empire to the control of the Communist International.

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1. P. K. Khrystiuk (ed.), *Zamitky i materiialy do istorii ukrains'koi revoliutsii* (Vienna, 1921-1922), vol.4, p.15 et seq.

The struggles between the various fractions within Ukrainian Bolshevism over the correct relationship with the much larger and more powerful Russian party were complex. The formal solution was in favour of a nominally independent party. The KP(b)U was aware that its chances of seizing power without Russian help were poor. As a party-in-exile in Moscow, it was very susceptible to pressure from the Russians. The Ukrainian party's theoretical position, therefore, did not derive so much from a concrete analysis of a concrete situation in Ukraine as from a realistic assessment of its *de facto* dependence on the Russian party. Nevertheless, the contradiction between certain nationalist tendencies among Ukrainian Bolsheviks and the less nuanced positions of their Russian comrades was not yet resolved in late 1918. It was the partial cause of the Bolsheviks' political and organisational ambivalence towards the growing strength of the *Makhnovshchina*, which was always to be seen as a question which could be resolved tactically.

In late 1918 Ukraine resembled in some ways an almost empty stage, upon which the second act of an extremely complicated play with a large cast was about to be enacted. The protagonists were ready in the wings. Centre-stage, waiting for the action to begin, were the peasants and workers of the Makhno movement. In late December the Red Army began its advance into Ukraine from the north. Two important figures were then drawn into the vacuum left by the withdrawal of the Austro-Hungarians and the Germans in November. One was General P. N. Krasnov, Ataman of the Don Cossacks. The other was General A. I. Denikin. His Volunteer

Army, with a year of hard fighting behind it, controlled the territory from the Sea of Azov to the Caspian. A rumour was circulating that the Allies too found the idea of intervention in the south attractive.

Throughout late December the Red Army under the command of Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko continued to move forward into Ukraine. Antonov had been a revolutionary since 1901 and a Bolshevik since May 1917. He had led the attack on the Winter Palace in October 1917 and had personally arrested the members of the Provisional Government. He had successfully commanded the Red Army in Ukraine during the first campaign of late 1917, before the German invasion. Despite his successes, his approach to generalship was essentially amateurish. Trotsky felt that he tended too much to improvisation and too little to calculation.<sup>2</sup> In November 1918 Antonov was again in charge of the Bolshevik forces that were to liberate Ukraine. They consisted of two ill-disciplined, undermanned and badly armed divisions of less than 4,000 men.<sup>3</sup> Characteristically, the optimistic and energetic Antonov nonetheless devised an ambitious strategy hinging upon the capture of key cities - in an area the size of France. He fixed in particular upon three cities, with their railway stations, their warehouses, their communications centres, and above all their industrial

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2. Trotsky, *The history of the Russian revolution* (Ann Arbor, 1957), vol.3, p.299.

3. V. A. Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski o grazhdanskoi voine* (Moscow, 1924-1933), vol.3, p.13.

workers sympathetic to the communist cause. They were Khar'kov, key to the industries of the Donbass; Kiev, capital of Ukraine and the seat of nationalism; and Odessa, together with Nikolaev a port city crucial to the expected Anglo-French intervention.

Antonov assumed that his superior officer, the Lettish commander-in-chief of the Red Army, I. I. Vatsetis (Vacietis in Lithuanian orthography), had agreed to this strategy. He expected that Vatsetis would make the necessary reinforcements available to him. But Vatsetis' main preoccupation was not with the chaos in the far-off Ukraine. It was with the much more immediate threat of Krasnov's Don Army, to the southeast of Voronezh, and much too close to Moscow for comfort. He did not intend to give Antonov any more than the bare minimum of troops and weapons. Antonov was desperate for men; he began to recruit by telegraph any partisan group with a record of anti-German or anti-White activity. He ordered these bands to foment rebellion and to organise themselves in readiness for the expected Allied intervention.<sup>4</sup>

In the midst of the preparations, while Antonov was busily agitating for more supplies and reinforcements, he received an order from Vatsetis that directly contradicted his assignment from the Revolutionary Military Council (RVS) to invade Ukraine. Still primarily concerned with the Army of the Don, Vatsetis ordered Antonov to attack Krasnov's rear to the southeast, away from Ukraine, with his "section." Outraged, Antonov paid Vatsetis a per-

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4. Ibid., p.17-18.

sonal visit in an attempt to win his support for an attack on Khar'kov. Faced with the commander's refusal, Antonov hurried angrily to Moscow, where he gained an interview with Lenin himself. He intemperately accused the former Tsarist colonel of treason and brought Lenin's wrath down upon his own head.<sup>5</sup> This quarrel laid a foundation of personal antipathy between Antonov and Vatsetis that lasted until Antonov's removal from the command of the Ukrainian front with its abolition in June 1919.

Vatsetis' judgement was sound. Krasnov's army occupied a large bulge that threatened Voronezh and might have outflanked any extended attack by the Red Army into Ukraine. Antonov's insistence on following his original orders to the letter was not in the event disastrous. Nonetheless, his lack of overall strategic vision and his errors of judgement, like those of other local commanders, constantly placed the survival of the Soviet state in doubt.

After the formation of the Ukrainian Soviet Government at Kursk on 28 November Antonov's position seemed stronger. He was now at least technically working for the Ukrainians and not for the Russians. Early in December he assumed real command of the two partisan divisions that had been assigned to him. Both units were under strength, disorganised and demoralised. Antonov energetically set about building his army, a task that required consider-

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5. Ibid., p.30.

able resourcefulness with no food, weapons, or pay, let alone an adequate command structure. The army was theoretically still subordinate to Vatsetis, but the new Ukrainian Soviet government appointed the RVS, which commanded it. So, throughout December Antonov moved his troops cautiously forward into Ukraine, into position for the attack on Khar'kov. He was determined that Vatsetis should not prevent him from seizing the opportunity to establish Soviet power in the south.

Away to the southeast General Denikin also felt that he had grounds for optimism about the outcome of the imminent struggle. He assumed that the British and the French were about to launch a military intervention in his favour. The White movement as a whole encompassed political views ranging from ultra-reactionary monarchism to the mild populism of the Right SRs. The Volunteer Army was in the main moderately republican in its outlook.

The Whites had argued, with some justification, that Germany had started the war to win world domination. The necessary first step towards this objective was the destruction of the Russian empire. It followed from this that the Germans must have planned and organised the revolution in Russia. The Allies, deceived by their own propaganda, thought that the war had been fought in defence of democracy, not for state interest. They had not grasped the extent of German ambition, and had welcomed the fall of the autocracy simply because they disliked that particular form of government. Many Whites concluded that the Russian people should reject Allied arguments in favour of a democratic system. Those ar-



guments clouded the issue and prevented accurate analysis of the true state of affairs. Nor did the provision of military assistance entitle the Allies to a voice in Russian politics. The struggle against Bolshevism was an extension of the war against Germany, to prevent her from upsetting the European balance of power, of which a reconstituted Russian empire would form as essential part.

This political analysis contained enough elements of truth to appear plausible at first glance. Germany *did* have ambitions in the east, and the Central Powers *had* meddled in the Russian and Ukrainian revolutionary movements.<sup>6</sup> Yet the analysis failed to take account of the legitimate aspirations of the Russian masses, and of what many contemporaries saw as the moral grandeur of the revolution.

The armies of Britain and France had defeated the military machine of Ludendorff, and Denikin was confident that they could rapidly dispose of the ill-prepared Red Army. The arrival of French vessels in the Black Sea in November encouraged Denikin in his optimism. So did the visits of Allied military representatives, who promised him supplies and assistance. But by the end of December 1918, the only concrete step that the Allies had tak-

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6. The extent to which Russian revolutionaries consciously accepted German help is still the subject of controversy; but it is certainly true that the German government was interested in fostering revolution. See A. E. Senn, "The myth of German money in the First World War" *Soviet Studies* vol.28 no.1 (1976), p.83-90.

en was the occupation by the French navy of Odessa and Sevastopol'. Denikin also faced problems in his relationship with the mercurial General Krasnov. The withdrawal of the German army of occupation from Ukraine had exposed Krasnov's left flank. He desperately needed aid - artillery, trains and men - from the Volunteer Army.<sup>7</sup> His hatred of Denikin prevented him from conceding the necessity for a united command. It was only in December that Allied pressure in support of Denikin forced Krasnov to meet with General Poole, the English representative with the Volunteer Army. Even then Krasnov's intransigence over the protocol of the meeting prevented any agreement. Not until 8 January did he finally accept Denikin's command; by then the Bolshevik armies were threatening to overrun the Don.

In northwestern Ukraine the Directory faced difficulties of similar proportions. At first Petliura was enormously popular, and his army swelled rapidly. Within two weeks of his triumphant entry into Kiev he commanded 30,000 men in the capital itself and 90,000 more in the adjoining countryside - fifteen times as many as he had begun with against Skoropadskii.<sup>8</sup>

Unfortunately for the nationalists, this large army was in no better condition than Antonov's "section." It consisted mainly of peasant insurgents seeking reparation for the depredations of the *Hetman* and his German masters. Once the peasants had spent their

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7. P. Kenez, *Civil war in south Russia* (Berkeley, 1971), p.264-265.

8. J. Reshetar, *The Ukrainian revolution, 1917-1920* (Princeton, 1952), p.217.

rage and driven their enemy away, they had no stomach for the discipline and training needed to turn such a force into an army. Yet without an army, the Directory could not survive. Petliura could not impose discipline, because he lacked administrative cadres. The Germans and the Hetmanate had destroyed the network that the Rada had begun to build. The cadres who had worked in Skoropadskii's government structure had mostly fled. The lack of adequate communications in the countryside prevented the Directory from even expressing its will effectively, let alone from enforcing it. Without officers or weapons the nationalists were unable to organise the partisan groups into a regular army adequate to the task of defending the new republic.

The disintegration of the Hetmanite forces and the withdrawal of the Central Powers left a military vacuum. The Directory was unable to fill it, but innumerable peasant groups rapidly exploited it. These partisan gangs were not united around a political ideology. Their membership ranged from reactionary ex-Tsarist officers to anarchistic peasants with xenophobic leanings. In such a context the executive incompetence and bourgeois nationalism of the Directory could only accelerate its loss of popular support among the peasantry.<sup>9</sup>

In the circumstances of the German withdrawal and the disorganised condition of the Petliurists and the Bolsheviks, Makhno es-

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9. P. Arshinov, *Istoriia makhnovskogo dvizheniia, 1918-1921 gg.* (Berlin, 1923), p.64.

established control over the Guliai-Pole area. He strengthened and reinforced the reputation he had won by his series of daring raids against the occupation forces. In early October 1918 the Austro-Hungarians left Guliai-Pole, and the insurgents marched in triumph into the village.<sup>10</sup> Makhno felt that his power in the area was now secure, and he immediately tested his strength by sending a message to the Hetmanite commander in nearby Aleksandrovsk, demanding the immediate release of prisoners from the Guliai-Pole region, naming in particular five men, including his brother Ssava. If the Hetmanite did not comply, threatened Makhno, then he would move against Aleksandrovsk in full strength. The imprisoned men were badly needed on Makhno's staff, but despite the ultimatum the Aleksandrovsk authorities held their ground, assuring Makhno that no harm would come to the prisoners.<sup>11</sup>

Makhno was well aware that he needed a properly organised army to defend his political gains against the Bolsheviks, the Whites and the nationalists. As an anarchist, he believed that no man had the right to command another. The story of Makhno's struggle during the Civil War against a succession of predatory and ruthless enemies, is the story of the abandonment of the latter principle in favour of the conventional tactics of a war of movement, mingled with guerrilla trickery. At an extraordinary conference held

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10. N. Makhno, *Ukrainskaia revoliutsia (iiul'-dekabr' 1918 g.)* (Paris, 1937) p.136-137; Arshinov, op.cit., p.81.

11. Makhno, op.cit., p.138, 163.

in late 1918 in Guliai-Pole Makhno took the first step towards more regular military formations. He proposed the reorganisation of the various partisan bands as "federal" units of a standing army with its headquarters in Guliai-Pole under Makhnovite control. With such reorganisation, and with tight cohesion among the units themselves and the staff, argued Makhno, the federal principle in their lives and struggles would be guaranteed. They could then defend their common aims with greater efficiency. Such an organisation could also form the basis for the social order of the future.<sup>12</sup>

Makhno wanted to establish fronts against the Don Cossacks, the remnants of the Austro-Hungarians, and against other local leaders. He envisaged units of combined cavalry and *tachanki* (light peasant carts on which the partisans mounted machine-guns) that could cover large areas at great speed. Some insurgents argued against these ideas, on the ground that there were no professional commanders in the movement with the experience necessary to conduct operations on this scale.<sup>13</sup> Makhno still went ahead and set up three fronts, at the railway junctions of Chaplino-Grishi-

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12. Ibid., p.142-143.

13. M. Palič makes the point that Makhno's attitude towards professional soldiers was ambivalent, and that he shot at least one artillery colonel from jealousy ("The peasant partisan movement of the anarchist Nestor Makhno" [Ph.D. dissertation, University of Kansas, 1971], p.195). Yet Ida Mett recalled Makhno's expressing admiration for the military skills of Budenny and Voroshilov ("Souvenirs sur Nestor Makhno" [Paris, 1948], p.6). Makhno's distrust of officers may well have stemmed from a peasant's healthy wariness towards the urban bourgeoisie rather than from any fear of rivals. He was after all as much a *political* as a military leader.

no to the north, from Tsarekonstantinovka to Pology in Mariupol' region, and at Orekhov in the Tauride. He reformed the small local partisan groups into larger formations in a command structure under his headquarters, and began to conduct successful conventional operations against the Hetmanite remnants. In late October Makhno led a raid to the right bank of the Dnepr, collecting large supplies of arms. He was away from Guliai-Pole when the news came on 20 November that a "Directory" had overthrown Skoropadskii and taken power in Kiev. The Directory bore a strong resemblance to the Rada of 1917-1918.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the enthusiasm of the peasants, Makhno had reservations. "I know," he told them,

"that Vynnychenko is now creating a new government in Ukraine. But I ask you, comrades, where among the toilers in the revolutionary towns and villages of Ukraine are to be found such fools as to believe in the 'socialism' of this Petliurist-Vynnychenkovist Ukrainian government, of this 'Ukrainian Directory' as it styles itself?"<sup>15</sup>

The realisation that he could not fight unaided against the much stronger White (or Bolshevik) forces tempered Makhno's suspicion of the nationalists. The Makhnovites were unsure of the position that they should adopt; some argued for war, others for armed neutrality. It seemed unlikely that the Directory would attempt to recruit soldiers from the area controlled by Makhno. The presence of the large nationalist army prevented the insurgents

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14. Makhno, op.cit., p.153.

15. Ibid., p.154.

from increasing their zone of influence. Makhno felt that the Directory had compromised itself politically, despite Vynnychenko's record of socialist struggle, by including Petliura. He could not forgive Petliura's collaboration with the Central Powers before and during their invasion of Ukraine. Vynnychenko's democratic Ukrainian socialism might have been acceptable to the anarchists, at least for purposes of military alliance, had it not been for the opportunism and lack of a mandate of the self-proclaimed Directory. Politically the Makhnovites felt that the Directory was even worse than the Rada.<sup>16</sup> They therefore adopted, with major reservations, a policy of armed neutrality. While not seeking to fight against the nationalists, they were willing to do so should the necessity arise. It was not long before it did.<sup>17</sup>

Early in December Makhno sent a message to the local Bolsheviks offering his cooperation against the Directory. The Communists turned him down, ostensibly because they were unwilling to associate with people they considered to be anarchist bandits.<sup>18</sup>

Because of the fronts that he had set up earlier, Makhno controlled the railway stations at Chaplino, Grishino and Sinel'nikovo along a line east of Ekaterinoslav, protecting his northern

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16. Ibid., p.154-155, 172.

17. Ibid., p.172-173.

18. *Zvezda* (4 December 1918) quoted in *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine* (Kiev, 1967; hereafter *GVU*), vol.1, book 1, p.476.

flank. He now turned westwards towards Ekaterinoslav itself.<sup>19</sup>

On the way to the city the Makhnovites encountered the comparatively well-armed forces of the Directory. To the Petliurists the Makhnovites were just another peasant gang, albeit an influential one, which might be usefully absorbed into their movement. They were ignorant of Makhno's political views, and asked him a series of questions - what did he think of the Directory? What was his idea of Ukraine's political future? Would an alliance not be in the interests of both groups in the common struggle for an independent Ukraine?<sup>20</sup> Makhno's answers, as always, were uncompromising. Despite the refusal of the local Bolsheviks to ally themselves with him, he accepted the decision of the earlier meeting and refused to have anything to do with the Directory. Petliura's movement, he declared, was bourgeois and nationalist, and Ukraine could only be free if the peasants and workers were free. Only armed struggle was possible between the Makhnovites, the workers' movement, and the Petliurists, the movement of the bourgeoisie.

Immediately after negotiations had broken down, the Makhnovites moved onto the offensive against the Petliurists in Ekaterinoslav. The town had fallen into Ukrainian hands in early December, and by the 22nd the nationalists felt sufficiently secure to move

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19. Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.81-82; Volin, *La révolution inconnue* (Paris, 1947), p.540.

20. Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.82.



against the local soviet and disperse it.<sup>21</sup> They arrested two Left SRs, who they shot, and six communists. There were also some Bolshevik detachments in the suburb of Nizhnedneprovsk on the left bank of the river, between the Petliurists and the Makhnovites. Of course, the Dnepr itself provided considerable protection for the troops garrisoning the city. The Bolshevik committee in Nizhnedneprovsk, although under attack by the nationalists, sent an ultimatum to the Ekaterinoslav garrison demanding that their comrades should be released. Unfortunately they had few troops and were hardly in a position to demand anything.<sup>22</sup>

Makhno's reputation as a revolutionary fighter was formidable. The Nizhnedneprovsk committee offered him, with the approval of the Central Committee of the KP(b)U, the command of their workers' detachments for the attack on the city. The combined forces totalled about 15,000 men.<sup>23</sup> On 27 December Makhno launched his attack, the success of which depended on a ruse typical of his style of warfare. The Petliurists had continued to allow trainloads of workers to travel in and out of the city from the suburbs, without even perfunctory inspection. Makhno therefore loaded an early morning train with soldiers, their guns tucked under

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21. D. Lebed', *Itogi i uroki trekh let anarkho-makhnovshchiny* (Khar'kov, 1921), p.13.

22. Arshinov, loc.cit.; *Izvestia Khar'kovskogo Soveta Rabochikh Deputatov* (3 January 1919) quoted in *GVU* vol.1, book 1, p.537; M. Kubanin, *Makhnovshchina* (Leningrad, [1926]), p.41.

23. Arshinov, loc.cit.; Kubanin, op.cit., p.40-41. According to the largely unreliable Stalinist E. Yaroslavsky, Makhno needed persuasion before agreeing to help the Bolsheviks. (*History of anarchism in Russia* [New York, 1937], p.62).

their greatcoats, and set off for the railway station in the heart of Ekaterinoslav. If the Petliurists had chosen to inspect that particular train the Makhnovites would have been in trouble, but their luck held and the trick succeeded.<sup>24</sup> The insurgents quickly captured the railway station, and fierce fighting began in the centre of the city. The communists captured the bridge into Ekaterinoslav with the loss of only six men. An unexpected bonus came with the defection of a Petliurist artillery officer and his guns and gun-teams to the insurgents' side.<sup>25</sup> The fighting continued in great confusion for three days, until the partisans were in control of most of the city. Makhno opened the gaol and released all the prisoners; he also formed a governing soviet and issued a decree against looting.<sup>26</sup> The Makhnovites also allegedly engaged in much more disturbing acts of destruction, burning libraries and archives, and deliberately shelling the city's most beautiful buildings with a cannon.<sup>27</sup>

The troops of the Directory recaptured the city after only one

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24. Paliĭ says that this particular trick was repeated successfully in October 1919, when the Makhnovites again captured Ekaterinoslav (op.cit., p.289).

25. *Izvestiia Khar'kovskogo Soveta Rabochikh Deputatov* (3 January 1919) quoted in *GVU* vol.1, book 1, loc.cit.; Lebed', op.cit., p.13; Kubanin, op.cit., p.43.

26. Arshinov, op.cit., p.83; Kubanin, op.cit., p.41-43; *GVU* vol.1, book 1, loc.cit.

27. Z. Iu. Arbatov, "Ekaterinoslav 1917-1922 gg." *Arkhiv Russkoi Revoliutsii* vol.12 (1923), p.85-86, quoted in an analysis of vandalist *mentalités* at this time by R. Stites, who characterises this type of destruction as both symbolic and iconoclastic ("Iconoclastic currents in the Russian revolution: destroying and preserving the past," in A. Gleason, P. Kenez and R. Stites (eds.), *Bolshevik culture: experiment and order in the Russian revolution* [Bloomington, 1985], p.5).

day of Makhno's effective control. The insurgents withdrew eastwards across the Dnepr back to the area around Sinel'nikovo, where they dug in.<sup>28</sup> A period of cautious non-belligerence followed. Neither side was strong enough to mount a full-scale attack on the other, although intermittent clashes over supplies continued to occur in other areas.

Meanwhile Antonov's offensive from the north was gathering momentum. Aided by strikes that closed down the electrical, water and transport systems, and by the panic which seized the defending nationalists, the Bolsheviks entered Khar'kov on 3 January 1919. They chased the retreating Petliurists for over thirty kilometres. Antonov, who had been agitating for the creation of a separate Ukrainian Front for some time, at last got his way. By 12 January the Bolshevik forces had reached Chernigov in the west, and by the 20th they controlled Poltava. Two days later communist troops led by the sailor Pavel Dybenko attacked Ekaterinoslav, and after several days of fighting drove out the nationalists for a second time on 27 January. From a civilian point of view, it seemed that these latest occupiers represented a distinct improvement on their predecessors. "Compared not only to the Makhnovites but even to the Petliurists," wrote one harassed burger, "the men of the Red Army created an extraordinarily disciplined

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28. Arshinov, loc. cit.; *Piat' let Krasnoi Armii: statei, 1918-1923* (Moscow, 1923), p.188.

impression."<sup>29</sup>

In October 1918 the Russian communists had signed an agreement with Vynnychenko promising non-interference in the affairs of the Ukrainian republic. Officially the forces under Antonov's command that were now threatening Kiev, were under the orders of the Ukrainian Soviet government. But the presence of Russian, Mongolian and Hungarian soldiers dispelled any illusion that this was a Ukrainian army. The arrival of what amounted to an invading army from Russia on Ukrainian soil widened the split in the Directory between the right-wing nationalists and those, like Vynnychenko, who supported both the proletarian revolution and the ideal of Ukrainian statehood. On 16 January, relying on the false hope that the French in Odessa would assist them, the Directory declared war on Soviet Russia. The French were willing to help only on the most humiliating terms, and the two sides never reached agreement. By 5 February the Directory had evacuated Kiev, abandoning their capital to the triumphant Bolsheviks.

Once the Petliurists had lost Kiev, they retreated to the northwest, where they still controlled Podolia, Volinia and parts of Kiev province. They found themselves wedged between the Poles, the Bolsheviks and the forces of the Intervention in the southwest. The Directory, and the Ukrainian nationalism that it represented, was never again to play a central role in the Civil

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29. G. Igrenev, "Ekaterinoslavskaia vospominaniia," *Arkhiv russkoi revoliutsii* vol.3 (1921), p.240.

The collapse of the Directory gave Makhno and his followers a period of relative stability in the interior of the area under their control in the southeast. They reached agreement on a *modus vivendi* with the Bolsheviks of Ekaterinoslav. Antonov seemed content at the beginning of 1919 to concentrate on seizing the major cities and towns of the northern Ukraine. Makhno knew that the Petliurists had been negotiating with Krasnov's Don Army, but the Directory no longer had a military presence in the southeast.<sup>31</sup> Nor could the Communists set up an efficient administrative system, since they needed to concentrate on more urgent military and political problems. For a few months the peasants of Guliai-Pole and its environs were again free to try to govern themselves.

The problem of the success or failure of Makhno's political, social and economic programme is central to any attempt to evaluate the claims made on his behalf by his apologists. As we shall see, it is hard to deny the significance of his military role in 1919,

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30. This is not to deny the powerful but limited emotional appeal of the ideas that the Directory represented, as an expression of Ukrainian national aspirations, and which lasted for months and even years to come. Nationalist insurgents continued to fight against Soviet power until at least 1926; the Second World War saw a powerful revival of this tradition, and after the Second World War Ukrainian nationalists, both within and outside Marxism-Leninism, continued to assert their right to national self-determination. This right was, of course, finally exercised after the break-up of the Soviet Union, in 1991. See, inter alia, J. Armstrong, *Ukrainian nationalism*, 2d ed. (New York, 1963); G. Kulchycky, "The Ukrainian insurgent movement, 1919 to 1926," (Georgetown University, Ph.D. dissertation, 1970); Ivan Dziuba, *Inter-natsionalizm chyrusyfikatsiia?* (Munich, 1968; English translation, London, 1968).

31. Makhno, op.cit., p.168.

although even that has been the subject of mythologising. Conversely, the most ardent of his defenders would scarcely claim for Makhno a place in the front rank of anarchist theoreticians and philosophers.<sup>32</sup> If he is to be seen as anything more than an audacious and charismatic partisan general, his anarchist practice must be examined as a possible alternative to the system that was victorious for the next 75 years. Yet it is difficult to deduce from the available evidence the answers to several crucial questions. Did this second period of social transformation build on the first?<sup>33</sup> Did it go farther than the first period? How did the process of "anarchisation" renew itself? What were the prospects and programme for the future, when the second period ended?

The peasants returned to the system of communes that they had adopted in 1917-1918. Anarchist commentators are careful to distinguish these working communes, or free communes, from the traditional kind and from the Bolshevik exemplary communes. "These were real working communes of peasants who, themselves accustomed to work, valued work in themselves and in others," wrote Arshinov. But his account provides us with little in the way of concrete information; it is a eulogy rather than an organisational blue-print.

"The peasants worked in these communes first of all to provide their daily bread. In addition, each found there whatever moral and material support he needed. The principles of brotherhood and

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32. Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.231-232.

33. The first period was described in Chapter 2. The questions stem from the apologia themselves.

equality permeated the communes. Everyone - men, women and children - worked according to his or her abilities. Organisational work was assigned to one or two comrades who, after finishing it, took up the remaining tasks together with the other members of the commune. It is evident that these communes had these traits because they grew out of a working milieu and that their development followed a natural course."<sup>34</sup>

There were very few of these communes. The anarchists named one, near the town of Prokovskoe, after Rosa Luxemburg, although this was a gesture of solidarity, not of sympathy with her theoretical positions. This commune grew from a few dozen members to over 300, but Bolshevik forces finally broke it up in June, after the split between Makhno and Trotsky.<sup>35</sup> They established another, named simply Commune no.1, seven kilometres away. Similar communes clustered close to Guliai-Pole, in an area about twenty kilometres across. Yet in the sketch map of the area of Makhno's operations printed in Arshinov's *Istoriia makhnovskogo dvizheniia* the radius of the "central Makhnovite area" from Guliai-Pole is about 120 versts (128 kilometres).<sup>36</sup>

There is a similar dearth of concrete information on political administration. A pamphlet entitled *Osnovnye polozeniia o vol'nom trudovom Sovet (proekt)* [Basic statute on the free worker's Soviet: draft] outlined the role of the soviets.<sup>37</sup> According to the

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34. Arshinov, op.cit., p.85-86. (Translation adapted from the version by L. and F. Perlman, from the English ed., Detroit, 1974).

35. Volin, op.cit., p.543.

36. Arshinov, op.cit., p.84-85.

37. Volin, loc.cit.; p.542; Arshinov, op.cit., p.176.

pamphlet the soviets should be independent of the political parties. They should operate within a socio-economic system based on real equality, and should consist only of workers, serving their interests and obeying their will. The soviets should not entrust their activist members with any executive power.<sup>38</sup>

It is unfortunate that the only available accounts of the structure of the communes and the soviets come from committed anarchists, who fall easily into rhapsodic descriptions of the lost paradise, and whose evidence is clearly open to charges of bias.<sup>39</sup> According to Volin, for example, the Makhnovite partisans exerted no pressure on the peasants, but confined themselves to propaganda in favour of free communes. This assertion has a certain naiveté.<sup>40</sup> Even if the anarchist communes were truly voluntary, one difference distinguished the earlier period from the later. Makhno learned the lesson of the Austro-German invasion well. He knew that if the revolution in his area was to remain in peasant control he needed an army to protect it. He had also learned to choose his enemies. He could distinguish between those he could ally himself to (the Bolsheviks), those he could ignore or take advantage of (the Petliurists), and those he must struggle uncompromisingly against (the Whites of General Denikin).

In January 1919 Denikin commanded an army of over 80,000 men.

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38. Volin, *loc.cit.*; Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.80.

39. E.g. Makhno, Arshinov, Volin.

40. Volin, *op.cit.*, p.544.



Perhaps 30,000 of these were tied down in rear areas, protecting his lines of communication and supply from the raids of guerrilla bands.<sup>41</sup> From the first weeks after Skoropadskii's downfall and the withdrawal of the armies of occupation of the Central Powers, cavalry units of the Volunteer Army had begun probing along the Don and the Kuban into the Makhnovites' region. Denikin expected that the partisans would be locked in combat with the Petliurists. In reality, after the struggle for Ekaterinoslav had finished, the front with the Directory was quiet, and the White cavalry met with stubborn resistance from the partisans. In January the Makhnovites had moved many of their troops to the southeast, and they controlled both Berdiansk and Mariupol' on the Sea of Azov. The front stretched for almost 100 kilometres to the north and northeast of Mariupol. It protected the Makhnovite "liberated zone" and cut well into the Donets Basin industrial area.<sup>42</sup>

As the Whites increased in power and influence, it became obvious that an alliance between the partisans and the Bolsheviks would be in the interests of both sides. The Red Army did not come into actual contact with the insurgents until February, when Dybenko's division arrived from the north at Sinel'nikovo, east of Ekaterinoslav. According to F. T. Fomin, a former member of the Cheka who was then at the front in charge of counter-espionage for the

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41. Cabinet paper p.112, Cab.29/2, "Report of a visit to the headquarters of the Volunteer Army in South Russia by Major-General F. C. Poole," (January 1919), quoted in Richard Ullman, *Britain and the Russian Civil War* (Princeton, 1968), p.49.

42. Arshinov, op.cit., p.91; Volin, op.cit., p.549.

Bolsheviks, the first contacts occurred earlier in the winter. Gusev, Makhno's chief-of-staff, visited Fomin in his railway carriage at Khar'kov station, and asked him to pass a proposal for a formal alliance to the Ukrainian RVS. In exchange for weapons and supplies the Bolsheviks would gain the advantage of a coordinated command over a vital sector of the front. Gusev claimed that the insurgent forces numbered about 10,000, but the communist intelligence estimated only 4,000 infantry and about 3,000 unarmed men.<sup>43</sup> Whatever its actual numbers, Makhno's army extended thinly along a 100 kilometre front. Even in a war of movement, it could not unaided have withstood a determined assault by Denikin's superior forces.

The RVS under Antonov's chairmanship discussed the proposed alliance. Denikin's advance presented a serious threat, and the RVS could not have afford to turn away help. One faction was in favour of breaking up the anarchist army and incorporating the troops into other units as reinforcements, minimising their disruptive influence. The second view, which prevailed, was that the Red Army could safely absorb the insurgents, as an integral unit, so long as political commissars were assigned to them.<sup>44</sup> The decision to conclude an alliance on these terms was a turning point. The RVS permitted Makhno to retain his military integrity. By subsequently relying on him to hold an important sector of the

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43. F. T. Fomin, *Zapiski starogo Chekista* (Moscow, 1962) p.73-74; *GVU* vol.1, book 2, p.81.

44. Fomin, *op.cit.*, p.74-75.

front, the RVS invited exactly the disastrous rupture in the heat of battle that actually occurred in June 1919. By assigning political commissars to Makhno's units the Bolsheviki ensured that they would alienate the anarchists who ran the insurgent army, while making little headway against peasant opposition. The cadres detailed to commissar work were often of low calibre. It is likely that most of the peasants in Makhno's army had not joined up out of ideological commitment to anarchism, but simply wanted loot and land. Others were victims of what the anarchists euphemistically called voluntary mobilisation.<sup>45</sup> In these circumstances the peasants received the Bolshevik commissars with considerable hostility, for they represented in the popular mind city-dwellers who stole grain.<sup>46</sup> Makhno continued to control a large region around Guliai-Pole and to put his anarchist ideas into practice there. While the Civil War raged around it, this tiny anarchist "republic" held conferences and congresses and discussed the finer points of libertarian theory.<sup>47</sup>

Throughout the negotiations the Makhnovites maintained their political activity and their opposition to the "Paper Revolution" of the communists. In January they captured 100 railway carloads

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45. There are some accounts of compulsory induction into the ranks of the partisans. See, for example, the unpublished memoirs of Ivan Topolye (pseud.), quoted in V. Peters, *Nestor Makhno* (Winnipeg, [1970]), p.45-47; I. Savin, "Boevye dni," *Na fronte i na fronte* (Leningrad, 1927), p.17-25.

46. *GVU* vol.1, book 2, documents nos. 137, 274, 290 (March-April 1919); Kubanin, *op.cit.*, p.48-50.

47. Halina Kuz'menko objected to the use of the term "republic": "Vidpovid' na stattiu Pomer Makhno v Novii Pori vid 9-ho serpnia 1934 roku, hor. Detroita, Mich." *Probuzhdenie* no.50-51 (1934) p.17; cf. N. Gerasimenko, "Makhno," *Istoriik i sovremennik* vol.3 (1922) p.197-199.

of wheat from Denikin, and sent them to the hungry workers of Moscow and Petrograd, a valuable propaganda coup.<sup>48</sup> On 23 January the anarchists convened their first regional congress at Greater Mikhailovka, to discuss, among other things, counter-measures against the twin threats of Petliura and Denikin.<sup>49</sup> A resolution passed at a meeting in Guliai-Pole the following week made an appeal to anti-Bolshevik and Ukrainian nationalist sentiment under the slogan "Down with the oppression of nation by nation, of party members by the party, of man by man!"<sup>50</sup>

In early February Makhno accepted Antonov-Ovseenko's command. The Bolsheviks assigned his units to serve as the Third Brigade in the Trans-Dnepr Division under Dybenko and alongside Grigor'ev, an *ataman* known for his vicious pogroms. Antonov may well have feared the possibility of an alliance against Soviet power by the two unruly guerrilla leaders, but as later events were to show, this was politically unlikely and temperamentally impossible. Whatever Antonov's motives for accepting their terms, the Makhnovites joined the Red Army on conditions that were unfavourable to the Bolsheviks. The insurgents were to keep their internal organisation, their black flags, and their title of *povstantsi*. They were to receive arms and supplies on the same basis as nearby

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48. Volin, *op.cit.*, p.550.

49. *Ibid.*, p.544-545: a second congress was held in February at Guliai-Pole, the minutes of which were later published in *Russkaia mysl'* no.1-2 (1921), p.226-231.

50. One libertarian newspaper commented that Makhno's soldiers had a "sufficient grasp" of anarchist theory (*Vol'nyi golos* [19 February 1919], p.4).

communist units. In return, they had to accept the assignment of commissars to each regiment.<sup>51</sup> The last two points were the cause of bitter recriminations, and eventually of the first rift between the mutually suspicious new allies.

The basis of Makhno's insurgent organisation was a conscious attempt to resolve the contradiction between anarchist principle and military necessity. Nominally, all his soldiers were volunteers, and they were all eligible for positions of command, either by election or by appointment. The most difficult idea to swallow was that of "freely accepted discipline." The troops voted on every regulation, and if passed, each rule was rigorously enforced "on the individual responsibility of each insurgent and each commander."<sup>52</sup> This was anathema to the Bolsheviks.

Bolshevik military policy had evolved, from a position based primarily on political considerations, to one in which the problems of fighting a war in defence of the revolution were of first importance. During the war against the Central Powers the Bolsheviks had denounced the militarism of the Tsarist regime. They had urged the peasant soldiers to rebel against the authority of their officers, who belonged to the class enemy. This tactic successfully undermined the Imperial Army, a weapon in the hands of the autocracy. The Bolsheviks infected it with revolutionary de-

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51. Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.93-95; Volin, *op.cit.*, p.551-552.

52. Volin, *op.cit.*, p.553.

featism, both by agitation among the troops and by exploiting the soldiers' concrete experience of their commanders' cynical incompetence.<sup>53</sup> By March 1918, when Trotsky became *Narkomvoen*, all that remained of the Imperial Army was Vatsetis' division of Latvian riflemen. The sentiments of the masses were a mixture of an emotional belief in pacifism and trust in the Red Guards and the partisan detachments. Most revolutionaries, whether anarchist, SR or Bolshevik, believed for example that officers should be chosen by their troops. Trotsky abandoned such democratic and anti-authoritarian ideas, although the Bolsheviks had espoused them earlier, in favour of centralisation and tough discipline. This reversal was theoretically sound, but it gave partisans like Makhno the advantage of appearing more consistent and more faithful to Russian revolutionary tradition. The Makhnovites made maximum use of this point in their propaganda.<sup>54</sup>

Trotsky was ready to use former Tsarist officers, if the army contained a core of proletarians on whose support the Bolsheviks could rely.<sup>55</sup> "The chaos of irregular warfare expressed the peas-

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53. For a useful single-volume collection of Lenin's views on these issues, see *Against imperialist war: articles and speeches* (Moscow, 1966).

54. See for example, the leaflet *K molodym liudiam*, (June 1920), published by L. J. van Rossum (ed.), "Proclamations of the Makhno movement, 1920", *International Review of Social History* vol.13, no.2 (1968), p.263-264.

55. L. Trotsky, *Stalin* (London, 1947) p.275-278; and Chapter 36 "The Military Opposition" in his *My life* (Harmondsworth, 1975); cf. his *Kak vooruzhalas revoliutsiia* (Moscow, 1923-1925) for the contemporary military writings, and the brief English selection, *Military writings* (New York, 1969). For an overall account of Trotsky's theories see Isaac Deutscher, *The prophet armed: Trotsky 1879-1921* (London, 1970) p.405 ff., especially the "Note on Trotsky's military writings," p.477-485.

ant element that lay beneath the revolution," he wrote in 1929,

"whereas the struggle against it was also a struggle in favour of the proletarian state organisation as opposed to the elemental, petty-bourgeois anarchy that was undermining it."<sup>56</sup>

Peasants were the least reliable members of the Red Army. They deserted in droves, and their morale was changeable. The kulaks, of course, could only be used in auxiliary units.

Trotsky's system was to place political commissars beside the officers at every level of command from the company to the commander-in-chief. Orders were valid only if both officer and commissar agreed. Thus the Bolshevik leadership, with the support of small numbers of worker-soldiers, provided an example of dedication and enthusiasm that was combined with iron discipline - the certainty of death in the rear - to hold the army together.

Not all Bolshevik commanders in the field shared Trotsky's opposition to partisan methods of warfare, for the anti-militarist tradition died hard. Despite this, the incorporation of units such as Makhno's into the Red Army as regular troops presented difficult practical problems, and there were many clashes. When the first commissars arrived in the Makhnovite regiments they discovered, to their horror, the lack of organisation and discipline that resulted from anarchist doctrines in practice. When he reached Guliai-Pole, reported the 3rd Brigade's commissar,

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56. Trotsky, *My life*, p.454-455.

"the HQ as such did not exist. There were a few men, headed by the Brigade commander, who ran the whole brigade [...] everything was in a state of uncertainty and chaos."<sup>57</sup>

The anarchists and the Bolsheviks were moving further apart ideologically even as they were agreeing on the question of military cooperation. A second regional congress, held in Guliai-Pole on 12 February, decided after heated debate that a "general voluntary and egalitarian mobilisation" should be called. This expression placated anarchist objections to enforced conscription, but was essentially empty phrase-making. Even Arshinov, who claims that it resulted in a great influx of volunteers, admits that most of them were turned away because there were no guns for them.<sup>58</sup> The Soviet estimate of Makhno's strength three days later was only 6,700 men.<sup>59</sup> A much more significant decision of the congress, held under the threat of an imminent attack from the Whites, was to establish a Revolutionary Military Council of its own, as an executive arm in the economic, political, social and military fields. The congress itself retained, at least in theory, the right to dissolve the RVS.<sup>60</sup>

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57. Political report no.1, 5 March 1919, in *GVU* vol.1, book 2, p.192.

58. Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.86-89; Volin, *op.cit.*, p.545-546; *Put' k svobode* no.2 (24 May 1919), p.1.

59. *GVU* vol.1, book 2, p.136: compare Arshinov's claim that there were 20,000 volunteers in Makhno's army at the time of the congress (*op.cit.*, p.87).

60. *Idem.*; Volin, *op.cit.*, p.545-546.



A week later the order creating the Trans-Dnepr Division out of Makhno's, Dybenko's and Grigor'ev's units was finally issued. Makhno's troops - the 3rd Brigade - consisted of the 7th, 8th and 9th Rifle Regiments, and the 19th and 20th regiments.<sup>61</sup> At the time Makhno was skirmishing to the southwest of Guliai-Pole, and he received orders to make contact with the Donbass units to his left.<sup>62</sup> The Red Army's primary military task in the south was to consolidate the advanced positions on the Dnepr, and to destroy the White forces in the Donbass.<sup>63</sup>

The early spring of 1919 was a period of success for the Red Army, as it pushed the Whites eastwards out of the Donbass, an area of crucial economic importance to the Soviet republic. In March, Makhno's brigade was ordered to cut off the White forces in the Berdiansk sector, and those operating further west from Melitopol'.<sup>64</sup> For the time being the anarchist forces were popular with the Soviet authorities on military, if not on political grounds. Antonov issued an order emphasising the need to "maximise on Makhno's success" by making contact with the enemy in the Donbass and driving them from Berdiansk and Mariupol'. He ordered the movement of troops and arms from the Crimea to reinforce Makhno's group for the assault.<sup>65</sup> The 3rd Brigade launched a "de-

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61. *GVU* vol.1, book 2, p.150.

62. *Ibid.*, p.148-149.

63. *Ibid.*, p.126, 161.

64. *Ibid.*, p.204.

65. *Ibid.*, p.220, 222.

cisive and energetic attack" that carried them as far as the junction of the Mariupol'-Platanovka railway, where they quickly destroyed the defending force.<sup>66</sup> The commissars noticed the effect of the partisans' success on the morale of other units. The political inspector of one Trans-Dnepr regiment reported that there was a glut of volunteers, but no weapons for them. He suspected that they were after easy loot; "all are drawn to Makhno, whose popularity is inconceivable." He suggested that the political situation could be corrected after the military one was more firmly under control.<sup>67</sup>

By the end of March the Bolshevik commanders were arguing about the best deployment of Makhno's troops. On the 22nd, Dybenko telephoned Anatol Skachko, the commander of the Khar'kov group, to tell him of his intention to replace the anarchists at the front with newly-formed units despite what he called Makhno's "inspired leadership."<sup>68</sup> Four days later Skachko received orders to push the insurgent brigade forward in an attempt to capture Taganrog on the Sea of Azov and to turn the White flank and rear in the Bakhmut region to the northwest.<sup>69</sup> But on 28 March Denikin attacked the Soviet 8th Army northeast of Makhno's sector, and

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66. Ibid., p.232.

67. Ibid., p.224.

68. Anatol Skachko was Commander of the Khar'kov group (the 2nd Division and other units joined to it) and hence subordinate to Antonov and superior to Dybenko (ibid., p.238, 240).

69. Ibid., p.259.

drove it northwards almost to Lugansk. Simultaneously, Makhno had again occupied Mariupol' on the coast, and was driving forward towards Rostov. He was short of supplies, partly because Dybenko had, on his own initiative, advanced into the Crimea.<sup>70</sup>

There was some confusion in the command structure. Vatsetis ordered that the 3rd Brigade should be transferred to the Southern Front, and despite Antonov's protests the move was effected.<sup>71</sup> Makhno's units, between Mariupol' and Taganrog, came under the different command for operational matters, but discipline and organisation remained in Antonov's hands. Supplies were to be provided by the Ukrainian government.<sup>72</sup>

The Ukrainian 2nd Army and the 13th Army counter-attacked against the Whites, initially with some success, on 31 March, in an attempt to occupy the whole of the west bank of the Don and thus release troops for other fronts. In response, Denikin's cavalry commander Andrei Shkuro attacked to the west in an attempt to outflank the Soviet right, where Makhno's brigade was still pushing forward along the coast to Rostov from Mariupol'.

Although Makhno's successes were still being lauded in central

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70. L. Trotsky, *The Trotsky papers* (The Hague, 1964-1971) (hereafter TP) vol.1, p. 374-375.

71. Arthur Adams comments on this arrangement: "This was a reasonable decision, since Makhno had for some time been engaged against White forces around Mariupol and was therefore the anchor of the whole western flank of the Southern Front." *Bolsheviks in the Ukraine* (New Haven, 1963), p.247.

72. Antonov, op.cit., vol.3. p.246; vol.4, p.98-101.

newspapers, and his popularity was at its height, the problem of the commissars continued to worry the Bolsheviks.<sup>73</sup> On 2 April the political commissar of the Trans-Dnepr Division complained that anarchist and Left SR agitation was making his work very difficult. The fighting units of the Guliai-Pole garrison were anti-communist, and included many non-party elements. There was a shortage of arms and of uniforms, and the partisans who comprised most of the fighting units were tired and demoralised. He needed more political workers and more political literature.<sup>74</sup>

The Bolsheviks were not only facing military problems in Ukraine. They were also having considerable difficulty developing autonomous policies with regard to the local peasantry, for example. In April 1919 the Central Committee of the KP(b)U passed a decree "On the tasks of the Party in the struggle with Kulak Gangsterism." This set up committees of poor peasants (*kombedy*, or in Ukrainian *komnezamy*) on the Russian model.<sup>75</sup> The Bolsheviks had already tried this tactic in Great Russia, under a decree of 11 June 1918, but had absorbed the committees into the rural soviets at the end of the year. In the new decree the Ukrainian Central Committee pledged itself to send as many experienced political workers as possible to the villages, and to publish more peasant-

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73. *Pravda* (3 April 1919); *Izvestiia* (6 April 1919).

74. *GVU* vol.1, book 2, p.296-297.

75. *Kievshchina v gody grazhdanskoi voiny i inostrannoi voenoi interventsii* (Kiev, 1962), p.201-202; compare the original decree, in K. Chernenko and M. Smirtiukov (eds.), *Resheniia partii i pravitel'stva po khoziaistvennym voprosam* (Moscow, 1967), vol.1, p.91-94. The experiment was renewed in 1920.

oriented political literature.<sup>76</sup> In Ukraine the differentiation between kulaks and poor peasants was greater than in Russia, as we have seen, and it seemed to the Bolsheviks worthwhile to try the experiment again. However, Lenin noted at the 8th Party congress that it was a mistake to apply Russian policies uncritically to the borderlands.<sup>77</sup> Despite this, the *kombedy* survived in Ukraine into the NEP period, as we shall see, and some delegates were still defending the activities of the committees, even in December 1920, at the 8th All-Russian Congress of Soviets.<sup>78</sup>

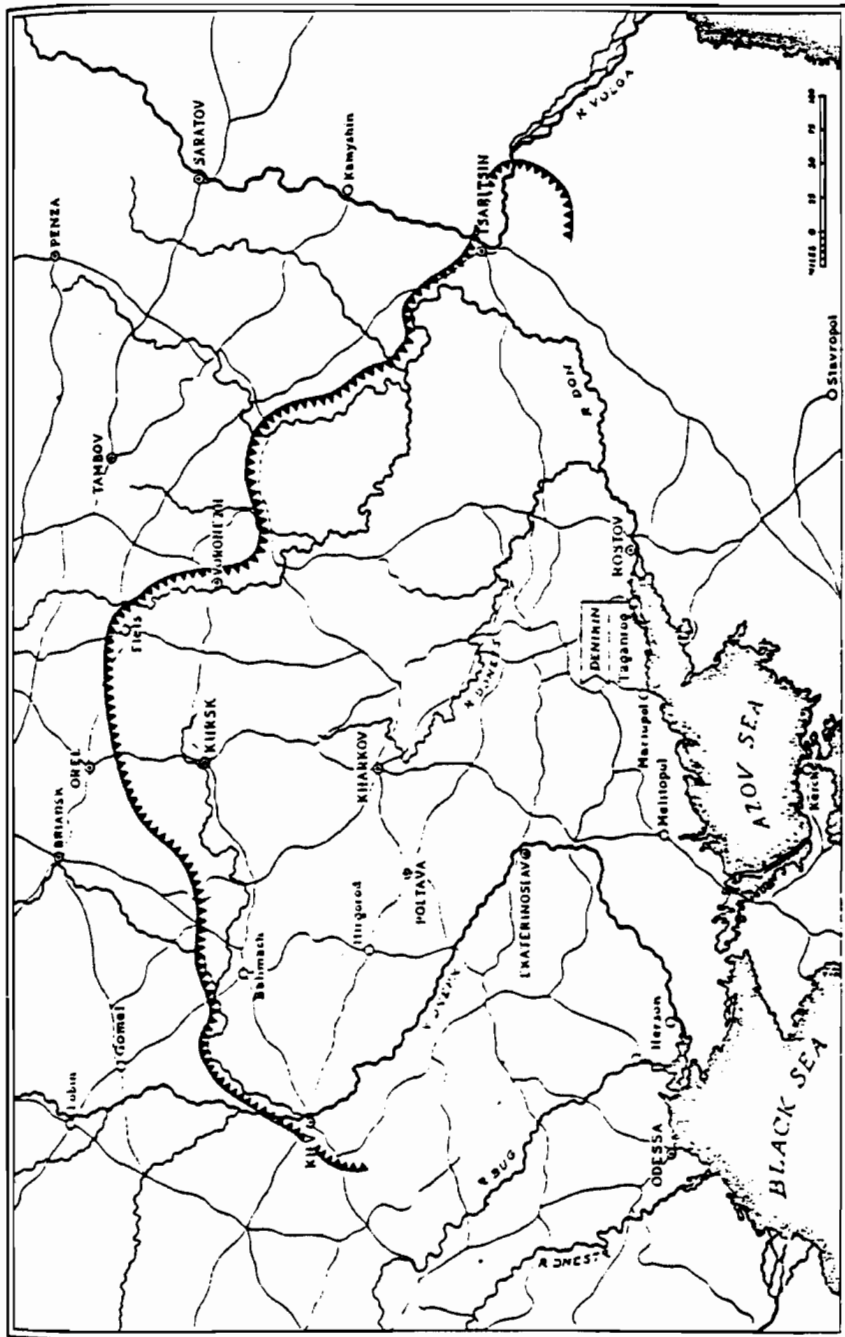
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76. *Kievshchina v gody grazhdanskoi voiny*, p.201-202.

77. Quoted by E. H. Carr, *The Bolshevik revolution, 1917-1923* (Harmondsworth, 1966), vol.1, p.163n.

78. *Vos'moi Vserossiiskii S'ezd Sovetov Rabochikh, Krest'ianskikh, Krasnoarmeiskikh i Kazach'ikh Deputatov: stenograficheskii otchet* (Moscow, 1921), p.202.

Map 5  
Denikin's Line at the Time of his Furthest Advance  
Summer 1919



Source: W. H. Chamberlin, *The Russian revolution* new ed. (New York, 1965), vol.2, p.147.

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**IX. THE ALLIANCE FALLS APART: APOSTASY OR OPPORTUNISM?**

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By the spring of 1919, the Soviet authorities regarded Makhno's activities with deep suspicion. The RVS received information that Makhno had allegedly sent a delegate to Ataman Grigor'ev to negotiate terms for an alliance against the Bolsheviks. The town Soviet of Ekaterinoslav had arrested the man. The situation, complained the Ekaterinoslav Bolsheviks, was "absolutely impossible," and they urged the RVS to take urgent steps to liquidate the Makhnovites, who were preventing communist work.<sup>1</sup>

Bolshevik suspicions were well-founded. By the middle of April 1919, several months after the incorporation of Makhno's units into the Red Army, the political position in the 3rd Brigade was still discouraging for the communists. The decision to keep the insurgent units separate after their acceptance of the unified command now bore its inevitable consequences. Particular difficulties arose around the system of assigning commissars to each unit at all levels. The assigned brigade commissar was still in

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1. F. T. Fomin, *Zapiski starogo chekista* (Moscow, 1962), p.75.

Mariupol', unable to take up his post. The 7th Regiment was disorganised, and its commissar had been replaced because of his inactivity. The 8th Regiment was keener, but the commissar had been killed in action. In the 9th Regiment the commissar had been obliged to introduce what he euphemistically called "comradely discipline," and there were no organised party cells. The Pravda Section, formerly the 1st Liubetskii Regiment, had neither commissars nor political workers. It was reportedly infected with anti-Semitism. The 1st Don Cossack Regiment was newly formed, and the artillery had very little political organisation.<sup>2</sup>

The commissars themselves were demoralised, and complained of widespread pilfering among the troops. Drunkards had been sent to the front. Members of the *Cheka* had been found decapitated or shot in the fields. In one town the partisans had dragged a wounded communist from his hospital bed and beaten him badly. One of Makhno's aides-de-camp, Boris Veretel'nikov, had gained a reputation for persecuting Bolsheviks and for refusing to supply them with food. The loathing was reciprocal. One commissar described the partisans as "the dregs of Soviet Russia."<sup>3</sup> Another urged the RVS to send the best possible political workers to Makhno's sections. The work with Red Army men was good, with mobilised troops it was "rather bad," and in the Makhnovite units

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2. *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine, 1918-1920 gg.: sbornik dokumentov i materialov* (Kiev, 1967) [hereafter *GVU*] vol.1, book 2, p.340-341.

3. *Ibid.*, p.362; P. A. Arshinov, *Istoriia makhnovskogo dvizheniia, 1918-1921 gg.* (Berlin, 1923), p.221-222; Volin, *La révolution inconnue, 1917-1921* (Paris, 1947), p.665.



it was lacking altogether. In addition, the commissar pointed out that some of his co-workers were hard drinkers, who themselves needed close supervision. They might easily make things worse, if left together with irresponsible soldiers. The refusal of political workers to go to the Makhnovite sections when assigned, he concluded, only encouraged "banditry and anti-Semitism."<sup>4</sup>

The political situation was becoming so bad from the Bolshevik point of view that the Ukrainian Narkomvoen, Nikolai Podvoiskii, began to demand ideas on how to "put the gangs of Grigor'ev and Makhno into regular order." Otherwise, he wanted to know how to disband them altogether and scatter their troops among reliable units. But nobody could suggest a practical method of dispersing armed regiments against their will without using large numbers of troops. Additionally, to intermingle the anarchists with Red Army units was to run the risk of spreading what Trotsky called the "infection" of *partizanshchina*. In the end the Bolsheviks stuck to their earlier decision, and permitted Makhno's troops to stay together. In this way Antonov was left to deal with the intractable problem of political discipline. Khristian Rakovskii, Chairman of the Ukrainian Sovnarkom, argued that the *atamans* could not possibly be as terrifying as they seemed when they were surrounded by their supporters.<sup>5</sup>

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4. *GVU* vol.1, book 2, p.374.

5. V. A. Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski o grazhdanskoi voine* (Moscow, 1924-1933), vol.4, p.195-196.

In the meantime Makhno's movement had attracted the support of southern anarchist groups such as the Nabat Confederation of Anarchist Federations, dominated by the intellectuals Aron Baron and Volin. From 2 to 7 April 1919 the Nabat Confederation held its first congress in Elisavetgrad. The congress came out strongly against anarchist participation in the soviets, which it described as organs of deadening centralism "imposed from above." No army based on conscription, claimed the Nabat intellectuals, could be regarded as a true defender of the revolution. Only a partisan army "organised from below" could do the job.<sup>6</sup>

The contradiction between idealism (a voluntary army) and necessity (conscription) was a major problem for Makhno. His formula of "general voluntary and egalitarian mobilisation" had already been shown to mean, in practice, that able-bodied men were liable to be drafted. The Nabat Confederation continued to take a strong voluntaristic line on these ideological questions until its forced dissolution by the Bolsheviks in the summer of 1919, when many of its members sought refuge in the Makhnovite ranks.

At the beginning of April it was becoming clear to all concerned that the alliance between the Red Army and the partisans was in danger of falling apart. Administrative confusion in the Bolshevik chain of command only made the situation worse. To Antonov's irritation, the Red high command simultaneously demanded that he

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6. *Rezoliutsii Pervogo S"ezda Konfederatsii Anarkhistskikh Organizatsii Ukrainsky "Nabat"* (Buenos Aires, 1923), p.18.

should control Makhno and Grigor'ev, while at the same time they sent telegrams directly to the atamans. "To deal with Makhno and Grigor'ev as my equals, puts me in a false position," he complained to Rakovskii.<sup>7</sup> But it was too late to resort to such procedural formalities. The combination of military pressure from the White guards and Makhno's intransigence over political questions made agreement between the two sides impossible.

On 10 April Makhno convened a third Congress of Regional Soviets in Guliai-Pole, in order to discuss policy questions. Delegates from 72 districts attended. Despite the seriousness of the military situation for the Red Army and for the revolution in general, the Congress apparently felt no compunction about adopting and endorsing an anarchist platform that the Bolsheviks inevitably viewed as a provocation. The platform rejected the dictatorship of the proletariat, denied the legitimacy of the All-Ukrainian Congress of Soviets, and advocated the liquidation of Bolshevik soviets.<sup>8</sup> The anarchists ordered agitation for "anti-state socialism," ignoring their earlier agreement with Antonov's RVS.

The predictable reaction of the Bolshevik military authorities was to ban the Congress. Dybenko sent a telegram to Makhno ordering him to disband the session, on pain of being declared an out-

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7. Antonov, *op.cit.*, vol.4, p.51 ff.

8. A. V. Likholat, *Pod leninskim znamenem druzhby narodov* (Moscow, 1970), p.356; Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.97 says that the transcripts were not available. A resolution on "voluntary mobilisation" was also passed (*Put' k svobode* no.2 [24 May 1919], p.1).

law.<sup>9</sup> The delegates responded with a lengthy and heavily sarcastic manifesto headed *Kontr-revoliutsionnyi li?* (Are we counter-revolutionary?) This document attacked the legalism of Dybenko's declaration:

"Can there exist laws made by a few people calling themselves revolutionaries, laws that enable them to outlaw en masse people who are more revolutionary than they themselves are?"

The partisans pointed out that they had held their first two congresses (in January and February) before Dybenko had even arrived in Ukraine. It was they, not the authorities of the Red Army, who had a mandate to represent the toiling masses in the area.<sup>10</sup>

Dybenko's threat was a hollow one, for Makhno was still engaging Shkuro in a key sector of the front. As the exchanges over the revolutionary legitimacy of the congress in Guliai-Pole were taking place, Dybenko continued to issue detailed orders on the tactical disposition of the regiments of the 3rd Brigade. The broad objective was to liquidate Shkuro's breakthrough in the Grishino sector by securing the important railway junctions, while maintaining a general eastwards advance and holding down the left flank of the 13th Army to the north.<sup>11</sup>

Shkuro was a daring and resourceful commander, at his best in a

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9. Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.98.

10. *Ibid.*, p.101. Arshinov prints the complete text, p.98-103.

11. See Dybenko's order of 9 April (*GVU* vol.1, book 2, p.317).

war of movement. He had gained experience of partisan warfare in the northern Caucasus in 1918, and had earned a reputation for brutality. His style of fighting was similar to Makhno's, and he was well aware of the value of flamboyance and terror in warfare. His cavalry were known as the Wolf Pack, after the wolf skin caps that they wore for effect.<sup>12</sup> His corps consisted of a division of Kuban Cossacks, a Circassian cavalry division, an infantry division, and three gun batteries - over 5,000 men and 12 artillery pieces.<sup>13</sup>

Makhno had occupied Mariupol' on 30 March, but the collapse of the 9th Division to his left, and his shortage of supplies, placed his position in imminent danger.<sup>14</sup> The Red Army command was in a state of confusion. On 12 April Skachko informed Dybenko that Makhno's brigade was to remain under his command as the anchor on the left flank. He ordered him to counter-attack to stop the breakthrough between Makhno's left and the 9th Division's right.<sup>15</sup> Dybenko, who was in Simferopol' in the Crimean peninsula, was also complaining about a shortage of supplies, especially uniforms. He promised Skachko that he would send artillery,

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12. H. Williamson, *Farewell to the Don* (New York, 1971), p.68-69; Antonov, op.cit., vol.4, p.51 ff. A recent study calls him "scarcely more than a glorified bandit" (W. Bruce Lincoln, *Red victory: a history of the Russian civil war* [New York, 1989], p.216).

13. *GVU* vol.1, book 2, p.376-377.

14. L. Trotsky, *The Trotsky papers, 1917-1922* (The Hague, 1964-1971) [hereafter cited as *TP*], vol.1, p.374-375.

15. *GVU* vol.1, book 2, p.328.

rifles and ammunition to Makhno's brigade.<sup>16</sup>

Such stop-gap measures could not have solved the problem of weapons and uniforms. More radical steps were needed. Shortly afterwards the Ukrainian army was divided into three to improve its efficiency, with the headquarters in Ekaterinoslav.<sup>17</sup> Makhno's own solution to the supply problem was typically simple and direct. He seized supply trains that passed through his area, and he prevented the Bolsheviks from collecting food or from setting up any kind of administration there.<sup>18</sup>

This kind of interference could have had - and often did have - serious consequences for the Bolsheviks in Russia. Military defeats and the failure to collect food from supposedly friendly areas placed the whole regime in acute danger. By June A. G. Shlikhter, who was in charge of collecting food in Ukraine, could report the dispatch of only 12,377 tons of grain to Russia. In March Lenin had asked for over 800,000 tons.<sup>19</sup>

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16. *GVU* vol.1, book 2, p.328. At this time Dybenko was attempting to capture Sevastopol'. Dybenko's campaign in the Crimea was undertaken in isolation from the major hostilities of the Ukrainian front, from which it removed troops that were badly needed by the Red Army.

17. Antonov, *op.cit.*, vol.4, p.129.

18. Y. Yaroslavsky [E. Iaroslavskii] *History of anarchism in Russia* (New York, 1937), p.64.

19. By June about 170,000 tons (10.5 million *pud*) had been collected but not sent (*Istoriia KP(b)U v materialakh i dokumentakh [khrestomatiia] 1917-1920 rr.*, 2nd ed. [Kiev, 1934], p.457); although the total harvest in 1919 was 9.7 million tons, the food agencies had demanded only 2.3 million tons to be delivered, 700,000 tons by March. According to Stalin, only 32,000 tons were finally collected, because of Makhno's manhunt against food officials (Speech to the 4th Conference of the KP(b)U, in his *Collected works* [Moscow, 1952-1955],

On 16 April, despite Dybenko's promises of help, Makhno had to evacuate Mariupol' under strong pressure from the Whites.<sup>20</sup> Vatsetis grew alarmed, but since his relations with Antonov were based on mutual suspicion the two men were unable to solve their problems through cooperative action. On the same day the Commander-in-chief ordered Antonov to send another brigade from the Trans-Dnepr Division to support Makhno, "whose attack in the direction of Taganrog is slowing down and almost failing."<sup>21</sup>

On the 17th, after Vatsetis had heard the news of Makhno's reverse and of the loss of Mariupol' and Volnovakh, he ordered an additional infantry division and a cavalry regiment to reinforce the 3rd Brigade, not counting the brigade ordered on the previous day. Vatsetis calculated that the 13th Army, the 8th Army, and the 3rd Brigade totalled 41,000 infantry and cavalry with 170 heavy guns, opposing 38,000 White Guards. With reinforcements from the 7th Sharpshooters Division the Red Army total rose to 46,000, an advantage of 8,000 men.<sup>22</sup>

Antonov was convinced that only he fully understood what was possible and what was not on the Ukrainian Front. His reaction to

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...Continued...

vol.4, p.311). For a nuanced case study of how the different food procurement campaigns of 1918 and 1919 actually worked in some provinces, see O. Figes, *Peasant Russia, civil war: the Volga countryside in revolution* (Oxford, 1989), p.248-273.

20. *TP*, loc.cit.

21. Antonov, op.cit., vol.4, p.56; *GVU* vol.1, book 2, p.xxvi.

22. *Ibid.*, p.xxvii and p.350.

Vatsetis' orders was irritable and uncooperative. "You exaggerate our strength," he replied to the Commander-in-Chief, "We have been weakened by constant fighting; we are poorly supplied; the troops want to go home."<sup>23</sup> Food, clothing, ammunition, artillery, horses, even political workers, were nowhere to be had. On top of his other tasks he was now expected to move reinforcements that existed only on paper to a unit that was no longer even his responsibility.

By this time Lenin himself was growing concerned about the situation. On 18 April he cabled Rakovskii suggesting that Dybenko's attack into the Crimea was an unnecessary adventure, and that Dybenko might replace Makhno for a counter-attack towards Taganrog and Rostov.<sup>24</sup> The next day he told Trotsky's aide G. Ia. Sokol'nikov that he was very disturbed at the slackening-off of operations against the Donbass. He asked him to formulate practical directives to speed things up again.<sup>25</sup>

Sokol'nikov replied that there were three causes of delay, namely the general state of disorganisation in the army, Denikin's acquisition of reinforcements, and the weakness of Makhno's brigade on the flank. He recommended the reorganisation of the 9th Army

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23. Antonov, *op.cit.*, vol.4, p.56-57.

24. V. I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 5th ed. (Moscow, 1958-1965), [hereafter cited as *PSS*], vol.50, p.282-283. Lenin was right, since Dybenko ran the risk of being cut off from the main forces to the north.

25. *TP* vol.1, p.368-369.



to the east of Lugansk, and the giving of top priority to the Southern Front.<sup>26</sup> Lenin informed Antonov directly that he should regard the Donets Basin as the most important objective. He must immediately give solid support to the Donbass-Mariupol' sector. Lenin brushed aside Antonov's protests in advance.

"I see from Podvoiskii's materials that there are quantities of military supplies in the Ukraine, even without Odessa; they must not be hoarded."<sup>27</sup>

Antonov, not the most patient or systematic of commanders, was in a nearly impossible situation. He had been ordered to move troops westwards, past hostile Ukrainian nationalist and Polish forces, to relieve pressure on Soviet Hungary, where a counter-revolution was gaining momentum. He had been ordered to move troops eastwards to the relief of the Southern Front in its struggle with Denikin. Simultaneously, he was expected to establish control over Ukraine so that coal and grain supplies to Russia should not be interrupted.

His forces were far from being the disciplined and well-organised formations depicted in some of Trotsky's reports. The "partisan infection" was widespread, not only among the soldiers of Makhno's and Grigor'ev's units, but throughout Ukraine. In Ekaterinoslav province, where Makhno was in control and still formally at least in alliance with the Red Army, there were actual fewer

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26. Trotsky, *Kak vooruzhalas' revoliutsiia* (Moscow, 1923-1925), vol.2, book 1, p.238; *TP* vol.1, p.370-371.

27. Lenin, *PSS* vol.50, p.286.

partisan rebellions against the Bolsheviks than there were in the northern Ukraine, where no single powerful local leader wielded power.<sup>28</sup>

Although Antonov agreed that Makhno's failure to resist Shkuro was at least partially the result of the autonomous status of his brigade, he was not as critical of the insurgents' actual and potential fighting ability as was Trotsky.<sup>29</sup> On 1 May, in a memorandum to the Central Committees of both the Russian and the Ukrainian parties, Trotsky argued that it was necessary to break units like Makhno's down to half-strength and turn them into regular troops. A grasp of iron was needed, argued Trotsky. Makhno had shown his total military ineffectiveness under sustained enemy attack. His forces must therefore be absorbed into the regular formations. Criminal elements should be purged, discipline established, and the system of elected commanders abolished. Antonov's approach of allowing a special status to the partisan units was mere opportunism.<sup>30</sup>

From mid-April onwards it was clear to the Bolshevik commanders that they had both misjudged the malleability of the *atamans* and

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28. In April 1919 there were 93 uprisings, only 4 of which were in Ekaterinoslav and 8 in Kherson (Shlikhter, "Bor'ba za khleb na Ukraine v 1919 g." *Litopys revoliutsii* no.2 [1928], p.106, quoted by A. Adams, *Bolsheviks in the Ukraine: the second campaign, 1918-1919* [New Haven, 1963], p.233).

29. "We've made a mistake, and a big one," Antonov to Skachko, 20 April 1919 (*GVU* vol.1, book 2, p.356; Antonov, *op.cit.*, vol.4, p.64).

30. *TP* vol.1, p.390-393.

over-estimated the effectiveness of their own command structure. Grigor'ev, in particular, was proving to have grandiose ideas about his role in the fighting. As early as 10 April, after the capture of Odessa from the French on the 6th, Grigor'ev had sent telegrams to Rakovskii, Antonov, Dybenko, Makhno and other commanders boasting of his courage and his troops' loyalty during the attack.<sup>31</sup> A week later, at considerable personal risk, Antonov went to visit Grigor'ev at Aleksandriia in an attempt to bring him and his unit under effective control. He wanted to persuade Grigor'ev to join forces with Makhno's brigade for a swift offensive towards the Donbass. He was unable to convince him that the plan was a good one.<sup>32</sup>

Ataman Grigor'ev was, like Makhno, a cunning and highly dangerous man. He came from a family of kulaks in Podolia, and had fought in both the Russo-Japanese and Great Wars, besides serving in the police force. In 1917 he had been active in the soldiers' committees, but his political views were opportunist in the extreme. After his return to Ukraine in late 1917 Grigor'ev supported in turn the Rada, the *Hetman*, the Directory, and, after January 1919, the Bolsheviks.

During the turbulent events of 1918 Grigor'ev had brought many small partisan groups around his home village of Aleksandriia under his command, particularly during the Directory's uprising in

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31. Antonov, *op.cit.*, vol.4, p.72-73.

32. *Ibid.*, p.81-82.

the autumn against the Austro-German occupation and the Hetman Skoropadskii. By February 1919 he controlled a substantial force of 23,000 men, with machine-guns and artillery. After he turned against the Directory over the question of Allied intervention in Ukraine, the Red Army's commanders were happy to reach a tactical agreement with him.

Like Makhno, he retained control of his troops as an integral unit under the Red Army's supreme command. His independence of mind could thus find concrete expression. The most striking difference between the two partisan leaders was one of ideological consistency, not of style. Grigor'ev had few scruples about aligning himself with anybody he pleased, should the tactical situation require it. He was a hard-drinking, hard-fighting adventurer, with the typical prejudices of the Ukrainian peasant - he was anti-semitic, xenophobic, and detested landlords.

Makhno, on the other hand, while he was equally inclined to violence (and to drink), was driven by a political philosophy that he used in deciding which course of action to follow from a choice of several alternatives. Thus, he punished anti-Semitism. He repeatedly refused offers of cooperation from the White Guards. He adopted a guardedly hostile attitude to the Ukrainian nationalists. He cooperated with the Bolsheviks while continuing to mistrust them.

In retrospect it is not difficult to see that the Red Army com-

manders should have anticipated more trouble from Grigor'ev than from Makhno, if only because he was so much more unpredictable. As it turned out, both *atamans* proved dangerous in about equal measure. The situation on the Southern and Ukrainian Fronts in April and May 1919 was too confused to allow the Bolshevik strategists time for the necessary analysis of their allies' political views or characters.

On 23 April Antonov met Grigor'ev for a second time, and again thought of exerting pressure on him to attack southwards into the Donbass. On reflection, Antonov decided that the risk of sending the volatile *ataman* to a crucial sector of the front was too great. It was equally impossible to leave him in the rear, close to Makhno's anarchist partisans. Antonov's solution was to order Grigor'ev out of Ukraine altogether. He was to go to Bessarabia, to campaign against Rumania in support of Soviet Hungary, releasing more reliable troops and resolving Antonov's dilemma at a stroke. In an emotional interview, conducted with histrionic skill on both sides, Antonov persuaded Grigor'ev to go to Bessarabia.<sup>33</sup>

Personal contact seemed the best way to deal with the touchy and difficult partisan leaders. At this time Makhno was behaving towards his allies with exceptional pugnacity. Not only were the grain requisition detachments unable to operate in his area, but he had recently lost patience with the Bolshevik commissars in

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33. Ibid., p.83-84.

the 3rd Brigade, and had them all arrested. This was a clear contravention of the agreement of February that year, but Makhno's units were wavering under the White attacks, and Antonov could ill afford to antagonise him. On the contrary, he wanted to bring the partisans solidly onto the communist side.

Antonov also visited Guliai-Pole, with two purposes in mind. The visit enabled him to see for himself this "under-sized, young-looking, dark-eyed man, wearing a Caucasian fur cap at an angle," and to assess him and his unit.<sup>34</sup> It also gave him the opportunity to try to solve the two problems of Makhno's relations with Grigor'ev and of his treatment of the commissars. Antonov was, by his own account, satisfied with the way Makhno ran his headquarters and with the fighting qualities of his men. Indeed, given the background of his dispute with Trotsky, he must have been predisposed to satisfaction.

Makhno on the other hand had much to complain of - he was short of arms, ammunition, clothing and money. He had received 3,000 Italian rifles, but so few bullets that they were already used up.<sup>35</sup> His grumbles were justifiable - although the 3rd brigade

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34. Ibid., p.110. Arshinov carelessly describes Antonov as Commander of the Southern Front in his one-sentence summary of this important encounter (op.cit., p.104). In general Arshinov's account of the 1919 campaign against Denikin is extremely unsatisfactory; it glosses over the partisans' *military* failures in April and May in favour of a lengthy account of relations with Grigor'ev, which raises at least as many questions as it answers.

35. Antonov, op.cit., vol.4, p.111; in fact Dybenko had already ordered 250,000 cartridges to be sent for these weapons (*GVU* vol.1, book 2, p.368).

was under bombardment from land and sea, they had only two 3-inch guns in good condition and lacked machine-guns and cartridges. Yet when Dybenko had raised this point, headquarters accused him of placing the brigade's welfare before that of the division as a whole.<sup>36</sup>

Antonov was sympathetic, and issued more orders for supplies to be sent to Makhno forthwith. On the question of the arrested commissars he was adamant. Makhno unexpectedly backed down, and released the imprisoned political workers, on condition that they must no longer work as spies for the Bolsheviks.<sup>37</sup> Even more comforting for Antonov to hear were Makhno's assurances that he did not have close relations with Grigor'ev, who he suspected of counter-revolutionary intentions. He admitted that he had sent an envoy to Grigor'ev's camp, but only to discover what his plans were.

Shortly after Antonov's visit to Makhno, Lev Kamenev, deputy chairman of the Russian *Sovnarkom*, also arrived in Guliai-Pole. Kamenev had been sent to Ukraine primarily to sort out the administrative problems that were preventing food from moving northwards. These problems were, of course, much more than merely administrative.

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36. Ibid., p.368-369.

37. V. S., "Ekspeditsiia L. B. Kameneva dlia prodvizheniia prodgruzov k Moskve v 1919 g." *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia* no.6 (1925), p.138.

In Guliai-Pole, the anarchists received him well, and he complimented the insurgents on their successful liberation of the region from Skoropadskii and their defence of it against Denikin and Petliura. Kamenev could not accept the legitimacy of Makhno's RVS, which inevitably seemed to him to usurp the functions of the RVS of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic, a creation of the party. The anarchists argued that the toiling masses of the region had created the insurgent RVS. It could only be dissolved by their will, or, they added pointedly, against their will by the counter-revolution. The Soviet RVS, on the other hand, was a creation of the Bolshevik Central Committee, and could be dissolved by its fiat.<sup>38</sup>

Kamenev's real worry was food, not legal quibbles, and he managed to get Makhno to promise to stop his obstruction of military and civil supply operations. His assessment of the Ukrainian situation was realistic: "whoever commands a large army will receive grain."<sup>39</sup> He realised that as long as Podvoiskii and Shlikhter could not cooperate over grain collection, agreement with Makhno would be pointless. Even Makhno's wagons were guarded by soldiers from *Narkomprod*, from the army supply organisation, and from the insurgent forces. Podvoiskii admitted to Kamenev that he had not tried to control the supply sections of semi-autonomous command-

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38. Ibid., p.137-138; Arshinov, op.cit., p.104 (where he uses the expression *Voенно-revoliutsionnyi Sovet* for the more common *Revvoensovet*).

39. V. S., op.cit., p.144.



ers such as Makhno.<sup>40</sup>

Meanwhile Shkuro's cavalry incursions continued to take their toll. He had broken through the Red Army's lines at the beginning of May. The 8th Army was forced to pull back to protect its rear, abandoning Lugansk to the enemy on 5 May. Lenin was enraged.

"There has not been a single accurate and factual answer from you up to now as to which units are moving to the Donbass, how many infantry, cavalry or artillery, and which stations the leading trains are at," he told Rakovskii, Antonov and Podvoiskii. "The fall of Lugansk shows that they are correct who accuse you of independence and of wanting to go into Rumania. Remember that it is you who will bear the responsibility for disaster if you are late with serious help for the Donbass."<sup>41</sup>

The commanders in the field continued to worry about Makhno and Grigor'ev. By this time Makhno's brigade was down to four reserve regiments and seven artillery pieces with no bolts. Two of his regiments had been defeated at Kuteinskovo.<sup>42</sup>

Lenin conceded that it was necessary to proceed diplomatically with Makhno, at least until the capture of Rostov. His insistence on making Antonov personally responsible for the troops of Makhno to that end ignored the simple fact that Makhno was still subor-

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40. Podvoiskii, as *Narkomvoen* of the Ukraine, ruthlessly overrode all other priorities, and interfered with the work of central government departments in his efforts to keep his armies supplied (*ibid.*, p.125, 131-132, 144).

41. Lenin, *PSS* vol.50, p.302-303.

42. *GVU* vol.2, p.8.

dinate to the Southern, not to the Ukrainian Front.<sup>43</sup> Lenin had little respect for his commanders in Ukraine, or for the local peculiarities of the peasantry there:

"In the Ukraine at the present time, every gang chooses a political title, each more free and democratic than the other, and there is a gang for every region."<sup>44</sup>

He expected Antonov to behave like a general, and simultaneously treated him like a commissar at brigade level. Two days after his first set of instructions to him, he made both Antonov and Podvoiskii "personally responsible for Makhno's group" and demanded a speed-up of the movement of supplies to the Donbass and "the swift capture of Rostov."<sup>45</sup>

Lenin's suspicion of Makhno was justified. Yet to dismiss him as a "gangster with a political title" was to ignore the reasons for the dislike for the Bolsheviks and their policies among the Ukrainian peasantry. The Ukrainian TsIK was more realistic in its proclamation of 8 May, in which it spoke of the hardships that the Ukrainian peasants were experiencing and explained the measures adopted by the Soviet government in land and food policy,

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43. Telegram to Kamenev, in *PSS* vol.50, p.307; *GVU* vol.2, p.16; Lenin, *Voennaya perepiska 1917-1920 gg.* (Moscow, 1956), p.117.

44. Lenin, *PSS* vol.38, p.356.

45. *Ibid.*, p.378; *TP* vol.1, p.406-407; *GVU* vol.2, p.18.

and the objectives of creating the *kombedy*.<sup>46</sup> The proclamation blamed the nationalists, the Whites, and the forces of the intervention who had set "Ukrainians quarrelling with Russians, Jews with Poles, Poles with Ukrainians, workers and peasants in the towns with workers and peasants in the villages, and so on."<sup>47</sup> This picture was far from inaccurate.

From the last week of April, the area that was under Grigor'ev's control became increasingly restless, as peasant soldiers looted and pillaged, shot commissars, and committed pogroms in a chain reaction of impatient violence. Grigor'ev's troops, tired of the Bolshevik commissars, were easily swayed by nationalists, SRs or even anti-semitic monarchists. The *ataman* himself had mixed feelings about the Red Army, for he prepared for revolt with an excessive number of assurances of loyalty to the cause of communism. Kamenev was the first to discover that the assurances were valueless, when his repeated attempts to contact Grigor'ev to discuss supply problems revealed large-scale troop movements towards Ekaterinoslav.

On 10 May Antonov reached the *ataman* over the telegraph, and heard of the rebellion at first hand. Grigor'ev transmitted the

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46. The *kombedy* failed to work well in the Ukraine, where the rich and middle peasants sometimes made up a majority opposed to communist measures. Nevertheless they survived there much longer than they did in Russia. By May the party had apparently decreed that even middle peasants could belong to the *kombedy*, but the attempt to win their support came too late. Grigor'ev's revolt was by no means an isolated case, although it was the largest and most dangerous.

47. *Kommunist* (8 May 1919), quoted by Likholat, *op.cit.*, p.357.

text of his Universal, in which he renounced the authority of the Bolsheviks, and insisted that he would continue to advance on Ekaterinoslav.<sup>48</sup> Antonov attempted to persuade the rebellious *ataman* that he would find himself isolated. Grigor'ev insisted that he had the partial support of the 1st and 2nd Armies and of the population. He claimed to be in touch with Makhno, a prospect that Antonov must have found chilling.<sup>49</sup> The two partisan groups were still close to each other, nearly in contact at Ekaterinoslav.

The Bolsheviks took immediate steps to avert the possibility of the two forces joining each other. On 12 May Makhno received a telegram from Kamenev demanding that he unequivocally take a stand against Grigor'ev's revolt and that he issue a proclamation against it.

"Either you will march with the workers and peasants of whole of Russia or you will, in effect, open the front to the enemy - there can be no hesitation!"<sup>50</sup>

According to Arshinov, Makhno's headquarters staff called a meeting to discuss the new turn of events. It seems unlikely that they had not expected the revolt since they already knew of Grigor'ev's adventurism.

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48. Antonov, *op.cit.*, vol.4, p.203-208.

49. *Ibid.*, p.207.

50. Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.107.

Some Makhnovites suspected that the Bolsheviks had provoked the revolt so that they might have an excuse for moving against and dissolving the autonomous partisan bands.<sup>51</sup> It was clear to all that Grigor'ev's revolt was not, in Arshinov's phrase, "in the spirit of the revolution or the working people," but was a political move based on nationalist feelings. Makhno therefore issued orders to his combat units, with copy to Kamenev, instructing them to take energetic measures to defend the front during the impending crisis.<sup>52</sup> He then sent a message directly to Kamenev.

"Upon receiving the news about Grigor'ev in the telegrams from you and from Roshchin, I at once ordered that the front be firmly maintained, and that not an inch be given to Denikin or to any counter-revolutionary gang, that we perform our revolutionary duty towards the workers and peasants of Russia and the whole world. But you must know that I and my front will remain unchangeably true not to the institutions of violence represented by your Commissariats and Extraordinary Commissions [i.e. the *Cheka*], which oppress the toiling masses, but to the revolution of the workers and peasants. If Grigor'ev has in fact abandoned the front and has advanced his forces in order to seize power, then this is a criminal adventure, and treason to the revolution of the people, and I shall publish my opinion to this effect far and wide. But so far I have not got precise information about Grigor'ev or the movement connected with him; I do not know what he is doing or for what reasons; therefore I will not issue a proclamation against him for the time being, before I get clear news about him. As a revolutionary anarchist, I declared that I cannot support in any way a coup by Grigor'ev or anybody else; as before, my comrade partisans and I will continue to harass Denikin's bands, at the same time endeavouring to permit our liberated zone to set up free worker-peasant unions, which will have all power to themselves; and in this regard, such organs of oppression and violence as the *Chekas* and Commissariats, serving the dictatorship of the party - violent even in relation to anarchist unions and the anarchist press -

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51. Ibid., p.108-109.

52. Text in Arshinov, op.cit., p.109.

will find us energetic opponents."<sup>53</sup>

This message clearly stated Makhno's position. He saw no reason to cooperate with either side in this quarrel. Grigor'ev had implied to Antonov that Makhno would support him, but his anxious telegrams belied the claim. One read simply: "Bat'ko! Why do you look to the Communists? Kill them! *Ataman* Grigor'ev."<sup>54</sup> Another, which never reached Makhno, argued that the cause of the revolt was his soldiers' unwillingness to stand for Chekists and commissars ordering them about. Grigor'ev must have calculated that such an anti-party line might strike a sympathetic chord in the anarchists' hearts.<sup>55</sup> If so, he was to be disappointed. Makhno's proclamation *Kto takoi Grigor'ev* [Who is this Grigor'ev?] was published and widely circulated, both as a leaflet and in the newspapers *Nabat* and *Put' k svobode*.<sup>56</sup> The document attacked Grigor'ev as a predator, an anti-semite, and a traitor to the revolution, while attempting to analyse the reasons for his popularity:

"[...] the causes which gave rise to the movement of Grigor'ev in-

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53. Ibid., p.110. Arthur Adams, followed by Paliij, argues that Makhno was personally jealous of Grigor'ev, who was a professional soldier, and feared that his movement would be absorbed. (Adams, op.cit., p.326; M. Paliij, "The peasant partisan movement of the anarchist Nestor Makhno, 1918-1921: an aspect of the Ukrainian revolution," (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Kansas, 1971), p.272).

54. Arshinov, op.cit., p.112.

55. Antonov, op.cit., vol.4, p.254; cf. S. Dubrovskii, "Grigor'evshchina," *Voina i revoliutsiia* no.4 (1928), p.97.

56. The text printed by Arshinov, op.cit., p.112-115, in the 1920s omits some paragraphs which are included in *Put' k svobode* (4 June 1919), p.3-4.

clude not only Grigor'ev himself, but to a great extent the chaos in Ukraine in recent times. Since the Bolsheviks arrived, the dictatorship of the party has been established. As a statist party, the Bolshevik party has set up everywhere state organs for the government of the revolutionary people [...] all such organs are made up of people removed from labour and revolution. In such a way a situation has been created in which the working people, the revolutionaries, have fallen under the rule of individuals alien to labour, who are inclined to tyranny and violence towards the masses [...] With its irresponsible dictatorship [the party] created the anger in the masses from which Grigor'ev profits today, and which some other adventurer will make use of tomorrow. Consequently, while condemning Grigor'ev's treason to the revolution, we simultaneously hold the Communist Party to be responsible for the Grigor'ev movement."<sup>57</sup>

This analysis made several telling points. Bolshevik policies towards the peasantry in Ukraine were tactless, heavy-handed, and badly administered. A party with little rural support in the best of circumstances, the Bolsheviks aligned themselves ostentatiously against the rich and middle peasants in a situation of acute military peril, when they were in the direst need of food supplies. They encouraged class antagonisms and sent the grain requisition units and the *Cheka* to terrorise the rural masses. By May the conditions in the villages were so bad that an administrative breakdown had become all but inevitable. Grigor'ev's rebellion and Denikin's increasingly successful attacks were the last straws.<sup>58</sup>

There is a danger in assuming that the well-defined, but often only subtly distinguished ideological positions of Makhno, Anto-

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57. Arshinov, op.cit., p.114.

58. Nonetheless, in the end "as long as the Whites remained in the field, the peasants were reluctant to challenge the Soviet regime" (Figes, op.cit., p.29).

nov, Petliura, or even Grigor'ev were shared by their troops at all levels. The fighting in the Civil War was confused and confusing. There were, apart from the major forces involved, innumerable local bands using revolutionary rhetoric to disguise all kinds of antipathies and prejudices.<sup>59</sup> The effectiveness of the handful of Bolshevik political workers was minimal even in the army, as we have seen. Even those peasants whose political consciousness was highly developed must have found it difficult to cut through the tangled verbiage to discover what men like Grigor'ev stood for.

Makhno himself faced this problem of a lack of accurate information about *Grigor'evshchina*. For large numbers of Ukrainian peasants the central issue was the practical one of staying out of danger. They fled, deserted, or hid in the forest. A partisan leader who had the confidence of his men and made them feel safe did not necessarily need their full political agreement as well.<sup>60</sup> In the local fighting it was common for men from the same village to find themselves on opposite sides. It was equally common for units or even regiments simply to change their allegiance. Makhno's forces often found themselves strengthened unexpectedly in this fashion, particularly in times of glory. Usually

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59. This was true not only in Ukraine, but also in other areas. Figes describes in detail a whole typology of peasant revolts along the Volga in 1920 and 1921 (op.cit., p.321-353).

60. See, for example, the account of the informant I. Topolye (pseud.) quoted by V. Peters, *Nestor Makhno: the life of an anarchist* (Winnipeg, 1970), p.46-47.



the peasant-soldier had a choice, if at all, only between equally unpleasant alternatives - between *pogromchiki* or Chekists, between Grigor'ev's violence or the Communists' land policy.

This is not to deny that the *partizanshchina* in its many forms was an expression of underlying class antagonisms. The point is that the military situation obscured rather than clarified such antagonisms, and the constant movement of men from one side to another was an indication of this. The Bolsheviks - a party of the revolutionary urban proletariat - could not attract mass support when the poor peasants, their potential allies, were so few. The White Guards could not attract support from the Ukrainian peasants when they were so closely associated in the popular mind with the *pomeshchiki*, the restoration of the Empire, and the denial of Ukrainian nationhood and autonomy.<sup>61</sup>

The class struggle took place not only between armies, as the Bolsheviks would have liked to think. It cut across the lines drawn up by the military commanders, and split armies on all sides. The Bolsheviks conscripted kulaks. The Whites and the nationalists enlisted poor peasants and workers. Both sides saw their ideas of military and political organisation undermined by the peasants - petty bourgeois, anarchic, and uncontrollable.

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61. In areas under Denikin's control use of the Ukrainian language was discouraged, newspapers and bookstores were closed, and teaching was to be conducted only in Russian. M. Hrushevs'kyi, *A history of the Ukraine* (New Haven, 1941), p.556. Throughout his memoirs Denikin refers to the country as *Malo-rossii* [Little Russia], e.g. *Ocherki russkoi smuty* (Paris-Berlin, 1921-1926), vol.5, p.234 and *passim*.

Grigor'evshchina was a powerful expression of this chaotic element.

The impact of the loss of Grigor'ev's brigade (and of the troops needed to suppress the rebellion) on the military capability of the Red Army was devastating. It came when the White cavalry were breaking through the communist lines, when Makhno's loyalty was wavering, and when the food and coal supply situation was bad. In addition, the anarchy let loose by Grigor'ev on the population in the area under his control surpassed in brutality anything that happened in the overtly anarchist "anti-state" of Guliai-Pole. In particular, Grigor'ev was responsible for some of the most vicious pogroms ever seen in Ukraine, an area with a long history of passionate anti-Semitism. Although such events are difficult to enumerate, since the victims are dead and their perpetrators unwilling to admit their guilt, it is likely that Grigor'ev's Jewish victims numbered about 6,000, in as many as forty different villages.<sup>62</sup>

The full weight of Bolshevik propaganda turned against Grigor'ev, denouncing him in newspapers, proclamations and leaflets, and accusing him of every imaginable villainy. K. E. Voroshilov, a capable but unimaginative cavalry officer who was then Ukrainian Commissar for Internal Affairs, was appointed military commander

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62. J. H. Hertz, *A decade of woe and hope* (London, 1923), p.11. See also *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. "Pogroms"; E. Heifetz, *The slaughter of the Jews in the Ukraine in 1919* (New York, 1921); E. Tcherikower, *Di ukrainer pogromen in yor 1919* (New York 1965).

with responsibility for the rapid destruction of Grigor'ev's bands. Unfortunately, his command was autonomous, and the creation of yet another independent army in Ukraine only complicated further the already serious problems of supply and administration.

Grigor'ev's revolt, although it was inchoate and doomed to defeat, had long-term consequences. It created the conditions for Denikin to press home his military advantage and to drive the Bolsheviks out of Ukraine. This helped him in turn to isolate and defeat the Soviet revolution in Hungary, and dashed Bolshevik hopes of seeing communist regimes in power in central and western Europe. It prepared the ground for a split between Makhno and the Bolsheviks, who no longer trusted partisans or anarchist political intentions. Although the revolt was not immediately eliminated, it rapidly dwindled in strength to a few thousand men, engaged in harassing Red Army units and in destroying communications links and railway tracks.<sup>63</sup> The end of *Grigor'evshchina* was announced, prematurely, on 23 May.

While this violent realignment of forces was taking place in the rear, the military situation at the front was worsening. On 14 May Makhno's brigade, as part of the 2nd Army and alongside the 8th and 13th Armies, had begun the long-awaited attack on the Donbass. It had liberated Lugansk. Units of the 2nd and 13th

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63. Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.132; for a more detailed account of the revolt, see Dubrovskii, *op.cit.*

Armies penetrated deep into Denikin's rear, seizing the area around the important railway station of Kuteinskovo. To counter this threat to his left flank, Denikin moved Shkuro's corps from the front of the Red 9th Army to that of the 13th Army.<sup>64</sup>

He aimed his blow carefully, striking at the sector where the Makhnovites held the right flank of the 13th Army. Makhno's forces had been weakened by the assignment of Dybenko's division, which had been on the 2nd Army's strength, to Voroshilov for his campaign against Grigor'ev. Between 16 and 19 May Shkuro's units broke through in Makhno's sector of the front. The 13th Army reported on 22 May that Shkuro's cavalry had taken the villages of Maksimil'ianovka and Aleksandrovka from Makhno. Shkuro was using tanks in the centre and on the left. Initial attempts to counter-attack had failed, and the commander of the 13th Army feared the paralysis of his forces.<sup>65</sup>

His fears were justified. In the one day, White cavalry penetrated 45 kilometres into the Red Army's rear. Denikin exploited his success energetically against the under-armed and vacillating partisans, and within three days had opened a gap 35 kilometres wide and 100 kilometres deep in Makhno's sector. By the end of May the Makhnovite rout had exposed the right flank and rear of the 13th Army. This threw the whole front into retreat from Deni-

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64. *GVU* vol.2, p.786.

65. *Ibid.*, p.70-71.

kin's well-coordinated attacks.<sup>66</sup>

rephrase this

? || The opening of the front to Denikin by the Makhnovite units, and the subsequent loss of Ukraine to the Bolsheviks, was at the time (and remains to this day) the subject of bitter polemics by both anarchists and communists.<sup>67</sup> According to anarchist accounts Trotsky, who had arrived in Ukraine in the middle of May, made it impossible for the anarchists to defend themselves by mounting a propaganda campaign against them, and then by refusing them supplies and equipment. There is no question that Trotsky's dislike of the insurgent groups led him at times to express himself in extreme terms. On 17 May, four days after he arrived in Ukraine, he called for "a radical and merciless liquidation of the partisan movement," and of all leftist hooliganism.<sup>68</sup> He dismissed Skachko and ordered Voroshilov to take over the 2nd Army, to reinforce it with troops from Khar'kov and to put it into proper shape. This included disciplining Makhno's units. This was to be done by removing the anarchist leaders and restoring order among the rank and file.<sup>69</sup>

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66. Ibid., p.786; Denikin, op.cit., vol.5, p.104. Arshinov claims that the breakthrough occurred on the left flank of the Makhnovite forces, i.e. in the Red Army's sector (op.cit., p.124).

67. On the anarchist side, see e.g. G. and D. Cohn-Bendit, *Obsolete communism: the left-wing alternative* (Harmondsworth, 1969), p.222-223; D. Guerin, *Anarchism: from theory to practice* (New York, 1970), p.101. Cf. Yaroslavsky, op.cit., p.69-71 (for example: "Makhno retreated far into the rear, where his men spent their time disarming, robbing and murdering Red Army men," p.70).

68. TP vol.1, document 221.

69. TP vol.1, p.460-463.

Earlier in May Stalin, in Petrograd, had demanded coal for the Baltic fleet.<sup>70</sup> On 26 May Lenin instructed Kamenev to start loading coal from Mariupol' for Petrograd, authorising him to deal with Makhno if the latter objected.<sup>71</sup> Trotsky was pessimistic. To collect grain and coal and to control Makhno as well, he told Lenin, he would require "a trustworthy *Cheka* battalion, several hundred Baltic fleet Ivanov-Vosnesenskii workers, and about thirty serious party workers."<sup>72</sup> Only with these personnel would an advance towards Mariupol' and Taganrog become possible.

In reality, it was already too late to control Makhno. Trotsky believed that Makhno's anarchism was only kulak gangsterism in fancy dress. He is alleged to have told his commanders that it would be better to lose Ukraine to Denikin, whose anti-Soviet, reactionary views were clear to even the most unsophisticated peasant, than to Makhno, whose movement developed among and aroused the support of the masses themselves.<sup>73</sup>

While Trotsky attacked his ally on political grounds, Vatsetis was still trying desperately to plug the gap, ordering an infantry brigade and an artillery division transferred to the command

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70. Stalin, *op.cit.*, vol.4, p.269-270.

71. *TP* vol.1, p.468-469.

72. *Ibid.*, p.458-459.

73. A. Berkman, *The Bolshevik myth* (London, 1925), p.189; Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.124; Volin, *op.cit.*, p.562.

of the 2nd Ukrainian Army to take Makhno's former position.<sup>74</sup> On 27 May the Red Army was forced to evacuate Lugansk, which they had recaptured only two weeks previously.

Lenin watched the fumbling attempts of his subordinates in Ukraine to stave off disaster with increasing dismay and irritation. "Makhno rolls away westwards, opening the flank of the 13th Army," he telegraphed, "Antonov and Podvoiskii [...] bear criminal responsibility for each minute of delay." He demanded that the two commanders should stop sending "meaningless and boastful telegrams," and should immediately reinforce the sector on a massive scale.<sup>75</sup> But Voroshilov knew that catastrophe was not to be averted by these steps alone.<sup>76</sup> He and Mezhlauk needed to strengthen the 2nd Army, which by the end of May consisted of little except Makhno's brigade in retreat. They argued briefly for the creation of a new "Donbass front," but both Lenin and Trotsky rejected the idea.<sup>77</sup> There was some indication that even the 8th and 13th Armies were "infected with the Makhnovite cancer."<sup>78</sup>

Makhnovite sympathisers, most notably Arshinov, have claimed that the Bolshevik commanders deliberately starved the insurgents of

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74. *GVU* vol.2, p.78-79.

75. *Ibid.*, p.91-92; *TP* vol.1, p.476-479.

76. *Ibid.*, p.486-487.

77. *Ibid.*, p.484-493 details the proposal.

78. *Ibid.*, p.486-487.

weapons, so that they might be easily neutralised by Denikin's forces. According to this version of events, the plan went wrong because the Bolsheviks did not realise how strong the Volunteer Army really was. They were not expecting it to deliver such powerful and well-coordinated blows. Arshinov cites in support of this view a visit to Guliai-Pole in early May by a Bolshevik official who promised to have ammunition sent from Khar'kov forthwith. Even two weeks later, no shells or cartridges had arrived.<sup>79</sup>

This interpretation remains unproven. As we have seen, the lack of an adequate supply system and of a clear chain of command hampered the Red Army considerably throughout the campaign. There is no need to search for a conspiracy to explain the Bolshevik failure to deliver weapons and munitions, when their incompetence to do so is well proven.<sup>80</sup> In addition, the repeated calls for reinforcements in Makhno's sector - *from* Bolsheviks to Bolsheviks - belie any willingness to see the Insurgent Army annihilated. Quite simply, and with good reason, the Bolsheviks did not trust the Makhnovites. Both sides were willing to seize on any slight excuse to justify the lack of trust.

Matters reached a head on 29 May. The Makhnovite headquarters sent Antonov a cable announcing that they had decided "to create

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79. Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.115-117.

80. Dybenko, for instance, as late as 30 May was hauling supplies captured from Grigor'ev in the wrong direction, to the Crimea (*TP* vol.1, p.490, 493).



an independent insurgent army, entrusting Comrade Makhno with the army's leadership." On the same day the Bolsheviks ordered Makhno's arrest.<sup>81</sup>

Meanwhile, the insurgent RVS decided to call an extraordinary Congress of Workers', Peasants' and Insurgents' Delegates for 15 June, to discuss the military crisis created by the White breakthrough and the political crisis in relations with the Bolsheviks. Despite the clash with Dybenko in April over the 3rd Congress, the tone of the telegram announcing the 4th Congress was as undiplomatic as ever and pulled no verbal punches.

"The Executive Committee of the RVS [...] has reached the conclusion that only the working masses themselves can find a solution, and not individuals or parties."

The telegram was addressed to "the districts, towns and villages of the provinces of Ekaterinoslav, Tauride and adjacent regions; to all units of Bat'ko Makhno's 1st Insurgent Division; to all Red Army troops in the same region."<sup>82</sup>

Not surprisingly, the reaction of the Bolshevik commanders to Makhno's resignation, followed by the summoning of yet another

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81. Antonov, *op.cit.*, vol.4, p.307-308; S. N. Semanov, "Makhnovshchina i ee krakh," *Voprosy istorii* no.9 (1966), p.45-46. A few secondary accounts take 29 May as the date of the split between Makhno and the Red Army; Arshinov does not mention the date. Cf. *GVU* vol.2, p.786n; L. Aragon, *A history of the USSR* (London, 1964), p.137. Voroshilov knew of Makhno's resignation by 30 May (*TP* vol.1, p.486-487). If Makhno had resigned in May, the subsequent Bolshevik attacks on him were not as "treacherous" as the apologists allege.

82. Arshinov. *op.cit.*, p.117-118.

anarchist congress - both at a time of military crisis - was decisive and harsh. Denikin was moving from success to success; on 1 June he captured Bakhmut, northeast of Guliai-Pole.<sup>83</sup> Simultaneously, the All-Ukrainian Congress of Regional Executive Committees passed a resolution "On Makhno," in which the Congress accused him of seeking the protection of the Soviet flag and of then attacking the political organisation of the Red Army and of the Soviet Government while trying to consolidate his power. The resolution equated Makhno and Grigor'ev, describing them as "mere bandits." The attempt to convene a regional congress without the knowledge of Provincial and Regional Executive Committees could "lead to very severe consequences." The Congress therefore expressed its categorical condemnation of Makhno's actions and moved that "Sovnarkom should [...] take very ruthless and resolute measures" against him and his like.<sup>84</sup>

Trotsky needed little encouragement. On 4 June he issued Order no. 1824, a document which Arshinov quotes in full, followed by two pages of exegesis, as proof of Bolshevik perfidy. But in the circumstances, the provisions of the order were not unreasonable:

"This Congress is directed squarely against soviet power in the Ukraine and against the organisation of the Southern Front, which included Makhno's brigade. This Congress can only result in some new disgraceful revolt like Grigor'ev's, and in the opening of the front to the White Guards, before whom Makhno's brigade is in constant retreat because of the incompetence, criminality and treason

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83. *GVU* vol.2, p.786n.

84. *Vestnik Narkomvnudel UkSSR* no.9 (1919), p.3-11, quoted in *GVU* vol.2, p.117.

of its commanders.

1. This Congress is forbidden, and will in no circumstances be permitted to take place.

2. All the workers and peasants shall be warned verbally and in writing that participation in the Congress will be considered an act of high treason against the Soviet Republic and against the front.

3. All delegates to the Congress shall immediately be arrested and arraigned before the Revolutionary Military Tribunal of the 14th (formerly 2nd) Ukrainian Army.

4. Those persons who disseminate the summons of Makhno and the Guliai-Pole Executive Committee to the Congress shall be arrested.

5. The present order shall take effect as soon as it is transmitted by telegraph and widely distributed, displayed in all public places and sent to the representatives of town and village Executive Committees and to all Soviet authorities, commanders and commissars of military units."<sup>85</sup>

Two days later, on 6 June, Trotsky reiterated his ban on the congress in even stronger terms.

"All military authorities and anti-profiteer detachments set up on my authority will issue an order to arrest all traitors who leave their units without permission and desert to Makhno, and to bring them before the Revolutionary Tribunal as deserters, for trial by provisional military law.

There can be only one punishment for them - the firing squad."<sup>86</sup>

Makhno did not receive a copy of Order no. 1824 for some two or three days, possibly because he was fully engaged in defending Guliai-Pole against Shkuro's Cossacks, who captured the village

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85. Arshinov, op.cit., p.119 ff. But, since Arshinov omits to mention the renunciation of Soviet power on 29 May, his presentation of Bolshevik duplicity seems weightier than it actually is.

86. Order no.107, 6 June 1919, in Trotsky, *Kak vooruzhalas' revoliutsiia* vol.2, book.1, p.200.

after heavy fighting on 6 June. Makhno retreated to the railway station at Gaichur, a few kilometres away, with his staff, a few soldiers and one battery.<sup>87</sup> From Gaichur, on 9 June, Makhno addressed a long letter of resignation to Voroshilov, Trotsky, Lenin and Kamenev. He protested against the press campaign mounted against him. The Bolsheviks were accusing the partisans of all manner of crimes. They had allegedly abandoned their communications equipment to the advancing Whites, who then not only had access to Red Army messages, but sent insulting telegrams directly over the wire to their enemies.<sup>88</sup> In early May the Makhnovites had published a letter from Shkuro suggesting an alliance, with derisive comments.<sup>89</sup> The Bolshevik press unscrupulously used this letter and the fact of its appearance in the insurgent newspaper to suggest that negotiations were in fact actually taking place between the Whites and the partisans.<sup>90</sup> Makhno was particularly irritated by Trotsky's article "Makhnovshchina," which appeared in issue no.51 of *V puti* for 2 June, and which accused the insurgents of undermining Soviet power, without mentioning their role in the fight against Denikin.<sup>91</sup>

"I perfectly understand the central authorities' attitude towards

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87. Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.125; *TP* vol.1, p.459n; Denikin, *The White Army* (London, 1930), p.272.

88. Semanov, *op.cit.*, p.45.

89. "Denikin i general Shkuro protiv burzhuazii!" *Put' k svobode* no.3 (4 June 1919), p.2-3.

90. Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.103-104; as late as 1962 Fomin repeats this allegation (*op.cit.*, p.76).

91. Trotsky, *Kak vooruzhalas' revoliutsii* vol.2, book 1, p.189-191.

me," wrote Makhno, "[...] this hostile attitude [...] leads inevitably to the creation of an internal front, with the working masses, who have faith in the revolution, on both sides. I consider this situation to be an immense and unforgivable crime against the workers, and I believe that it is my duty to try to prevent it [...] I must leave the post that I occupy."<sup>92</sup>

Escaping arrest, Makhno departed with a cavalry detachment for Aleksandrovsk. He had previously arranged with commanders loyal to him that the bulk of his forces would remain under Red Army control. The Bolsheviks arrested and shot many of these Makhnovites, and also took the opportunity to destroy the anarchist communes.<sup>93</sup>

In curing the Red Army of the "partisan infection," Trotsky had risked the patient's death. Now that Makhno himself had gone, the Red Army commanders acted swiftly to absorb the units that he left behind. Some of them were ordered to Pavlograd to establish contact with Dybenko's forces. A new commander was appointed for the Guliai-Pole sector.<sup>94</sup> By 15 June the Ukrainian *Narkomvoen* could report that the Makhnovite units in the Grishino sector had been dispersed, and the partisans integrated into regular units.<sup>95</sup>

As the Red Army retreated from Ukraine in disorder, other heads

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92. Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.127; Kubanin suggests that Makhno was ordered to hand over command (*op.cit.*, p.77-78). The two accounts are not incompatible.

93. Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.128; Volin, *op.cit.*, p.543n.

94. *GVU* vol.2, p.131-132.

95. *Ibid.*, p.147-148.

were doomed to roll. On 16 June Antonov-Ovseenko was removed from his command, and on 21 June the Ukrainian front, for which he had laboured so long, was formally abolished by the Ukrainian TsIK.<sup>96</sup> Vatsetis had the penultimate word:

"[...] Makhno's brigade, which you sent to the Southern Front, played a traitors role, withdrawing to Guliai-Pole at the critical moment and opening the Southern Front for 80 versts to the free passage of enemy cavalry [...]"<sup>97</sup>

But by 3 July Vatsetis himself had been replaced as commander-in-chief of the Red Army by S. S. Kamenev, the victor over Kolchak.

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96. Antonov, *op.cit.*, vol.4, p.321-325; *TP* vol.1, p.577.

97. *Ibid.*, p.572-575.

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X.                   SUMMER 1919: THE LONG RETREAT

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The break between the Makhnovite partisans and the Bolsheviks in the spring of 1919 marked the end of a period of freedom for the multitude of leftist and anarchist intellectuals in Ukraine. The Red Army was under strong pressure from the White Guards. The political authorities were in no mood to tolerate criticism, least of all from anarchists, whom they held responsible for the looming military catastrophe.

On 11 June they seized Mikhailev-Pavlenko, a Makhnovite engineer, while he was in action against Denikin on an armoured train. They accused him of having distributed notices about the convening of Makhno's Regional Congress. The Khar'kov Cheka sentenced him to be shot, with six peasants whom they had also found guilty of the same offence.<sup>1</sup> It was not an isolated case. The Bolsheviks captured Iakov Oserov, Makhno's chief-of-staff, and condemned him to the same fate, with many others, including members of the insur-

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1. Nabat (7 July 1919); G. Maksimov, *The guillotine at work* (Chicago, 1940), p.423-425; Volin, *La révolution inconnue* (Paris, 1947), p.666-667.

gent RVS.<sup>2</sup> In mid-June 1919 they banned the newspaper *Odesskii Nabat* for publishing an article called "The Truth about Makhno," which attacked the Bolsheviks and defended the partisans.<sup>3</sup>

The Bolsheviks themselves could do no more than try to cut their losses to the minimum and gather strength for a counter-offensive. Denikin was attacking along a massive front, in a two-pronged thrust that he hoped would take him to Moscow. The left horn, consisting of the Volunteer Army, aimed at Khar'kov and thence at central Russia, while the right horn, the Army of the Caucasus, was to strike at Tsaritsyn and the central Volga region in an attempt to contact Kolchak's forces in Siberia.<sup>4</sup>

With the help of British advisors, and equipped with British tanks and aeroplanes, as well as British arms and ammunition, Denikin's forces began to sweep aside everything in their path. In the eastern sector the Caucasian Army advanced to within 65 kilometres of the city of Astrakhan; in the west the Volunteer Army captured Odessa without heavy losses. General Wrangel, on

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2. Minute no.146 of the Collegium of the Ukrainian Cheka, printed in Maksimov, *op.cit.*, p.435; cf. Volin, *op.cit.*, p.574.

3. "Pravda o Makhno," *Odesskii Nabat* (16 June 1919), p.1; *Nabat* (15 July 1919); Maksimov, *op.cit.*, p.431-432.

4. But the high point of Kolchak's military success had passed in March and April. By June the initiative in Siberia was back in the hands of the Red Army, which was advancing eastwards. Admiral A. V. Kolchak was "Supreme Ruler" of Russia and commander of the White forces in Siberia, but, like Denikin, he was out of his depth in the complex politics of the Civil War. His regime was characterised by brutality, incompetence, and its reliance on the goodwill of the Czech Legion. See e.g. D. Footman, *Civil war in Russia* (London, 1961), p.211-244; S. P. Mel'gunov, *Tragediia admirala Kolchaka* (Belgrade, 1920; repr. Paris, 1930-1931), 3 vols. in 4.



the Volga front, managed to take Tsaritsyn despite Voroshilov's and Stalin's massive counter-offensive.<sup>5</sup>

The successes of the White Guards in the Donbass were unexpected. Two major factors contributed to the Bolshevik rout. The first, as we have seen, was the inability of the commissars and the Cheka to keep the peasant insurgent armies of Grigor'ev and Makhno in the field against Denikin's attacks. The second was the intelligent use that the White generals made of their superior cavalry and of the railway system. Thus they gained a tactical advantage that they exploited in probing for weaknesses in the Bolshevik defence. Denikin's successes in Ukraine permitted him to deny the economic resources of the Donbass to both the Bolsheviks and to the Ukrainian nationalists in the north-west.<sup>6</sup>

The White leadership did not agree on the wisdom of committing so many troops to Ukraine. Wrangel still favoured moving extra forces to the Volga, to contact Kolchak's army, and others argued with prescience in favour of consolidating the area already con-

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5. Lenin used Stalin throughout the Civil War as a counter-balance to Trotsky. There was fierce antagonism between Stalin, Voroshilov, and other members of the Tsaritsyn army command on one hand, and Trotsky on the other, over questions of tactics and strategy. The ill-feeling on these issues persisted for many years. See I. Deutscher, *Stalin: a political biography*, rev. ed. (Harmondsworth, 1966), p.203-211.

6. In the summer the Directory joined forces with the Galician army which had been driven from the territory of the former Western Ukraine by the Poles. In June 1919 the combined army began to advance on Kiev, taking advantage of the Bolsheviks' defeats.

quered before continuing the advance.<sup>7</sup>

In any event, the Red Army was unable to hold back the White advance. The Bolsheviks began to evacuate as many men and as much materiel - especially rolling stock - as they could save. Although the military prospect for the revolution was bleak, several political factors weighed against Denikin's long-term success. His acknowledgement of the inept Admiral Kolchak as Supreme Commander of the White Armies was a major mistake. Despite this, it did produce a temporary impression of political and military unity among the anti-communist forces in Russia. Denikin's most disastrous military error was the ill-timed and ill-fated order of 3 July 1919 for the "Drive on Moscow." This committed him and his best troops to risk everything in a do-or-die thrust for the Bolshevik capital by way of Kursk, Orel' and Tula.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, other forces were to advance in parallel thrusts to the west. This romantic gesture was hard to justify in military terms, and was indefensible on any other practical grounds, although it may have seemed psychologically sound at the time. Denikin's army was already dispersed over a wider area than it could effectively control, along an extended and thinly-held front.

But Denikin's other political errors were as much a result of his

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7. W. H. Chamberlin, *The Russian revolution*, new ed. (New York, 1965), vol.2, p.244-245.

8. The text of the order is printed by Denikin, *Ocherki russkoi smuty* (Paris-Berlin, 1921-1926), vol.5, p.108-109; English translation in Chamberlin, *op.cit.*, vol.2, p.485-486.

character and that of his movement, as of any specific decision. Thinking always in terms of a "united, great and indivisible Russia", he ignored the depth of nationalist feeling in a narrow but influential sector of the population of the borderlands. Believing in such grand abstractions as freedom, justice and the rule of law, he refused to take overtly political decisions, and instead left "politics" to the shady intriguers who followed his camp. He relied heavily on a deeply unpopular advisor, I. P. Romanovskii, who was distrusted by virtually all his other officers.<sup>9</sup>

Admittedly, in military terms to have stood still would have been fatal. Other writers have pointed out, with the benefit of hindsight, that a shorter front and a single thrust towards Moscow might well have brought better results. As it was, the Army of the Caucasus stalled outside Astrakhan. The eastern horn of the White Army could not take advantage of the capture of Tsaritsyn to contact Kolchak's forces, who had lost their momentum long since. In north-western Ukraine Denikin's forces confronted the combined armies of the Directory and the Galicians around Kiev. Despite a considerable community of interest the two sides could not agree to cooperate against the Bolsheviks. Fighting broke out between them, weakening Denikin's left flank.

The "Moscow order" forced the Bolsheviks into intensified activi-

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9. For a character sketch of Denikin, who was only in his late forties at this time, see W. Bruce Lincoln, *Red victory: a history of the Russian civil war* (New York, 1989), p.205-209.

ty. In Kiev, for example, they held meetings, conferences and street demonstrations, and produced wall-newspapers, while the regular newspapers proclaimed the crisis. Those who were not for the Bolsheviks, were held to be against them. The party proclaimed its slogans - "All against Denikin!", "All to fight the Ukrainian counter-revolutionaries!", "All to fight the bandit Makhno!" The Bolsheviks considered that the Makhnovites were objectively helping Denikin, although they professed to be fighting against him (and were actually doing so). A poster of the time showed a giant Red Army soldier with a dwarfish Makhno hooked onto the end of his bayonet.<sup>10</sup>

When Makhno defected from the Bolshevik side, it was not an unplanned action. He had already arranged with a few loyal commanders that they would not break ranks within the Red Army, but would wait for his summons to rejoin the insurgent forces. In this way he apparently hoped to make a clean break with the Bolshevik command, to avoid accusations of abandoning the front to the counter-revolutionaries, and to ensure that he retained long term control of his forces. In the event he was not short of recruits. Denikin's repressive policies, both in restoring the old order and in forbidding any manifestations of Ukrainian nationalism, drove large numbers of adventurers into his ranks.<sup>11</sup>

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10. A. Hak [pseud.], *Vid Huliai-Polia do N'iu-Iorku: spohady* (Neu Ulm, 1973), p.104.

11. P. A. Arshinov, *Istoriia makhnovskogo dvizheniia* (Berlin, 1923), p.130-131.

Many peasants had by this time become suspicious of all the atamans and all the White generals - Grigor'ev, Makhno, Denikin, or anyone else. They were unwilling either to believe them or to take up arms for them.<sup>12</sup> The brutality of the White occupation forced even these doubters to flee, and Makhno's detachments provided a rare place of refuge. In Guliai-Pole especially, the *Denikintsy* plundered, raped, burned and pillaged in revenge against the peasant movement that had stood in armed opposition to them since the end of 1918.<sup>13</sup>

Initially, Makhno had attempted to make a stand at the Kichkas bridge across the Dnepr, but the Whites outnumbered him. He was forced to retreat across the river to the right bank in the direction of Elisavetgrad. The Red 14th Army, which had been created from the remains of the Ukrainian 2nd Army at the time of the dissolution of the Ukrainian front, was cut off to the south, in the region of Krivoi Rog. It was trying to push north under the young commander I. E. Iakir. In the end Iakir managed, in a spectacular coup, to rescue several divisions from the closing trap and marched them nearly 500 kilometres to the north. Makhno seized the chance to try to add to his forces, inciting mutiny

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12. See for example a resolution of the peasants of Kremenchug region, *Kommunist* (18 July 1919), reprinted in *GVU* vol.2, p.239.

13. Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.131.

among the Bolshevik troops and sabotaging their trains.<sup>14</sup>

Meanwhile the Makhnovites had also assimilated the *Grigor'evshchina*. After Grigor'ev's revolt against Soviet power, the ataman had begun to lose influence. His army dwindled because of the attacks of the Red Army, and the disillusionment of his soldiers. He continued to harass the Red Army on the right bank, mainly in Kherson province around Znamenka, Aleksandriia and Elisavetgrad. Eventually, he was reduced to raiding small garrisons and wrecking railway lines.<sup>15</sup> The Bolshevik authorities put a price on his head. They were unable to do anything more than contain the rebellion, which was in any case of diminishing concern to them as the advancing White forces drove them northwards.

On the other hand the Grigor'ev movement remained an important problem for the Makhnovites. Apart from the ideological hostility that existed - at least on the Makhnovite side - towards other, impure, and counterrevolutionary movements, both bands were by this time operating in roughly the same territory. It must have been obvious to Makhno and his staff that if they were to have a clear line of retreat westwards, something would have to be done about the rival group that blocked their path. Makhno therefore took steps to eliminate Grigor'ev and to absorb his troops into

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14. V. V. Popov says that anarchist agitators were most active in north Tauride and Kherson provinces - "Dlia etogo nado byt' bol'shevikom," in P. I. Iakir and Iu. A. Geller (eds.), *Komandarm Iakir: vospominaiia družei i soratnikov* (Moscow, 1963), p.86-87; cf. I. E. Iakir, *Vospominaniia o grazhdanskoi voine* (Moscow, 1957), p.35 ff.

15. Arshinov, op.cit., p.132.

the insurgent army.<sup>16</sup>

There is some confusion about the actual details of the liquidation of the leaders of the *Grigor'evshchina*.<sup>17</sup> According to one version, Makhno called yet another congress, of insurgents from the provinces of Ekaterinoslav, Kherson and the Tauride, to discuss a programme of action for all the partisans of Ukraine. Both Grigor'ev and Makhno were scheduled speakers. The conference met in the village of Sentovo, near Aleksandriia, on 27 July 1919, in the presence of about 20,000 peasant soldiers.

Grigor'ev spoke first, asserting that the Bolsheviks were the real enemies of the working masses. They had to be driven from Ukraine by any means that came to hand, even if it meant making common cause with Denikin. He himself was ready to make such an alliance with the Whites. After the Bolsheviks had been finished off, it would be possible to review the situation afresh.

In Makhno's eyes this speech sealed Grigor'ev's fate. Speaking next, he declared that the only possible kind of struggle against Bolshevism was a revolutionary one, and that to join forces with counterrevolutionary generals was criminal adventurism. To advocate such a course of action was to behave like an enemy of the

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16. *Ibid.*, p.132-133.

17. The most widely disseminated version is that of Arshinov (*op.cit.*, p.133-134). M. Kubanin, *Makhnovshchina* (Leningrad, [1927], p.81-83, prints A. Chubenko's account, naming himself as the assassin; see also Makhno, "Makhnovshchina i antisemitizm," *Delo truda* no.30-31 (1927), p.18.

people. Other Makhnovites also argued along these lines. In addition Makhno demanded that Grigor'ev should account for the pogrom that he had organised in May in the city of Elisavetgrad, and for his other anti-semitic speeches and actions. "Such scoundrels as Grigor'ev are a disgrace to all Ukrainian insurgents," declared Makhno, "They cannot be allowed among the ranks of honest revolutionary toilers!" At this point shooting broke out among the two groups of leaders. Within a few minutes, Grigor'ev and his aides were dead.<sup>18</sup>

Another version tells a slightly less dramatic story. According to F. Meleshko, Makhno met Grigor'ev near Aleksandriia to discuss unification of the two bands. Although Grigor'ev had a large contingent with him, Makhno accused him of planning to betray the revolution by joining Denikin. When Grigor'ev tried to defend himself, the Makhnovites gunned him down, with his chief of staff. They then buried him with full military honours.<sup>19</sup>

After Grigor'ev's death, Makhno, Chubenko and other anarchist leaders addressed the assembly, assuming responsibility for ex-

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18. Arshinov, op.cit., p.133-134.

19. F. Meleshko, "Nestor Makhno ta ioho anarkhia," *Litopys chervonoi kalyny* no.3 (1935) p.9-11. The important issue is not *who* killed Grigor'ev, but whether Makhno *planned to kill him before the meeting*. If Makhno was prepared to cooperate with the *ataman*, and only shot him on impulse, then anarchist claims for his revolutionary consistency would be shown to be baseless.



ecuting the ataman.<sup>20</sup> They offered the partisans the chance to join the insurrectionary army. The next day, on 28 July, the general assembly passed a resolution, which set out in full the political - if not the military - reasons for the executions.

"The assassination of the Ataman Grigoriev on the 27th of July in the village of Sentovo, circuit of Alexandria, Government of Kher-son, by the ideal leader of the insurrectionists, the Batko Makhno, must be regarded as a necessary and required historical fact, for Grigoriev's policy, acts and aims were counter-revolutionary and had the main purpose of supporting Denikin and other counter-revolutionists, as is proved by the Jewish pogroms and the arming of the thugs. The union of his army with that of Batko Makhno is explained as being necessary in order to take away from him all the honest freebooters who are fighting for revolutionary ideas and follow him only because of their ignorance.

We cherish the hope that now no one will be found who will sanction Jewish pogroms, and that the working people will in their honesty rise against the counter-revolutionists like Denikin and others, as well as against the Bolsheviki and communists who are establishing a dictatorship by force with the help of mercenary Magyars, Chinese and Letts. The followers of Makhno regard it as their revolutionary duty to take upon themselves the historical consequences of this assassination."<sup>21</sup>

**The Makhnovshchina and Anti-Semitism**

Drop this  
(p. 307-25)

A major point of dissension between Makhno and Grigor'ev was the question of the latter's attitude towards Jews. But the wave of pogroms in Ukraine from 1917 to 1921, which reached its highest level of violence in 1919, was not the first outbreak of anti-

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20. This appears repeatedly as a claim to merit - see Arshinov, loc.cit.; Makhno, "Une réponse au defenseur de Petlura," *Le Libertaire* (28 October 1927), p.1; E. Heifetz, *The slaughter of the Jews in the Ukraine in 1919* (New York, 1921), p.71-72.

21. Copy of a copy of the resolution from Protocol no.4 of the Congress, printed in Heifetz, loc.cit. The translation is clumsy, and contains errors (e.g. Septovo for Sentovo, Vitko for Bat'ko); but Arshinov states that the proceedings of the Congress were lost as early as 1920 (op.cit., p.134n).

Semitism in the area. It was undoubtedly the most severe.<sup>22</sup>

In the 1880s, in the confusion after the assassination of Tsar Alexander II, rioters had made violent attacks on Jewish communities in southern and eastern Ukraine. They had killed, beaten and raped individuals, and burned their houses and property, with the implicit connivance of the Tsarist authorities.<sup>23</sup> Ironically, the outcome of these attacks was the introduction of a series of discriminatory laws. These aimed at preventing Jews from holding prominent public or commercial positions, from gaining admission to secondary schools or to universities, and from residing freely in cities such as Moscow.

The second series of pogroms occurred during the 1905 revolution and the events leading up to it. The Tsarist government permitted the reactionary press to slander Jews freely and to represent them as conspirators against Russian society. As early as 1903 a savage pogrom in Kishinev resulted in over 50 dead and hundreds injured. In 1904 and 1905 other serious attacks were made on the Jewish population in such places as Ekaterinoslav, Nikolaev, Kremenchug, and Aleksandriia. By far the most serious pogrom took

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22. For a recent collection of essays on the three waves of late nineteenth and early twentieth century pogroms, which includes a comparative perspective on racist violence in the United States of America during the same period, see J. Klier and S. Lambroza (eds.), *Pogroms: anti-Jewish violence in modern Russian history* (Cambridge, 1991).

23. There had also, of course, been earlier attacks on Jews in the 17th and 18th centuries, under *Hetman* Bogdan Khmel'nyts'kyi and during the Haidamak rebellion.

place in Odessa, where 300 Jews died and many more were injured. Altogether, there are records of nearly 700 individual pogroms in the towns and villages of the south during this period, costing over 800 lives.<sup>24</sup>

It was the government which inspired these attacks, and which ordered local officials not to interfere, and to protect the *pogromchiki* from Jewish defence units. The Tsarist secret police themselves printed anonymous leaflets calling for attacks on Jews. By 1906 the authorities were participating actively instead of passively in the pogroms. At Bialystok in June that year, the police opened fire on Jews who were already under attack by a mob, resulting in a death toll of eighty. In Siedlce in August soldiers and policemen themselves committed a pogrom.

The Duma and other government agencies sent commissions of enquiry, that clearly established the connivance of the autocracy in the wave of pogroms. The main result of the violence was to stimulate massive Jewish emigration to Palestine, Western Europe, and the United States. Once the authorities had suppressed the first Russian revolution, and reaction was firmly in control again, the need for a scapegoat disappeared. Organised violence against Jews ceased for a time.

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24. There were 64 pogroms in towns and 626 in villages; about 660 of these took place in Ukraine. There were no pogroms in Poland or in Lithuania. (*Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. "Pogroms"). The total number of deaths was estimated by one contemporary historian to be much higher - around 3,500 to 4,000 (M. Pokrovskii, *Russkaia istoriia* [Moscow, 1931], vol.3, p.61, quoted by Chamberlin, *Russian revolution*, vol.1, p.53).

By 1917 the disintegration of the old social order had reached an advanced stage. A third wave of pogroms began, which all commentators agree was the most severe, both in scope and in degree. By the end of the year several pogroms had taken place in villages near the German front. It was here that the Russian army was breaking up into small groups of soldiers who drank and looted at will, often attacking Jews in the process. These pogroms were merely a forewarning of worse to come.

Ironically, it was Red Army troops who perpetrated the first serious pogroms involving loss of life during this period. The attacks occurred while the Bolsheviks were retreating from Ukraine under pressure from the Austrians and Germans in 1918. According to one source, the pogroms took place under the slogan "Strike at the bourgeoisie and Jews!"<sup>25</sup> Almost immediately the Bolsheviks introduced stern punishment for *pogromchiki* in the ranks of the Red Army. They mounted a barrage of propaganda against anti-Semitism. Individual offenders were shot. Units found to have been involved in pogroms were disbanded. By 1920, because of these measures, Jews in Ukraine generally regarded the Red Army as the only force that would protect them. Bolshevik troops did continue, in a few isolated cases, to commit pogroms.

In early 1919 the Bolsheviks drove the Ukrainian army of the Directory from Kiev. During the retreat Ukrainian nationalist units

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25. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, loc.cit.

carried out organised attacks on the Jewish populations of Zhitomir and Berdichev. By far the most serious attack was the notorious pogrom at Proskurov on 15 February 1919. In the space of a few hours, 1,700 Jews were murdered.<sup>26</sup> Soldiers stabbed most of the victims to death with bayonets. The Petliurist commander Semesenko, who is generally held responsible for this atrocity, had earlier issued a proclamation calling on the population to remain calm. He called this advice to the particular attention of Jews.<sup>27</sup> The proclamation went on:

"You are a people hated by all nations. And yet you bring such confusion among the baptised. Do you really not want to live?"<sup>28</sup>

The next day a further 600 Jews were massacred in a neighbouring town. Petliura and his commanders were neither able nor willing to punish the soldiers who had committed these crimes. It must have appeared to the *pogromchiki* in the nationalist ranks that they had a free hand. The Jewish population of Ukraine, in return, held Petliura personally responsible for the massacres and

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26. Idem. This abbreviated account of the history of the pogroms is broadly based on Yehuda Slutsky's, which is also available in the collection *Anti-Semitism* (Jerusalem, 1974).

27. J. S. Reshetar puts the death toll at over 3,000 (*The Ukrainian revolution* [Princeton, 1952], p.254-255).

28. Heifetz, op.cit., p.40.

many continue to do so even today.<sup>29</sup>

Throughout 1919 social disruption was widespread in Ukraine. Peasant gangs roamed the countryside, led by adventurers who were either anti-Semitic themselves, or did not care to restrain anti-Semitic outbursts among their followers. There is little point in listing all the *atamans* here. One such gang, that of Grigor'ev, was responsible for an estimated 40 pogroms and 6,000 deaths during its brief career in the summer of 1919. Multiplied a hundred-fold, such attacks were being mounted throughout Ukraine.

As the White Guards advanced towards Moscow through the Caucasus and Ukraine, they also proclaimed as their motto "Strike at Jews and Save Russia!"<sup>30</sup> This amounted to an open invitation which the officers of the White Army lost little time in accepting. White soldiers attacked Jewish communities in every town that fell into their hands. At Fastov, in September 1919, about 1,500 men, women and children perished. This was only one example among many. Similar massacres took place in Siberia and in Belorussia, in areas held by other White Guard generals, and often under the

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29. For an example of the intensity with which subsequent polemics on this subject have been conducted, see Taras Hunczak, "A reappraisal of Symon Petliura and Ukrainian-Jewish relations, 1917-1921," *Jewish Social Studies* vol.31, no.3 (1969), p.163-83; Zosa Szajkowski, "A rebuttal," *op.cit.*, p.184-213; Hunczak's reply, *op.cit.*, vol.32, no.3 (1970), p.246-53; and Szajkowski's further comments, *op.cit.*, p.253-63.

30. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, *loc.cit.*

eyes of Western advisors.<sup>31</sup>

By this time Jewish communities in many areas had formed self-defence units. The most famous and successful of these paramilitary groups was the Jewish Militia for War against Pogroms. Based in Odessa, it effectively prevented pogroms against the large Jewish population there.<sup>32</sup>

These units, like the Mennonite Selbstschutz bands, were not always large enough or competent enough to defeat the forces that attacked them. It was not until Soviet power was firmly established that the wave of pogroms finally ended. In the nature of things it is impossible to establish any accurate figures for the total number of victims of these massacres. There were at least 60,000 persons killed and many more injured in about 1,200 separate attacks on over 500 towns and villages.<sup>33</sup>

Clearly, anti-Semitism was an extremely widespread phenomenon amongst Ukrainians during the Civil War. What then is the nature of the evidence about the *pogromchiki* - White or Red, partisan or nationalist, Ukrainian, Polish or Russian? Investigation of the

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31. See, *inter alia*, Z. Szajkowski, *Kolchak, Jews and the American intervention in northern Russia and Siberia, 1918-1920* (New York, privately published, 1977) which indicts the British, the Americans and the Japanese for endorsing White anti-Semitism (p.93-101, 105-107).

32. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, loc.cit.

33. Idem. According to another source, 891 pogroms can be categorised as follows: 430 by the atamans (Grigor'ev, Makhno, Struk, etc.); 170 by Denikin; 192 by Petliura; 99 by Bolshevik or Polish forces (J. H. Hertz, *A decade of woe and hope* [London, 1923], p.11).

pogroms started as they were still being committed. Such intrepid researchers as Eliyohu Tcherikower and his colleagues collected masses of data, including eye-witness accounts, and much of this material still exists.<sup>34</sup>

It was clear to distant observers even then, that Denikin's forces were responsible for some Jewish deaths. Winston Churchill had been brought into the British War Cabinet by Lloyd George when he was promoted from Munitions Minister to Secretary of State for War after the signing of the armistice, and was pursuing a one-man anti-Bolshevik crusade. In September 1919, he cabled Denikin personally urging him to take practical measures to prevent massacres of Jews in the "liberated districts," and to issue a proclamation against anti-Semitism.<sup>35</sup> A month earlier, in August, a trade union congress in the south of Russia had passed a joint resolution condemning pogroms. It accused Denikin of issuing a proclamation calling for attacks on Jews.<sup>36</sup>

The evidence against Petliura and his supporters is equally damning, coming from a range of witnesses who could not be expected to agree on very much else. Petliura, unlike Denikin, has inspired impassioned defenders, even after his death. For example,

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34. However, much of it remains unused.

35. Winston S. Churchill, *The world crisis: the aftermath* (London, 1929), p.225.

36. B. Kolesnikov, *Professional'noe dvizhenie i kontrrevoliutsiia* (Khar'kov, 1923), p.402-403.



most of Oleksandr Shul'gyn's tendentious volume on the "Red nightmare" in Ukraine is an attempt to demonstrate Petliurist innocence of anti-Semitism.<sup>37</sup> Le Comité Commémoratif Simon Petlura published a collection of documents in France, with similar polemical objectives, in the same year.<sup>38</sup>

Several years later, on 25 May 1926, Petliura was assassinated in Paris by a Jewish man, Schwarzbard. Schwarzbard's subsequent acquittal by the French courts, which accepted his claim that he was avenging the victims of the pogroms, aroused considerable controversy at the time. The crucial point is that since the court believed Schwarzbard's defence, it presumably also found Petliura guilty of anti-Semitism by implication.<sup>39</sup>

Petliura, as a social-democrat, knew the value of liberal phrasemaking. It is easy to point to various noble sentiments in defence of Jews in his writings and speeches. As early as 1907 he had written in the preface to Chirikov's play *Evrei* [The Jews] of his "warm feelings for the oppressed." In the same text he mentions his "hatred for the [Tsarist] regime under which such sav-

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37. *L'Ukraine et le cauchemar rouge: les massacres en Ukraine* (Paris, 1927). See especially chapter 6, The difficulties which Ataman Petliura and the Ukrainian government had to overcome in their struggle against pogroms, and chapter 7, Measures taken by the Ukrainian government and by Simon Petliura against pogroms.

38. *Documents sur les pogromes en Ukraine et l'assassinat de Simon Petlura à Paris, 1917-1921-1926* (Paris, 1927).

39. For an account of the assassination and trial see Yosef Nedava, "Some aspects of individual terrorism: a case study of the Schwartzbard affair," *Terrorism* vol.3, no.1/2 (1979), p.69-80. For contemporary reports, see the extensive coverage in e.g. *The New York Times* (18-30 October 1927).

age atrocities [as pogroms ...] are possible."<sup>40</sup>

Similarly, pro-Petliurist writers have made much of Order no. 131 of 26 August 1919, which forbade pogroms and promised "the punishment that they deserve" for those who disobeyed.<sup>41</sup> Nonetheless, the facts of the massacres at Proskurov, Berdichev and Zhitomir are difficult for Petliura's defenders to explain away. In the latter case, according to the British consul in Kiev, the Zhitomir soviet, which had a substantial Jewish membership, refused to recognise the Directory as the legitimate government of Ukraine. The Directory then sent a punitive expedition to the town (about 140 kilometres from Kiev) to enforce its writ. The detachment plundered all Jewish houses and shops in the town, and killed about 200 people.<sup>42</sup>

Against this record of atrocity can be set, as we have seen, some half-hearted proclamations, the appropriation of several million rubles for compensation to the victims of the pogroms, and almost no serious attempts to bring the criminals to justice.<sup>43</sup>

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40. Quoted by F. Pigido, "Ukrainian-Jewish relations during the revolution, 1917-1921," *Ukrainian Review* vol.5 (1957), p.85n.

41. Shul'gyn, *op.cit.*, p.173-175; J. Batchinsky et al., *The Jewish pogroms in the Ukraine* (Washington D.C., 1919), p.15-16.

42. Report by the British vice-consul in Kiev, quoted by Harold Fisher, *The famine in Soviet Russia, 1919-1923* (New York, 1971 reprint), p.258n.

43. Reshetar, *op.cit.*, p.255; Arnold Margolin, a prominent member of the Rada and of the Directory, also appears to have regarded Petliura as personally anti-Semitic (*From a political diary* [New York, 1946], p.38-39).

The Bolshevik record is also far from clean. Despite this, a clear distinction can be made between Petliura's occasional and vague proclamations on the one hand, and the continuous propagan-da campaign against pogroms in Soviet newspapers, wall posters, and proclamations, on the other. Petliura took no action. The Red Army meted out severe punishments.

The Bolshevik press constantly repeated that it was class, not "race" that divided exploiter from exploited. The Jews, like everybody else, belonged to the bourgeoisie or the proletariat according to their position in the process of production. A Jewish worker was therefore just as much a victim of the capitalist system as his Christian or Muslim co-worker. Similarly, Jewish capitalists were the enemies of the revolution not because they were Jews but because they were exploiters.

Against this background of pervasive anti-Jewish feeling among the peasantry, and of declarations of "racial" equality of varying degrees of sincerity, we must consider the distinct questions of Makhno's personal anti-Semitism and of the Makhnovites' anti-Semitism. Several anecdotes, quoted by different writers, show that Makhno was apparently free from anti-Jewish feeling.

The most famous of these is the story of the incident at Verkhni Tokmak railway station, near Guliai-Pole. In early May 1919, about the 4th or 5th, Makhno passed through the station on his way to meet Kamenev, who had come from Khar'kov to see him. A

large poster was on display, reading "Death to Jews! Save the Revolution! Long live Bat'ko Makhno!" Makhno summoned the partisan who had put the poster up, and when he confessed his guilt, had him shot immediately, despite his otherwise excellent revolutionary record.<sup>44</sup>

According to Arshinov, there were several incidents of small groups of Makhnovite partisans looting Jewish houses in the summer of 1919, during the long retreat towards Uman'. The Makhnovites discovered that the handful of men responsible had all formerly belonged to the Grigor'ev insurgent army. Arshinov claims that after this, all former members of the Grigor'evshchina were discharged from the Makhnovite ranks as unreliable elements.<sup>45</sup>

It seems to be widely believed among at least some students of the Russian revolution that Makhno was personally anti-Jewish. It is possible that this belief was partially fostered by Joseph Kessel's extraordinary short novel *Makhno et sa juive*.<sup>46</sup> The story tells of Makhno's falling in love with a Jewish woman called Sonia, despite his alleged anti-Semitic feelings.

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44. Arshinov, op.cit., p.208. Alexander Berkman tells the same story, with the significant difference that the slogan was "Kill the Jews! Save Russia! Long live Makhno!" Berkman's source was Iosif "Emigrant" who told him the anecdote during his visit to the Ukraine (*The Bolshevik myth* [London, 1925], p.188).

45. Arshinov, loc.cit.

46. First published in *Révue Hebdomadaire* (27 February 1926), p.419-444; (6 March 1926), p.22-48. It subsequently appeared as a separate volume (Paris, 1926). An English translation is available in Kessel's collection *The pure in heart* (London, 1928), p.199-259.

"Most anti-Semites I have known were so from conviction," writes the narrator of the story, "But with Makhno it was in the blood [...] I cannot imagine there could exist a more convinced exterminator of Jews than Makhno."<sup>47</sup>

Many biographical details in Kessel's work come from Gerasimenko's highly unreliable biography.<sup>48</sup> Volin's assessment, with which it is hard to disagree, was that "there's not a word of truth in the whole thing. It's a fantasy, pure fiction."<sup>49</sup>

Accusations of anti-Semitism antedated Kessel's work, which merely served to spread the image of Makhno as *pogromchik* to a wider audience. As early as the autumn of 1919 the Directory's diplomatic representative in the United States had written to the *New York Globe*, the *New York Evening Post*, and various Jewish newspapers in Philadelphia and Boston, inaccurately describing Makhno's fickleness in transferring his support from the Reds to the Whites. "While changing his allegiance," wrote the nationalists' ambassador, "he never stopped harassing Jews."<sup>50</sup>

Similarly, in a book published in 1921 and based on materials assembled by the All-Ukrainian Relief Committee for the Victims of the Pogroms, under the auspices of the Red Cross, Elias Heifetz

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47. *The pure in heart*, p. 252.

48. N. V. Gerasimenko, "Makhno," *Istoriik i Sovremennik* vol.3 (1922), p.151-201, later republished in book form as *Bat'ko Makhno: memuary belogvardeitsa* (Moscow, Leningrad, 1928).

49. *Le Libertaire* (22 April 1927), p.2.

50. J. Batchinsky, *op.cit.*, p.9-10.

(I. Ia. Kheifets) wrote that Makhno's forces had been "guilty of the maddest excesses" against Jews. Heifetz alleged that Makhno had killed and tortured thousands of individuals, and he was "now for, now against pogroms, depending upon the political situation of the moment."<sup>51</sup>

In 1923 the British Chief Rabbi repeated the accusation yet again. He described Makhno, with Denikin, Petliura and Grigor'ev as the leaders of "wild hordes [...] raging like wild beasts amid the defenceless Jewries of South Russia."<sup>52</sup> The British observer J. E. Hodgson, who worked with Denikin, even attributed the split between Makhno and the Bolsheviks to the former's "record as a hater of Jews, [which] caused the Soviet powers, which were strongly permeated with Jewish influence, to look askance at his offers of help."<sup>53</sup>

Many Western scholars continued to accept this view of Makhno and his forces, even after the Second World War. In 1969 a leading American political scientist could write that "the Cohn-Bendits [in their book *Obsolete communism*] do not mention that Nestor Makhno was an anti-Semite. I do not blame them for this, since

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51. Heifetz, op.cit., p.72-73.

52. Hertz, op.cit., p.5.

53. *With Denikin's armies, 1918-1920* (London, 1932), p.116.

they possibly do not know it."<sup>54</sup>

A widely held view is not necessarily a correct one. None of these writers, even those who were contemporaries of Makhno's, choose to name the place or date of a single one of these alleged Makhnovite pogroms. Yet Hertz, the Chief Rabbi, mentions 891 pogroms committed during the Civil War, 170 by Denikin, 192 by Petliura, 99 by Polish or Bolshevik forces, and 430 by insurgent gangs.<sup>55</sup> Heifetz gives a detailed analysis of pogroms by the atamans (Grigor'ev, Struk, Golub, Iatsenko) in which Makhno's name does not appear.<sup>56</sup>

In another section of his work he lists pogroms by province. According to this tabulation only one pogrom can be documented in Ekaterinoslav guberniia. The vast majority took place in Kiev, Volhynia and Podolia, areas of significant nationalist influence.<sup>57</sup> If Makhno really did summon "his people to murder and exterminate Jews" as Heifetz alleges, then he and they travelled

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54. Seymour Martin Lipset, "The left, the Jews and Israel," *Encounter* vol.33, no.12 (December 1969), p.33. The remark drew a retort from Luis Mercier-Vega, denying Makhno's anti-Semitism (*Encounter* vol.34 no.6 [June 1970], p.96) and the sentence was omitted when Lipset's essay was reprinted in his *Revolution and counterrevolution: change and persistence in social structures* rev. ed. (New York, 1970).

55. Hertz, op.cit., p.11.

56. Heifetz, op.cit., p.177-9.

57. Ibid., p.176-7.

far to commit their crimes.<sup>58</sup>

This paucity of evidence contrasts sharply with the abundance of names, dates and places recorded for Makhno's ill-treatment of Mennonite German colonists. Arguably, Ukrainian peasants perceived that most of these German-speaking and Protestant settlers belonged to the kulak class stratum, and were thus class enemies. There is no doubt that the Mennonites suffered severely at the hands of the partisans. The Makhnovites forced the women to cook German food for them, stole their horses, killed many individuals (and not only members of the Selbstschutz), burned churches, and brought disease and death to the settlements that they visited.<sup>59</sup> For various reasons, there was much less contemporary interest, either inside Russia or abroad, in the fate of these unfortunates. Nobody except their co-religionists paid any attention to them.

Individuals and committees from a variety of political positions, on the other hand, investigated and documented the fate of Jews. Yet "documentation on anti-Semitism in Jewish archives has never cited proof that the *Makhnovshchina* committed pogroms."<sup>60</sup>

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58. Ibid., p.74. Other such texts also fail to produce documentary accounts of any Makhnovite pogroms, e.g. the Federation of Ukrainian Jews, *The Ukraine terror and the Jewish peril* (London, 1921).

59. For details, including dates and the names of victims, see Gerhard Toews, "Schönfeld, Werde- und Opfergang einer deutschen Siedlung in der Ukraine," *Der Bote* [Saskatoon] (28 December 1965), p.9-10.

60. Michel Kovetzki, letter to the author, 27 June 1973.



In exile, Makhno devoted considerable energy to an attempt to clear his name, refuting in detail the accusations of his detractors. Ironically, it is Makhno himself who furnishes a date and a place where a pogrom was committed by the insurgents. He admits that, for example, peasant soldiers under his command killed about 30 Jews at Gor'kaia in May 1919. They committed this crime after they discovered the bodies of two Makhnovites, allegedly assassinated by members of the Jewish colony. Makhno had the six insurgents responsible for this pogrom shot. He points out that the commander was a Bolshevik commissar.<sup>61</sup>

In other writings he attacked Kubanin, Arbatov, Gerasimenko and Kessel for accusing him of anti-Jewish feeling.<sup>62</sup> An important point in his defence, and one that he and his advocates have made much of, was that many Jewish partisans fought in the Makhnovite ranks. The vice-president of the insurgent RVS was Jewish, a certain Kogan. There were at least three Jewish members of the Army's cultural and educational section, all from the "Nabat" Confederation. In addition, Jewish workers manned a Makhnovite artillery battery. According to Arshinov, Denikin's attack on Guliai-Pole in June 1919 wiped out the entire unit.<sup>63</sup>

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61. Makhno, "Une réponse au défenseur de Petlura," loc.cit.; Arshinov, op.cit., p.207.

62. Contre Kubanin, see his *Makhnovshchina i ee vcherashnie soiuzniki-bol'sheviki* (Paris, 1928) p.21-8; contre Gerasimenko et al. see "K evriam vsekh stran," *Delo Truda* no.23/24 (1927) p.8-10.

63. Arshinov, op.cit., p.205-207.

Makhno made many speeches in which he condemned pogroms as counter-revolutionary; he also issued some printed proclamations.<sup>64</sup> In exile he continued to deny that he was a pogromchik. Other anarchists also came to his defence.<sup>65</sup>

The positive evidence is not at all conclusive. Most of it comes from anarchist sources, and none of the contemporary broad-sheets are now available. Even if they were, of course, it might be argued that Makhno, like Petliura, could have been a hypocrite. He could easily have condemned anti-Semitism with words while killing Jews in deed. Nor is a lack of named places and dates for Makhnovite pogroms, in itself, proof that they never happened, although other massacres are well documented.

At least two Jewish scholars have found the case against Makhno to be not proven, despite the thinness of the evidence either way. Eliyohu Tcherikower told Volin that

"the proportion of *justified* complaints against the Makhnovite army, compared to the others, is negligible [...] Not once have I been able to prove the presence of a Makhnovite unit at the place where a pogrom against Jews took place."<sup>66</sup>

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64. Idem.; cf. Berkman, op.cit., who heard of such a speech in Nikolaev, ca. September 1920. Unfortunately the proclamations apparently survive only in Arshinov's text. He prints "Robochim, Krest'ianam i Povstantsam: s ugnennymi protiv ugnatatelei - vseгда! (May 1919) and "Prikaz no.1" (August 1919); op.cit., p.209-213.

65. E.g., G. Maksimov, "Nestor Makhno i pogromy," *Delo Truda* no.84 (1935), p.13-14; L. Lipotkin, "Nestor Makhno i evreiskii vopros," *Delo Truda-Probuzhdenie* no.58 (1959), p.17-19.

66. Volin, op.cit., p.675; cf. Tcherikower's *Di ukrainer pogromen in yor 1919* (New York, 1965), p.290-302 [in Yiddish].

Yehuda Slutsky has argued that many peasant bands declared themselves to be adherents of a particular *ataman* without having any real connection with him.<sup>67</sup> Many pogroms allegedly committed by the Makhnovites may have been the work of these gangs. The Makhnovite army proper only began to be infected with anti-Semitism when it started to disintegrate, by which time the worst of the pogroms were over.<sup>68</sup>

It seems, then, that Makhno himself was probably free of anti-Jewish feeling, and objected strongly to such feelings in others. His troops may or may not have been guilty of some pogroms, but no conclusive evidence can be produced to prove them guilty of any major or systematic attacks on Jews. Whether such evidence exists must remain in doubt.<sup>69</sup>

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67. This hypothesis is supported by a proclamation in the BDIC at Nanterre, headed "Vozzvanie Komandira Partizanskogo Otriada imeni Makhno-Iatsenko" which, although stridently anti-communist in tone, uses the expression *Rus' Svataia* ("Holy Russia", or more strictly "Holy Rus") an unlikely phrase for a Makhnovite militant. Iatsenko was, of course, an independent *ataman*. (BDIC, O pièce 403 rés.) Some other Makhno proclamations in the BDIC were destroyed by fire during the Second World War.

68. Y. Slutsky, letter to the author, 18 May 1973. Cf. Slutsky's article "[The problem of responsibility for the Ukrainian pogroms]" *He-'Avar* [Tel Aviv] vol. 17 (1970) p.1-17 [in Hebrew].

69. It may lie in a Soviet archive, or less probably in the Tcherikower papers at the YIVO Institute in New York. There is material on Makhno among these papers, mostly in Hebrew or Yiddish, but the material is not yet indexed.

### **The March Westwards**

The consolidation of Makhno's and Grigor'ev's forces in Kherson, and of the Petliurists and the Galicians in the west, alarmed the Bolsheviki. On 3 August the Central Committee of the KP(b)U passed a resolution on the "Kulak Counterrevolution," warning of the dangers that such unification presented.<sup>70</sup>

There was good reason for alarm. The soldiers of the Red Army were demoralised and disillusioned by the Volunteer Army's successes, and regarded their officers with suspicion. In late July units in the Crimea mutinied, at the instigation of Makhnovite leaders who had retained their posts within the Red Army. They deposed or executed their communist commanders, and moved northwards to join the main insurgent force. Groups of Red Army deserters also arrived from Novi Bug.<sup>71</sup> The Red Army brigade in Dolenskaia, on the left flank of the 12th Army, went over to Makhno at the beginning of August.<sup>72</sup> By the middle of the month Makhno, although on the defensive, was in control of most of the area north of Nikolaev.<sup>73</sup>

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70. *GVU*, vol.2, p.281-2; *Istoriia KP(b)U v materiialikh i dokumentakh*, 2nd ed. (Kiev, 1934), p.475-6.

71. Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.135; Volin, *op.cit.*, p.579-580.

72. *TP*, vol. 1, p.632-6.

73. M. Kapustians'kyi, *Pokhid ukrains'kykh armii na Kyiv-Odesu v 1919 r.* 2nd ed. (Munich, 1946) vol. 2, p.156.

The small cavalry detachment that he had taken with him when he left his command in the Red Army had swelled to between 15,000 and 20,000 men.<sup>74</sup> Makhno called a halt, to regroup and to decide the next step. He divided the army into four brigades of infantry and cavalry, an artillery division and a machine-gun regiment with 500 guns. Fedor Shchus' commanded the cavalry units, numbering about 2,000 men. A special cavalry squadron of 150 to 200 men accompanied the Bat'ko himself on his raids and expeditions.<sup>75</sup>

There is little doubt that anarchist sources consistently exaggerate the strength of, and the degree of organisation within, the "Insurgent Revolutionary Army of Ukraine (Makhnovites)." It is instructive to compare the accounts of Volin and Arshinov with an intelligence report compiled by an officer from the Ukrainian National Army.<sup>76</sup> The nationalist wrote the report in October, after Makhno's forces had been in action against the Whites over a period of several months. Despite this, there is little reason to suppose that any major structural changes had taken place meanwhile.

The Makhnovite soldiers had no uniforms or badges of rank, and

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74. E. Hurwicz claims that between August and September Makhno suffered 8,000 casualties. (*Staatsmänner und Abenteurer: russische Porträts von Witte bis Trotzki* [Leipzig, 1925], p.268-9).

75. Volin, *op.cit.*, p.580; Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.135.

76. M. S., "Makhno ta ioho viis'ko," *Litopys Chervonoi Kalyny* (1935), quoted by V. Peters, *Nestor Makhno: the life of an anarchist* (Winnipeg, 1970), p.60-62.

military organisation was very loose. Although some of Makhno's aides attempted to introduce more conventional structures into the army, the Bat'ko's control remained absolute, arbitrary and impulsive.<sup>77</sup> Although figures of up to 50,000 men were put about, reported the nationalist intelligence officer, the actual fighting strength was nearer 5,000. To this he added another 3,000 transport, education and political workers, and a huge camp-following. The 1,500 cavalry were divided into two regiments, the remainder of the fighters into eight infantry regiments, including two units that had come over from the Red Army.

Transport included all kinds of wagons and carriages, with camels, mules and horses. The units had many machine-guns, but there were only about 35 artillery pieces, without an adequate supply of shells. Herds of cattle and sheep tailed along at the rear of the army.<sup>78</sup>

Makhno's regrouping was likely, therefore, to have been rudimentary. It may have consisted of little more than an assessment of strength and an allocation of commands, perhaps accompanied by discussion of tactics to be used against the advancing White Guards. The insurgents were under increasing pressure from Denikin's forces, who were attempting to outflank them on the

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77. Volin confirms that "an excess of 'warrior sentiment' [...] led to the formation of a kind of military clique or camarilla about Makhno [...] which] showed contempt towards all those who were outside it" (op.cit., p.683). This tendency would have been strengthened by the existence of an elite cavalry unit.

78. M. S., op.cit., quoted by Peters, op.cit., p.61.

right.<sup>79</sup> In an attempted counter-offensive the partisans pushed the *Denikintsy* back for several kilometres, but the attack lost its momentum, mainly because of a shortage of ammunition. The partisans dissipated much of their energy in wasteful raids to capture supplies. Nor was the area completely free of Bolshevik troops pushing northwards to make contact again with the main body of the Red Army.<sup>80</sup>

The RVS in Odessa had already resolved that their first task was to try to eliminate the gangs of Makhno, Zabolotny, Zeleny and the other *atamans* who occupied the territory between the main lines of rail.<sup>81</sup> Rumours abounded, and the rate of desertion was high. The Trans-Dnepr division reported that it was untrue that a group of sailors had gone over to Makhno. The report continued, apparently without irony,

"some have shot their friends rather than let them fall into Makhno's hands."<sup>82</sup>

In the circumstances, Makhno could only move westwards and northwards into Kiev province. This retreat lasted several weeks, and

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79. Denikin, *op.cit.*, vol. 5, p.234.

80. Volin, *op.cit.*, p.581.

81. *GVU*, vol. 2, p.362.

82. It is left to the reader to decide whether the victims were shot at their own request to avoid capture or because they were wounded, or whether they were shot to stop them changing sides. V. I. Aleksandrova et al., (eds.), *Moriaki v bor'be za vlast' sovetov na Ukraine, noiabr' 1917-1920 gg.: sbornik dokumentov* (Kiev, 1963), p.269.

it is claimed, covered a distance of over 600 kilometres; it was later to assume epic proportions in the historiography of Makhno's apologists. Volin, who took part in the withdrawal, has left a vivid picture of the conditions under which it took place.

"[...] the Makhnovite army was joined and followed in its retreat by thousands of peasant families in flight from their homes with their livestock and belongings. It was a veritable migration. An enormous mass of men, women and children trailed after the army in its slow retreat towards the west, a retreat which gradually extended over hundreds of kilometres [...]

The summer of 1919 was exceptionally dry in Ukraine. Over the dusty roads and the neighbouring fields this human sea moved slowly, with thousands of cattle, with wagons of every kind, with its own food supply, administration and health service. It became a virtual supply train for the army.

But the army did not allow its movements to be influenced by the mass of fugitives. It kept strictly to its course, except for the units which went off to protect the main body; the cavalry, in particular, were almost always away fighting.

The infantry, when it was not fighting, led the march of the army; it was carried in *tachanki*.<sup>83</sup> Each of these vehicles, which were drawn by two horses, carried the driver on the front seat and two soldiers behind them. The artillery brought up the rear. A huge black flag floated over the first carriage. The slogans "Liberty or Death" and "The Land to the Peasants, the Factories to the Workers" were embroidered in silver on its two sides [...] Every now and then a popular or a revolutionary song would ring out from some part of the line, and soon it would be taken up by thousands of voices [...]

Those summer nights, which only lasted a few hours, hardly allowing a brief rest to the men and horses, vanishing suddenly with

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83. The *tachanka* was a light two-wheeled horse-drawn cart used by the peasants in Ukraine and the Caucasus. Makhno and other atamans used them as highly mobile platforms for their Lewis machine guns, a tactical innovation which was successful in the conditions of the Civil War. Even some of the Jewish self-defence units used *tachanki* in this way (V. Shklovskii, *A sentimental journey: memoirs, 1917-1922* [Ithaca, N.Y., 1970], p.205). There is some evidence that the Red Army adopted the idea, and may still have been using the carts into the 1930s (W. H. Chamberlin, *Russia's iron age* [Boston, 1934], p.201). Trotsky, however, was predictably contemptuous of the *tachanka* even in 1921: "Around the world in a hand-cart - there is a doctrine for the Red Army!" ("Voennaia doktrina ili mnimo-voennoe doktrinerstvo?" in his *Kak vooruzhalas' revoliutsiia* [Moscow, 1923-1925] vol.3, p.214-5.



the first glimmer of daylight, the rattle of machine guns, the explosion of shells and the gallop of horses! It was the Denikinists who, attacking from all sides, sought once again to enclose the insurgents in a vice of iron and fire [...]

The insurgents lacked clothing, shoes and sometimes also food. Through torrid heat, under a leaden sky and a hail of bullets and shells, they moved further and further away from their own country towards a destination and a destiny that was unknown."<sup>84</sup>

The incessant harassing of the column by Denikin's cavalry, who willingly accepted hand-to-hand combat with sabres, took a heavy toll. For more than a month the insurgent army moved westwards, engaging daily in small but costly actions against the enemy.

Towards the end of August, when Denikin's troops received reinforcements from Odessa and Voznesensk, Makhno's army and supply-train were driven away from the lines of rail, that they had been retreating along. First they managed to destroy some armoured trains to which they had access.<sup>85</sup> The retreating insurgents were forced to move from village to village along dusty country side-roads.

In mid-September the column arrived in the area to the south-east of Uman', near the junction of the rivers Iatran' and Siniukha. The forces of the Directory occupied the city of Uman' itself, to the north and west. To the south and east were White forces under the Denikinist general Slashchev. The Whites had largely ignored

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84. Volin, op.cit., p.578-9, 582; translation adapted from Holley Cantine's English ed. (London, 1955).

85. Ibid., p.582-3; Arshinov, op.cit., p.136-7.

the Petliurists during the final drive towards Moscow and the hoped-for overthrow of Bolshevism.

The Makhnovites were uncertain what to do about the Petliurists, to whom they were generally hostile.<sup>86</sup> In such an extremity, needlessly to take on yet another enemy might well have resulted in the annihilation of both the insurgent and the nationalist armies. The Makhnovites were short of ammunition and had about 8,000 wounded men in the column, slowing down operations and hindering movement. They decided to ask the Petliurists to agree to remain neutral and to admit the wounded partisans to hospitals in Uman' for treatment.<sup>87</sup>

At this time some of Petliura's Galician officers were becoming suspicious of their leader's close liaison with a Polish captain, Czarnocki. After a catastrophic encounter with the left wing of the retreating Red Army, in which the Galicians were badly mauled, they began to accuse Petliura's staff of double dealing to serve Polish interests. The Galicians decided to try to make an alliance with Makhno.<sup>88</sup>

They made contact on 14 September, and the next day Makhno visited Uman' to conclude the treaty. He wanted to barter some artil-

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86. "Trust was not absolute," Denikin commented dryly; op.cit., vol.5, p.234.

87. Volin, op.cit., p.583-4; Arshinov, op.cit., p.137.

88. Zenon Jaworskyj, "Alliance of the First USS Brigade with N. Makhno in 1919," (Unpublished typescript, 1973) p.4-8. Jaworskyj was himself the emissary from the Galicians to Makhno's camp.

lery shells for rifle ammunition, but the nationalists refused. Strict military neutrality was to be observed and political disagreements were to be put on one side. Liaison officers were exchanged, and the wounded insurgents were transferred to the hospitals.<sup>89</sup>

Both sides evidently regarded this agreement as one to be respected or discarded according to the needs of the moment. The insurgent propaganda section soon began to distribute leaflets among the nationalist soldiers, attacking Petliura as an enemy of the people and a defender of privilege.<sup>90</sup> The nationalists, for their part, opened negotiations with Denikin. Makhno's apologists later accused them of permitting the encirclement of partisan positions by the Whites.<sup>91</sup>

Possibly they could not have prevented it, for the Galicians came under attack from Denikin's forces soon afterwards.<sup>92</sup> By 25 September Makhno's army, free of its wounded, found itself surrounded by Denikin's regiments in an area of about 10 square kilometres of wooded steppe around the village of Peregonovka.<sup>93</sup>

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89. Ibid., p.12-9; Arshinov, loc.cit.; Volin, op.cit., p.584-5; cf. Denikin, op.cit., vol.5, p.234.

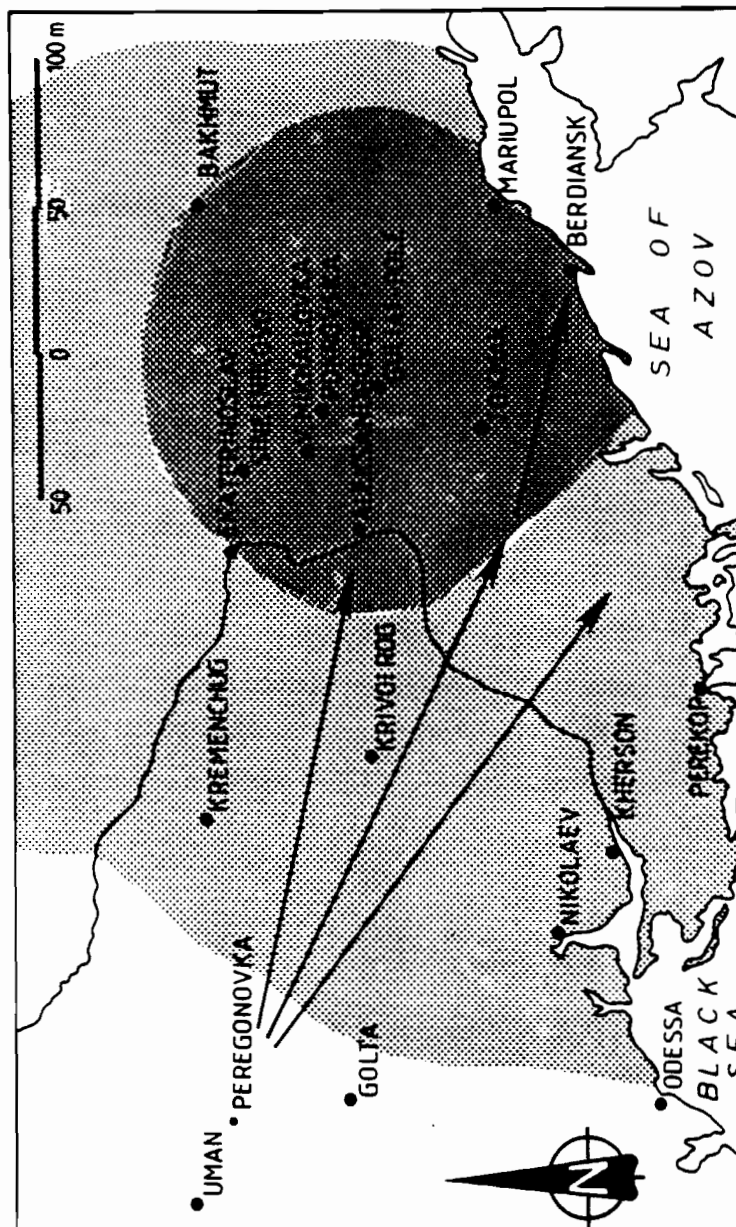
90. "Kto takoi Petliura?" paraphrased by Arshinov, op.cit., p.138; cf. Jaworskyj, op.cit., p.16.

91. Arshinov, loc.cit.

92. Jaworskyj, op.cit., p.19-20.

93. In Ukrainian, Perehinne.

Map 6  
 Makhno's Area of Influence and the Advance Eastwards  
 Autumn 1919



Dark shaded area: Makhnovite heartland. Light shaded area: generalised support. The arrows show the direction of the Makhnovite advance towards the left bank after Peregonovka.

Map based on sketch in P. Arshinov, *Istoriia makhnovskogo dvizeniia* (Berlin, 1923), redrawn by E. A. McPherson, Dept. of Geography and Environmental Studies, University of the Western Cape, Bellville, South Africa, 1994.

Almost every non-Soviet writer on the history of the Russian civil war pays lip service to the importance of Makhno's victory at the battle of Peregonovka and the insurgents' subsequent virtually unopposed rampage across southeastern Ukraine, in eventually preventing Denikin from following through in his advance on Moscow.<sup>1</sup> Chamberlin, for example, without mentioning the battle by name, points out that the situation in the rear was extremely favourable to Makhno, not only because Denikin's policies had allowed the landlords, police chiefs "and other decidedly unpopular figures" to reappear, but also because Denikin had "thrown almost all his reliable troops on the front." In these conditions, Makhno was able "to play a most devastating role in Denikin's rear."<sup>2</sup> More recent synthetic accounts of the war generally agree on this, as did the journalists of the time:

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1. An important exception is Denikin himself, who in his memoirs simply states laconically that Makhno suddenly attacked and defeated two of General Slashchev's regiments and began to advance eastwards. But he does admit that Makhno's actions in the rear occurred at a highly critical period (*Ocherki russkoi smuti* [Paris, Berlin, 1921-1926], vol.5, p.234-235).

2. W. H. Chamberlin, *The Russian revolution*, new ed. (New York, 1965), vol.2, p.234-235.

"There is no doubt that the defeat of Denikin is explained more by the uprisings of peasants waving Makhno's black flag than by the success of Trotsky's regular army. The partisan bands of 'Batko' tipped the scales in favour of the Reds and if Moscow wants to forget it today, impartial history takes account of it."<sup>3</sup>

wrote a French observer in the 1930s.

Evan Mawdsley cites the opinion of former White officers that it was the removal of a few regiments from the front line to deal with Makhno, that allowed the Red Army to turn the Whites' flank at Orel', and to launch a counter-attack.<sup>4</sup> W. Bruce Lincoln agrees, pointing to the destruction of the Whites' armoury at Berdiansk by Makhno in early October as an especially heavy blow against the Whites, who needed the artillery shells stored there for their assault on Orel'.<sup>5</sup>

Most other popular and scholarly writers agree that Peregonovka

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3. Pierre Berland, Moscow correspondent of *Le Temps*, writing in an obituary of Makhno published in the same newspaper ("Lettre d'URSS: Makhno," [8 August 1934], p.2). The obituary was subsequently reprinted in *Georges Luciani: six ans à Moscou* (Paris, 1937), p.26-29.

4. M. A. Kritskii, "Krasnaia armia na iuzhnom fronte v 1918-1920 gg.," *Arkhiv Russkoi Revoliutsii* no. 18 (1926), p.269, quoted by Evan Mawdsley, *The Russian civil war* (Boston, 1987), p.212-213.

5. W. Bruce Lincoln, *Red victory: a history of the Russian civil war* (New York, 1989), p.326-327.

was among the crucial encounters of the Civil War.<sup>6</sup> The anarchist apologists, of course, do not mince words in claiming, like Arshinov, that

"The complete defeat of the Denikinists in their struggle against the *Makhnovshchina* in southern Russia [sic] determined the fate of their entire campaign against the Russian revolution.

It is necessary to emphasise the historic fact that the honour of having annihilated the Denikin counter-revolution in the autumn of 1919 belongs almost entirely to the Makhnovites. If not [for them] the Whites would have entered Moscow [...]"<sup>7</sup>

However, even specialist studies of *Makhnovshchina* pay virtually no direct attention to the battle itself.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, the libertarian Alexandre Skirda has compared accounts by surviving White participants with the anarchist sources to produce a pre-

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6. Some random examples: "What happened on that fateful night of September 25-26, 1919 in a battle started by Makhno at three in the morning, was perhaps the turning point of the Russian Civil War [...] Makhno [...] actually saved the Soviet Republic - incredible as this may sound." (Max Nomad, "The epic of Nestor Makhno, the 'bandit' who saved Red Moscow," *Modern Monthly* no.6 [1935], p.345). Or: "There is some justification for the claim that Peregonovka was one of the decisive battles of the Civil War in the south." (D. Footman, "Makhnovshchina" [Oxford, 1956], p.74). This was also a contemporary belief, at least among anarchists. Emma Goldman heard an anarchist at a clandestine meeting in mid-1920 claim that Makhno and his *povstantsi* had routed Denikin and saved Moscow (*Living my life* [New York, 1970], vol.2, p.734).

7. P. Arshinov, *Istoriia makhnovskogo dvizheniia, 1918-1921 gg.* (Berlin, 1923), p.144. Volin uses virtually identical words, and may in fact be simply quoting Arshinov without indicating it (*La révolution inconnue, 1917-1921* [Paris, 1947], p.595-596).

8. For example, V. Peters, *Nestor Makhno* (Winnipeg, 1970), p.79; and M. Palič, "The peasant partisan movement of the anarchist Nestor Makhno," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Kansas, 1971), p.286-287, both give the battle itself only cursory attention.

liminary if uncritical synthesis.<sup>9</sup>

The war was, of course, not decided by any single battle, and it is always risky to indulge in speculation about hypothetical outcomes. Nonetheless, the silence of Soviet historians of the period, and the worrying unanimity of Western writers, probably make it worthwhile to examine the engagement and its aftermath again in detail. Fortunately we do have first-hand accounts of the battle from both Makhnovite and White Guard sources.<sup>10</sup>

In fact, the battle of Peregonovka was the culmination of a series of a series of skirmishes and tactical manoeuvres which had begun considerably earlier, and which from the White point of view had the objective of closing an encirclement of Makhno's forces and thereby completely liquidating them. In late August, the *Denikintsy* had been reinforced by fresh troops, and the ex-

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9. Skirda's account relies heavily on the juxtaposition of lengthy quotations from the writings of Al'mendinger and Slashchev (see below for citations). It remains, however, the first attempt to look at the battle as a military event written in a Western language (*Nestor Makhno, le cosaque de l'anarchie: la lutte pour les soviets libres en Ukraine, 1917-1921* [Paris, 1982], p.169-178).

10. Arshinov (op.cit., p.139-141) gives a brief, coherent but problematic version, later quoted by Volin (op.cit., p.586-589), who adds a few colourful details of his own. There is a contemporary commentary on the battle by Makhno himself ("Razgrom Denikintsev," *Put' k svobode* no.4 [3 October 1919]), which is quoted *inter alia* by M. Kubanin, *Makhnovshchina* (Leningrad, 1927), p.86. White accounts include those of General Ia. Slashchev ("Materialy po istorii grazhdanskoi voiny v Rossii: operatsii belykh, Petliury i Makhno na Ukraine," *Voennyi Vestnik* no.9/10 [1922], p.38-43; no.12/13 [1922], p.49-51); and three much later texts, of which the most detailed is by former battalion commander Colonel V. Al'mendinger, *Simferopol'skii ofitser'skii polk, 1918-1920: stranitsa k istorii belogo dvizheniia na iuge Rossii* (Los Angeles, 1962), p.19-24. See also the nearly identical account by G. Sakovich, "Proryv Makhno," *Pereklichka* no.116 (1961), p.11-14; and also the comment by ex-Staff Captain Mustafin, "Proryv Makhno," *Pereklichka* no.121 (1961), p.10-14.



hausted Makhnovites had abandoned the lines of rail along which they had been retreating, to shift deeper into the countryside, moving westwards from village to village.<sup>11</sup> The insurgents were also running short of ammunition, and two out of every three skirmishes which they initiated at this time were actually raids to capture supplies.<sup>12</sup>

The White encirclement had two other objectives: to prevent Makhno from making contact with the forces of the Directory, who were a possible source of supply for ammunition, on the one hand; and to push them away from the White-held town and base of Elisavetgrad, on the other.<sup>13</sup> From Elisavetgrad, the way east would have lain open to the insurgents. At the same time, the *Denikintsy* by now had access, this far west, to the north-south line of rail and supply running from the port of Odessa to Voznesensk.<sup>14</sup>

General Slashchev, the commander of the White forces confronting Makhno, faced a dilemma. If he attacked the Makhnovites head on, it was likely to be a costly operation. On the other hand, if he waited for a better opportunity, Makhnovite raids into his rear would become more frequent, and would create demoralisation and

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11. Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.136-137.

12. *Ibid.*, p.135.

13. As we saw in the previous chapter, contact was eventually made between Makhno and the nationalists, but no supplies were obtained. Nevertheless, Denikin apparently believed that the nationalists had in fact handed over ammunition (*loc.cit.*)

14. For parts of this line of analysis, see Skirda, *op.cit.*, p.169.

even panic.<sup>15</sup>

In the encounter that followed, the Makhnovite army received a severe mauling from the relatively well-disciplined White cavalry units, and sustained heavy losses of men and materiel. Later, Arshinov paid tribute to the "energy and obstinacy" of these opponents, who, unlike the less experienced Red cavalry "always accepted combat with sabres and charged onto the enemy at full speed."<sup>16</sup>

By the time Makhno halted near Uman' and made the agreement with the Petliurists to hand over his wounded, it must have been obvious that a breakthrough back to the left-bank was his only chance of surviving encirclement. In fact, by 20 September the Whites had specific intelligence that he was looking for just such a chance.<sup>17</sup> In order to prevent this, it was essential for the White units to maintain contact with each other on the flanks, in order to sustain their overall strategic numerical superiority.<sup>18</sup> It was their failure to do this in an extremely fluid situation,

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15. Slashchev, op.cit., no page indicated, quoted by Skirda, op.cit., p.170.

16. Arshinov, op.cit., p.136.

17. The Whites actually issued an order on 23 September "to repulse all attempts by the enemy to break through to the east" (Al'mendinger, op.cit., p.19).

18. Makhno claimed at the time that he had faced "about twelve to fifteen regiments" ("Razgrom Denikintsev," *Put' k Svobode* no.4 [30 October 1919], quoted by Al'mendinger, op.cit., p.23); four of these, apart from the 1st Simferopol', were the 51st Litovskii, the 2nd Labzinskii, the 42nd Don Cossacks, and the 2nd Tamanskii Cossacks (Al'mendinger, op.cit., p.19-23; M. Kubanin, *Makhnovshchina* [Leningrad, 1927], p.86).

as we shall see, that gave Makhno a temporary *tactical* advantage in numbers over a regiment to the east, and presented him with an opportunity that he was not slow to exploit.<sup>19</sup>

Initially the Petliurists were ranged to the northwest of the insurgents, with the Whites along a front to the southeast, around Golta. From 19 to 21 September a series of small engagements took place around the villages of Peregonovka, Kruten'koe, Pokotilovo, and Podvyskoe. Peregonovka changed hands several times.

On 22 September Slashchev began the operation to encircle and eliminate the Makhnovite forces. The First Simferopol' Officers' Regiment, which was to do much of the subsequent fighting, advanced in the centre on the line Kruten'koe-Tekucha. On the right, units under General Skliarov advanced towards Uman', and on the left flank were two infantry divisions and a regiment of Cossacks. The Simferopol' regiment concentrated in Peregonovka, and the Makhnovites occupied some high ground east of Kruten'koe and Rogovo, profiting from Skliarov's movement towards Uman'. During their advance, the Simferopol' regiment lost contact with Skliarov's forces.<sup>20</sup> This was to have disastrous consequences.

The fighting took place in a hilly area divided by ravines and by the "y"-shaped junction of two rivers, the Iatran' to the west

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19. Makhno had perhaps 8,000 men; the 1st Simferopol', *on its own*, had only 1,475 men on strength, of whom 43 percent (635 men) were killed or wounded in action between 2 and 27 September 1919 (Al'mendinger, *op.cit.*, p.20, 23).

20. Al'mendinger, *op.cit.*, p.19-20.

and the Siniukha to the east. Between the two arms of the "y" and on each side of them as well lay patches of dense woodland; the rivers themselves were both deep and wide. The village of Peregonovka lay due south of another village, Rogovo, on the Iatran'; Kruten'koe lay to their west, with forest behind it. The eastern arm and the base of the "y" was formed by the Siniukha, and in an easterly direction could only be crossed at Novoarkhangel'sk to the north or at Ternovka to the south. This area was to turn into a death trap for the 1st Simferopol' Officers Regiment.<sup>21</sup>

From 21 to 25 September there was fierce fighting and both sides sustained heavy losses. The Whites repeatedly found themselves under powerful artillery bombardment from the Makhnovites. They persisted in their advance, dislodging the insurgents from the high ground and driving them from the forest near Peregonovka and Kruten'koe. By the 25th, the Makhnovites had regained some ground, partly because of the poor coordination of the White attacks, which permitted the insurgents to fall upon the exposed flanks of individual units and to inflict heavy casualties upon them.

By 26 September, the day on which the battle was decided, General Skliarov had occupied Uman', opening in the process a gap of 40 kilometres between his forces and the Simferopol' regiment. The gap lay between Rogovo, on the Iatran' river north of Peregonov-

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21. Mustafin, *op.cit.*, p.12, prints a useful sketch map; Al'mendinger, *op.cit.*, *passim*, prints several.

ka, and Uman'. Makhno was to exploit this weakness to the full.<sup>22</sup> He used the breathing space to carry out a regrouping and concentration of his forces on the right bank of the Iatran'. This manoeuvre appears likely to have consisted of moving troops northwards and eastwards from Semiduby and other villages to position them opposite the Simferopol' Regiment's weak right flank.<sup>23</sup> According to the White accounts, the *Denikintsy* successfully repulsed the attacks of the superior partisan forces for two days. On the night of 25-26 September the Whites observed significant movement among the Makhnovite forces, and the commander of the Simferopol' Regiment reported that his two battalions were exhausted, and isolated in a highly dangerous position facing massed enemy forces. The only reply from General Slashchev {IS IT HIM?} in Uman' was an expression of thanks for the regiment's heroism, and a request to hold out for another twenty-four hours, so that the encirclement could be completed.<sup>24</sup>

Meanwhile, according to Arshinov, Makhno was delivering a morale-boosting speech to his tired and demoralised insurgents, ill-clad, ill-fed and running out of ammunition. The 600-kilometre retreat, declared the *Bat'ko*, had been a strategic necessity, but now "the real war was about to begin." The same evening a brigade of Makhnovites engaged in a feint near Kruten'koe, skirmishing

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22. Ibid., p.20-21.

23. Ibid., p.20-21.

24. Idem.

with the Whites there and then pulling back to the west, to create the impression that a breakthrough was not yet imminent. Later, under cover of darkness, the whole insurgent army began to move to the east.<sup>25</sup> There are serious difficulties in reconciling some of these details in Arshinov's account with Al'mendinger's version, especially the former's argument that the Makhnovites were under serious pressure from the Whites until Makhno personally led a cavalry charge against the White flank (presumably the right one, which was exposed). Al'mendinger says that the right flank was under *infantry* attack, and that it was the *left*, or protected flank that was under pressure from insurgent cavalry.<sup>26</sup> It was obviously in Arshinov's interests to portray the whole action as one in which the heroic anarchists triumphed over the forces of reaction.

Arshinov makes other crucial assertions which are directly contradicted by Al'mendinger's account. He describes the Makhnovites as "outnumbered", which although true strategically was almost certainly not so tactically, as we have seen. He also implies that the White units received reinforcements during the fighting, but a constant refrain throughout Al'mendinger's text is that the right flank remained exposed from lack of support and that the coordination of forces was poor.<sup>27</sup>

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25. Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.139.

26. Al'mendinger, *op.cit.*, p.21; cf. Mustafin, *op.cit.*, p.13, who agrees.

27. Skirda, *op.cit.*, does not concern himself with these relatively obvious points, and is content simply to quote first Arshinov and then Al'mendinger.

Most important of all, however, is Arshinov's overall portrayal of the battle hanging in the balance by mid-morning:

"By nine in the morning [of 26 September] the *outnumbered* and exhausted Makhnovites began to lose ground. They were already fighting on the outskirts of [Peregonovka]. *From all sides enemy reinforcements* brought new bursts of fire to bear on the Makhnovites [... it] seemed that the battle and with it the whole cause of the insurgents was lost. The order was given for everyone, even the women, to be ready to fire on the enemy in the village streets."<sup>28</sup>

From the White side, the story is somewhat different in detail. The six machine-gun companies on the right were pushed back by insurgent infantry, according to this version, into the forest northeast of Konen'kovato, which was impassable for horses or heavy equipment. Emerging from the woodland, the White units encountered more insurgents, this time with artillery support. Under continuous harassment from the Makhnovite cavalry, and themselves running out of ammunition, the Whites continued to retreat towards the Siniukha, at the same time signalling vainly for support.<sup>29</sup> They were making for the southern ford at Ternovka, which was held by other White units, but they were also "moving over trackless country, across large ploughed fields" and did not know exactly where they were. As it turned out, they were too far to the north.<sup>30</sup>

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28. Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.140 (emphasis added).

29. The signal flags were seen by units at the river, but no action was taken (Al'mendinger, *op.cit.*, p.21).

30. *Ibid.*, p.21-22.

After a prolonged retreat of about over 20 kilometres in hot weather, with heavy losses, the Whites reached a bend in the river Siniukha to the north of Burakovka. Attempts to cross there under fire failed, and some men drowned.<sup>31</sup> The units began to move southwards towards Ternovka, but were stopped by Makhnovite cavalry outside Burakovka, where they prepared to make a stand. At this point they discovered a dike across the river, and about 100 men succeeded in escaping to the left bank, from where they moved, still under pursuit, towards Konstantinovka. However, by this time there were more Makhnovite blocking their way forward, and about 60 men under a Captain Gattenburger made a stand, allowing carts with the wounded to escape successfully to Novoukrainka, to the southeast. All the members of Gattenburger's rear-guard were killed.<sup>32</sup>

Makhno's assessment of this action at the time was a generous one. He described the 1st Simferopol' as "distinguished by its extreme steadfastness and determination" and as having "good organisation".<sup>33</sup> The booty was impressive: 20 field guns, over 100 machine guns, and 600 prisoners, of whom 120 were officers.<sup>34</sup>

Makhno's victory at Peregonovka over the pursuing White forces

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31. Arshinov says "hundreds" perished in the river (op.cit., p.141).

32. Al'mendinger, op.cit., p.22-23.

33. Makhno, op.cit., quoted by Al'mendinger, op.cit., p.23.

34. Makhno, op.cit., quoted by M. Kubanin, op.cit., p.86.



was so complete that the path to the east, back to the Dnepr and to his home base of Guliai-Pole lay open to him. The only obstacles were the weak and unprepared garrisons which Denikin had left behind as he prepared to risk all for the push to Moscow. It is clear from his later comments that Denikin was unable to grasp, then or later, the nature of his enemy, or the fact that Makhno represented a serious threat. For Denikin, anarchism was a "tragic farce," and the *Makhnovshchina* was "purely popular and robber, but in no way political" in character.<sup>35</sup> His nearest approach to taking the *Makhnovshchina* seriously was to put a price of half a million rubles on Makhno's head.<sup>36</sup> Winston Churchill, pursuing his obsessive one-man campaign in favour of continued British support for the Whites, advised Denikin to try to "make use" of the "Green Guards," whose numbers were growing, but the White leader made no attempt to do so.<sup>37</sup> Denikin's own soldiers apparently believed at this time that a new Makhno-Red Army alliance would be an unbeatable combination, and that if such an alliance was forged the war would soon be over.<sup>38</sup> General Wrangel, a much more politically astute man than Denikin, actually

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35. A. I. Denikin, *The White army* (London, 1930), p.294-295.

36. Volin, *op.cit.*, p.550.

37. In an undocumented and obscure passage, J. F. N. Bradley states baldly that "the British [negotiated] with Makhno themselves and reduced Denikin to muted protestations. This initiative came to nothing; after much dangerous talking the rapidly deteriorating situation of the Volunteers precluded an agreement" (*Civil war in Russia, 1917-1920* [London, 1975], p.129). It is highly unlikely that such "use" of the *Makhnovshchina* was feasible, but the fact that Churchill offered the advice shows that he probably took the insurgents more seriously than Denikin did (*The world crisis: the aftermath* [London, 1929], p.225).

38. *GVU*, vol.2, p.384.

attempted to persuade his commander to take appropriate steps to face the threat to the rear, but Denikin shrugged him off: "we will finish [Makhno] off in the twinkling of an eye." Wrangel records that this attitude filled him "doubt and apprehension", as well it should have done.<sup>39</sup>

At first, the outside world, including the Bolsheviks, came to hear of the battle only obliquely. The 12th Red Army was aware that Petliura's forces had been in Kazatina, Zhmerinka and Vapnarkia regions in Kiev and Podolia provinces in late September and early October, and that some sort of agreement was in force with Makhno against Denikin. In an apparent reference to the battle, a later Bolshevik intelligence report noted inaccurately that

"according to our information, Petliurist troops together with Makhno's fought a battle against the Whites in the region of Uman'-Gaisin in the middle of October [sic], after which Makhno and his units advanced through Aleksandrovsk and captured Pologi and Melitopol'".<sup>40</sup>

Newspapers in Kiev also got things significantly wrong, reporting in early October that it had been Petliura's forces which had beaten the insurgents, and that the Makhnovites "broke and ran."<sup>41</sup>

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39. P. Wrangel, *The Memoirs* (London, 1929), p.101.

40. 12th Army intelligence report for the period 15 September-25 October 1919, quoted in *GVU*, vol.2, p.457.

41. *Ibid.*, p.488-489.

The Makhnovites' three-pronged rampage back across the Dnepr and as far east as Mariupol' has been described in several texts, most of which have accepted unquestioningly that the advance was astonishingly rapid.<sup>42</sup> A careful reading of Arshinov shows that he claims that the day after the battle Makhno himself was already nearly 100 kilometres away, and the main body of his army was about 50 kilometres behind him. On 28 September, according to Arshinov, the Makhnovites captured Dolinskaia, Krivoi Rog, and Nikopol'; on 29 September they took the Kichkas bridge and occupied Aleksandrovsk, and after ten days had occupied the whole of southern Ukraine.<sup>43</sup> These dates can safely be discounted as wholly unbelievable.

Denikin is more specific, and slows things down a little. In his memoirs he states that Makhno reached Guliai-Pole, about 640 kilometres from Uman', on 7 October, having covered the distance using *tachanki* to move the infantry.<sup>44</sup> This would represent an average rate of advance, for combat-weary troops, of 58 kilometres a day for 11 days. Five years earlier, German infantry had managed an average of 38 kilometres a day for four days, from 30

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42. For example: "[The Makhnovites] advanced eastward at great speed, about one hundred versts [107 km.] per day" (Palič, op.cit., p.287); "In about ten days, an immense territory was liberated at the trot" (Skirda, op.cit., p.177).

43. Aleksandrovsk is about 435 kilometres from Uman' as the crow flies; to have reached the city by the 29th, the insurgents would have had to cover an impossible 145 kilometres per day for three days (Arshinov, op.cit., p.142).

44. Denikin, *Očerki russkoi smuty*, vol.5, p.234.

August to 2 September 1914, before the First Battle of the Marne. Even so, according to a contemporary, they marched "with eyes closed, singing in chorus so as not to fall asleep."<sup>45</sup> Makhno's advance was thus apparently made at cavalry pace. In fact Volin claims that *tachanki* with sprung suspension *could* cover between 70 and 100 kilometres per day if necessary.<sup>46</sup>

There are problems with this exceedingly fast and sustained rate of advance. First, of course, is the fact that it was sustained for nearly two weeks, and that these were not fresh troops. They were men exhausted by a two-month retreat, the last part over rough terrain in hot weather, followed by a brutal action against a resolute enemy. Second, independent sources give dates which apparently slow things down significantly. For example, a British officer who served with Denikin in 1919 says that Makhno only reached Aleksandrovsk, where he blew up the railway bridge and cut telegraph wires, in the first week in October. This is confirmed by Denikin, who also admits at the same time that the units defending the town were weak.<sup>47</sup>

The major revision to be made concerns, therefore, the distance involved. Even using the folded sketch map in Arshinov's book,

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45. Sir Frederick Maurice, *Forty days in 1914* (New York, 1919), p.150-151, quoted in Barbara Tuchman, *The guns of August* (New York, 1963), p.446.

46. Volin, *op.cit.*, p.548.

47. J. E. Hodgson, *With Denikin's armies, 1918-1920* (London, 1932), p.118-119; Denikin, *loc.cit.* The first of October in 1919 fell on a Wednesday, so the expression "first week in October" might in fact mean any day up to 11 October.

which is drawn to a scale of 66.66 versts to the inch, the distance as the crow flies from Uman' to Guliai-Pole is 445 versts or approximately 417 kilometres. Using modern maps we can calculate the distance more accurately as approximately 445 kilometres. This brings the rate of advance down to a much more plausible 41 kilometres a day, virtually the same as that achieved by the fresh German infantry in northern France in August 1914, assuming that Denikin's memory for dates was better than his eye for distances.

A second revision, supported to some extent by contemporary documentation, concerns the way in which the *Makhnovshchina* spread across the Ukraine. It seems plausible to argue that what we are dealing with here is not so much a forced march by an army, although that did take place, but the spread of generalised peasant insurrection. Denikin's own choice of phrases supports this indirectly: he describes the spread of the Makhnovite insurrection across southeastern Ukraine as having been like wildfire. Denikin estimated that the insurgent army grew significantly, to a number somewhere between 10,000 and 40,000 men by the middle of October, and he mentions the existence of semi-autonomous groups which often operated independently of any centralised command. The apparently rapid growth in numbers, plus the existence of semi-independent groups both suggest that existing bands may simply have become active after Makhno's breakthrough. In any case, by late October the Makhnovites, in one shape or form or another, had taken control of Melitopol', Berdiansk and Mariupol', this last a mere 100 kilometres or so from Denikin's campaign head-

quarters in Taganrog. The insurgents approached Sinel'nikov and even threatened Denikin's artillery base at Volnovakh.<sup>48</sup>

Apart from the disputed and unstable occupation of Aleksandrovska and Ekaterinoslav, which changed hands several times, Makhno's hardest blow against the *Denikintsy* at this time was undoubtedly the capture of Berdiansk and the destruction of the armoury there. According to one eyewitness account, Makhno mobilised a group of local fishermen, who captured some White artillery and bombarded the town. Scenes of confusion followed, as an overloaded boat filled with fleeing Whites capsized in the harbour. For several days the Makhnovites combed the city looking for Whites, shooting any that they captured, and looting shops and stores. Four days after the fall of the city, according to an eyewitness, Makhno himself arrived.<sup>49</sup>

The White armoury in Berdiansk held 60,000 artillery shells and large quantities of small arms ammunition destined for Kiev, Kursk and Orel'. The British had warned Denikin that Berdiansk was vulnerable, but he had taken no steps either to secure or to move the munitions, explaining that he had no railway wagons

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48. Denikin, loc.cit.

49. This last detail, suggesting that Makhno was four days *behind* his vanguard, supports the argument for a spreading insurrection rather than an advancing army. J. Petrovich, "Makhno: istoriia odnogo povstanskoho vatashka," *Nedilia* no.43 (1935), quoted by V. Peters, *Nestor Makhno: the life of an anarchist* (Winnipeg, 1970), p.84. However, this source, which I have not seen, apparently follows N. V. Gerasimenko, "Makhno," *Istoriik i Sovremennik* vol.3 (1922), p.151-201, which I have already criticised above as unreliable.

available for the latter. A contemporary British observer comments dryly that he had seen a White general's train made up of 44 coaches at about this time.<sup>50</sup> Certainly it was widely believed, then and later, that the loss of the armoury was a major factor in preventing a further White advance northwards.<sup>51</sup>

But the loss of a single armoury, and even the extended lines of communication resulting from the rapid advances do not explain the speed and ferocity with which the insurrection spread across Denikin's rear areas in the autumn of 1919. The fact is that Denikin had not just lost the political battle for the hearts and minds of the people of the borderlands; all the indications are that he never even properly realised that it was necessary to fight such a battle. In order fully to understand how bad conditions actually were in the conquered rear areas, we must return briefly to the situation in July.

Between the issuing of Denikin's secret order no.08878, the "Moscow Directive", on 3 July, and the defeat of Skliarov at Peregonovka on 25 September, nearly three months later, the White armies had seriously overextended themselves. The original directive had been ambitious enough, with a main push northwards along the line of rail Kursk-Orel'-Tula to Moscow, and flanking drives via Voronezh-Riazan and even as far northwestwards as Saratov and

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50. Hodgson, *op.cit.*, p.155.

51. As cited at the beginning of this chapter; see also A. Berkman, *The Bolshevik myth* (London, 1925), p.194.

Nizhnyi Novgorod, as we have seen earlier. The longest of these thrusts would have had to cover some 1,200 kilometres.<sup>52</sup>

When the Moscow directive was issued, the White armies occupied a 1,300 kilometre front that stretched from the Dnepr to the Don, from Ekaterinoslav in the west via Khar'kov to Tsaritsyn in the east. At this time, with over 100,000 men under arms, the White forces more or less matched the Bolsheviks, but were spread thinly along such a long front.<sup>53</sup> To begin with, Denikin continued to use the Dnepr as natural protection for his left flank, but as he moved northwards this ceased to be possible, for two reasons. The first of these was the simple fact that the river flows south-eastwards, and movement due north inevitably exposed the flank. The second was that Denikin's commanders also began, largely on their own initiative and contrary to the strategic ideas of the Moscow Directive, to cross the river to seize towns and cities on the right bank. Thus Shkuro captured Ekaterinoslav, and White units pushed westwards along the coast of the Black Sea towards Odessa, which they captured with the help of naval artillery on 23 August. Meanwhile, other forces moved northwestwards to take Poltava and Kiev, which also fell on the 23rd.<sup>54</sup>

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52. See the persuasive analysis of the failure of the attempt to reach Moscow by Mawdsley, *op.cit.*, p.172-174.

53. By the autumn, the forces were no longer evenly balanced. Mawdsley estimates the Volunteer Army's combat strength in October-November as 97-99,000, against 127,000 infantry and 21,000 cavalry in the Red Southern and Southeastern Army Groups (*ibid.*, p.214).

54. *Ibid.*, p.172-173.



But the problems brought about by the over-extension and rapid advances of Denikin's troops manifested themselves in their most pernicious form in the rear. It was Denikin's failure to confront and deal with the corruption and brutality of his own soldiers in the territory he controlled, as much as his military weaknesses, which created the conditions in which the intervention of the few thousand anarchist partisans of the *Makhnovshchina* could spark off other peasant insurrections and tip the balance against him.<sup>55</sup>

For one thing, Denikin was a Great Russian chauvinist operating out of territories which were mainly either Ukrainian or Cossack.<sup>56</sup> For another, his base of popular support in such industrial cities as Khar'kov, with its "bolshevised" factory workers, was limited to the urban middle class. But neither the nationalist feelings nor the political antipathy of large segments of the population had such a negative effect as the behaviour of his own soldiers, and most especially those left behind in the garrisons of the rear.<sup>57</sup> Tsarist bureaucrats, as one modern com-

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55. In fact, the myopia of the Whites expressed itself even in their term for the rear - "occupied territory" (Lincoln, *op.cit.*, p.219).

56. The Cossacks were originally Russians who had been given land over the centuries in the exposed border areas in exchange for military service obligations which passed from generation to generation. They were organised in twelve *voiski*, each with its own *ataman*. Although they were by-and-large conservatives and had been used in the nineteenth century as the shock troops of the Tsar, they were also divided along class lines. See E. H. Carr, *The Bolshevik revolution* (Harmondsworth, 1966), vol.1, p.300n.

57. The garrisons were weak; Denikin wrote later that Makhno's forces could defeat them and the reserve battalions "easily" (*op.cit.*, p.234).

mentator has pointed out, had never been noted for their high standards of integrity, and Tsarist officers, with their wild life-style, were always short of cash, and looking for a way to get some easy money.<sup>58</sup>

Although the Whites were suffering from the same shortages as the Reds when it came to food, clothing or supplies, the flow of financial and material aid from the Allies allowed all kinds of speculation and black market transactions to flourish in White areas. Nurses uniforms, ladies' stockings, summer kit for British officers, good quality serge cloth, all this ended up sooner or later in the hands of those with some ready money or some influence to peddle.<sup>59</sup>

Other officers resorted openly to armed robbery, taking goods or money by force from terrified civilians. One of Denikin's generals ran a protection racket to cream of the profits from gambling operations. Illegal or arbitrary arrest was common, and random violence by armed and drunken soldiers was widespread. Rapes and pogroms were committed at will and at random. Denikin's own chaplain, despairing of the effect that these crimes, going unpunished, would have on the White cause, wrote that "depravity has reached the point of absolute shamelessness [... The army] is

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58. W. Bruce Lincoln, no great sympathiser with the Communists, makes much of the depravity of the Volunteer Army (op.cit., p.218 ff).

59. Hodgson, op.cit., p.181.

nothing but a gang of thieves."<sup>60</sup>

Anarchist sources confirm that the White occupation was especially brutal in Guliai-Pole, but was also generally hostile to the local populations:

"[...] this was not only a war against the Makhnovite army. Nearly every village which was occupied by Denikin's troops was the scene of fire and bloodshed. Peasants were robbed, violently abused, killed. *It was the officers' revenge against the revolution.*

From the first days of Denikin's occupation of Guliai-Pole, many peasants were shot, houses were destroyed and hundreds of wagon loads of food and other possessions of the Guliai-Pole peasants were sent to the Don and the Kuban by Shkuro's Cossacks. Nearly all the Jewish women in the village were raped."<sup>61</sup>

Nevertheless, while discontent built up in the rear areas, to begin with Denikin's advance northwards went well. The successes on the right bank cleared a potential threat to the flank and rear as the Red Army was pushed northwards, and the capture of Kiev and Odessa boosted morale. By early August General Wrangel had pushed from Tsaritsyn to within 95 kilometres of Saratov. But in the centre, in the sector of the front north of Khar'kov, the Whites stood still from July until September, apart from a daring raid on Tambov and Voronezh by a Don Cossack unit under the command of General Mamontov. But by the time Mamontov returned to base in September, his men wanted to return to their homes with the loot that they had collected, and valuable cavalry support

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60. Father G. Shavel'skii, quoted by Lincoln, op.cit., p.220.

61. Arshinov, op.cit., p.131 (emphasis added).

was lost.<sup>62</sup>

On the Red side, over Trotsky's vociferous objections, Vatsetis had been replaced in July by S. S. Kamenev, the eastern front commander who had routed Kolchak.<sup>63</sup> Trotsky later described Kamenev as "distinguished by optimism and a quick strategic imagination [although] his outlook was still comparatively narrow."<sup>64</sup> Kamenev's strategy in response to the White push towards Moscow was developed in less than three weeks. On 23 July, he ordered a strike against the extreme eastern end of the front, from the Volga down towards Tsaritsyn and Rostov. By 15 August the attack was launched, but Wrangel managed to stop the Reds, some 50,000 strong, at the gates of Tsaritsyn. A secondary attack in the centre had reached Kupiansk, to the east of Khar'kov, by the 25th. But when the attacks faltered, the danger of encirclement by counter-attacking White units arose, and after a rapid retreat the Red Armies found themselves by 15 September back where they had started.<sup>65</sup>

Part of the reason for the Bolshevik failure was foreseen by Trotsky, who argued that to attack the Don would simply act as a recruiting drive for the White Army. Rather, he argued, concen-

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62. Mawdsley, *op.cit.*, p.175; Lincoln, *op.cit.*, p.224.

63. Lincoln argues that Kamenev was Stalin's man, and that Stalin also managed to get three other supporters onto VTsIK at this time (*op.cit.*, p.221-222).

64. L. Trotsky, *Stalin: an appraisal of the man and his influence* (London, 1947), p.314.

65. Mawdsley, *op.cit.*, p.175.

trate on the Donbass, where the support of the industrial working class and the dense infrastructure of roads and railways would help the Reds not only to capture the territory but also to hold onto it.<sup>66</sup> Kamenev and his allies on the VTsIK, however, discounted these social and political factors and opted for a classic but purely military plan.<sup>67</sup>

When he heard about the forced retreat of the Red Army, Lenin was predictably furious at the setback. He was also unwell at the time:

"Comrade Sklianskii! I do not feel well. I have had to go to bed.

The delay of the offensive in the direction of Voronezh (*from 1 to 10 August*) is monstrous. Denikin has had enormous successes.

What is wrong? Sokolnikov said that on the way to Voronezh our forces outnumbered theirs by four to one. So what is wrong? How could we miss our chances in this manner?

Tell the Commander-in-Chief that this will not do. Serious attention must be paid to this [...]"

he demanded in a message to the VTsIK on 10 August.<sup>68</sup>

By the beginning of September the initiative had passed over to the Whites again, and Denikin's forces began to advance rapidly northwards along their broad front. The Don Cossack army pushed

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66. Trotsky, loc.cit.

67. Opinion varies as to who was right. See Mawdsley, op.cit., p.176-177 for a discussion of the issues.

68. *Iz istorii grazhdanskoi voiny v SSSR: sbornik dokumentov i materialov* (Moscow, 1960-1961), vol.2, p.512.

steadily forward during two months of fighting from September to October, and by early November had covered 160 kilometres to reach close to the outskirts of Saratov on the Volga. On the left too, White units pushed the Red Army back from Kiev north-eastwards towards Chernigov, on the other side of the Dnepr, hard up against the positions of the Polish Front. But the main thrust was made as originally envisaged, along a line running due north from Khar'kov through Kursk, Orel' and Tula. Responsibility for the offensive rested with the Volunteer Army itself, led by the eccentric General V. Z. Mai-Maevskii, whose reputation for drunkenness and debauchery was matched only by his reckless courage.<sup>69</sup>

The thrust at the centre soon threatened to become a rout as the exhausted Red units fell back. Their field commander, General Selivachev, died of typhus on 17 September. In mid-September Lenin complained to Gusev that the RVS itself was working badly, sending reassuring reports when "in reality, we have stagnation, almost collapse." Autumn was passing by, he complained, "and Denikin will triple his forces, get tanks." Unless orders are followed up and obeyed "it simply means destruction."<sup>70</sup> But his complaints were to no avail. On 20 September the Volunteer Army captured Kursk. By this time Bolshevik units were deserting to the White side en masse. A few days earlier cavalry units under

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69. Mai-Maevskii, a Tsarist corps commander in the Great War, was short and fat with a red bespectacled face, and later became an alcoholic. Mawdsley, *op.cit.*, p.170-171; Lincoln, *op.cit.*, p.214-215.

70. Lenin, *Collected works* (Moscow, 1960-1971), vol.35, p.420-421.

General Shkuro had taken Voronezh. Finally, a month later, on 14 October, the Whites captured Orel', taking 8,000 prisoners and positioning themselves for the final thrust to Tula, where the Red armoury was located. The Whites were less than 400 kilometres from Moscow, and the Bolshevik hold on power seemed - at least to Denikin - shakier than it had ever been.<sup>71</sup>

But Denikin's victories at the front masked his vulnerability, caused partly by the speed and the spread of his advance. Mawdsley argues convincingly that Denikin did not commit a single, major error, but rather a series of cumulative minor ones.<sup>72</sup> These included his failure to evaluate correctly the importance of both military and political consolidation in the rear; his over-optimistic evaluation of Soviet power as itself lacking in widespread popular support; the lack of discipline evidenced early on by, for instance, Shkuro's crossing to the right bank of the Dnepr, and later by the loss of contact between the Volunteer Army and the Don Cossacks; and poor logistical management operating along vastly extended lines of supply. The Reds were also hampered by disagreements over strategy, by poor control and by doubtful support among the population in many areas. Mawdsley's evaluation is blunt: "[i]t was not skillful handling of the Red southern armies that beat Denikin."<sup>73</sup>

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71. Mawdsley, *op.cit.*, p.195-196; Lincoln, *op.cit.*, p.223-224.

72. Mawdsley, *op.cit.*, p.207.

73. *Ibid.*, p.203.

What happened was that by good fortune the Red Army was able to trap the Volunteer Army in a salient at Orel', between experienced Latvian infantry on the right flank and Budenny's Red Cavalry on the left. As the weather worsened, the Volunteers were able to escape from the narrowing trap, but in the process the momentum of their advance was lost for the year, and as it turned out, for ever.

Stalin's historians later claimed that the credit for Denikin's defeat was his. The documentation says that he was ordered "to organise the defeat of Denikin" in September, and arrived at Southern Front Headquarters on 3 October.<sup>74</sup> In the notorious Short Course Stalin leads Voroshilov, Ordzhonikidze and Budenny in preparing "the rout of Denikin."<sup>75</sup> Other documents have him writing to Lenin to propose cutting the Volunteers off from the Don Cossacks - which in fact happened - as early as 15 October:

"the Volunteer Army we shall leave to Makhno to devour, while the Cossack armies we shall threaten with the danger of being out-flanked."<sup>76</sup>

In this atmosphere of muddle and improvisation, it is hard to see Makhno's victory at Peregonovka as anything more than a contribu-

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74. J. V. Stalin, *Works* (Moscow, 1952-1955), vol.4, p.446n.

75. *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): short course* (Moscow, 1939), p.238.

76. Stalin, *op.cit.*, vol.4, p.287. Voronezh was captured on 24 October; the cutting of the rail link was only accomplished on 15 November (Mawdsley, *op.cit.*, p.202).



tory factor to Denikin's defeat. Makhno's return to the left-bank as the victor of Uman' sparked an insurrection, but the groundwork for that insurrection had been laid by Denikin's own political incompetence. Perhaps the need to move fighting divisions and Cossack brigades from the front to the rear to combat the *Makhnovshchina* tipped the balance in the Orel' salient, but it is difficult to see what political or ideological credit Makhno might claim for that.<sup>77</sup> There is no evidence that he or his lieutenants had grasped at the time the strategic picture which had also partly eluded both Denikin and Kamenev; the insurgents themselves were just heading for home.

During the period from October to the end of the year, as the collapse of the White offensive accelerated, conditions in Ekaterinoslav province, and most especially in Aleksandrovsk region, were as confused politically as they were militarily. The Whites, stunned by the Red Army's successful adoption of cavalry tactics from September onwards, were pushed back into disorderly retreat across terrain in which they commanded little local support.<sup>78</sup>

Perhaps by inclination, but also from force of circumstance, lo-

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77. By the end of October, Denikin had moved the Terskaia and Chechenskaia divisions, three Don Cossack brigades and several other units to the rear, "regardless of the serious situation at the front" (Denikin, op.cit., vol.5, p.234-235; cf. Hodgson, op.cit., p.119-120). The Chechenskaia was a cavalry unit. In November he also moved the 80th Kabardinskii Regiment to the rear in the Kiev sector (GVU vol.2, p.508).

78. Mawdsley argues that it was the Mamontov raid which changed Red opposition to the "outdated" and "elitist" concept of the cavalry army into enthusiastic utilisation of it (op.cit., p.220-221). Budenny's successes convinced them that they were right.

cal Bolshevik structures behind the front line adopted conspiratorial and underground methods. This was partly to counteract anarchist influence, but also because they could at any time find themselves again under White rule as areas changed hands.

But the presence of the unruly anarchist bands made even underground work difficult. The Makhnovites plundered and robbed people, complained a party worker in Berdiansk towards the end of the year. They beat up and tortured party sympathisers, and the life of the chairperson of the local Berdiansk party organisation was only saved when a Communist regimental commander intervened on his behalf. Permission for meetings was often refused, despite anarchist commitment to free political activity.<sup>79</sup>

In late 1919 the secretary of the party's provincial committee (Gubkom) in Ekaterinoslav was a certain G. L. Levko. He wrote several reports to the *Zafrontbiuro* in January and February 1920, which give detailed accounts of conditions and describe vividly just how dangerous it could be at the time to have a known political affiliation.<sup>80</sup> The Party leadership in Moscow assigned Levko to the Ekaterinoslav party structures in October, and by the end

*Does the Levko story?*

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79. *GVU* vol.2, p.572.

80. The text of the first report, dated January 1920, was published in *Letopis' Revoliutsii* no.4 (1925), p.95-98, and later reprinted in A. Ia. Pashchenko (ed.), *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ekaterinoslavshchine* (Dnepropetrovsk, 1968), p.184-188. A summary of a second report survives in a newspaper account dated 23 February 1920, first published in *Izvestiia Ekaterinoslavskogo Gubernskogo Revoliutsionnogo Komiteta* no.38 (29 February 1920), and also reprinted by Pashchenko, *op.cit.*, p.205-206.

of the month he had managed to cross the front and reach Khar'kov via Kursk, noting on the way that the mood among the White Guards varied from "apprehensive" to "downcast".<sup>81</sup>

In Khar'kov, Levko learned why this was so: Makhno was operating in the southern part of the area around Ekaterinoslav with a strong force of between 10,000 and 15,000 men. He had captured a series of large towns, including Nikopol', Pologi, and Aleksandrovsk, where he stayed for four weeks, using the town as his headquarters. By the time Levko managed to reach Ekaterinoslav city from Amur, Makhno had occupied the city as well. Ekaterinoslav changed hands several times during the autumn of 1919, as Makhno and the Whites slugged it out.<sup>82</sup> The insurgents only managed to take the city late in October, and the Whites then promptly dug in nearby on the left-bank. They shelled the city from armoured trains on an almost daily basis, until they were able to retake it at the end of November.<sup>83</sup> It is clear that after the initial rampage, Makhno's forces were in fact being pushed westwards again during this period, while the main front moved south, although Denikin's claim that the whole left bank was cleared of partisans by 23 November is probably an exaggeration.<sup>84</sup>

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81. Ibid., p.184.

82. Denikin, op.cit., vol.5., p.235.

83. Volin, op.cit., p.595, 621.

84. Denikin, loc.cit.

In addition, there is some evidence to indicate that the Makhnovites may have been operating further north and west than was their custom during October and November. One contemporary report puts them in Sumy, northwest of Khar'kov, and all over Poltava in early November.<sup>85</sup> Another document reports breakthroughs in Znamenka and around Kherson, while a third account describes communist concern about the spread of insurgency on the right bank generally.<sup>86</sup>

Nevertheless, the communist underground continued their work while Makhno was in Aleksandrovsk, according to Levko's report. The local party committee managed to maintain contact with communist party cells within the units of the Makhnovite army, although it is unclear whether these had been formed by means of infiltration of party members or through conversion of former anarchists to the party line.<sup>87</sup> In a later report, Levko claims that "a whole group of experienced comrades" was added to the existing cells during the period of Makhno's occupation of Ekaterinoslav.<sup>88</sup> But the departure of the Makhno army left the small Bolshevik group in an extremely vulnerable position if the Whites were to return, and they therefore followed their unknowing and

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85. *GVU* vol.2, p.484.

86. *Ibid.*, p.474, 616-617.

87. While it was obviously in Levko's interests to exaggerate local successes in infiltrating insurgent ranks, anarchist sources confirm that this was indeed a constant problem. Arshinov's text is full of complaints about spies and agents provocateurs (*op.cit.*, *passim*).

88. Pashchenko, *op.cit.*, p.205.

almost certainly unwilling protectors to Ekaterinoslav.

Ekaterinoslav at this time had a population of around 1.8 or 1.9 million people, of whom nearly 70 percent were Ukrainians, with a significant Russian-speaking minority of 17 percent. There were also sizable Jewish and German communities. The population was also a young one: nearly 750,000 of the city's inhabitants were under 15 years of age.<sup>89</sup>

The party's organisation in Ekaterinoslav was even weaker than that in Aleksandrovsk, and the provincial committee had virtually no contact even with the city suburbs, to say nothing about the countryside. Southern districts such as Melitopol', Mariupol' and Berdiansk were in touch only with the Aleksandrovsk structures.<sup>90</sup>

Given the weakness as well as the vulnerability of the Ekaterinoslav party organisation, Levko set about organising an underground committee of three people, linked to a network of party members whose affiliation was not publicly known. This conspiratorial structure was to operate if the tide of battle brought the Whites back to the city.

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89. The Central Statistical Board of Ukraine estimate for 1920 was 1,910,000, against V. A. Arnautov's figure of 1,782,500 (in *Golod i deti na Ukraine* [Khar'kov, 1922], quoted by I. Herasymovych, *Holod na Ukraini* [Berlin, 1922], p.9). The breakdown of the city's population by nationality and age is also from Herasymovich (op.cit., p.12).

90. Pashchenko, op.cit., p.185.

The Makhnovites apparently made serious efforts both in Ekaterinoslav and in Aleksandrovsk to emphasise to the inhabitants that they were neither a new occupying power, nor a party, but rather a guarantee of the absence of both. But political work in Ekaterinoslav, under sustained artillery bombardment, was significantly more difficult than in Aleksandrovsk, which was also much closer to Guliai-Pole. In Aleksandrovsk the Makhnovites held a couple of general conferences at which they urged ideas of self-management and workers' control upon the less than enthusiastic working population. Finally the railway workers got themselves organised and elected a committee to draw up time-tables, control the fare structure, and so on.<sup>91</sup>

On 20 October 1919, the Makhnovites called a week-long regional congress of peasants and workers in Aleksandrovsk, which was attended by 180 peasant delegates and 20 or so workers. The congress agenda included both military and political questions, but even with regard to technical questions on the future of the Insurgent Army, the anarchist principle of not imposing authority onto the proceedings was followed. Volin, who also chaired the sessions, gives a detailed account of the way in which the pro-

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91. Arshinov, op.cit., p.145-146. This incident may have been the origin for Yaroslavsky's contemptuously-told story that Makhno advised the Aleksandrovsk rail workers to get money or food from their passengers. Yaroslavsky puts the following words into Makhno's mouth: "[...] we don't need the railways, and if you do then get bread from those who want your railway [...]" (op.cit., p.72). Footman quotes this tale, and it appears in Kessel's "Buccaneers of the steppes" in an even more distorted form: "If anyone wants to go anywhere - let him [sic] take a cart and a horse [i.e. a *tachanka*] and go! At least, there's no smoke and no stench" (*Living Age* no.315 [4 November 1922], p.276). Arshinov, in a footnote, says that the story first appeared in a White newspaper (op.cit., p.149n).

ceedings were conducted, and says that he consciously strove to limit his role to steering the congress, following the agenda, and recognising speakers.<sup>92</sup>

The Makhnovites did not allow any sort of electoral campaign to take place before the congress, prohibited party representation, and limited themselves to presenting an agenda, which delegates were free to modify as the mood took them. Volin recounts a visit before the congress from a Left SR, a certain Lubim, who expressed serious reservations about this procedure, especially as it would allow "counter-revolutionaries" to be elected as delegates. Lubim also intervened during the opening session, calling for the chair to exercise its functions more decisively. According to Volin, he was shouted down.

The congress decided, among other things, that all males below 48 years of age would "voluntarily" serve in the Insurgent Army, and that the Army would be fed by "free gifts" of food from the peasantry. The congress also organised what Volin terms a "freelance medical service" for wounded or sick insurgents, and appointed a commission of enquiry into the activities of Makhno's security service., which was accused of various excesses, including arbitrary arrests, executions, and torture.

The structure and behaviour of the Makhnovite security services

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92. Volin, *op.cit.*, p.603-620. My account of the congress follows Volin's.

are poorly documented, but it seems certain that frequent abuses of power took place. Volin himself admits that a kind of "warrior clique" formed itself around the *bat'ko* and that brutalities were committed.<sup>93</sup> A secondary source names the Zadov brothers as the commanders of security operations.<sup>94</sup> There may even have been two services, perhaps at different times, the *razvedka* and the *Kommissia Protivmakhnoskikh Del*.<sup>95</sup>

There was certainly an arbitrary reign of terror against anyone perceived by the Insurgents as their class enemies. In one incident around October, witnessed by a Bolshevik agent, a train from Aleksandrovsk to Ekaterinoslav was stopped by a Makhnovite detachment armed with machine-guns. Six officers who were on board were summarily shot, after being told that they were to receive a reward of "ten thousand [rubles] for the *pomeshchik's* land." The Makhnovite detachment then rode the train for a while before dramatically stopping it in the open steppe and disappearing into the night.<sup>96</sup>

Meanwhile, great efforts were made by the Bolshevik underground in Ekaterinoslav to ensure continued trade union support in the

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93. Volin, op.cit., p.683.

94. Yaroslavsky, op.cit., p.71.

95. But *razvedka* simply means security or intelligence service; the other name translates as Commission of Anti-Makhno Activities (Kubanin, op.cit., p.116-117; Footman, op.cit., p.288).

96. The report adds that 22 officers were shot that day, ten arrested and many others wounded (Pashchenko, op.cit., p.177-178).



city, especially during intervals of White rule. After the expulsion of Bolshevik military forces, the local Mensheviks had assumed that underground trade union work in Ekaterinoslav would be left to them, and called for new union elections. Although weakened by mass arrests, the Bolsheviks managed after a struggle to prevent this. The local trade union structure was concerned with strikes and lockouts, and also with resisting a mass mobilisation declared by the White authorities. But with Makhno's arrival in October, the unions reverted to a semi-legal status and became much more passive, only to resume militant action again in the period between Makhno's final expulsion at the end of November and the arrival of the Red Army on 30 December.<sup>97</sup>

During the Makhnovite occupation of the city, the party began to publish a daily paper, *Zvezda* (The Star) which immediately launched an unreserved campaign against anarchism as an ideology, and incited workers to take action against the Makhnovites in preparation for the imminent arrival of the Red Army from the north.<sup>98</sup> Makhno, while waging a fierce anti-Bolshevik war of words, remained true to his principles and took no action against the local party organisation.<sup>99</sup>

In fact, the Makhnovites permitted both Right and Left SRs as

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97. A detailed account of local trade union activity in Ekaterinoslav during late 1919, by one Brin, is printed in *ibid.*, p.202-204.

98. *Ibid.*, p.177-178.

99. Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.146; Pashchenko, *op.cit.*, p.186.

well as the Bolsheviks to publish newspapers, and even published a confused and contradictory proclamation on socialist freedom of the press and of association:

"1. All socialist political parties, organisations and tendencies have the right to propagate their ideas, theories, views and opinions freely, both in speech and in writing. No restriction of socialist freedom of speech or of the press will be permitted, and no persecution may take place in this respect.

*Observation:* Military communiques may not be printed unless they are supplied by the editors of *Put' k Svobode* [...]

2. [...] any attempt to prepare, organise or impose political authority over the working people will not be permitted [...]"<sup>100</sup>

According to Levko, a campaign of infiltration into the Makhnovite ranks was given "special attention" in Ekaterinoslav. The objective was to lower morale in the Insurgent Army as a whole, and to identify units which might be smoothly integrated into the Red Army later on.<sup>101</sup> Infiltrated Bolsheviks were ordered to stay with the Makhnovites, because the Red Army was close by.<sup>102</sup> The Bolsheviks even succeeded in subverting a Makhnovite brigade commander, Polonskii, but along with seven others he was eventually arrested by the insurgent headquarters on charges of conspiring

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100. Datelined Ekaterinoslav, 5 November 1919 (Arshinov, op.cit., p.151-152).

101. Levko's reports show that the absorption of the *Makhnovshchina* - as a fighting force - into the Red Army remained a constant Bolshevik objective throughout 1919 and 1920. In fact, the fighting that was to break out in January 1920 between the Reds and the Makhnovites lasted until October 1920, nearly a year later, when the Starobel'sk agreement brought about a short-lived unity (Pashchenko, op.cit., p.186, 205).

102. Ibid., p.205.

to poison Makhno.<sup>103</sup> The seven were all condemned to death by firing squad. Despite a combination of appeals for mercy, propaganda and threats from the Bolsheviks, the Makhnovites refused to release the condemned men, but the issue became academic when the retreating White Guards suddenly pushed Makhno out of the city again in late November.<sup>104</sup> In what was now becoming almost a routine, the major part of the city's quasi-legal Bolshevik organisation went with him.

But by mid-December the Bolshevik underground had got itself organised, had received funding, and was organising revolutionary committees in nearby districts. On 29 December the Ekaterinoslav military revolutionary committee formally took power. Red divisions occupied local railway stations. On 30 December the Red Army returned to Ekaterinoslav and legal political structures accompanied the communist troops as they entered the city.<sup>105</sup>

The months of military and political confusion meant that the Bolshevik grip on the revolutionary politics of Ukrainian cities was significantly weaker than it had been. Rival communist groupings with nationalist inclinations had to be neutralised, partly by absorbing them, partly by liquidating them. The term "Makhno-

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103. A careful reading of Levko's first report shows that it does not state in so many words that the charges were untrue, and given the circumstances it is not implausible that the Bolsheviks wanted to see him dead (ibid., p.186-187).

104. Levko's first report concludes with a Kafka-esque account of the difficulties faced by the underground organisation in converting Soviet rubles into Denikin rubles in order to continue subversive work (ibid., p.187-188).

105. Ibid., p.206.

vite" became, for Trotsky among others, an abusive synonym for any anti-Bolshevik or indeed any Bolshevik dissenter, and was thrown around, often misleadingly, in this sense.<sup>106</sup> At the ninth Congress of the RCP(b), for instance, Lenin attacked the "democratic centralists" - Saprnov, Osinskii and Smirnov - who wanted a collective administration rather than using bourgeois experts.

"I know very well that Comrade Osinskii and the others do not share the views of Makhno [...]"

said Lenin sarcastically, suggesting the opposite. Their dissension would, in any case, he implied, lend comfort to Makhno.<sup>107</sup>

In the last few days of 1919, the Whites managed to extricate themselves from the looming threat of complete annihilation by the advancing Red Army. The eccentric General Slashchev, a bird fancier and drug addict as well as an astute strategist, was still engaged with Makhno's forces near Ekaterinoslav in conditions of "thick mud and almost completely impassable country roads."<sup>108</sup> Slashchev decided not to attempt to defend northern

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106. Referring, for example, to the SR-linked Borot'bist (or "Struggle") group, the UKP(b) (as opposed to the KP(b)U), Trotsky recommended in December that "implacable retribution" be meted out to the "Makhnovites" in its ranks. Clearly there were none in the strict sense (*The Trotsky papers, 1917-1922* [The Hague, 1964-1971; hereafter *TP*], vol.1, p.790-791).

107. V. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 5th ed. (Moscow, 1958-1965) [hereafter *PSS*], vol.40, p.260. See also *Lektsii po istorii KPSS*, issue 2 (Moscow, 1966), p.219; *Ocherki istorii KPSS*, 5th ed. (Moscow, 1971), p.206.

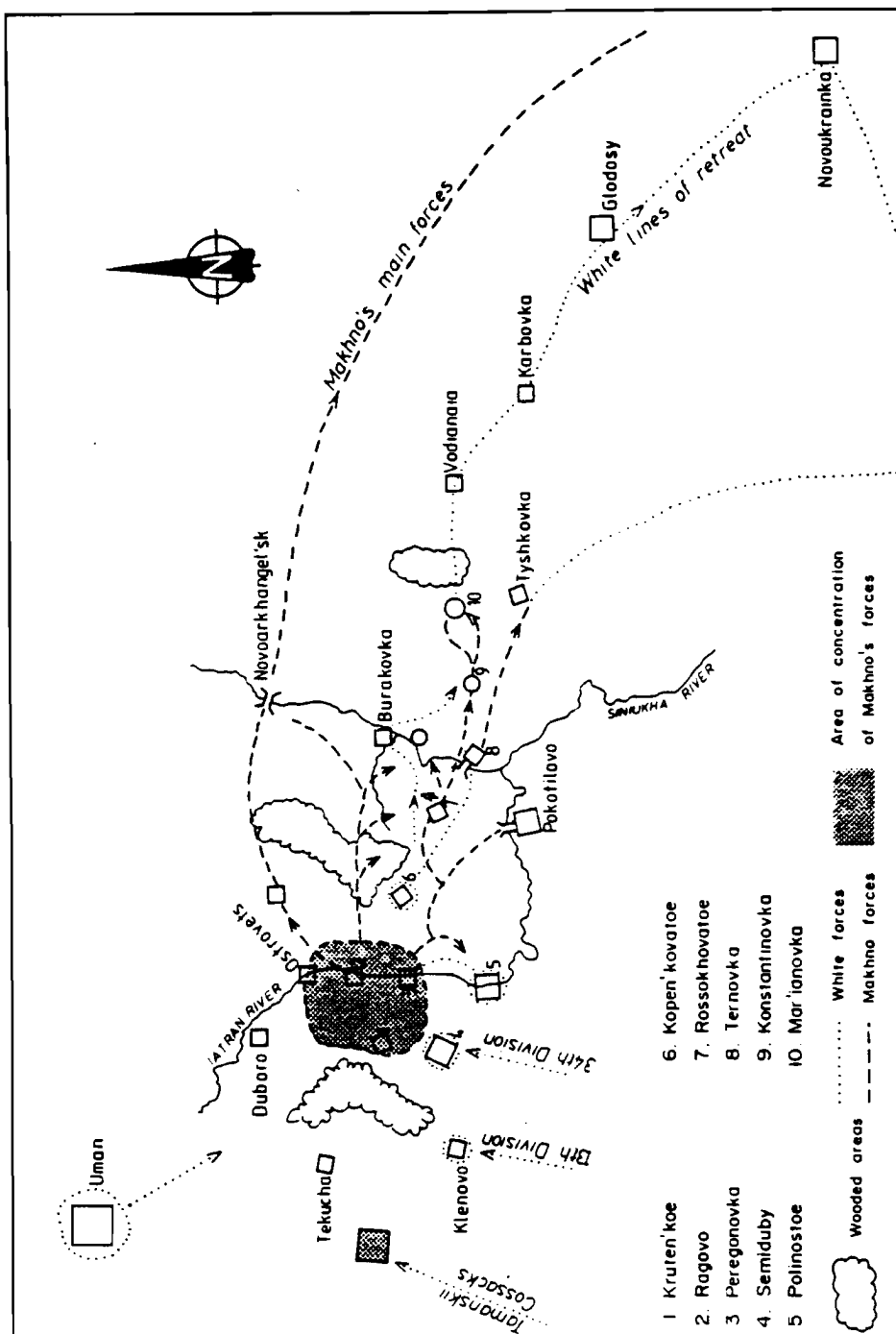
108. Ia. Slashchev, *Krym v 1920 g.: otryvki iz vospominanii* (Moscow, Leningrad, 1923), p.24. Lincoln, in a vivid phrase, says that Slashchev had "crossed that fragile boundary that separates eccentricity from madness" (op.cit., p.436-437).

Tauride against the Reds, but to push Makhno back to the Kichkas bridge and then to evacuate the White infantry behind a cavalry screen from Ekaterinoslav to Nikolaev, and then by ship to Sevastopol'. In the ensuing battle for the bridge over the Dnepr, Makhno's forces were badly mauled and withdrew, losing five artillery pieces in the process. The Whites then executed their own withdrawal from Ekaterinoslav without more fighting. Slashchev subsequently made a stand at Perekop, at the entrance to the Crimean peninsula, and prevented a Red occupation for the winter. If the Reds had thrown their full weight into the attack, the whole Wrangel episode might have been avoided.<sup>109</sup>

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109. Slashchev, op.cit., p.24-25; Chamberlin, op.cit., vol.2, p.281.

Map 7  
The Battle of Peregonovka, September 1919



Map based on sketch in V. Al'mendinger, *Simferopol'skii ofitser'skii polk* (Los Angeles, 1962), redrawn by E. A. McPherson, Dept. of Geography and Environmental Studies, University of the Western Cape, Bellville, South Africa, 1994.

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**XII. GUERRILLA INTERLUDE: MAKHNO'S 1920 CAMPAIGN**

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Up to January 1920 the new Red strategy of splitting their offensive forces into two mobile groups, which had been adopted at the end of October, had been successful. It had led to Budenny's stunning cavalry victory at Voronezh on 24 October, and had continued to pay off handsomely. The demoralised Whites, chopping and changing their commanders, were inexorably pushed back over 700 kilometres to the south. Nevertheless, two factors conspired to deny the Bolsheviks complete victory, and thus to prolong the civil war by another year. First, the Whites succeeded in hanging on to the territory of the Crimean peninsula, defending it against superior numbers of Red troops and thus securing a base of sorts where they could regroup and from which they could launch new campaigns.

Denikin for one had few doubts that the Bolshevik inability to remain on good terms with Makhno's Insurgent Army had been a major factor in saving the Whites. In January 1920, he wrote later, Makhno drove

"a wedge within the disposition of the 14th Soviet Army, and by

harassing it until October [1920] prevented the Bolsheviks' offensive against the Crimea."<sup>1</sup>

Second, in a scrambled evacuation, the Whites were able to move at least some of the remnants of the shattered Volunteer Army to Crimea by sea, as well as various Cossack units, for regrouping. The Bolsheviks, with no sea power in the south, were helpless to prevent it.

But initially, at the beginning of the year, despite the acrimonious break between the Bolsheviks and the Makhnovites which had taken place the previous summer, relations between the two sides in the field were quite amicable, continuing the kind of informal if grudging cooperation that had sometimes developed behind White lines in late 1919. Around New Year, the Red 45th Infantry, advancing against the by now completely demoralised forces of Denikin, occupied Ekaterinoslav and Aleksandrovsk. According to one version, the Reds disarmed the Makhnovites in both Aleksandrovsk and Nikopol', but another account claims that the returning Red Army contacted the Makhnovites in Aleksandrovsk earlier, in December 1919, and joint meetings were held.<sup>2</sup> This seems quite plausible, in view of long-standing Bolshevik ambitions to absorb the *Makhnovshchina* into the Red Army.

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1. A. I. Denikin, *The White army* (London, 1930), p.337 [emphasis added].

2. V. V. Popov, "Dlia etogo nago byt' bol'shevikom," in P. I. Iakir and Iu. A. Geller, *Komandarm Iakir: vospominaniia družei i sovratnikov* (Moscow, 1963), p.234; Palij also gives circumstantial details ("The peasant partisan movement of the anarchist Nestor Makhno, 1918-1921," [Ph.D. dissertation, University of Kansas, 1971] p.294). See also Louis Aragon, *A history of the USSR* (London, 1964), p.155.



But the brief honeymoon between the two groups of fighters did not last long.<sup>3</sup> Early in January the headquarters of the 14th Red Army under Voroshilov sent Makhno a formal order instructing him to proceed with his entire army to take up positions on the Polish frontier.<sup>4</sup> Although there might have been some military justification for this tactically speaking, the Bolsheviks were in fact trying to separate the partisans from their political base by sending them to a front where their influence would be minimal. At worst they would break up as a coherent force, at best they would be more easily integrated into the regular forces of the Red Army.<sup>5</sup>

The Makhnovites were too wary to fall into what they saw as an obvious trap. They sent a carefully-worded reply back to Voroshilov, refusing his order.<sup>6</sup> The Insurgent Army would stay in Ukraine where it belonged. There was no point in moving to the Polish Front, and anyway, the typhus epidemic which was then raging

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3. P. A. Arshinov, *Istoriia makhnovskogo dvizheniia, 1918-1920 gg.* (Berlin, 1923), p.157.

4. Idem. Palij comments that "the author of the order realised that there was no real war between the Poles and the Bolsheviks at that time" (op.cit., p.295, emphasis added), but as we shall see below, there is some debate about exactly when the "real war" between Poland and Soviet Russia began.

5. There was apparently little expectation on the Bolshevik side that Makhno would obey the order (S. N. Semanov, "Makhnovshchina i ee krakh," *Voprosy Istorii* no.9 [1966], p.52). David Footman points out that this tactic was used successfully with "difficult partisan leaders" in Siberia on other occasions (*Civil war in Russia* [London, 1960], p.291).

6. Arshinov, op.cit., p.157-158.

across Ukraine had decimated the Makhnovite ranks. Until the epidemic abated, the move was impossible.

The civil war brought with it, together with widespread hunger and shortages of essential goods, massive outbreaks of such diseases as cholera, virulent strains of influenza, typhoid and typhus. The spread of typhus, borne by lice, was made possible by the movement of huge armies, and the hordes of refugees created by their passing, as well as the virtual absence of soap and disinfectants and the decline of people's ability to resist the disease when weak with hunger.<sup>7</sup> The clothing of soldiers in particular was usually crawling with lice. When the clothing of one Red detachment was deloused in early 1920, the dead insects made up a layer several centimetres thick on the floor of the disinfecting room, looking like greyish sand.<sup>8</sup>

For many Russians, death seemed only a single louse bite away. The writer Pitirim Sorokin noted in his diary:

"Today I caught an insect on my body. Is it a typhus louse or not? [...] If it is typhus, that means the end of me. I am too weak to

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7. For general studies on the impact of insect-borne epidemics on the course of human history, see Hans Zinsser's now classic life history of typhus fever, *Rats, lice and history* (Boston, 1935); and J. L. Cloudsley-Thompson's less satisfactory work *Insects and history* (London, 1976). For a more specific overview of urban social and health conditions during the war, with some reference to Ukraine, see D. Brower, "'The city in danger': the civil war and the Russian urban population," in D. Koenker, W. Rosenberg and R. Suny (eds.), *Party, state and society in the Russian civil war: explorations in social history* (Bloomington, 1989), p.58-80.

8. *Pravda* (14 March 1920), quoted by W. H. Chamberlin, *The Russian revolution, 1917-1921* new ed. (New York, 1965), vol.2, p.337.

live through the fever."<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, by December 1919 public health conditions had become so precarious that Lenin reported to the 8th All-Russian Conference of the Russian Communist Party that the three "simple problems" that faced his government were bread, fuel and the louse. Typhus, he added, might yet "prove a calamity that will prevent our tackling any sort of socialist development."<sup>10</sup> A few days later, at the 7th All-Russian Congress of Soviets, he was even more dramatic: "either the lice will defeat socialism, or socialism will defeat the lice."<sup>11</sup>

Certainly lice came close to destroying the *Makhnovshchina*. Arshinov claims that the typhus epidemic among the insurgents in October and November 1919 was the principal reason why they eventually "abandoned" Ekaterinoslav to General Slashchev at the end of November. Their effective strength had been reduced by 50 percent due to sickness.<sup>12</sup> Another contemporary observer recalls that the situation was so serious that when Makhno's men retreated, the numerous typhus cases had to walk without assistance.<sup>13</sup>

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9. *Leaves from a Russian diary* (New York, 1924), p.234, quoted by W. Bruce Lincoln, *Red victory: a history of the Russian civil war* (New York, 1989), p.64

10. *Collected works* (Moscow, 1960-1971), vol.30, p.185.

11. *Ibid.*, vol.30, p.228.

12. Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.157. Slashchev, however, describes some fierce fighting (*Krym v 1920 g* [Moscow, Leningrad, 1923], p.24).

13. V. Shklovskii, *A sentimental journey: memoirs, 1917-1922* (London, 1920), p.220.

By January the situation was little better: all the members of the Makhnovite headquarters staff were sick, and Makhno himself had contracted a "particularly virulent" strain of typhus. Many of the movement's soldiers had returned to their villages.<sup>14</sup> Makhno was comatose for several days and was hidden in a series of peasant dwellings in Guliai-Pole and nearby, while the Red Army conducted a house-to-house manhunt for him. Through good fortune and through the skill and "fanatical devotion" of his followers, he survived both the illness and the manhunt.<sup>15</sup>

The long-haired, under-nourished and ill-clad partisans were, if anything, even more susceptible to typhus and other endemic diseases than the Red Army soldiers. The Makhnovites lacked medical equipment and even soap, and wore bits and pieces of whatever uniforms they came across. Infections passed from them to the peasants and back again, so that it was often in the villagers' own interests to nurse them, regardless of political sympathies:

"Our first job would be to delouse our patients," wrote one reluctant nurse many years later. "When one of them removed his shirt you could almost see it move, especially along the hems. Usually the Makhnovtse [sic] would wear their hair long, and we would have to comb them for lice. The man would sit with his head over the table and every time you pulled the comb through his hair the lice would scatter on the table, and he would gleefully crush them with his thumb-nail."<sup>16</sup>

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14. Arshinov, op.cit., p.158-159.

15. Ibid., p.159.

16. Victor Peters, *Nestor Makhno: the life of an anarchist* (Winnipeg, 1970), p.62, quoting an informant. Peters also quotes another correspondent who estimated that between 11 and 15 percent of the population of his village, occupied by the *Makhnovshchina*, died of typhus (op.cit., p.67).

But although they were hard hit by disease, the Makhnovites were not completely incapacitated. At the same time that they sent off their refusal to move to the Polish front, insurgent headquarters also published an appeal addressed directly to the rank and file of the Red Army, asking for their solidarity in the face of this provocation.<sup>17</sup>

The Bolsheviks did not waste any time in reacting to Makhno's half-expected refusal to obey their orders. On the 9th, the All-Ukrainian Revolutionary Committee in Khar'kov, under the chairmanship of G. I. Petrovskii, issued a decree addressed to "all workers, Red Army men, and Ukrainian peasants" declaring the Makhnovites to be outlaws.

"The military command, trying by all means possible to unite all military forces against the common enemy of the working classes - the land-owners and capitalists - offered the Makhnovites the chance to take up arms against the Poles [...]

But Makhno did not subordinate himself to the will of the Red Army, refused to take up arms against the Poles, and declared war against our liberation army of workers and peasants [...]

Therefore the All-Ukrainian Revolutionary Committee decrees:

1) Makhno and his group, as deserters and traitors, are declared

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17. Arshinov, op.cit., p.158. It is possible but unlikely that this document is in fact the same as *Ob"iavlenie Revoliutsionnoi Povstancheskoii Armii Ukrainy (Makhnovtsev) ko vsem krest'ianam i rabochim Ukrainy*, dated 7 January 1920, which has survived in the Ugo Fedeli Archive at the Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis in Amsterdam, and which was published by L. J. van Rossum in his "Proclamations of the Makhno movement, 1920," *International Review of Social History* vol.13, part 2 (1968), p.246-268. The difficulty is that the surviving document is addressed to the peasants and workers of Ukraine, not to the Red Army, and that it is not concerned with military matters.

outlaws;

2) All who support and harbour these traitors will be mercilessly annihilated."<sup>18</sup>

It is likely that the Bolsheviks were concerned about the possibility of troop desertions to the Makhnovites, now that the two groups were in close contact.<sup>19</sup> Even if such desertions did not occur on a large scale, the spread of anarchist and even nationalist ideas and the emphasis being placed on Makhno's role in the defeat of Denikin in newspaper articles was worrying to some Bolsheviks. Sergo Ordzhonikidze, for example, was moved to protest in writing, pointing out with some accuracy that Makhno had not actually led the uprising; rather the masses themselves had risen up against Denikin's oppressive policies.<sup>20</sup> A Bolshevik report complained that party work had to be carried out in extremely adverse circumstances. The Makhnovites as well as the Petliurists were carrying on a "furious" propaganda campaign, while the Bolsheviks, said the report, lacked workers, literature or funds to counteract this.<sup>21</sup> But conditions varied widely from place to place and from day to day. Another report from Krivoi Rog on the right bank, dated a few days later, stated that although the mood of the peasantry was hard to evaluate, their attitude towards the

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18. A. Ia. Pashchenko (ed.), *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ekaterinoslavshchine* (Dnepropetrovsk, 1968), p.210-211.

19. Clearly Arshinov believed that this was the case (op.cit., p.157).

20. Ordzhonikidze was working for the RVS of the 14th Army at the time (L. Nikulin, "Gibel' makhnovshchiny," *Znamia* no.3 [1941], p.181).

21. Report dated "not earlier than 25 January" in Pashchenko, op.cit., p.213.

Makhnovshchina was negative.<sup>22</sup>

There is some surviving evidence from the "furious" propaganda campaign that both sides were carrying on at this time. A lengthy declaration from the Insurgent Army of Ukraine (Makhnovite) still exists and has been published both in the original Russian and in an English translation.<sup>23</sup> After a rousing and highly rhetorical introduction, the document lists 11 substantive points, all of which present practical difficulties of conceptualisation and implementation. These repeal all legislation passed by Denikin's administration, as well as any Communist legislation that might be objected to by "the working people"; transfer land to the peasants, and factories and mines to the workers; propose "free Soviets"; abolish the *Cheka*, the police and armies; and guarantee freedom of speech, the press, assembly, union activity "and the like". One paragraph declares that the workers and peasants must not allow any "counter-revolutionary demonstrations by the bourgeoisie or the officers." Anybody convicted of banditry "will be summarily shot."

Most interestingly, the declaration states baldly that:

"10. The exchange of goods and the products of labour will be free. This activity will not be assumed by organisations of workers and peasants for the present. However, it is proposed that the

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22. Loc.cit., p.220.

23. Interestingly, none of the surviving Makhnovite proclamations is in Ukrainian. See L. J. van Rossum, op.cit. p.252-254. For an English translation by Ann Allen, see P. I. Arshinov, *History of the Makhnovist movement, 1918-1921* (Detroit, Chicago, 1974), p.265-267.

exchange of the products of labour should occur mainly BETWEEN WORKING PEOPLE."<sup>24</sup>

This text quite clearly shows the anarchist tendency to underestimate the need to underpin a worker-peasant alliance with the *systematic* exchange of goods between the agricultural and industrial sectors. Without such an underpinning, it will founder on encountering the first difficulty on either side.

The Bolshevik propaganda machine, even in its weakened state, was not slow to reply, and attacked the insurgents on several fronts, accusing them of causing the defeats of the summer of 1919, of wanting to set up their own state, of propagating anarchy, of executing commissars, and of refusing to go to the Polish front:

The Red Army had to pay dearly for the liberation of Ukraine from the White Guard invasion. Thousands of our best revolutionaries fell in battle with the gangs of the gold-epaulets.<sup>25</sup> The deaths of our beloved comrades demand from us that we strengthen the freedoms that they attained.

Remember, comrades of the Red Army, what caused our defeat last summer. Why did we suddenly, after a series of glorious victories, start to retreat in the face of an out-numbered and weak enemy?

Every sensible Red Army man knows that the reason was that instability was created in the rear. While Red units were bravely fighting at the front, a gang of bandits were busy organising a kingdom in Guliai-Pole. Guliai-Pole became a separate state, which did not recognise the centre. They started to propagate anarchy ...<sup>26</sup> But they needed this anarchy only so that they could rob

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24. Van Rossum, op.cit., p.254 (capitalisation in the original).

25. *Zolotopogonny* - slang for officers, with reference to the gold braid on their shoulder-straps.

26. Ellipsis in the original. Throughout the document, the contemptuous Russian word *bezvlast'* (anarchy) is used instead of the more neutral *anarkhizm* (anarchism).



the workers and peasants! They needed this anarchy so that they would be able to desert from the front! They needed this anarchy so that they would be able to betray the working people.

And they succeeded in doing this! They opened the front and for nearly half a year the sons of the bourgeoisie and the landowners robbed, raped, hanged and shot your brothers and sisters!

Who is it who should be blamed for this?

Those anarchist-bandits and Guliiai-Pole robbers, who wanted to organise a state within the state!

Those self-seeking marauders of Makhno's, who shot our communist comrades and killed our political commissars.

And because of this, now that we have destroyed our enemies, we must not forget even for a moment the lessons of the past.

Those who want victory for the workers and peasants over the landowners must oppose these anarchist-bandits!

Those who want to consolidate our victory must support the united and organised Red Army and oppose separate and independent partisan groups.

Remember, comrades of the Red Army, that only in organisation lies strength!

*Those who support anarchy, consciously or unconsciously, are helping Denikin and Kolchak!*

When we now ask Makhno to take up arms against the Polish landowners and magnates, he refuses!

Is this not a clear betrayal, comrades, of our just cause? Is this not aid to our enemies? Is this not a declaration of war against the government of workers and peasants?

Now it is clear to everybody what this "anarchy" means.

In answer to this foul treason the working class, in the form of its government, *declared Makhno an outlaw!*

Red Army comrades! Makhno is preparing to stab us in the back ... But he will not succeed! The Red Army, having smashed Denikin's White gangs, will know how to deal with Makhno's gangs! All his honest partisans will come over to our side, and for the robbers

and bandits there will be no mercy.<sup>27</sup>

What followed this war of words was "eight months of the most savage fighting in which the Makhnovites were ever engaged."<sup>28</sup> But unlike the campaigns of 1919, this was not a war of large set battles. It was a fluid semi-guerrilla drive in which the Bolsheviks by and large retained the initiative, and kept the *Makhnovshchina* - by now a much smaller army than it had been at its peak at the end of 1919 - pushed back onto the defensive. In this respect it was a precursor of the type of fighting that took place until August 1921, and which ended in the final defeat of the *Makhnovshchina*. In 1920, as later, the Bolsheviks had two key objectives, to eliminate Makhno's forces militarily, and to neutralise peasant support for the *partizanshchina* in the countryside.

It was also a war of movement, in which territory changed hands frequently. Guliai-Pole itself was captured and then lost several times, and other villages too.<sup>29</sup> The Makhnovites could not mount full-scale conventional offensives, and were restricted to harassing the Red forces, or picking off units which had become separated for one reason or another.

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27. Originally published by the Agitprop Soviet of the Ekaterinoslav Military Revolutionary Committee, the Russian text of this document, "Doloi Makhnovshchina," (Down with the *Makhnovshchina*) is printed in Pashchenko, op.cit., p.217-218.

28. Footman, loc.cit.

29. Arshinov, op.cit., p.160.

Both sides employed terror. The Cheka would move into a newly-occupied village and kill any *Makhnovtsy* that they found. Communists would be placed in positions of power, and a militia set up. But these positions were not secure ones: the grain requisition policies of War Communism had created bitter resentment of the Bolsheviks among the Ukrainian peasantry, and when the *Makhnovites* appeared again they would reverse the process, shooting the Bolshevik functionaries in their turn.<sup>30</sup>

But just as Makhno's semi-guerrilla campaigns of 1920 and 1921 together differed from the set pieces of mid-1919, the 1920 campaign was itself sharply different in several key respects from the fighting of the following year. In 1920, as in 1919, Bolshevik attention was still divided among the various active enemies of the Soviet state.

Several imminent threats promised, at the beginning of 1920, to create difficulties for the Soviet government when the winter was over. Petliura had been driven out of Ukraine, but he had not been completely neutralised. Poland was becoming increasingly hostile. Denikin's Whites, although decisively defeated, were bottled up in Crimea, regrouping for the spring. Makhno's insurgency, from the Bolshevik point of view, was simply another factor in this complicated mixture.

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30. *Ibid.*, p.160-161.

As it turned out, Ukrainian nationalism had shot its bolt for a generation. Semen Petliura had left for Warsaw in December 1919, and his best troops had subsequently been interned in the Polish borderlands after being caught up in an unexpected Polish advance in northern Galicia. He subsequently made a deal with the Poles, out of desperation, to try jointly to drive the Bolsheviks out of Ukraine, in exchange for handing over all of Galicia west of the Zbruch river, as well as Volynia. This has justly been described as "one of the most sordid pages in all Ukrainian history."<sup>31</sup> In the meantime, some nationalist partisan activity continued between the Zbruch and the Dnepr, under the leadership of such nationalist officers as M. Omelianovych-Pavlenko and Iurko Tiutiun-nyk.<sup>32</sup>

*Cut § on Polish war (p. 390-396)*

The threat constituted by the Poles was of a different order of magnitude, and presents in addition some serious historiographical problems. Until the 1970s, the war between the Bolsheviks and the Poles in 1920 was widely regarded by students of the Russian civil war as simply a campaign within the wider conflict, and was sometimes, it is claimed, relegated in the general histories to

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31. J. S. Reshetar Jr., *The Ukrainian revolution, 1917-1920* (Princeton, 1952), p.299. Reshetar also prints a full English translation of the treaty which Petliura concluded with the Poles on 21 April 1920 (*ibid.*, p.301-302).

32. *Ibid.*, p.299.

mere footnotes on the borderlands.<sup>33</sup> A powerful revisionist interpretation then appeared, which was put forward principally by Norman Davies, and which argued three theses about the nature of the campaign. Davies maintained that the war

"did not break out in April 1920, that it lacked any organic connection with the Civil War and Allied Intervention, and that its intensification in 1920 was due no less to Soviet than to Polish designs [...]"<sup>34</sup>

More recently, the importance of the Polish campaign has been explicitly recognised by two general histories of the civil war published in the late 1980s, both of which devote whole chapters to it. As one might expect, the revisionist account has been partially absorbed into these syntheses. The United States historian W. Bruce Lincoln accepts that the war began earlier than April 1920, but otherwise presents what is essentially a narrative account of the campaign, implicitly rejecting the idea that it was not organically connected to the civil war.<sup>35</sup> The second and most radical of Davies' revisionist theses has, however, been quite explicitly rejected by Evan Mawdsley in his 1987 account, where he argues strongly for the viewpoint that even though

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33. Revisionist claims sometimes go too far. The Polish campaign does in fact usually receive adequate treatment, at least quantitatively. The best narrative history of the civil war in English until the 1980s devotes half of a lengthy chapter and two maps to the war with Poland (see W. H. Chamberlin, *The Russian revolution, 1917-1921* new ed. [New York, 1965], vol.2, p.297-316).

34. N. Davies, "The missing revolutionary war: the Polish campaigns and the retreat from revolution in Soviet Russia, 1919-21," *Soviet Studies* vol.27, no.2 (April 1975), p.178 [emphasis in the original].

35. W. Bruce Lincoln, *op.cit.*, p.399.

"[...] there was a strong element of nationalism on both sides [...] But the Polish campaigns were part of the general Civil War. The Russian Civil War was concerned with national self-determination as well as social revolution. Poland (most of it) had been part of the Russian Empire for 130 years [...] And the Belorussian-Ukrainian borderlands, which the fighting was initially all about, were certainly part of the Civil War."<sup>36</sup>

Before the debate around Davies' interpretation took place, the conventional version of the Polish-Soviet war had it that Soviet recognition of the independence of the Baltic states (Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia) and of Finland, which had all been part of the Russian empire until 1917, encouraged Polish nationalists led by Jozef Pilsudski to adopt a conciliatory attitude towards the Bolshevik government throughout 1919.<sup>37</sup> But the revisionists point to evidence that there were aggressive intentions on both sides, certainly by the beginning of 1920.<sup>38</sup> Earlier, the Poles had seized some Lithuanian territory and had also occupied eastern Galicia (western Ukraine), formerly part of the Austro-Hungarian empire, which both Russians and Ukrainians agreed was an ethnic Ukrainian area. Negotiations took place in late 1919 over prisoner of war exchanges and frontier adjustments.

In the winter of 1919-1920, Pilsudski kept Polish relations with the Soviet government deliberately but not seriously tense, while

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36. E. Mawdsley, *The Russian civil war* (Boston, 1987), p.260 [emphasis in the original].

37. However, there was fighting between Poles and Bolsheviks in February 1919 over a short-lived plan to establish a Lithuanian-Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic. See N. Davies, *White eagle, Red star: the Polish-Soviet war, 1919-20* (London, 1972), chapter 1.

38. Davies, "The missing revolutionary war," p.182.

he waited out the result of the internal struggle for power in Russia. There were frontier incidents, but no important military activity. Pilsudski believed that a government led by a revanchist Kolchak or Denikin in Moscow constituted a much greater threat to Polish independence than Lenin or Trotsky's project of exporting the revolution to Germany. It was only when the Whites had apparently been decisively defeated at the end of 1919 that Pilsudski set out to occupy Ukraine, an ancient Polish aim. But Pilsudski's objectives were modern ones: he wanted to protect Poland by placing Ukraine in a chain of anti-Bolshevik buffer states from Finland to Georgia.<sup>39</sup>

In the spring of 1920, therefore, Pilsudski decided to attempt to incite a Ukrainian revolt against Russian rule, and to take advantage of this to re-establish Poland's eighteenth century eastern frontiers. Polish (and Catholic) landlords had dominated much of the Ukrainian countryside in those days, and many Poles hoped to take advantage of the Allied failure to define the eastern frontier at Versailles, to establish one instead which would re-

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39. The Polish foreign minister of the time claimed later that both Petliura and Makhno assured Pilsudski that Ukrainians would rise up for independence and against Bolshevism (Stanislaw Grabski, *The Polish-Soviet frontier* [New York, 1944], p.28). However, it seems inherently unlikely that Makhno was involved in encouraging the Polish adventure, although another Polish source also reports that Makhno cooperated with the Poles in late April (Titus Kormarnicki, *Rebirth of the Polish Republic* [London, 1957], p.579). The failure of the Ukrainian populace to rise up led directly to the abandonment of the Jagellonian Programme. On the alliance between Petliura and Pilsudski, see Reshetar, *op.cit.*, p.299 et seq.

claim what some of them saw as "lost lands".<sup>40</sup>

Makhno's direct role in all this was strictly limited. By mid-April his relations with the Bolsheviki had deteriorated to the point that his forces were actively harassing Bolshevik troop movements to the Polish Front. Obviously the Bolshevik command took this kind of action seriously, and it was remembered with bitterness in the months to come.<sup>41</sup>

On 7 May 1920 the Poles occupied Kiev, and prepared to set up a puppet government. In a complex argument which need not detain us here, Norman Davies has written that Pilsudski's invasion of Ukraine and the taking of Kiev were no more "act[s] of aggression against Soviet Russia than the Allied landings in Normandy in 1944 [were] against Nazi Germany."<sup>42</sup> On the contrary, they merely continued an existing conflict.

The Polish army was made up of ethnic Poles who had served in the Russian, German or Austrian armies during the Great War, and who,

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40. The Treaties of Versailles (with Germany) and Saint-Germain (with Austria) had jointly re-established independent Poland in mid-1919. Article 87 of the Versailles document promised that the allies would demarcate the eastern border in due course. By December 1919 the British proposed the so-called Curzon Line as a compromise which divided the Catholic Poles from their eastern Orthodox Slavic neighbours. It was from this frontier that Pilsudski wanted to expand.

41. The Commander of the 1st Army reported several skirmishes with Makhnovite forces at this time (*Kievshchina v gody grazhdanskoi voiny i inostrannoi voennoi interventsii, 1918-1920 gg.: sbornik dokumentov i materialov* [Kiev, 1962], p.397-398).

42. Davies, "The missing revolutionary war," p.183.



in an excess of patriotism, now volunteered to continue fighting. Contemporary commentators were astonished both by the effectiveness of this new army, and by their self-discipline and orderly behaviour in newly conquered lands. But much of their initial success was attributable to the advantage of surprise, and as soon as the Red Army was able to turn its full attention on the new enemy, it was only a matter of time before the Poles were pushed back. In 1920, eight out of the 16 armies which made up the Red Army were deployed against Poland. Such a heavy concentration of resources for a campaign on foreign territory cost the Bolsheviks a high price.<sup>43</sup>

By June and July Red counter-attacks had rapidly pushed the Poles out of Ukraine, and back across the river Bug, traditionally regarded as the linguistic frontier between the Poles and the eastern Slavs. By early August the Poles were defending a line which stretched from the north-west to the south-east, diagonally from Plotsk, passing to the east of Warsaw, down to L'vov. The Red Army was poised to take Warsaw, and the city's fall seemed for a time both inevitable and imminent. Tukhachevskii, commanding the Red Armies, wrote triumphantly that the path to world revolution would pass over the "corpse of Poland".<sup>44</sup>

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43. Davies argues that, despite Lenin's downplaying of the concept of "revolutionary war" for tactical advantage in his struggle with the Bolshevik left over War Communism, he and the Bolshevik leadership were actually hoping to provoke a "major European conflagration". The Polish war, Davies adds, "was intimately bound up with all the [political] issues of the day" ("The missing revolutionary war," p.187).

44. Quoted by E. Wiskemann, "The Russo-Polish war," *History of the Twentieth Century* vol.3, no.35 (1969), p.978.

At the beginning of August, amidst frenzied diplomatic activity, including negotiations between Russians and Poles at Anglo-French insistence, the Polish generals encouraged by their French military advisor, General Weygand, decided to counter-attack, and on the 16th launched the offensive later dubbed by Polish Catholics "the Miracle of the Vistula." The miracle was that the offensive was successful; by 24 August the Poles had taken nearly 70,000 Russian prisoners and had almost pushed the Bolsheviks back to the Curzon line again. On 23 September Lenin conceded defeat and ordered an armistice. The Bolsheviks had lost their gamble for direct access to Germany; they gained time to resolve the status of other borderlands, such as Belarus, and most importantly, Ukraine. In the end the only result of the Polish intervention was to destroy for decades the political credibility of mainstream Ukrainian nationalism, whose adherents had once again taken the opportunistic option and aligned themselves with the foreign invader.

There is little direct documentary evidence about the activities of the *Makhnovshchina* during the period between its being outlawed, and the end of the Polish campaign. However, two Soviet sources have made use of a diary covering this period, whose authenticity is hotly disputed. The extracts printed have an authentic ring of casual brutality, while incidentally providing us with our only glimpse of a woman's perspective on such issues as the conduct of the campaign, Makhno's drunkenness, and the fron-

tier justice meted out to grain requisition officials. The diary, by a certain Fedora Gaenko, who was possibly Makhno's mistress, was first quoted by Kubanin.<sup>45</sup> According to Kubanin, the diary, which is in the Archive of the Revolution in Khar'kov, was captured by the Red Army. It reveals the cavalier frenzy of the day-to-day operations conducted by the Makhnovites. In this respect, the diary could well be authentic. However, Arshinov, making a mountain out of a mole-hill, pedantically dismisses the whole document as counterfeit on the grounds that Makhno's wife, Galina Kuz'menko, never left him and was never captured by the Bolsheviks.<sup>46</sup> This seems wilfully naive, in view of Volin's (admittedly hostile) account of Makhno's sexual mores:

"[a] failing of Makhno and of many of his close associates was their attitude towards women. These men, especially when intoxicated, could not refrain from behaviour that was improper - disgusting would often be the correct adjective - amounting almost to orgies in which certain women were obliged to participate."<sup>47</sup>

It seems quite probable, therefore, that Makhno had other women companions who might well have stayed with him for relatively prolonged periods. Even more importantly, the extracts from the diary do not depend for their authenticity on the author's intimate relationship with Nestor Makhno. Even if Gaenko had been a rank-and-file member of the *Makhnovshchina*, or a mere camp follower, her comments would still ring true. Whatever the case, ex-

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45. M. Kubanin, *Makhnovshchina: krest'ianskoe dvizhenie v steppei Ukraine v gody grazhdanskoi voiny* (Leningrad, 1927), p.118.

46. Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.219.

47. Volin, *La révolution inconnue, 1917-1921* (Paris, 1947), p.682.

tracts from the document have since been reproduced, sometimes for hostile purposes, by other writers on the civil war, apart from Kubanin.<sup>48</sup> The flavour of the document, and its limited value as historical evidence, is amply illustrated by the following extracts:

"23 February 1920: Our boys captured some Bolshevik agents, who were then shot.

25 February 1920: Moved over to Maiorovo. Three grain requisition agents were caught and shot.

1 March 1920: Soon the boys arrived and reported that Fediukin, a Red Army commander, had been taken prisoner. Makhno sent for him, but the messenger returned with the news that the boys had not been able to mess around with him - he was wounded - and had shot him at his own request.

7 March 1920: In Varvarovka. Makhno got very drunk, began to swear loudly in the street in unprintable language. We arrived in Guliai-Pole, and something incredible began under Makhno's drunken orders. The cavalrymen used their whips and the butts of their rifles against all the former Red partisans they met [...] Two had their heads broken and one was driven into the river [...]

14 March 1920: Today we moved to Velikaia Mikhailovka. One communist killed here."<sup>49</sup>

In this kind of campaign, Makhno's forces obviously sensed their weakness and isolation in a hostile environment as early as spring. Speculation about possible alliances was widespread on all sides and often wildly inaccurate. In mid-April, for example, Red intelligence reported that Petliurist bands in the rear of

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48. Ia. Iakovlev, *Russkii anarkhizm v velikoi russkoi revoliutsii* (Petrograd, 1921), p.30; E. Yaroslavsky, *History of anarchism in Russia* (New York, 1937), p.73-74, quoting extensive extracts dating from the months of February, March, June, July, August, and December 1920; and Chamberlin, *op.cit.*, vol.2, p.236-237, quoting from Iakovlev.

49. Yaroslavsky, *loc.cit.* [spelling of place-names standardised].

the 14th Red Army were considering an alliance either with Makhno, or with the Whites in the Tauride.<sup>50</sup>

In the meantime, the Whites in the Crimea were also busy trying to get themselves reorganised. After two disastrous and chaotic White evacuations from Odessa, which had fallen to the Red Army on 7 February, and Novorossisk, which fell on 27 March, Denikin's credibility as a field commander was at its lowest ebb. At the beginning of April, obsessed by now with counteracting various "conspiracies" which he believed were being hatched against him, Denikin finally realised that he would have to give up his command if the White cause was to survive, let alone overcome its main enemy. After a Council of War, held on 3 April, had expressed its preference, Denikin resigned as commander-in-chief and appointed as his successor a man whom he had effectively cashiered a few weeks earlier, the tall and aristocratic Baron Petr Nikolaevich Wrangel.<sup>51</sup> The new commander passed his first two months re-forming his army, securing the defences of the narrow entrance to the Crimean peninsula, and establishing civil order. Wrangel realised what Denikin had never understood, that he had to win the active loyalty of at least part of the civilian

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50. Report dated 13 April 1920, in *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine, 1918-1920 gg.: sbornik dokumentov i materialov* [hereafter *GVU*] (Kiev, 1967), vol.3, p.41.

51. A Baltic German by extraction, Baron Petr Nikolaevich Wrangel (in Russian: *Vrangel'*) was an aristocrat but not rich. Compared to Denikin he was both more realistic and more flexible, but at heart was also a deeply conservative monarchist. Trained as a staff officer, Wrangel had been a daring cavalry commander in Cossack units; tall, deep-voiced, well-educated and courageous, he was bitterly anti-communist, and showed no mercy to his enemies.

population over which he ruled if he was to succeed in his military aims. He introduced a semblance of civilian government, established a professional police force, and even set about limited agrarian reform to win over the peasantry. His methods have been described, in a widely quoted phrase, as "leftist policies by rightist hands."<sup>52</sup>

When Wrangel took command in April, he openly stated that he felt that he could not defeat the Soviet government, and that he would limit himself to keeping "the honour of the Russian flag" unstained.<sup>53</sup> The war between the Bolsheviks and Poland now gave him an opportunity to go over to a limited offensive beyond the Crimean peninsula, while the Bolsheviks' attention was concentrated elsewhere. This had several advantages. It was good for morale. It gave the Whites access to the northern Tauride, a grain-producing area bordered on the south by the Black and Azov seas, and to the northwest by the lower reaches of the Dnepr, below Aleksandrovsk. It was not only food that was running short, moreover, but also such essentials as ammunition, clothing and fuel. On 6 June, against British advice, Wrangel moved into the northern Tauride out of Crimea, and also made sea-borne landings on the Azov coast. By the end of the month, the northern Tauride was entirely in White hands, and Wrangel had captured 11,000 Red sol-

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52. V. Obolenskii, *Krym pri Vrangele* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1927), p.7, quoted by both R. Lockett, *The White generals: an account of the White movement and the Russian civil war* (London, 1971), p.360; and W. Bruce Lincoln, *op.cit.*, p.427.

53. P. Wrangel, *The Memoirs* (London, 1929), p.142.

diers, dozens of artillery pieces, hundreds of machine-guns and even two armoured cars.<sup>54</sup>

Having lost British support, Wrangel needed allies. He was willing to work with any anti-Bolshevik force, and attempted to negotiate with the Petliurists as well as the Poles. On 13 May, for example, he wrote in order no.3130, from Sevastopol', that in order to achieve his "sacred purpose" - namely the "destruction of communism," which was the "main foe of Holy Russia," - he would be prepared to ally himself even with Makhno's insurgents, or indeed with the Ukrainian nationalists.<sup>55</sup>

Makhno also needed assistance. He was harassing the Bolshevik rear and destroying supplies and administrative structures, but the sudden descent of the Whites onto the plains of the northern Tauride placed him in a vulnerable position. Despite this, however, it is obvious in hindsight that an alliance with Wrangel was never a viable *political* option for him, given the basis of the *Makhnovshchina's* support among the peasantry.<sup>56</sup>

Intelligence reports from the summer of 1920 give confusing information on this matter of alliances, perhaps from ulterior political motives, perhaps because the gatherers of information

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54. Wrangel, *op.cit.*, p.254.

55. *GVU* vol.3, p.115.

56. This was recognised even in Soviet accounts before the 1930s: e.g. *Grazhdanskaia voina 1918-1921 gg.* (Moscow, 1928-1930), vol.3, p.511-512.

themselves were unable to see clearly what was happening at local level. There is extensive documentation from mid-1920 onwards alleging that a formal alliance was contracted, and although careful examination of the sources shows the story to be untrue, and although it was denied by the Bolsheviki themselves after the Starobel'sk agreement in October 1920, it has been repeated ever since, especially by Soviet general histories of the Stalin period.<sup>57</sup>

Contemporaries apparently also believed that an alliance between Makhno and Wrangel was in effect. On 10 July, for example, a UNR reconnaissance dispatch reported that a large Makhnovite levy was operating in Poltava province, and cooperating with Wrangel's forces.<sup>58</sup> In early August the *Times* in London reported that Wrangel had reached an agreement with Makhno, whom it described fairly accurately as "the real master of the country immediately to the east and the south-east of Ekaterinoslav."<sup>59</sup> Two weeks later the same newspaper carried a story reporting that a local paper had said that Wrangel had issued an order to his troops instructing them to assist all anti-Bolshevik forces. Makhno, according to the report, had done the same, a fact which the reporter in-

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57. See, for example, the *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): short course* (Moscow, 1939), which says ambiguously that Makhno "assisted" Wrangel (p.242-243); the official *Istoriia Ukrain'skoi RSR* (Kiev, 1953-1958), vol.2, p.189, says there was a formal alliance, which is repeated without correction in the second edition of the same work ([Kiev, 1967], vol.2, p.138).

58. *Ukrains'ko-moskovs'ka viina 1920 roku v dokumentakh* (Warsaw, 1933- ), vol.1, p.97.

59. *The Times* [London] (3 August 1920), p.9.



terpreted as a de facto alliance.<sup>60</sup>

Wrangel himself apparently did little to dispel the illusion that he had forged an alliance with Makhno, especially in the chancelleries of the West, on which he depended for support and supplies. Indeed, it seems that he actively sought to spread the story. On 14 August, for example, Prince Trubetskii, a close associate of Wrangel's, arrived in Paris and reported to the Entente that there was an agreement between Makhno and Wrangel to coordinate operations from the north down to Aleksandrovsk. Trubetskii described Makhno's guerrilla methods. The peasants remained in their villages, and at a given signal formed up as small units to cut communications in the rear of the Red Army. Trubetskii credited the insurgents with the failure of a recent Red cavalry offensive against Wrangel in the Aleksandrovsk region.<sup>61</sup>

Later, after the Starobel'sk agreement had been concluded between the Bolsheviks and Makhno, an article originating from the People's Commissariat for War and published in various Khar'kov newspapers on and around 20 October made it quite clear that there had never been any formal alliance, although from the Bolshevik point of view war was a two-sided, not a three-sided

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60. *The Times* [London] (20 August 1920), p.9. It is unclear from the report what the original source was.

61. *Iz istoriia grazhdanskoi voiny v SSSR: sbornik dokumentov i materialov, 1918-1922* (Moscow, 1960-1961), vol.3, p.147. The original source is allegedly a document from a captured German archive.

affair:

"As is known, the French press has written a great deal about a union between Wrangel and Makhno. The Soviet press also published from time to time documents which testified to a formal alliance between Makhno and Wrangel. Now this information has turned out to be untrue. Undoubtedly Makhno rendered real assistance to this Polish gentleman, Wrangel, inasmuch as they fought the Red Army simultaneously.<sup>62</sup> But there was no formal alliance between them. All the documents which mention a formal alliance are forgeries of Wrangel's [...]

Some weeks ago Wrangel actually attempted really to contact the Makhnovites and sent two representatives to Makhno's headquarters for talks [...] not only did the Makhnovites not join up with Wrangel, but they publicly hanged his representatives soon after their arrival [...]<sup>63</sup>

The 1920 campaign, by its guerrilla nature, was a war which was difficult to report in military terms. There were no huge armies or pitched battles. This may be the reason why this period is rich in anecdotal evidence, such as that around Makhno's attitude towards money, for example. On 10 July 1920 a UNR reconnaissance unit reported that Makhno had issued 1,000 *karbovanets* notes.<sup>64</sup> The story that Makhno issued his own currency is also repeated in secondary sources. The American journalist and historian W. H. Chamberlin, for instance, reported over twenty years later that Makhno had not only issued his own currency, but that the notes

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62. The text uses *szlachta*, a Polish word for noble.

63. *Kommunist* no.234 (20 October 1920), reprinted in *GVU* vol.3, p.642; see also L. Trotsky, *Kak vooruzhalas' revoliutsiia* (Moscow, 1923-1925), vol.2, book 2, p.214. Volin says that the piece appeared in other Khar'kov newspapers.

64. The *Karbovanets* is a Ukrainian coin equivalent to the Russian *ruble*. *Ukrains'ko-moskovs'ka viina 1920 roku v dokumentakh* (Warsaw, 1933- ), vol.1, p.97.

bore an ironical anarchist warning that nobody would be prosecuted for forging it.<sup>65</sup>

An important perspective on the *Makhnovshchina* in 1920, sympathetic but on the whole fair-minded, is provided by the writings of the American anarchists Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, both of whom were in Russia at this time. Goldman and Berkman arrived in Russia by ship, with a military escort, after having been stripped of citizenship and deported from the United States on extremely shaky legal grounds for opposing compulsory military service. Both had been born in the territory of the former Russian empire, Goldman in Kovno in 1869 and Berkman in Vilna in 1870, but both had emigrated to North America in their 'teens. Astonishingly for anarchists, neither of them apparently harboured serious misgivings about the nature of the Bolshevik regime, and in fact Goldman, in a dramatic gesture, refused to appeal against her deportation order, saying she preferred to return to revolutionary Russia. Disillusionment gradually set in, however, and the published accounts which they both left behind give graphic accounts of this process.<sup>66</sup>

Naturally, Goldman and Berkman were intensely interested in anar-

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65. W. H. Chamberlin, *The Ukraine: a submerged nation* (New York, 1944), p.50.

66. For a general account of Western anarchists' views on the revolution, see H. J. Goldberg, "The anarchists view the Soviet regime, 1918-1922," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1973), especially p.155-158. For Goldman's reminiscences, see specifically *My disillusionment in Russia* (New York, 1923); *My further disillusionment in Russia* (New York, 1924); and *Living my life* (New York, 1970). Berkman also published an account of this period: *The Bolshevik myth: diary 1920-1922* (London, 1925).

chist activities, and were soon attracted to the *Makhnovshchina*. But they were shocked by the brutality of Bolshevik actions towards political opponents. In a conversation with Goldman and Berkman as well as the Russo-Italian Angelica Balabanoff, who had deputised for a time as Ukrainian Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Lenin himself denied that the Soviet government gaoled anarchists for their beliefs. The Bolsheviks were, he said, only suppressing bandits and followers of Makhno.<sup>67</sup> But a little later, in Khar'kov gaol, the two visitors were shown an old peasant woman, allegedly a Makhnovite, who Goldman describes as a "stupefied old creature [...] half-crazed with the solitary and the fear of execution."<sup>68</sup>

Equally naturally, Goldman and Berkman wanted to meet Makhno and talk to him, but although the possibility was discussed, the encounter never took place.<sup>69</sup> The two Americans did succeed in visiting the ailing Kropotkin at Dmitrov, however, and the old man's wife, Sofia, informed them that Makhno had somehow "contrived to supply [the Kropotkins] with extra provisions," an extraordinary feat given the distance involved and wartime conditions.<sup>70</sup>

By the end of July or in early August Goldman and Berkman had

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67. Goldman, *Living my life*, vol.2, p.765; Angelica Balabanoff, *My life as a rebel*, 3rd ed. (New York, 1968), p.255.

68. Goldman, *op.cit.*, vol.2, p.810-811.

69. Berkman, *op.cit.*, p.196.

70. Goldman, *op.cit.*, vol.2, p.769.

managed to travel south towards Kiev, where they were handed the official line on Makhno, namely that in 1919 he had mutinied and opened the front to Denikin. Since then he had fought against the Bolsheviks and helped the enemies of the revolution.<sup>71</sup> But in Kiev, Goldman was introduced to a "young woman in peasant costume" who turned out to be Galina Kuz'menko, Makhno's wife. Kuz'menko told Goldman that the Bolsheviks had put a price on Makhno's head and killed his brother, as well as several members of her own family. Makhno was planning to capture the train which was to carry Goldman and Berkman southwards, so that he could meet them, and he would then escort them back to Soviet territory. He wanted them to refute accusations of anti-Semitism to the world, and to explain the *Makhnovshchina's* aims. Goldman, however, could not overcome her scruples about deceiving her hosts, and nothing came of the plan. Instead, she and Kuz'menko spent the night talking about women's rights, birth control and related issues. But as a result, Goldman subsequently reduced her ties with the Bolsheviks.<sup>72</sup>

Berkman was also busy making contacts with southern anarchists. In August he visited Iosif Gotman at the *Vol'noe Bratstvo* (Free Brotherhood) book shop in Khar'kov. Gotman was better known under his pen-name, *Emigrant*, with which he signed articles in *Nabat*, and had also worked as a teacher in Makhnovite camps. Gotman dis-

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71. Berkman, op.cit., p.177. Berkman also mentions the question of artificial "shortages" of ammunition (p.194).

72. Goldman, op.cit., vol.2, p.829-831.

liked the Bolsheviks:

"[...] I consider Makhno's *povstantsi* movement as a most promising beginning of a great popular movement against the new tyranny,"

he told Berkman, while another anarchist who was present added that "there isn't enough left of the Revolution to make a fig-leaf for Bolshevik nakedness."<sup>73</sup> Gotman believed that the *Makhnovshchina* represented "the real spirit of October" and, significantly, that kulaks were a minority in the movement.<sup>74</sup> While he admitted that there was no freedom of speech for Communists in Makhnovite-controlled areas, there certainly was for Maximalists and Left SRs.<sup>75</sup>

Meanwhile, sporadic guerrilla engagements continued. In early May the 9th Cavalry Division was in action against Makhno near Aleksandrovsk, but the contact was inconclusive.<sup>76</sup> Throughout late July and early August the military situation remained fluid. Late in July, according to Red reports, Wrangel's forces were active around Aleksandrovsk and Guliai-Pole, where they held the line of rail Kamyshevotka-Orekhov.<sup>77</sup> But by 4 August Red forces were able

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73. Berkman, *op.cit.*, p.184-185.

74. *Ibid.*, p.187.

75. *Ibid.*, p.188. Gotman was killed by the Bolsheviks in the autumn of 1920 while on his way to Starobel'sk, then Makhno's headquarters (*Goneniia na anarkhizm v sovetskoi Rossii* [Berlin, 1922], p.29).

76. *GVU* vol.3, p.92.

77. Report covering the period up to 1 August, in *ibid.*, p.329.

to advance without opposition into the villages around Guliai-Pole. At Tsarekonstantinovka, however, they met stiff White resistance, and were forced to fall back to the east.<sup>78</sup> By mid-September, nonetheless, the Reds were well-established at Guliai-Pole, which was by that time the headquarters of the 13th Army's 42nd Division.<sup>79</sup> The Division's main tasks, among others, were to defend the Gaichur river valley from south of Chaplino across to Guliai-Pole.<sup>80</sup> At this time, according to an estimate by a foreign reporter, Makhno's core of effective troops was only about 2,000 men, but he could draw on up to 20 or 30 thousand reserves from the villages.<sup>81</sup>

Earlier, on 24 August, in what was apparently a push eastwards, Makhno had occupied Gubinikha, a little over 20 kilometres north of Novomoskovska, with a force of 3,000 infantry and about 700 cavalrymen. But the Reds were unsure of what his intentions were, or in which direction he intended to move. An order was issued concentrating the forces of the 2nd Cavalry Army against Makhno, and organising the rear, especially with regard to intelligence gathering.<sup>82</sup> Ferocious fighting followed. In one engagement at Kocherezhki village, on the night of 25-26 August, two Makhnovite infantry regiments with 30 machine-guns, and with another three

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78. Ibid., p.338.

79. Ibid., p.502.

80. Ibid., p.531.

81. *The Times* [London] (20 August 1920), p.9.

82. *GVU* vol.3, p.408.

regiments in reserve, were pushed back eastwards with heavy losses by the 115th Red Cavalry Regiment under A. A. Derevenskii. Over 200 Makhnovites were taken prisoner and Derevenskii was later awarded the Order of the Red Banner.<sup>83</sup>

The game of alliances, meanwhile, continued. In late August, the Petliurists remained unsure of Makhno's intentions. In the absence of reliable information about the composition of Makhno's forces, the seat of his government and the basis of his military operations, there could be no relations, commented one nationalist report. But the only source of intelligence was via Wrangel. The Petliurists were also uneasy about what one document termed Wrangel's "relatively unclear political views on Ukrainian matters" and while willing to talk to him about military cooperation, refrained from political discussions. In the military sphere, the objective was to avoid "regrettable conflicts" between the two sides, which would "only serve to benefit the Bolsheviks."<sup>84</sup> The Petliurists estimated the size of Wrangel's forces at 35,000 men, believing that the *Makhnovshchina* was bigger.<sup>85</sup> The Petliurists were also overly optimistic about the hold that Ukrainian nationalist ideas had on Red Army men, reporting for example that some of Budenny's cavalrymen had prepared Ukrainian flags, in preparation presumably for some sort of nati-

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83. Ibid., p.450-451.

84. Letter dated 24 August from the Directory's "Ministry of Foreign Affairs", in *ibid.*, p.409-410.

85. Ibid., p.480.



onalist demonstration.<sup>86</sup>

In the summer of 1920 reports surfaced of Makhno's forces operating against river-boats and even - astonishingly - from aircraft. On 1 August, for example, Makhnovite units reportedly attacked a steamer on the Dnepr river, the *Nadezhda*, with machine-gun fire. They subsequently boarded the vessel and robbed officers and passengers. The Jewish passengers were taken away into the forest, and the boat was burned.<sup>87</sup> Later in August an unverified account from an unnamed agitator claimed that Makhnovite proclamations *dropped from aircraft* were confusing the peasantry.<sup>88</sup> *cut*

Meanwhile, as far north as Kiev province, the Reds attributed Petliurist sentiments to local atamans and worried about the possibility of their joining forces with Makhno, even though their intelligence reported that Makhno had disarmed some of the bandits. In mid-September even Poltava remained unstable, and desertion was a constant problem.<sup>89</sup>

On 24 September 1920 Kamenev defined the two main tactical objec-

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86. Ibid., p.480.

87. The report, from the commander of the Dnepr Military Flotilla, assumes that the Jews were killed, but provides no evidence for this. The Flotilla later used river patrol-boats against the Makhnovites (*Moriaki v bor'be za vlast' sovetov na Ukraine: noiabr' 1917-1920 gg.* [Kiev, 1963], p.385).

88. Certainly the *Makhnovshchina* produced several proclamations at this time; there is no other evidence that Makhno's sympathisers had access to aeroplanes! (ibid., p.501). *cut*

89. *GVU* vol.3, p.537.

tives for his southern forces as preventing Wrangel from descending on the Kuban again, and liquidating the *Makhnovshchina*. As we shall see, his new Front commander was to achieve the neutralisation of the *Makhnovshchina* by the beginning of October, through the forging of a real, rather than a rumoured alliance. It was necessary, ordered Kamenev, to pay special attention to consolidating the coastlines of the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea, as well as reinforcing and training Red troops, including garrisons in "unreliable regions and spots."<sup>90</sup> Politically the Reds believed that "if Wrangel disappears, then Makhno will disappear as well," arguing reasonably that victory over the Whites and the establishment of a "solid revolutionary regime" in Ukraine would remove the conditions in which the *Makhnovshchina* thrived. But the Bolshevik political analysts were wide of the mark when they argued that the *Makhnovshchina* was "deliberately organised" by Wrangel.<sup>91</sup>

The *Makhnovshchina*'s ability to sustain guerrilla warfare of the type which took place for months on end in 1920 and 1921 cannot, however, be understood simply in military terms. Despite the fact that the Red Army's attention was strategically divided in 1920 (as it was not in 1921), the question of the Ukrainian communists' agrarian policy also had an important impact, for in many respects it failed to control peasant discontent and fanned the

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90. Ibid., p.522.

91. Ibid., p.526.

flames of class warfare among the peasantry.<sup>92</sup>

As we saw in an earlier chapter, the KP(b)U had passed a decree in April 1919 establishing Committees of Poor Peasants.<sup>93</sup> These committees had been abolished in Russia itself in December 1918. Now the fourth All-Ukrainian Conference of the KP(b)U, meeting in Khar'kov from 17 to 23 March 1920, adopted yet another decision in favour of the continued existence of the *kombedy*.<sup>94</sup>

The *kombedy* in Russia had been introduced in mid-1918 with two main objectives, namely to split the peasantry and to provide a system of informers who could assist in requisitioning grain from the recalcitrant kulaks. Food supplies to the towns and to the Red Army had fallen sharply because of the loss of grain-producing areas to various enemies on the one hand, and because of an overall falling trend in agricultural productivity which predated the revolution, on the other. Grain, it was clear, could only be extracted from the countryside by force or guile. The underlying assumption was that the kulaks, who held 38 percent of the land and produced half the marketed grain, were holding further surplus.<sup>95</sup> The actions of the informers would, it was reasoned, help

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92. I shall argue later in this text that Makhno's final defeat in 1921 had as much to do with NEP, even though it was not introduced in Ukraine until the autumn of 1921, as it had to do with his strategic shortcomings or Bolshevnik treachery.

93. *Kombedy* in Russian; *komnezamy* or *komnezamozhi* in Ukrainian. *Nezamozhnik* means "poor peasant" in Ukrainian.

94. J. V. Stalin, *Works* (Moscow, 1952-1955), vol.4, p.447.

95. Atkinson, *op.cit.*, p.168.

to intensify class divisions between rich and poor peasants.<sup>96</sup>

Interpretations differ as to the impact of the *kombedy*, which rapidly spread to a majority of the villages in Russia.<sup>97</sup> On the one hand, the Bolsheviks may have left out of account the fact that the number of landless peasants had fallen as a result of the land redistribution of 1917. Too many landless peasants had, according to this view, become middle peasants by acquiring land.<sup>98</sup> It has even been argued that in fact they *increased the cohesion* of the peasantry.<sup>99</sup> Another view is that the differentiation of the peasantry in Russia was not as developed at this time as the Bolsheviks supposed.<sup>100</sup> Indeed, Teodor Shanin has argued that the main Soviet study of the *kombedy* fails to produce any evidence at all of the kulak nature of peasant rebellions, the only example adduced being termed by the author of the study himself a "general peasant revolt against extensive taxation and poor supplies."<sup>101</sup>

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96. E. H. Carr, *The Bolshevik revolution, 1917-1923* (Harmondsworth, 1966), vol.2, p.161-163.

97. There were over 122,000 *kombedy* by November 1918 (Atkinson, op.cit., p.170).

98. Ibid., p.174.

99. Mawdsley, op.cit., p.71.

100. C. Bettelheim, *Class struggles in the USSR. First period: 1917-1923* (New York, 1976), p.223.

101. V. Aver'ev, *Komitety bednoty* (Moscow, 1933; 2 vols.), quoted by T. Shanin, *The awkward class: political sociology of peasantry in a developing society* (Oxford, 1972), p.147.

Be that as it may, the *kombedy* did not work as planned in Russia, and created serious problems into the bargain. Kulaks, rich peasants, landlords, and those with grain surpluses or hired labourers were theoretically not eligible for membership of the *kombedy*. The poor peasants' reward was to receive allocations at a discount from requisitioned grain. The Bolsheviks expected these measures to inflame class hatred, helping the grain requisition detachments by using the animosity of the poor against the rich. The poor peasants may have been fewer than the Bolsheviks had estimated in Russia, but it is also important to note that the members of the *kombedy* were, by and large, an unrepresentative minority of the poor peasantry, often with their own hidden agendas. The *kombedy* eventually came, according to the conventional wisdom, to rival the soviets as organs of local power. By the end of the year this had created a *de facto* situation of "dual power." In December 1918 VTsIK decreed their disbandment.

But it is an oversimplification simply to say that by 1918 many poor peasants had become middle peasants through the black redivision. As Littlejohn points out, the *kombedy* were initially set up in areas where the black redivision had been most extensive; they lasted longest in Ukraine, where peasant capitalist relations in agriculture were most developed. The key to understanding this phenomenon is that the fact that the land expropriations had destroyed large-scale agriculture and thus denied the kinds

of crops necessary to sustain industry to the Bolsheviks.<sup>102</sup>

The Ukrainian Bolsheviks certainly felt, as Carr indicates, that the capitalist and large-scale character of agriculture in Ukraine meant that their country was peculiarly ready for socialism. The corollary was a perception that the kulaks were also relatively more powerful than they were in Russia. The *kombedy* survived much longer in Ukraine, continuing until 1923, well into the NEP period, at least partly because of the perception that differentiation in the Ukrainian peasantry was significantly more extreme than among the Russians.<sup>103</sup> But much more important is the likelihood that in Ukraine, as a grain-surplus area and as the territory of the counter-revolution, the *komnezamy* may have continued to facilitate access by poorer peasants to implements and draught animals.<sup>104</sup>

In addition, it has been argued that the *komnezamy* survived in Ukraine precisely because of Bolshevik political weakness there. The committees, unlike the rural soviets (*rady*), were Bolshevik controlled. They were used to police the unruly Ukrainian villages, and most especially the rural intelligentsia (teachers, agronomists and others). By the end of the period at least their membership was largely non-Ukrainian, and not poor peasant ei-

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102. G. Littlejohn, *A sociology of the Soviet Union* (London, 1984), p.47-48.

103. Carr, *loc.cit.*

104. Littlejohn, *op.cit.*, p.49.

ther.<sup>105</sup> Indeed, "they were composed largely of 'lumpenproletariat' elements from the city, charged with performing police functions," according to this view.<sup>106</sup>

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105. B. Krawchenko, *Social change and national consciousness in twentieth century Ukraine* (London, 1985), p.65-66.

106. *Ibid.*, p.61.

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### XIII. FROM STAROBEL'SK TO PEREKOP: THE SECOND ALLIANCE

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The preliminary fencing around the question of alliances by Wrangel - and other, minor players - in June and July 1920 was in fact the concrete expression of real and generalised weakness. Wrangel knew that he had to hold onto the northern Tauride in order to secure food supplies for his forces in the Crimean peninsula. His only international support by now came from the French.<sup>1</sup> His army consisted of 25,000 foot soldiers and 6,000 cavalry, to defend a front nearly 500 kilometres long.<sup>2</sup> It was essential that his forces secure this front before the full weight of the Red Army, with an estimated 350,000 men available if they were needed and no longer occupied with the Poles, was turned to crush the Whites.

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1. The British by this stage would not permit even private support from business sources. The French discussed aid, but did not in practice provide it (E. Mawdsley, *The Russian civil war* [Boston, 1987], p.267).

2. R. Lockett, *The White generals: an account of the White movement and the Russian civil war* (London, 1971), p.368. W. Bruce Lincoln, quoting a Soviet source, puts the cavalry figure much higher at 11,795 (I. S. Korotkov, *Razgrom Vrangelia* [Moscow, 1955], p.206, quoted in *Red victory: a history of the Russian civil war* [New York, 1989], p.441).



Wrangel's territory was flanked on the left by the river Dnepr, upstream as far as the Kichkas pass at Aleksandrovsk, which was easy to defend. His right flank stretched from Aleksandrovsk down to Berdiansk on the Sea of Azov coast, and was clearly the most vulnerable part of the front. In an attempt to preempt pressure on this right flank, Wrangel began to push northeastwards in early September, along the coast towards Mariupol' and Taganrog, threatening to overrun Makhno's heartland around Guliai-Pole. In the few weeks which followed, the Whites succeeded in capturing several urban centres, including not only Aleksandrovsk, Melitopol', Mariupol' and Nikopol' but also the key railway junction at Sinel'nikovo, to the east of Ekaterinoslav.

The successful White advance into Makhnovite territory was clearly a major threat to the insurgents, who were now faced for the second time with the possibility of finding themselves in a war on two fronts against two superior enemies. According to anarchist sources, Makhno's RVS was the first to propose a cease-fire and an alliance to the Red Army, and in fact did so twice, in July and then again in August, but the Bolsheviks did not reply to these overtures.<sup>3</sup>

By the end of September, much of Makhno's home territory around Guliai-Pole was effectively in Wrangel's hands. Makhno had been doing little more than raiding the transport systems and food de-

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3. P. Arshinov, *Istoriia makhnovskogo dvizheniia, 1918-1921 gg.* (Berlin, 1923), p.171.

pots in the rear. Even Russian anarchists seem to have realised at the time that the *Makhnovshchina* was in a peculiarly vulnerable position. Anticipating the "organisational platform" debate of the late 1920s, the anarchist newspaper *Nabat* wrote in a contemporary editorial, for example:

"Anarchism, which always leaned upon the mass movement of the workers, has to support the Makhno movement with all its power; it has to join this movement and close ranks with it. Hence we must also become a part of the leading organ of this movement, the army, and try to organise with the help of the latter the movement as a whole."<sup>4</sup>

Mainstream Soviet historiography argued later that it was Makhno's precarious military and political situation which forced him to negotiate another alliance with the Red Army. This does not seem unreasonable.<sup>5</sup>

On 27 September, the Bolshevik military theorist and successful field general Mikhail Frunze arrived in the Ukrainian capital, Khar'kov, to take command of the operations against Wrangel. Frunze knew that he was fighting a war to liquidate the White army, and he took immediate and vigorous steps to achieve his objective. "Our task," he told a subordinate, "is not the occupation of territory, but the destruction of the living forces of

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4. *Nabat* quoted by G. Maksimov, *The guillotine at work* (Chicago, 1940), p.459. This was not a period of optimism for anarchists: Kropotkin told Volin at Dmitrov in November 1920 that this "typical unsuccessful revolution" could well end in "profound reaction" (G. Woodcock and I. Avakumovic, *The anarchist prince* [London, 1950], p.428).

5. *Grazhdanskaia voina, 1918-1921* (Moscow, 1928-1930), vol.3, p.511-512.

the enemy."<sup>6</sup>

In some ways it made sense for Wrangel to fight the Red Army on the steppe of the northern Tauride for as long he could. There, his experienced cavalry had the maximum amount of space available for manoeuvre, and he would be able to delay his retreat southwards by as long as possible, to ensure food and other supplies for the winter. But given the disparity in numbers in favour of the Reds, this was a high-risk strategy, unless the line of retreat to Crimea could be secured. In these circumstances, Frunze, commanding the 4th, 6th and 13th Red Armies as well as the 2nd Cavalry Army, had two immediate choices. He could either accept Wrangel's challenge to fight on the plains, while at the same time trying to cut off his line of retreat to Crimea in a campaign of encirclement; or he could simply push him back with the Red Army's superior weight to his defensive lines and lay siege to him in the Crimea. If Frunze was to succeed in trapping Wrangel, however, the Reds needed to deploy more mobile troops. In late September, Kamenev ordered Budenny's and Voroshilov's 1st Cavalry Army from the Polish Front, but it had been in heavy fighting in August and took several weeks to arrive in southern Ukraine.<sup>7</sup> Anxious to avoid another lengthy campaign in winter time, which would have had high political costs for the Bolshe-

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6. Quoted by Lincoln, *op.cit.*, p.442-443.

7. The armistice with Poland was signed two weeks later, on 12 October.

viks, Frunze opted for the first choice.<sup>8</sup>

Frunze saw immediately that Makhno's forces were occupying an area "where [the Bolsheviks] had no troops at all."<sup>9</sup> Within 48 hours of taking command he was working to neutralise the *Makhnovshchina* as an anti-Bolshevik force, and to bring it on board as an ally for the all-out effort to crush Wrangel before the winter.

Negotiations between the Bolsheviks and the Makhnovites began in late September, and events moved rapidly. According to Arshinov, a delegation from the Central Committee (presumably of the KP[b]U), came to the Makhnovite camp at Starobel'sk, in the western part of Khar'kov province, where Makhno's headquarters had been established. Negotiations were opened immediately, and it seems likely that the agreement which was eventually concluded was drafted at the same time. The Bolshevik delegation was not authorised to ratify the accord, however, and it was therefore sent back to Khar'kov to be approved. A Makhnovite delegation of three accompanied the document to the Ukrainian capital.<sup>10</sup> On 29 September Frunze told Kamenev anxiously in a telephone conversation that "a final answer from Makhno must be received by midday

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8. For a detailed strategic and tactical analysis of this campaign, which is in general convincing, see W. Jacobs, *Frunze: the Soviet Clausewitz, 1885-1925* (The Hague, 1969), p.209-226. Jacobs is critical of Frunze's overall conduct of the campaign.

9. M. V. Frunze, *Sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow, 1926-1929), vol.1, p.271.

10. Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.171.

today, but there's nothing from him yet."<sup>11</sup>

The minutes of a meeting of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the KP(b)U explain what Frunze was referring to. It had been resolved on the same day as Frunze's call, 29 September, in the presence of Rakovskii, and eight others, to nominate a representative to Makhno, to order the underground Bolshevik structures to assist the *Makhnovshchina* and to try to strengthen discipline among the insurgents. But the Bolsheviks fought shy at this stage of integrating their forces with the Insurgent Army, limiting cooperation to operational contacts. The Bolsheviks also consented "not to object in principle" to the release of anarchist prisoners.<sup>12</sup>

On 4 October Frunze and Bela Kun sent a secret message to the headquarters of the 6th and 13th Armies, and to the 2nd Cavalry Army, among others, in which they stated that the RVS of Makhno's Insurgent Army had asked for a cease-fire on 30 September, that is, after the Politburo meeting already referred to. Frunze added that he had issued an order on 2 October stopping military operations against Makhnovite units in return for their recognition of Soviet power and submission to the command of the Front. Makhno was to join the struggle against Wrangel.<sup>13</sup>

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11. *GVU* vol.3, p.550.

12. Minutes of the Session of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the KP(b)U, 29 September 1920, printed in *ibid.*, p.549-550.

13. *Ibid.*, p.580.

Clarification to the faithful was obviously needed for this dramatic about turn. The Central Committee of the Ukrainian party sent a letter to the Ekaterinoslav provincial committee explaining that the Starobel'sk agreement was a purely military affair, relating to moving Makhno's forces to Wrangel's rear. The political objective of blocking any contact between Red units and Makhnovites remained in place, the letter stated, even though the Makhnovites, except for criminals, were to be amnestied.<sup>14</sup>

The Central Committee meeting of the KP(b)U had already decided on 29 September that news of the Starobel'sk agreement was not to be published until after Makhno's forces were in action in Wrangel's rear.<sup>15</sup> But the Makhnovites in their turn refused to implement the agreement until it was published. Even so, the Bolsheviks only divulged the text in parts, and allegedly left one clause completely unpublished.<sup>16</sup>

The agreement consisted of two sections, a military accord and a political accord. According to Arshinov the Bolsheviks published the second, military part of the text first.<sup>17</sup> As in 1919, the military agreement allowed the *Makhnovshchina* to retain its own internal command structure, while accepting subordination to the

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14. Ibid., p.637.

15. Ibid., p.550.

16. Arshinov, op.cit., p.174.

17. Idem.

Red Army. It also laid down restrictions on the acceptance of Red deserters into the insurgent ranks, a major preoccupation, and interestingly extended Red Army welfare provisions to the families of partisans. When the Ukrainian Council of People's Commissars finally minuted its approval of the military and political agreements on 31 October, it added that the decree on assistance to soldiers' families should be publicised among the insurgents as well.<sup>18</sup> The Bolsheviks may have believed that the extension of welfare provisions to dependents would have the effect of locking the Insurgent Army into the agreement as far as other provisions were concerned. In other words, in exchange for the partisans fighting for the Reds, the Reds fed the partisans' families.

The full text of the military agreement read as follows:

1. The Ukrainian Revolutionary Insurgent Army (Makhnovite) will join the armed forces of the Republic as a partisan army, subordinate in regard to operations to the supreme command of the Red Army; it will retain its established internal structure and does not have to adopt the rules and principles of the regular Red Army.

2. While crossing Soviet territory at the front, or going between fronts, the Insurgent Army will not accept into its ranks either detachments of, or deserters from the Red Army.

Observations:

(a) The units of the Red Army as well as isolated Red soldiers who have met and joined the Revolutionary Insurgent Army behind Wrangel's lines shall re-enter the ranks of the Red Army when they again make contact with it.

(b) The Makhnovite insurgents behind Wrangel's lines, as well as men at present in the Insurgent Army, will remain in place even if they were previously mobilised by the Red

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18. *GVU* vol.3, p.680.

Army.

3. For the purpose of destroying the common enemy - the White army - the Ukrainian Revolutionary Insurgent Army (Makhnovite) will inform the working masses that collaborate with it of the agreement that has been concluded; it will call upon the people to cease all military actions hostile to Soviet power. For its part, the Soviet power will immediately publish the clauses of the agreement.

4. The families of the combatants of the Makhnovite Revolutionary Insurgent Army living in the territory of the Soviet Republic shall enjoy the same rights as those of soldiers of the Red Army and for this purpose shall be supplied by the Soviet government of the Ukraine with necessary documents."<sup>19</sup>

The first part of the agreement dealt with political matters, and involved serious concessions on the part of the Bolsheviks. There were three main points. All Makhnovite and anarchist political prisoners were to be released immediately; the *Makhnovshchina* was to enjoy freedom of expression and the press, apparently including access to government printing houses; and, most importantly, the Makhnovites were to have the right to participate in elections to the Ukrainian Congress of Soviets, to be held in December. This last may possibly have been an alarming prospect for the Bolsheviks, who in Ukraine at least were falling back more and more on authoritarianism as a cover for their political weaknesses. The text read as follows:

1. Immediate release of all Makhnovites and anarchists imprisoned or in exile in the territories of the Soviet Republic; cessation of all persecution of Makhnovites or anarchists, except those who carry on armed conflict against the Soviet government.

2. Complete freedom in all forms of public expression and propa-

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19. Arshinov, op.cit., p.172-173; *GVU* vol.3, p.571-572. There are some minor editorial differences between the two texts, but these do not seem to have any substantive significance. The *GVU* text is reprinted from I. Teper, *Makhno: ot "edinogo anarkhizm" k stopam rumynskogo korolia* (Moscow, 1924), p.117-119.



ganda for all Makhnovites and anarchists, for their principles and ideas, in speech and the press, with the exception of anything that might call for the violent overthrow of the Soviet government, and on condition that the requirements of military censorship be respected. For all kinds of publications the Makhnovites and anarchists, as revolutionary organisations recognised by the Soviet government, may make use of the technical apparatus of the Soviet state, while naturally submitting to the technical rules for publication.

3. Free participation in elections to the Soviets; and the right of Makhnovites and anarchists to be elected to them. Free participation in the organisation of the forthcoming Fifth All-Ukrainian Congress of Soviets, which will take place next December."

According to Arshinov, the Makhnovites attempted unsuccessfully to get the Reds to agree to a fourth clause. They argued that since a basic principles of the Makhnovite movement was the struggle for self-management by workers, the Insurgent Army believed it must insist on an additional fourth point to the political agreement:

4. In the region where the Makhnovite Army is operating, the population of workers and peasants will create its own institutions of economic and political self-management; these institutions will be autonomous and joined in federation, by means of agreements, with the governmental organs of the Soviet republic."<sup>20</sup>

Obviously this was pushing things a little too far, and the Bolsheviks told the insurgents that they would have to refer the proposal to Moscow for approval. The Makhnovites agreed, and the subject was apparently quietly dropped.<sup>21</sup>

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20. Arshinov, op.cit., p.171-172. Arshinov remains the only source for this additional text, which is not reproduced in Soviet document collections.

21. Ibid., p.174.

A legal scholar has pointed out that the text of the Starobel'sk accord, as finally agreed, is an interesting example of the well-known principle of international law that to be effective a treaty does not require previous reciprocal *de jure* recognition.<sup>22</sup> Certainly the Bolsheviks did not feel constrained from continuing to make verbal attacks on the Makhnovites, despite the guarantee that "all forms of persecution" would cease. Lenin himself, for example, in a speech to political education workers on 3 November, grouped Makhno with Iudenich, Kolchak and Petliura as "remnants of the Kerenskii gang, the SRs and the social democrats," and hence as merely different types of counterrevolutionary.<sup>23</sup>

In addition, there was obviously some concern among communists about Makhno's reliability, given the experience of 1919 and the bitter recriminations which had followed. On 9 October Lenin reassured a meeting of Communist Party activists in Moscow that the Bolsheviks could only gain from the alliance. Makhno, he said, was "hedged around with guarantees", and his men, having experienced Wrangel's policies once, were not keen to repeat the ordeal. Wrangel was making the same mistake as Denikin and Kolchak before him, namely ignoring the rights of the peasantry,

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22. V. Markus, *L'Ukraine soviétique dans les relations internationales, 1918-1923* (Paris, 1959), p.231.

23. V. I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*. 5th ed. (Moscow, 1958-1965; hereafter PSS), vol.41, p.401.

Lenin added.<sup>24</sup>

Makhno's acceptance of a Red Army command was internationally known as early as 7 October, when the *New York Times* reported the fact. The rest of the report, dated 6 October and quoting a Moscow radio broadcast, claimed inaccurately that Makhno had "left Wrangel", because (and this part is correct) his lower ranks did not want to fight against the Bolsheviks.<sup>25</sup>

The alliance with Makhno did not eliminate the problem of peasant "banditry" in Ukraine for the Red Army, however. The *Makhnovshchina* was far from being the only group of "forest brothers" still active in the south; it was simply the best known and best organised. In early October, the 1st Cavalry Army, for instance, en route from the Polish Front to join Frunze's command against Wrangel, encountered large bands nick-naming themselves *Chernovorona* and *Kvashi* in the woods around Erazmovka. The Army's 3rd Brigade was involved in a fierce engagement with them on 10 October, and the commander of the 4th Division, S. K. Timoshenko, issued orders to sweep through the forest in a pincer movement and "to wipe out the band concentrated in the woods."<sup>26</sup>

In October the Makhnovites were called upon to play an active

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24. This last was rhetorical overkill: Wrangel', unlike Denikin, actually had a land policy (*ibid.*, vol.41, p.340).

25. *New York Times* (7 October 1920), p.19.

26. "Iz boevoi deiatel'nosti tov. Timoshenko v gody grazhdanskoi voiny v SSSR," *Krasnyi Arkhiv* no.104 (1941), p.96.

part in Frunze's ultimately unsuccessful attempt to encircle Wrangel before winter came and before he could pull back into the Crimean peninsula. By the 15th of the month Frunze had decided to send Makhno to move around the eastern flank, and on 21 October the Makhnovites were ordered to advance, by a forced march at night, to the east of the Whites, in the direction of Iantsevo-Sofievka, where they were to cut off an armoured train and strike at Wrangel's rear.<sup>27</sup>

On 22 October Makhno helped to capture over 4,000 prisoners from one of the White Drozdov divisions, which was retreating towards Aleksandrovsk. Aleksandrovsk itself was recaptured.<sup>28</sup> This success was apparently not sufficient, for Frunze felt that the Makhnovites were not reacting quickly enough. A few days later the Bolshevik command exhorted them to continue energetically to carry out earlier orders, and to move in the direction of Orekhov-B. Tokmak-Melitopol', raiding transport links, communications, and railways. They were ordered to reach the Crimean isthmus no later than 29 October.<sup>29</sup>

On 26 October Frunze issued the order for a general advance. At the same time, he notified Lenin that he rated the Red Army's chances of completing the encirclement and capturing the isthmus

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27. *GVU* vol.3, p.644; Louis Aragon, *A history of the USSR* (London, 1964), p.173.

28. Arshinov, *loc.cit.*; Aragon, *op.cit.*, p.173.

29. *GVU* vol.3, p.651-652.

at 100:1 against, presumably because of the Red Army's generalised lethargy. "Appropriate directives have been issued with regard to Makhno," Frunze added, referring to the incorporation of the insurgents into the Red Army's command structure.<sup>30</sup> Lenin was less than satisfied:

"I am outraged by your optimistic tone, when you go on to report that there is only one chance in a hundred [...]"<sup>31</sup>

he thundered in reply. But not even Lenin was able to get the Red forces moving in this campaign. It was two days after the order was issued, on 28 October, that Frunze's army group lumbered into action. The group was deployed along a gently curved front, with the 6th Army and the two Cavalry Armies facing Wrangel's left flank across the Dnepr, and the 4th and 13th Armies opposite his more exposed right flank, from Aleksandrovsk down to the Sea of Azov coastline.

Although Makhno scored some more successes, storming enemy entrenchments and capturing over 200 prisoners and four artillery pieces, his advance was still too slow for the increasingly impatient Frunze, who was under pressure from Moscow and saw his chances of completing the encirclement of Wrangel slipping away. In the event, Makhno's forces passed to the west of Tokmak only

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30. L. Trotsky, *The Trotsky papers, 1917-1922* (The Hague, 1964-1971; hereafter *TP*), vol.2, p.342-345.

31. Lenin, *PSS* vol.51, p.321; *TP* vol.2, p.344-345.

on the morning of the 29th.<sup>32</sup>

On 30 October units of the 13th Red Army occupied Melitopol' and the day after they entered Akimova, capturing "immense prizes", in what Red dispatches described, without apparent irony, as a "swift blow". These operations were carried out with the support of Makhno's forces in the rear.<sup>33</sup>

The struggle between Frunze and Wrangel hinged first on Frunze's attempt to block Wrangel's line of retreat back into Crimea, and second, on Wrangel's own need to delay his retreat long enough to ensure that the Whites collected the grain harvest from the Northern Tauride - an objective unlikely to endear them to the local peasantry. But even though Wrangel's need to postpone his retreat improved Frunze's chances of completing the encirclement, the Soviet commander was still unable to get his troops moving fast enough. Indeed, one Western analyst has commented that, apart from displaying "an almost complete failure in the coordination of arms" (i.e. cavalry and artillery with the infantry), in addition,

"[...] from beginning to end, Frunze displayed a most remarkable slowness. His rapid reactions, when they occurred, were almost always tactical and not strategic. He had several chances for a quick liquidation of Wrangel which he failed to redeem due to that slowness."<sup>34</sup>

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32. *GVU* vol.3, p.671.

33. *Ibid.*, p.697-698.

34. Jacobs, *op.cit.*, p.224.

By the beginning of November, thanks to this Bolshevik sluggishness, Wrangel had successfully executed an "active retirement" from the Northern Tauride past the 1st Cavalry Army and other Red forces which had already reached his rear, and was ensconced behind the Perekop-Chongar defensive lines, across the series of narrow isthmuses and peninsulas which either connect or almost connect the body of the Crimea to the Ukrainian mainland.<sup>35</sup>

*Russell says  
too detailed*

The main westward approach to Crimea, the isthmus of Perekop, is between eight and 11 kilometres wide. It was protected by the Turkish Wall, an ancient military earthwork with a deep ditch in front of it on the northern side. From the bottom of the ditch to the top of the rampart is a distance of about 18 metres, up a steep 45 degree slope. Wrangel also had forward defensive lines set up a few kilometres in front of the main rampart. The defenders of the Turkish Wall included two Drozdov regiments from the division which had been mauled by the Makhnovites a few days earlier.<sup>36</sup> Wrangel's second and last line of defence was the Iushun' line, some 20 kilometres to the south, strategically located in an area dotted with small inland lakes, at a point where the Perekop isthmus widens out into the Crimean peninsula proper.<sup>37</sup>



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35. Jacobs argues that on 29-30 October, Budenny could have closed off access to Crimea, when White reinforcements (the 7th Infantry Division) sent to keep the route open "got lost in the cold and darkness". But neither Frunze nor Budenny reacted to the opportunity (op.cit., p.220n-221n).

36. Ibid., p.211.

37. Ibid., p.211-212.

To the east of Perekop, three long and narrow spits of land jut out into the brackish waters of the Sivash sea. The first of these, which sticks out from the side of the Perekop isthmus south of the Turkish Wall, is the Lithuanian Peninsula, which reaches northwards to within five kilometres of the Ukrainian mainland. Fifty kilometres eastwards, the Chongar Peninsula reaches southwards from the mainland to within a few hundred metres of Crimea. The Whites destroyed two bridges across this stretch of water when they retreated from the Northern Tauride.

The most important of these land connections was, however, the longest and narrowest of all, the Arabat Spit, which runs parallel to the eastern coast of the Crimea proper, and connects the Kerch Peninsula almost to the mainland. It is possible to cross from the Arabat Spit into Crimea proper behind the defensive lines prepared by Wrangel, and this had in fact been done in earlier battles in the area. However, the presence of unopposed White naval forces in the Sea of Azov made this a suicidal manoeuvre.<sup>38</sup>

Since he was unable to outflank the White positions along the Arabat Spit, Frunze had no choice but to attempt to liquidate Wrangel by means of frontal assaults on the prepared defensive positions of Perekop and Chongar.<sup>39</sup>

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38. Ibid., p.212-213.

39. Ibid., p.215.



For the assault on Wrangel's defences, Makhno's forces were deployed with six other divisions and a brigade as part of the 4th Red Army, opposite Chongar. Makhno's strength is given in an apparently authoritative table from Frunze's office as being 4,000 infantry, 1,000 cavalry, and 6,000 "other troops", with 13,600 support personnel, 250 machine-guns, and 12 artillery pieces.<sup>40</sup> On 5 November, Frunze ordered the Makhnovites to move before the 8th to a line Vladimirovka-Stroganovka-Malyi Kugaran, in order to be ready to attack the Perekop positions from the rear at the same time as the main Red forces launched a frontal attack.<sup>41</sup>

Unfortunately, although some units of the 6th Red Army succeeded in wading across the Sivash to the Lithuanian Peninsula in unusual weather conditions, they were observed by the Whites early on the morning of 8 November. Nevertheless, the Bolshevik forces established a beach-head on the peninsula. But at this point, Frunze's poor coordination of forces came into play. No artillery barrage was laid down on the Perekop fortifications, shrouded by fog, and no infantry attack was attempted.<sup>42</sup>

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40. *Grazhdanskaia voina, 1918-1921* (Moscow, 1928-1930), vol.3, p.513.

41. A. V. Golubev (ed.), *Perekop i Chongar: sbornik statei i materialov* (Moscow, 1933), p.34; M. V. Frunze *na frontakh grazhdanskoi voiny: sbornik dokumentov* (Moscow, 1941), p.426-427; *Iz istorii grazhdanskoi voiny v SSSR: sbornik dokumentov i materialov 1918-1922* (Moscow, 1960-1961), vol.3, p.427.

42. Jacobs is scathing in his comments on this part of the engagement: "Such a failure [to use artillery] can be blamed either on the inexperience and low professional competence of the firing batteries or on the failure of local commanders [...]" (op.cit., p.217).

It was only during the early afternoon of 8 November that Frunze managed to get a frontal assault on the Perekop fortifications under way. Despite a series of infantry charges at high cost to the Reds, the Whites managed to beat back the attackers throughout the afternoon and on into the night.<sup>43</sup>

Meanwhile, the weather had changed and the waters were rising at the fords which the 6th Army units had used to cross over to the Lithuanian Peninsula. Frunze ordered another vigorous attack on the Perekop fortifications, set men to work to keep the fords open, and ordered two cavalry divisions and the Insurgent Army across the Sivash to reinforce the 6th Army beach-head. According to one source, Makhno crossed at 4:00 a.m. on the morning of the 9th, in fog, an hour after the cavalry.<sup>44</sup> Arshinov states that the Makhnovite cavalry commanded by Marchenko crossed first, followed by a machine-gun regiment under Foma Kozhin. The crossing was made under fire with many casualties, including Kozhin.<sup>45</sup>

In the meantime, Frunze's repeated battering of the Turkish Wall had at last paid off, and early in the morning of 9 November Wrangel pulled his main defensive force back to the Iushun' line

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43. Jacobs quotes Soviet sources that some regiments lost as many as sixty percent of their strength (op.cit., p.218; see also W. Bruce Lincoln, op.cit., p.447). Frunze himself reported to Lenin on 12 November that he had lost not less than 10,000 men (*Direktivny komandovaniia frontov Krasnoi Armii, 1917-1922 gg.: sbornik dokumentov. Vol.3: aprel' 1920 g.-1922 g.* [Moscow, 1974], p.510).

44. Jacobs, op.cit., p.218; Aragon gets the date wrong, stating that Makhno's units crossed on 6 November (op.cit., p.174).

45. Arshinov, op.cit., p.175.

to avoid being outflanked by the 6th Army and the Makhnovite units.<sup>46</sup> But Bolshevik attacks along Chongar and the Arabat Spit remained indecisive.

The battle was far from over at this stage, however, although the White commanders knew that it was already lost.<sup>47</sup> Wrangel had managed to withdraw his troops down the Perekop Peninsula without heavy losses, was still in possession of a defensible line at Iushun', and finally, was well advanced in his preparations for a full evacuation should it become necessary. According to one Western analyst, however, there were five reasons why Frunze's eventual success was likely: he enjoyed overwhelming superiority in numbers; he was on the offensive; Wrangel was harassed in the rear by partisans; Wrangel knew that he did not have to make a stand; and lastly, Wrangel had lost effective international support.<sup>48</sup>

The battle for the Iushun' line was fiercely contested. But while it raged, Frunze was also starting to apply pressure in Chongar, and two rifle regiments won the Order of the Red Banner for their persistence in this area, which resulted in the over-running of two White regiments and the fall of the small Crimean town of Tiup-Dzhankoi on 11 November.<sup>49</sup>

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46. Both Jacobs (op.cit., p.218) and Arshinov (loc.cit.) make this point.

47. Lockett, op.cit., p.380-381.

48. Jacobs, op.cit., p.219.

49. Ibid., p.221.

By this time Wrangel had already decided for evacuation, and on the same day, 11 November, ignoring a demand from Frunze that he surrender together with an offer of amnesty, he issued the order in a general proclamation to the people of Russia:

"[...] I now order the evacuation and embarkation at the Crimean ports of all those who are following the Russian army on its road to Calvary; that is to say, the families of the soldiers, the officials of the Civil Administration and their families, and anyone else who would be in danger if they fell into the hands of the enemy.

[...] May God grant us strength to endure this period of Russian misery [...]"<sup>50</sup>

The evacuation was carried out without major panic, and by 14 November Sevastopol' was empty of Whites. On the 13th or 14th Makhnovite troops under Semen Karetnik occupied Simferopol'.<sup>51</sup> The operation was repeated at a series of coastal cities, until on 16 November the last White ship steamed away from Kerch. The evacuation removed 145,693 people in 126 ships from what was now Soviet soil.<sup>52</sup>

Opinion is divided on how important a role the Makhnovites played in the engagement at Perekop and Chongar. A United States military analyst has written that

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50. Wrangel's proclamation in Lockett, op.cit., p.381-382. Frunze's unauthorised amnesty offer in Jacobs, op.cit., p.222n, quoting *Krasnyi Arkhiv* no.6 (1935), p.62.

51. Arshinov, loc.cit.

52. Lincoln, op.cit., p.449

"[...] non-communist forces played an important role in the Perekop battle. (Among such troops were those of [...] Makhno. Without Makhno's actions at Perekop the war might well have gone into the winter campaign which Lenin feared so much. The role of Makhno is ignored, minimised or distorted by contemporary Soviet authorities [...])."<sup>53</sup>

But this point of view is not really supported by the evidence. Indeed, Frunze started disparaging the Makhnovites' contribution to the campaign almost from the start. In an exchange with the Commander-in-Chief, by direct wire on 13 November, in reply to a question from Kamenev about the behaviour of the insurgents, Frunze stated that:

"In the most recent engagements the insurgents played their part indifferently. They avoided in an obvious way missions which entailed the risk of serious losses."<sup>54</sup>

There were other signs of increasing Bolshevnik disenchantment with the *Makhnovshchina*. The 5th Conference of the KP(b)U in Khar'kov, from 17-22 November 1922, passed a resolution on "Banditry and the Struggle against It", which recognised the dominance of anarchist-Makhnovite ideas among "farmstead elements" in the Aleksandrovsk-Guliai-Pole region. But, the resolution continued, all the "bandit" movements shared certain common characteristics. One of the most striking was the "Soviet" character of

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53. Jacobs, *op.cit.*, p.225.

54. *Direktivy komandovaniia frontov Krasnoi Armii*, vol.3, p.513; M. V. Frunze *na frontakh grazhdanskoi voiny*, p.442-443. Interestingly, Mawdsley concludes from this exchange that Makhno's part in the Perekop campaign "should not be exaggerated" (*op.cit.*, p.270).

their slogans: Makhno was for "Free Soviets", Zeleny was for "An Independent, Free and Soviet Ukraine", Grigor'ev was for "Independent Soviet Power". The resolution stated that the Party's work on land and food issues - and above all the concentration on class stratification - had changed the social character of banditry, which was no longer an "all-village revolt" but rather a movement of kulaks, declass  elements and criminals, who were out of touch with village sentiment. Makhno, who in 1919 had been the great "peasant" leader, was left with a few thousand experienced fighters; he and they were, however, alienated from their homes.<sup>55</sup>

On 17 November, Frunze issued order no.00106 liquidating the Southern Front and transferring units to other commands. Makhno's insurgent army was passed over to the command of the 4th Red Army, which meant that the Makhnovites, together with the 9th Infantry Division, were to move to the Caucasus. The actual order is buried in a long text which deals with all the units under Southern Front command.<sup>56</sup>

Order no.00149, issued on 23 November and addressed specifically to Makhno, repeated the instructions, and indeed, went further. Since Wrangel had been defeated, the order argued (ignoring the provisions of the Starobel'sk accord) that "the task of the In-

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55. *Kommunisticheskaia Partia Ukrainy v resoliutsiiakh i resheniiakh s'ezdov i konferentsii, 1918-1956* (Kiev, 1958), p.98-99.

56. *GVU* vol.3, p.771.

surgent Army is completed [...] There is no longer any reason for [it] to continue to exist as such." Three steps were, therefore, to be taken:

- "1) All units of the Insurgent Army at present in Crimea should immediately be incorporated into the 4th Army;
- 2) The military formations at Guliai-Pole should be dissolved. The fighters will be distributed among the reserve detachments according to the instructions of the local commander;
- 3) The RVS of the Insurgent Army shall take all steps necessary to explain the need for these measures to the fighters."<sup>57</sup>

According to Arshinov, the Bolsheviks later accused Makhno of refusing to obey these orders, but he claims that they were never received.<sup>58</sup> The published copy of order no.00106 is marked "Secret" and is routed "To all, besides the Commander of the 4th. To the Commanders of the 4th, 6th, 1st and 2nd Cavalry. Copy to Commander-in-Chief [...]" But Arshinov also says that Makhno was recovering from a leg wound and "did not concern himself at all with paper work" which was handled by subordinates. Hence a doubt arises: were the Makhnovites actually reading their orders?

At about this time, according to Arshinov, accusations began to fly around from the Makhnovite side that Bolshevik spies had been captured and a complex plot to assassinate Makhno uncovered "which must have taken at least ten or 15 days" to prepare. The

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57. M. V. Frunze, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol.1, p.177. Arshinov prints an abbreviated text, omitting a list of allegations of Makhnovite crimes, and with a minor textual difference as well (op.cit., p.185).

58. Ibid., p.187.

Bolsheviks, for their part, accused the Makhnovites of distributing copies of the so-called "4th political clause" of the Starobel'sk agreement, as part of a call for a general insurrection.<sup>59</sup> It was clear that both sides were getting ready for a parting of the ways: in the event, it was the Bolsheviks who were the better disposed for what followed.<sup>60</sup>

The Bolsheviks moved against the *Makhnovshchina* on 26 November with brutal effectiveness, but in the event failed to close the net completely. At 3:00 a.m. the Makhnovite delegation in Khar'kov was arrested, along with large numbers of anarchists all over the Ukraine. These included Volin. Two hours later, at 5:00 a.m., Bolshevik forces began an artillery bombardment of Makhnovite positions at Guliai-Pole; simultaneously Makhnovite units in Crimea were attacked, and insurgent staff members, including Semen Karetnik, were arrested at a meeting in Mariupol' and summarily shot.<sup>61</sup> This was clearly not a spontaneous decision.

It is difficult entirely to acquit the Bolsheviks of anarchist charges of treachery (at worst) or bad faith (in the most charitable of interpretations).<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, the fact remains that the deadline for a response to the order laid down by Frunze, the

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59. Ibid., p.179-180.

60. Ibid., p.182.

61. Ibid., p.182-183, 188-189.

62. But modern texts avoid the problem. Lincoln simply says that Makhno's army "broke its temporary alliance with the Reds and left the Crimea" (op.cit., p.449). Mawdsley (op.cit.) does not refer to the matter at all.



day after he issued his order no.00149, was also 26 November, so that it can be argued that he had given the Makhnovites due warning before taking action against them.<sup>63</sup>

In the circumstances, it would seem extraordinary that the Makhnovite commanders, having received orders dissolving their army, orders that were arguably in violation of the terms of the Starobel'sk agreement of mid-October, would not, first, have taken precautionary defensive measures, and second, would have visited or remained at Bolshevik headquarters in Khar'kov, Mariupol' and in Crimea up to and on the very day when the deadline expired. Their lack of preparedness is even more culpable in the light of the warning alleged to have been made by Makhno's adjutant on 16 November, after Wrangel's defeat:

"I wager that within a week the Bolsheviks will be on our backs."<sup>64</sup>

In fact, Arshinov insists that the orders were never received by either the headquarters in Guliai-Pole or the Makhnovite delegation in Khar'kov. The order dated 23 November, he says, was published for the first time in the Khar'kov newspaper *Kommunist* for

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63. On the crucial question of the deadline, which does not appear in the text of order 00149 (printed *inter alia* by Arshinov [op.cit., p.184-185]), see Frunze, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol.1, p.176. The deadline is in fact only mentioned in another order, no.00155, issued on 24 November, where Frunze writes "I shall await a response to the order summarised above [i.e. the earlier order no.00149] until 26 November. The order is marked "Copy to Insurgent Army Commander Makhno". Volin does not mention the deadline (*La révolution inconnue* [Paris, 1947], p.647); Aragon does (op.cit., p.175).

64. Arshinov, op.cit., p.180.

15 December.<sup>65</sup>

Whatever the case, on 26 November yet another order, no.00131, quite possibly prepared in advance, uncompromisingly excommunicated the *Makhnovshchina* for the last time:

"[...] Makhno came out openly against Soviet power and the Red Army, declared a mobilisation in Guliai-Pole region and began hostile and aggressive operations [...] In view of this it is ordered that:

1. the military front consider Makhno and all his units as enemies of the Soviet Republic and the Revolution;
2. Commanders of all Red Army units who come into contact with Makhnovite units are to disarm them; if they resist, they are to be annihilated;
3. the whole territory of the UkSSR is to be cleansed, at the earliest possible date, of the remnants of this bandit gang, thus providing a chance for peaceful reconstruction."<sup>66</sup>

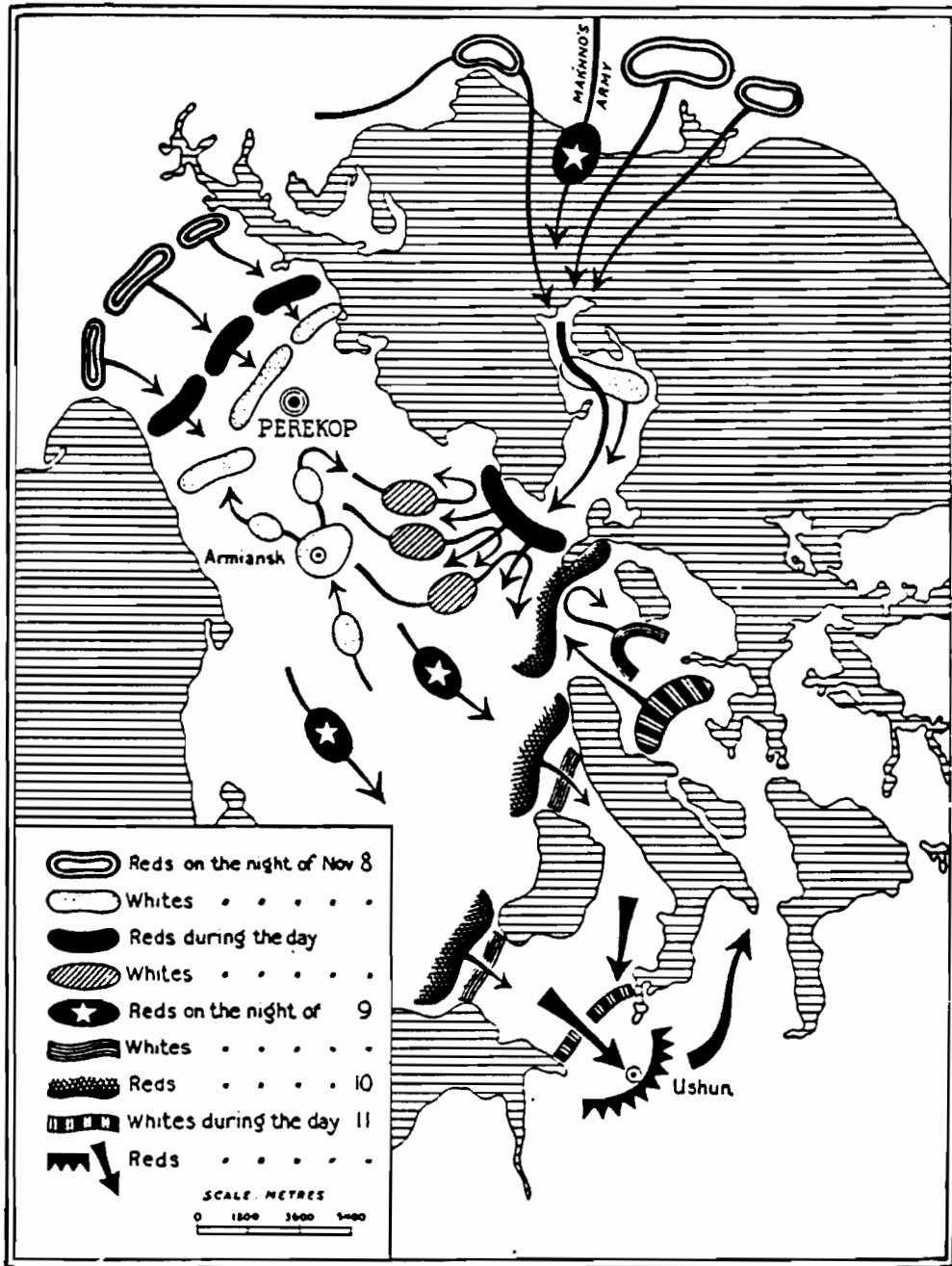
But the attempt to liquidate the Makhno movement at one blow had failed, and clearing it out of Ukrainian territory was to prove a more difficult task than Frunze anticipated.

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65. Ibid., p.187. The fact that the order was published in a newspaper three weeks later does not, of course, have any bearing on Arshinov's allegation that it had *not been circulated* before that date.

66. *GVU* vol.3, p.780-781.

Map 8  
 The Perekop operation against Wrangel, November 1920



Source: W. H. Chamberlin, *The Russian revolution* new ed. (New York, 1965), vol.2, p.331.

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#### XIV. THE NEP AND THE ELIMINATION OF PEASANT RESISTANCE

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The *Makhnovshchina* and other peasant revolts of this period were finally beaten by a combination of overwhelming and concentrated military force, by appropriate tactics, by famine, and arguably above all by the introduction - in Russia in early 1921 and in Ukraine in the autumn - of the New Economic Policy (NEP). From the peasants' viewpoint, the NEP meant principally the disappearance of the hated grain requisition detachments of the war communism period from the countryside, and hence the removal of one of their main grievances towards the Bolsheviks.<sup>1</sup>

In a different context half a century later, the West African freedom fighter Amílcar Cabral wrote perceptively:

"Always bear in mind that the people are not fighting for ideas, for the things in anyone's head. They are fighting to win material benefits, to live better and in peace, to see their lives go forward, to guarantee the future for their children."<sup>2</sup>

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1. According to one Soviet Ukrainian source, grain requisitioning did not stop in Ukraine until the autumn of 1921 (*Istoriia Ukrain's'koi RSR* [Kiev, 1967], vol.2, p.178).

2. Quoted by B. Davidson, *The people's cause: a history of guerrillas in Africa* (London, 1981), p.159.

Basil Davidson comments in a gloss on this passage:

"The 'big ideas' concerning liberation, nationalism, independence must therefore develop out of the 'small ideas' concerned with local grievances, local protests, local aspirations [...] A successful ideology of liberation, in short, [has] to develop from the living reality of living people, and not from any theoretical concept of what others might think good for those people. Intellectuals might be useful, but only in the measure that they [are] able to 'rethink' themselves into this reality of living people. Intellectuals would otherwise be useless, or worse."<sup>3</sup>

The civil war, as we have seen throughout this narrative, was fought at two levels: the grand set-piece battles between national armies, Red and White; and the small-scale *guerrilhas* over local grievances between peasant insurgents and whatever local authority happened to be in their way. The *Makhnovshchina* is important precisely because it was active at the interface between these two kinds of warfare, and participated in both.

"Local grievances" among the peasantry centred inevitably around the question of the central government's food policy. Under war communism, Bolshevik food policy was brutally demanding. *Prodrazverstka*, the forced requisitioning of grain, cleaned out peasant store-houses to feed the industrial working class and caused bitter resentment. An attempt in 1919 to collectivise peasant production in *kommuny* was implemented in authoritarian style and threatened to kill off the peasant dream of independent and indi-

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3. Ibid., p.159-160.

vidual land-ownership.<sup>4</sup> It was also a failure. Similarly, the policy of *ogosudarstvlenie* or "subjection to the state", which would have imposed sowing plans on peasant households, was an embarrassing flop.<sup>5</sup>

Lenin's own writings contain various passages in which he attempts to come to terms with the nature of the mistakes in which the war communism policy involved the Soviet government. Principally, this had meant a premature attempt to organise state production and distribution on communist lines; but above all it had meant fostering the illusion that socialist transformation was an imminent short-term possibility.<sup>6</sup> The result of this voluntarism was that labour obligations, grain requisitioning, the attempts at collectivisation and the disruptive impact of the war itself together fuelled peasant discontent until revolts "erupted like a chain of volcanoes."<sup>7</sup>

NEP represented simultaneously both the nemesis of the *Makhnovshchina* - and perhaps of the *atamanshchina* in general - and its victory. It was its nemesis because a generalised peasant insurrection became unsustainable, not only because of exhaustion and

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4. G. Littlejohn, *A sociology of the Soviet Union* (London, 1984), p.55-56.

5. M. Lewin, "The civil war: dynamics and legacy," in D. Koenker, W. Rosenberg and R. Suny (eds.), *Party, state and society in the Russian civil war: explorations in social history* (Bloomington, 1989), p.414-415.

6. C. Bettelheim, *Class struggles in the USSR. First period: 1917-1923* (New York, 1976), p.451-455.

7. Lewin, *op.cit.*, p.415.

war weariness, but also because grievances were addressed. Makhno retained enough passive peasant support to keep fighting until August 1921. But the situation in eastern Ukraine remained "chaotic and uncontrolled" well into 1922, and sporadic violence may have continued in the Ukrainian countryside until as late as 1926.<sup>8</sup> But the peasantry in general was no longer prepared to take up arms in defence of village democracy: the moment had passed. On the other hand, NEP was Makhno's victory because, in one view:

"[t]ogether with the Kronshtadt [sic] mutiny and a series of workers' revolts, [peasant wars] forced the Bolshevik leadership in March 1921 to abandon the unpopular policies of war communism in favour of a free trade under the NEP. Having defeated the White Army, backed by eight Western powers, the Bolshevik government surrendered before its own peasantry."<sup>9</sup>

The urban anarchists may not have recognised this, but the Ukrainian middle peasantry certainly did.

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8. R. Pethybridge, *One step backwards, two steps forward: Soviet society and politics in the New Economic Policy* (Oxford, 1990), p.257. Banditry and insurgency were widespread all over Russia and Ukraine during the "famine years" (O. Figes, *Peasant Russia, civil war: the Volga countryside in revolution, 1917-1921* (Oxford, 1989), p.340). About 2,000 Petliurist troops crossed from Poland in October 1921 to launch the "Second Winter Campaign." Some Makhnovites from internment camps may have been ready to join them (V. Markus, *L'Ukraine soviétique dans les relations internationales, 1918-1923* [Paris, 1959], p.147). An "insignificant" Makhnovite group was reported at Bohuslavka, near Kiev, in 1922 (T. Hornykiewicz (ed.), *Ereignisse in der Ukraine 1914-1922, deren Bedeutung und historische Hintergrunde* (Philadelphia, 1966-1969), vol.4, p.335. G. P. Kulchycky takes the story of nationalist attempts to maintain an insurgency up to 1926 ("The Ukrainian insurgent movement, 1919 to 1926," [Ph.D. dissertation, Georgetown University, 1970]).

9. Figes, op.cit., p.321. Louis Aragon is blunter, but only grasps half the point: Makhno "finding no more support among the peasants because of the NEP" fled the country (*A history of the USSR* [London, 1964], p.190).

There is some circumstantial evidence to indicate that the Bolsheviks had already decided to liquidate what they saw as the anarchist and Makhnovite menace even before the end of the campaign against Wrangel. The behaviour of the Makhnovites as part of the victorious Red Army when it occupied Sevastopol' must have only served to reinforce Bolshevik determination to eliminate once and for all the unruly and iconoclastic partisans. According to a former Chekist, admittedly not an unbiased witness, when the Makhnovites entered the city in triumph, they immediately reverted to their old habits of plunder, so familiar to the good citizens of Ekaterinoslav and other cities to the north. The "blessed little father raised the cry 'Our Crimea and everything in it!' and that was the beginning of the usual things - plunder, murder, rape."<sup>10</sup>

It is also possible - although this is pure speculation - that the Bolsheviks were regretting the last clause of the political agreement concluded at Starobel'sk, which would have allowed the Makhnovites to participate fully in elections to the Soviets in the Ukraine, and to the 5th All-Ukrainian Congress of Soviets in December. Regardless of the anarchists' chances of success, their interventions were bound to be disruptive from the Bolshevik point of view. The renewal of hostilities removed the need to make that particularly awkward political accommodation work.

Evidence of Bolshevik bad faith is cited by anarchist sources. It

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10. F. T. Fomin, *Zapiski starogo chekista* (Moscow, 1962), p.76.



is claimed that soon after fighting had started again, the Makhnovites found undated leaflets on Red Army prisoners, proclaiming "Death to the *Makhnovshchina!*" But the captives said that they had been distributed as early as 15 and 16 November, that is to say immediately after it had become clear that Wrangel had been decisively defeated.<sup>11</sup> Even more convincing, however, is the series of sweeps which took place at this time against anarchists and their organisations. The Cheka moved against the Khar'kov-based Nabat Federation, arresting many prominent figures, including Volin, and sending them to Moscow, where Grigorii Maksimov, Kh. Z. Iarchuk and others were also thrown in gaol. The Cheka published a piece entitled "Makhno's Treason" in the Khar'kov newspaper *Kommunist* to justify their actions against the anarchists.<sup>12</sup> Arrests were also made in Elisavetgrad, and in Khar'kov the *Vol'noe Bratstvo* book shop was raided.<sup>13</sup> Some of the more courageous anarchists tried to raise their voices in protest, but in vain. Maksimov and S. Markus, for example, petitioned the Executive Committee of the Third International as well as the Cen-

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11. P. A. Arshinov, *Istoriia makhnovskogo dvizheniia, 1918-1921 gg.* (Berlin, 1923), p.182.

12. G. Maksimov, *The guillotine at work* (Chicago, 1940), p.453.

13. Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.188. According to G. Maksimov, 44 people were arrested (*op.cit.*, p.447-448). Kubanin laconically confirms this: "Nabat was liquidated by the organs of the Cheka" (*Makhnovshchina* [Leningrad, 1927], p.213). Palič quotes the example of Czech president Edvard Benes (1884-1948) upbraiding himself for having trusted Stalin in 1935, as an explicit parallel for this type of Communist treachery ("The peasant partisan movement of the anarchist Nestor Makhno, 1918-1921: an aspect of the Ukrainian revolution" [Ph.D. dissertation, University of Kansas, 1971], p.313n). Palič's account of this period conforms uncritically in all essential respects to that presented by Arshinov.

tral Committee of the RKP(b).<sup>14</sup>

From Makhno's point of view, as the depths of winter closed in, the pressing need was to regroup, survive the winter, and prepare for the spring fighting. In these circumstances, with most of his staff lost, individual initiative was priceless. The Makhnovite cavalry commander, Marchenko, for instance, managed to salvage something from the situation, and broke through an encirclement at Perekop by the 4th Red Army, with a small group of about 200 men, to meet up with Makhno and the rest of the Insurgent Army on 7 December at Kermenchik, in Mariupol' district, near the Sea of Azov. Makhno himself had also broken out of an encirclement at Guliai-Pole with between 150 and 200 fighters, and had been roaming the nearby countryside on a recruitment drive which increased the size of his forces to 2,500 troops, of whom 1,500 were cavalry.<sup>15</sup> On 1 December three regiments of Makhnovite cavalry and two of infantry were in action against units of the 1st Cavalry Army around Timoshevka, where he was reportedly "conducting a violent offensive along the whole sector with a continuous line of machine-guns," while trying to push through to the north-east.<sup>16</sup> But this particular engagement apparently ended badly for the insurgents: by the afternoon, according to Red Army dispatches, the infantry regiments had been destroyed and the cavalry badly

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14. Maksimov, op.cit., p.452.

15. Arshinov, op.cit., p.189.

16. "Iz boevoi deiatel'nosti Tov. Timoshenko v godoi grazhdanskoi voiny v SSSR." *Krasnyi Arkhiv* no.104 (1941), p.101.

mauled, with many horses and *tachanki* captured. The survivors fled, pursued by Red cavalry.<sup>17</sup>

Despite this setback, Makhno returned to and attacked Guliai-Pole with the new recruits on 3 December, expelling the Red Army's 42nd Division, and taking, it is claimed, nearly 6,000 prisoners, of whom 2,000 became recruits in their turn and the others were sent home.<sup>18</sup> A few days later, Makhno attacked again near Andreevka, and again took thousands of prisoners. On 17 December, Frunze reported to Lenin and Trotsky that Makhno had broken through a triple encirclement three days earlier, and was now moving northwards with a large force and eight field-guns.<sup>19</sup> Within the space of a few days the Makhnovites also fought actions at Komar', Tsarekonstantinovka and Berdiansk.<sup>20</sup> During the raid on Berdiansk on 12 December, under Makhno's personal command, the Makhnovites allegedly killed 83 communists, including a key political worker in the region, a certain Makhalovich.<sup>21</sup> It

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17. *Ibid.*, p.102.

18. Earlier, for obvious reasons, it had been Makhnovite policy only to recruit armed fighters. This might well have been the motive for sending 4,000 prisoners home at this time too (Makhno, *Ukrainskaia revoliutsiia* [Paris, 1937], p.74).

19. L. Trotsky, *The Trotsky papers, 1917-1922* (The Hague, 1964-1971; hereafter *TP*), vol.2, p.366.

20. Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.189-190. Palij, basing his chronology on the collation of a wide range of Soviet and other sources, gives the sequence as being: 12 December, Berdiansk; 14 December, Andreevka; last, no date, Komar' (*op.cit.*, p.315-316).

21. "Rech' tov. Bukharina [19 July 1921]," *Biulleten' Pervogo Mezhdunarodnogo Kongressa Revoliutsionnykh Professional'nykh i Proizvodstvennykh Soizov* no.15 (21 July 1921), p.11.

is clear that the Red units which Makhno was confronting during this short period were scarcely composed of crack troops; it is equally clear that the Makhnovites were fighting with a kind of reckless desperation.

After their attempt to eliminate the *Makhnovshchina* by a swift surprise attack had failed, the Red command fell back on an apparently improvised and clumsy strategy of encirclement by large numbers.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, Makhno himself switched to guerrilla tactics, relying for advantage on rapid movement by horse and *tachanka*, on his own intimate knowledge of the terrain, and on the tacit sympathy of the local population.<sup>23</sup> To keep his forces as mobile as possible, Makhno left his wounded behind in the villages and hid arms and ammunition in caches for later recovery.<sup>24</sup>

By the middle of December, Makhno had managed to rock the ill-prepared Red forces back on their heels, had acquired enough recruits from among his captives to double the size of his admittedly decimated army, and had in addition accumulated substantial

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22. Makhno wrote later that many of the Red troops were brought in from other fronts and had little idea about who they were fighting against or why (Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.199).

23. But again, waging "people's war" depends largely on an effective ideology of liberation, which must grow out of concrete local grievances (Davidson, *loc.cit.*) The Bolsheviks were ultimately successful because unlike the Whites they addressed popular grievances at this time. Both R. Eideman (the Red commander chasing Makhno at the time), in his "Piataia godovshchina odnogo uroka," *Voina i Revoliutsiia* no.12 (1926), p.32-39; and E. Esbakh, "Poslednie dni Makhnovshchiny na Ukraine," *ibid.*, p.40-50, comment on the popular aspects of the last campaign.

24. Eideman, *op.cit.*, p.37.

amounts of arms, ammunition, and military equipment.<sup>25</sup> The obvious threat that he constituted to the pacification of the region was a source of grave concern to the Bolsheviks, who undoubtedly remembered all too vividly the impact which his breakthrough from Uman' had had on the White advance on Moscow. They increased the effort which they were devoting to the campaign of encirclement, but to little avail. On 16 December Makhno's army was attacked by a large Red force at Federovka, to the south of Guliai-Pole, but after a long engagement lasting from 2 o'clock in the morning until 4 o'clock in the afternoon, he broke through the Bolshevik lines.<sup>26</sup> In this battle, Makhno lost all eight of his field-guns and much of his captured equipment. Three days later, on 17 December, Frunze reported to Lenin and Trotsky that Makhno had escaped with a handful of cavalry, who were now being pursued by Red horsemen, but his infantry were dispersed.<sup>27</sup>

It is clear that the Bolsheviks realised quite early that this campaign would not be won simply by military means. But equally obviously they were at a loss to discover what an appropriate politico-military strategy would look like. To begin with, they seem to have relied heavily on terror as a key element in their political tactics. Frunze dispatched Antonov-Saratovskii, the

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25. Estimates of the actual size of Makhno army at this time, as always, vary. Palič quotes two estimates, ranging from 5,000 to 6,000 at the lower end of the scale, to an unlikely 10,000 to 15,000 at the upper end (op.cit., p.316). Frunze put the numbers on 14 December at 7,000 fighting men (TP, vol.2, p.366).

26. Arshinov, op.cit., p.190-191.

27. TP, vol.2, p.366-367.

People's Commissar for Internal Affairs in the Ukraine, to the Makhnovite areas with 450 political workers. Their instructions were to strengthen the apparatus of Soviet power and to liquidate banditry - in other words to put political pressure on the civilian population to stop supporting Makhno.<sup>28</sup>

Makhnovite prisoners, wrote Frunze, were in a "mood of extreme fatigue and demoralisation," and "all that remains [...] is to secure the position."<sup>29</sup> This was to prove a considerably over-optimistic assessment, and within a few weeks Lenin impatiently instructed E. M. Sklianskii, Trotsky's deputy, that

"[t]he Commander-in-Chief [Kamenev] and Frunze should be daily goaded and spurred on to get them to rout and catch Antonov and Makhno."<sup>30</sup>

The lack of enthusiasm among the troops on both sides for yet another winter campaign in the snow and icy mud of the Ukrainian steppe was evidenced by the frequency with which even whole units changed sides. Frunze's reference to the fatigue and demoralisation of the Makhnovite fighters rings true; but it certainly ap-

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28. Idem. Palij comments bluntly that the Reds "decided [...] to terrorise the civil population in the region" (op.cit., p.317).

29. *TP*, vol.2, p.367.

30. Antonov was the leader of a short-lived peasant revolt in Tambov province (V. I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 5th ed. [Moscow, 1958-1965; hereafter *PSS*], vol.52, p.42).

plied with equal force to his own soldiers.<sup>31</sup> One of the most famous of these desertions happened in January 1921, when the commander of the 1st Brigade of Budenny's 4th Cavalry Division, a certain Maslak or Maslakov, deserted to Makhno with his whole unit. By March 1921 Maslak was commanding Makhnovite operations as far afield as the Don and the Kuban.<sup>32</sup>

Although such desertions initially encouraged the illusion among the partisans that a couple of victories would be enough to compel a Bolshevik withdrawal from Ukraine, the gradual closing of the net around the insurgent army, and the large numbers deployed against them, soon forced them to face up to reality. The Bolsheviks simply could not afford to let Ukraine go its own way because Russia depended on it for food supply. Consequently the insurgents realised that if the *Makhnovshchina* was to avoid annihilation, a strategic retreat was going to be necessary. They took a collective decision to allow Makhno complete tactical freedom regarding the direction of retreat.<sup>33</sup>

The local Bolshevik commander, R. Eideman, afterwards described

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31. In September, Lenin had told the newly-appointed Frunze that the Bolsheviks did not have the right "to subject the people to the horrors and sufferings of another winter campaign" (S. A. Sirotinskii, *Put' Arsenii: biograficheskii ocherk M. V. Frunze* [Moscow, 1956], p.188, quoted by W. D. Jacobs, *Frunze, the Soviet Clausewitz, 1885-1925* [The Hague, 1969], p.209).

32. Letter from Makhno, quoted by Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.194, 196. See also *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia* (31 September 1921); *Protokoly desiatyi S"ezd RKP(b), mart 1921 g.* (Moscow, 1933), p.260, 314, 733; and Trotsky, *Kak vooruzhalas' revoliutsii* (1923-1925), vol.2, part 1, p.172.

33. Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.190-191.

the punitive measures taken by the Cheka against suspected sympathisers of the *Makhnovshchina*.<sup>34</sup> These were largely aimed at destroying Makhno's informal intelligence network among the local peasants. In the conditions of flux which prevailed at the time, men, women and children; beggars, army deserters, and orphans were used to maintain a constant stream of accurate information to the Makhnovite staff concerning Bolshevik movements and troop strengths.<sup>35</sup> These were the classic intelligence resources of people's war.<sup>36</sup>

But for all the romanticism of the anarchist accounts of Makhno's doomed last campaign, the fact remains that Ukraine is made up for the most part of terrain which is highly unsuitable for this kind of guerrilla fighting. The country consists virtually entirely of a flat open plain, the steppe, without many towns, but also without natural hiding places. Military movements can be seen for miles. Only in the extreme north is there a belt of forest and swamp land which is suitable for guerrillas to hide in.<sup>37</sup> Both sides knew this, of course, and it was a relatively simple matter, with so many troops, for the Bolsheviks to bar the insur-

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34. Eideman, *op.cit.*, p.38.

35. M. Rybakov, "Makhnovskie operatsii v 1920 g." *Krasnaia Armiia* no.12 (1922), p.12.

36. Basil Davidson quotes a contemporary assessment of a 19th century Algerian rebel which could have been applicable here as well: "He is well informed on everything. He knows just what goes on inside our camps and what our generals are thinking, while they on their side have no idea what is happening with the [enemy]" (*op.cit.*, p.36).

37. John A. Armstrong, *Ukrainian nationalism*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1963), p.130-131.



gents from access to roads and railway lines, and to slow their movement by forcing them into the open steppe. In these conditions, the Makhnovites were compelled to abandon heavy equipment, such as field-guns, so as to remain as mobile as possible. They avoided pitched battles wherever possible, ranging far outside their former zone of influence, and even outside Ukraine itself. In these months the insurgent units operated as far afield as the Volga, the Kuban, the Don, and even, it is claimed by one source, in Siberia, near Samara.<sup>38</sup>

In the meantime, the Red Army, unaccustomed to this kind of fighting, faced the usual difficulties of large military formations when they are suddenly confronted by a different set of circumstances or by a different type of enemy. As the Reds blundered about, in a territory in which they enjoyed little support at the best of times, they developed a set of tactics - hardly a strategy - which, if not guaranteed to produce immediate results, did at least keep the insurgents on the run. They included continuous pursuit, the use of fast-reaction units with armoured cars, the denial of access to the home base, and a hearts-and-minds campaign at village level.<sup>39</sup>

By early February the deployment of all these resources had had little effect and Lenin was warning Sklianskii "one more time"

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38. Arshinov, *op.cit.*, p.199.

39. Esbakh, *op.cit.*, p.42.

that a result was expected. Makhno had escaped yet again, although faced by superior forces under strict orders. What, demanded Lenin, were the cavalry, armoured trains and cars, aeroplanes and other military hardware being used for? Grain and fuel were being lost, he added, while the Red Army was "a million strong."<sup>40</sup>

Meanwhile, by the spring of 1921, the Bolsheviki were preparing to adapt to new economic conditions, now that their major armed enemies had been disposed of, and the military justification for war communism no longer held. As part of a complex political process which is well described in the literature, the set of policies now known as war communism were replaced by another set termed the New Economic Policy (NEP), which in broad terms "attempted to use commodity relations as the basis for constructing an alliance with the poor and middle peasantry, as a strategy for the construction of socialism."<sup>41</sup> NEP was a response to the domestic economic and political crisis of 1921:

"[t]he country as a whole was cold, hungry, disease-ridden, exhausted and embittered; and this was true as regards the majority of the industrial workers and a good many of the rank-and-file Communists."<sup>42</sup>

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40. Telegram dated 6 February 1921, in Lenin, *PSS*, vol.52, p.67.

41. Littlejohn, *op.cit.*, p.52. See also Bettelheim's detailed discussion of the balance sheet of war communism and NEP (*op.cit.*, p.437-537). For the standard Soviet view of the relationship between "kulak revolts" and the crisis of war communism, see I. Ia. Trifonov, *Klassy i klassovaia bor'ba v SSSR v nachale NEPa, 1921-1923 gg. Vol.1: Bor'ba s vooruzhennoi kulatskoi kontrrevoliutsii* (Leningrad, 1964), especially p.51-71, 72-115, and 270-289.

42. W. H. Chamberlin, *The Russian revolution*, new ed. (New York, 1965), vol.2, p.431.

The most important plank in this policy platform was the tax-in-kind, introduced in Russia in March and described by Lenin as marking "a transition [...] to a regular socialist exchange of products."<sup>43</sup> Grain requisitioning was to be replaced by a tax-in-kind, in an attempt to win the peasants over from such leaders as Makhno and Antonov. After the government had taken 25 percent of the crop, the peasants could dispose of the remainder as they pleased. Significantly, the tax was to be less than what had been taken by requisitioning; it was to be progressive; responsibility for payment was individual, not collective; and the amount was to be fixed before the spring sowing.<sup>44</sup>

In a speech to the Moscow Soviet in late February, Lenin had returned to the attack against his subordinates, blaming supply problems on the "corruption" of rich peasants in Ukraine, who, he argued, had anyway had a much easier time during the Civil War than their counterparts in the Central Russian regions.<sup>45</sup> But things were not really so simple. On 2 March the Ukrainian Narkomprod (Commissar for Food Supply), Vladimirov, reported to Moscow that working conditions were "such as to wreck all plans." Makhno, he wrote, had completely destroyed the food supply system in both Aleksandrovska and Berdiansk, and had massacred food sup-

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43. Quoted by Lincoln, *op.cit.*, p.472.

44. The VTsIK decree was published in *Pravda* (23 March 1921); an English translation is printed in Chamberlin, *op.cit.*, vol.2, p.499-501.

45. Lenin, *op.cit.*, vol.42, p.363.

ply workers there.<sup>46</sup> He was now busy doing the same thing around Kherson. He had crossed the Dnepr from Dneprovsk uezd, and had killed the district supply commissar as well as 42 workers from the Greater Aleksandrovsk food supply committee. From the Ukrainian point of view, continuing to supply the Donbass and the Red Army was an "almost insoluble problem." Food requisitioning in the Ukraine had altogether cost the lives of 1,700 workers.<sup>47</sup>

Vladimirov was uneasy about the imminent change-over from grain requisitioning to the tax-in-kind, which he described as "dangerous." He argued that the peasants would contest the official crop assessments, acceptance of which was the basis for paying the tax and permitting the barter of the remainder of the harvest.<sup>48</sup> Despite these and other objections, the tax-in-kind was promulgated on 15 March 1921.<sup>49</sup> Lenin commented to Trotsky that

"the Ukrainian communists are wrong. The conclusion is not against the tax, but for stronger measures for the total annihilation of Makhno."<sup>50</sup>

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46. In early 1921, the soon-to-be famous Soviet writer Mikhail Sholokhov, then a 15- or 16-year-old, was captured by the Makhnovites while working with the grain requisition detachments. Sholokhov describes Makhno as "very bitter". His comrades were shot, but after two days Sholokhov was released, presumably because of his age (introduction to *Selected tales from the Don* [Oxford, 1967], p.x).

47. *TP*, vol.2, p.386-389.

48. *Ibid.*, p.388-391.

49. *Pravda* (17 March 1921), p.4.

50. *TP*, vol.2, p.394-395; *PSS*, vol.52, p.88. Nevertheless, the introduction of NEP measures in Ukraine was delayed by some six months.

Certainly the Makhnovite units roaming Ukraine as winter turned to early spring represented a grave threat to the food supply situation. While Vladimirov was complaining about the change of policy, the unit led by the deserter Maslak, which despite the need for mobility still possessed two field-guns, was moving northeastwards from Stavropol' and the Don towards the undefended town of Tsaritsyn, where 500,000 *puds* of grain, the only reserves for Astrakhan', were stored.<sup>51</sup>

The Bolsheviks were also counting on the war weariness of the Ukrainian peasants to help them liquidate the *Makhnovshchina*. Different approaches were tried. The 5th All-Ukrainian Congress of Soviets offered an amnesty to all "bandits" who voluntarily turned themselves over to the authorities by 15 April, and later on the VTsIK extended the deadline. In April *Plamia Truda* reported some surrenders under the terms of this amnesty, including one allegedly involving 63 former insurgents in Guliai-Pole itself. On 1 June the same newspaper reported that some Makhnovite insurgents had surrendered at Zmiev *uezd*, in Khar'kov, and land had been allotted to them.<sup>52</sup>

But the Makhnovites were not the only insurgent force operating in Ukraine as the victorious Bolsheviks attempted to consolidate their hold on power. Although those remnants of Petliura's UNR

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51. Report dated 17 March 1921, in *TP*, vol.2, p.402-405.

52. Issues for 27 and 29 April, and 1 June 1921. See also S. N. Semanov, "Makhnovshchina i ee krakh," *Voprosy Istorii* no.9 (1966), p.59-60.

which had not retreated with the main force into Poland in 1920 were mainly active on the right bank, they still maintained some sort of guerrilla presence in Kherson and Ekaterinoslav. Indeed, Petliura and the UNR-in-exile had decided, with Polish support, to turn from conventional warfare, at which they had been resoundingly beaten, to the tactics of insurgency, and had set up a general staff, together with a highly centralised command structure, to control the various regions and sub-regions into which they divided the map of Ukraine.<sup>53</sup> The plan was to organise a "general uprising" on 1 September, but the organisation's structures were easily infiltrated and broken up by the Bolsheviks. Although it is clear from the little that is known, that much of this exile activity was not reflected in any serious operations on the ground inside Ukraine, Soviet sources nevertheless confirm that the Bolsheviks took the threat seriously, deploying militias and experienced party workers to confront the nationalist insurgents militarily as well as politically.<sup>54</sup>

By March 1921, Makhno's situation had become desperate. His army

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53. For an uncritical account of this period, which takes UNR planning documents at face value, see Kulchycky, op.cit., p.256-261. He argues earlier (p.71), following such analysts as Ivan Hnoyovy, that the *Makhnovshchina* was the natural home of nationalists from the left-bank, and that nationalism was a significant ideological component of the movement. But this is wishful thinking: the real problem remains the class structure of Ukrainian society at this time. Some, or even many of the insurgents may have had nationalist sympathies; but since these seem neither to have found expression nor to have influenced Makhno's conduct, the argument falls away into irrelevance.

54. Figures mentioned are 87 military operations and 9,000 men captured. I. Dubyns'kyi and H. Shevchuk, *Chervone kazatsvo* (Kiev, 1965), p.151, quoted by Kulchycky, op.cit., p.262.

was split up into marauding groups which carried out sabotage actions as they tried to survive by plundering military warehouses, or by battenning onto the weary peasantry.<sup>55</sup> Makhno, who rode a horse reluctantly because of a wounded foot, was forced into the saddle to lead the insurgents in the now almost daily engagements, often fought with sabres, which the Makhnovites grimly dubbed *rubki* ("choppings" or "hackings").<sup>56</sup> He was wounded several times, in the stomach, leg and neck, and on each occasion was rescued by *tachanka*.<sup>57</sup> On 16 March, for example, after a pursuit which lasted 13 hours and covered about 180 kilometres, Makhno only managed to slip through the net thanks to a rear guard action by a unit of Lewis machine-gunners, who all perished.<sup>58</sup>

The summer of 1921 was hot and dry, and Ukraine suffered from a severe drought. Harvests failed in Ekaterinoslav, Tauride, parts of Kherson and Poltava, and on the Don. The Volga provinces were already suffering from famine conditions, and Ukraine was expected to step into the gap and send food to Petrograd and to Moscow. But Ukraine was also starving, although the fact was not men-

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55. Makhno describes the insurgent requisitioning process during an earlier phase. Poor peasants would contribute bread according to their means. Kulaks would each contribute a sheep. If this was still the procedure in the conditions of 1921 it would have been a heavy burden indeed (Makhno, op.cit., p.74).

56. Arshinov, op.cit., p.195, 197.

57. In earlier periods, women apparently rode in some of the *tachanki* to nurse wounded men. This was probably not the case by 1921 (Makhno, loc.cit.)

58. Arshinov, op.cit., p.196-197.

tioned in the Soviet press at the time.<sup>59</sup> In such conditions even passive peasant support began to wither and dry up too, and Makhno was forced to range wider and wider to find food. According to Frunze, who may well have wished to explain away his own failure to eliminate the *partizanshchina*, he was operating in no less than fifteen raions of Ukraine, with up to 15,000 well-armed cavalrymen.<sup>60</sup> Makhno claims that his forces were in action in Ekaterinoslav, the Tauride, parts of Khar'kov and Poltava, the Don region, towards Kuban, and below Tsaritsyn and Saratov. He himself led a raid across the Volga.<sup>61</sup> Certainly Makhnovite units were active in Poltava, to the northwest and far from the *Makhnovshchina's* traditional base of support, at the end of July and the beginning of August, although they were being pushed steadily northwestwards.<sup>62</sup> On one occasion Makhno reportedly clashed with a 1st Cavalry Army unit under the personal command of Semen Budenny, whom he described in a letter, quoted by Arshinov, as a "disgraceful coward," although in later years he expressed respect for him as a worthy adversary.<sup>63</sup>

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59. By 1922, discrimination against Ukraine had become severe: taxes were not lifted there as they were in the Volga, and still the peasantry was forced to contribute grain. According to one source, 92 wagon loads were collected in Ukraine that year; 36 were sent to the Volga (R. Pethybridge, op.cit., p.108-109).

60. E. Hurwicz, *Staatsmänner und Abenteurer: russische Porträts von Witte bis Trotzki, 1891-1925* (Leipzig, 1925), p.272. See also Arshinov, op.cit., p.199.

61. Letter by Makhno quoted in Arshinov, op.cit., p.199.

62. P. Sergeev, "Poltavskaia operatsiia protiv Makhno," *Voina i Revoliutsiia* no.9 (1927), p.122-134. See especially the map of operations on p.131.

63. *Gnusnyi trus* or "vile coward" is the expression used (Arshinov, op.cit., p.199). But according to Mett (op.cit., p.6), Makhno in exile spoke in terms of professional respect about both Budenny and Voroshilov.



By July it was clear that time was running out, and that Makhno was only fighting a rear guard action. Newspaper reports published as far away as the United States announced, only a little prematurely, that Makhno had been "hopelessly beaten" and that several of his commanders had surrendered.<sup>64</sup> Meanwhile, the political campaign to equate the *Makhnovshchina* with straightforward banditry was gathering force.<sup>65</sup> At the first congress of the Profintern, the Russians took a tough position in the face of criticism from foreign delegates, some of whom had syndicalist sympathies. At one session of the Presidium, two Soviet representatives, Rykov and Tseperovich, declared "in the name of the Russian delegation" that the "important persons" who were complaining about Makhno's ill-treatment must themselves be involved with his gang. Indeed, they went on, some of them had known counter-revolutionary connections, for example with people at Kronstadt.<sup>66</sup>

Bukharin, speaking at the last session in the name of the Central

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64. *New York Times* (18 July 1921), p.15

65. There is indeed a noticeable change in the level of Bolshevik hostility towards the *Makhnovshchina* after 1921, as commentators have noted. Makhno is increasingly portrayed as simply a bloodthirsty and uncultured bandit, a characterisation later picked up and elaborated by Joseph Kessel. Pre-war Soviet films also portrayed Makhno as simply a robber chief (G. Guilleminault and A. Mahé, *L'épopée de la révolution: le roman vrai d'un siècle d'anarchisme* [Paris, 1963], p.325).

66. "Zaiavlenie russkoi delegatsii po povodu rechi sirolia v zasedanii 19 iul'ia 1921 g.," *Biulleten' Pervogo Mezhdunarodnogo Kongressa Revoliutsionnykh Professional'nykh i Proizvodstvennykh Soiuzov* no.16 (July 1921), p.10.

Committee, created an uproar among the foreign anarcho-syndicalist delegates by first reducing Russian anarchism to the *Makhnovshchina*, and then by reducing the *Makhnovshchina* to banditry.<sup>67</sup> His speech represents one of the few detailed defences, by a senior government figure, of Bolshevik policy towards the *Makhnovshchina* in this final period:

"As is known to all comrades, a few of those present here have an interest in the problems of the Russian anarchists [...] our Russian anarchism appears to be a modern phenomenon of a different order than anarchism in Western Europe and America [...] our pure-Russian anarchism is not based on the proletariat, but on some other social categories. The principal trend in Russian anarchism does not appear as a social product of the working class but [...] in reality appears as the product of a certain stratum of our peasantry.

[...] The majority of our population are peasants; moreover, a stratum of especially rich peasants are concentrated in some parts of our huge country, in geographical terms. First among these areas, we have Ukraine. And in this very same Ukraine, it seems that we have the motherland of our authentic Russian anarchism. And not by accident, but necessarily, we see that our Russian anarchism finds its real embodiment, especially clearly, in the partisan gangs of the notorious Makhno [...] It is also clear that this form of anarchism finds itself precisely in sympathy with the kulak peasantry.

When we, representing proletarian power, go to the villages, and above all to the rich villages, we must take from these rich peasants, mainly in the form of bread, in order to give to the hungry workers. Up to now we could only use the requisitioning method. At present we obtain bread by means of a tax-in-kind, in other words, we steal grain from the rich peasants and make it work in the interests of the working class. [...] the White generals also stole bread from the peasants. When the Reds come, now the peasants are against the Reds; but when the Whites come, now the peasants are against the Whites.

On this soil, an anarchist ideology has grown up. In outward appearance it is a specifically Russian anarchism. Insofar as it is directed against the Whites, it is for us communists [...] but when it is directed against the economy of the proletariat, it plays the part of the rich peasant vandals against the proletariat

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67. Maksimov, op.cit., p.444; on Profintern, see E. H. Carr, *Socialism in one country, 1924-1926* (Harmondsworth, 1972), vol.3, p.974-980.

[...]

If the evaluation which I have made of this movement is correct, then this anarchist revolution must be seen under absolutely objective conditions as a counter-revolution."<sup>68</sup>

Bukharin went on to describe a series of incidents dating from June to August 1920, and one from December, carefully chosen to illustrate the brutality and vandalism of the *Makhnovshchina*.

While his supporters and detractors argued in Moscow, Makhno's situation on the ground was becoming increasingly desperate. On 13 August, with a small group of 100 cavalrymen, Makhno fought his way across to the right-bank of the Dnepr, and began to look for refuge. He was wounded again during the crossing, undertaken with the help of some peasant fishermen. The trap was closing rapidly. After several increasingly hopeless encounters with Red cavalry units, Makhno was wounded again, this time in the face, on the 22nd, and had to be moved in a *tachanka*. Finally, on 28 August, no longer insurgents but hunted fugitives, Makhno and his dwindling band of survivors crossed the Dnestr river into Rumania. He was never to set foot in Ukraine again.<sup>69</sup>

Makhno's entry into Rumanian territory almost immediately provoked problems between the Rumanian and Soviet governments, already on poor terms over the Bessarabian issue, as well as over a series of frontier incidents provoked by Petliurists and White

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68. "Rech' tov. Bukharina," p.10.

69. Arshinov, op.cit., p.200.

Guards who had found refuge there.<sup>70</sup> A contemporary report states that although Bessarabian or Moldavian towns were full of anti-Soviet refugees, and therefore well-disposed towards the Rumanian annexation, the situation in the countryside was quite different. Indeed, although the peasantry was mainly Moldavian-speaking (i.e. Rumanian), they had two grounds for discontent with the Rumanian government: the delay in implementing land reform, and the changeover from the Russian currency.<sup>71</sup>

Border crossings by armed groups were a constant cause of contention. The Soviet governments of Russia and Ukraine maintained a steady flow of complaints about the presence on Rumanian soil of representatives of the Petliura "government", such as Matsevich, Ataman Guly-Gulenko, General Delvig and others. Rumania itself, as well as Bessarabia and Bukovina, were being used as bases for espionage and "for assaults by brigands against Ukraine" complained the Bolsheviks.<sup>72</sup> Units under General Bradov regrouped in Rumania; a raid led by Pshennik and allegedly supported by Ruma-

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70. Bessarabia, a Rumanian-speaking province of Tsarist Russia (and now an independent country, Moldava) was occupied by the Rumanians in January 1918 and formally annexed in April. In October 1920 the Allies recognised Rumanian jurisdiction. Of all the bordering countries, Rumania was the only one to refuse diplomatic and commercial relations with the Soviet government (E. H. Carr, *The Bolshevik revolution, 1917-1923* [Harmondsworth, 1966], vol.3, p.346-347).

71. Report dated 13 January 1921, reprinted in *L'Ukraine sovietiste: quatre années de guerre et de blocus. Recueil des documents officiels d'après les livres rouges ukrainiens* (Berlin, 1922), p.122.

72. Some Petliurists were captured crossing the frontier with *tachanki*, normally associated more closely with Makhnovite tactics (*L'Ukraine sovietiste*, p.92-93). For Russian back-translations from the diplomatic French of this correspondence, see *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR* (Moscow, 1957- ), vol.4, p.435-438, 488-491.

nian artillery fire was repulsed in November 1921.<sup>73</sup> The Rumanians also felt that they had grounds for protest. On 26 August the Rumanian Foreign Minister, Take-Ionesco, had radioed Chicherin to complain that "several people" had tried to cross the Dneestr in boats, but had been turned back by Rumanian border patrols. Rifle and machine-gun fire had then been aimed at the Rumanians from the Russian side of the river, protested Take-Ionesco.<sup>74</sup>

cut this § down a lot p. 471-574

Chicherin apparently ignored this particular Rumanian protest. On 17 September, however, he addressed a formal request for Makhno's extradition to the Rumanians, on behalf of both the Russian and Ukrainian governments. The famous bandit Makhno, he wrote

"crossed the Bessarabian frontier on 23 August, close to Monastirevka with a band of followers, seeking asylum in a territory which is under the *de facto* control of Rumania [... he] has committed a number of crimes on Russian and Ukrainian territory, including burning and plundering villages, massacring peaceful populations, and extorting their goods by torture [...] the Russian and Ukrainian governments address a formal request to the Rumanian government to hand over as common criminals the afore-mentioned brigand chief and his followers."<sup>75</sup>

The Rumanian reply, sent ten days later on 27 September, consisted of a lesson in the niceties of diplomatic intercourse from the President of the Council of Ministers himself, General Averesco. Averesco refused to accept the message, because of its form as

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73. *Istoriia Rumynii 1918-1970* (Moscow, 1971), p.62.

74. It is not clear from the text whether these were Makhnovites or not (*L'Ukraine sovietiste*, p.91).

75. *Idem*.

well as its content. First of all, he pointed out pedantically that according to the standard practices of international law, an extradition request must be made by the *judicial* authorities of the requesting country, after an order for arrest has also been made. Second, the accused persons must be properly identified. In addition, since there was at the time no death penalty in the Kingdom of Rumania, a formal assurance must be provided that the accused would not be sentenced to death.<sup>76</sup> When the request satisfied all these norms, Averesco added, even though there was no extradition treaty between the three countries, his government would consider it on its merits.<sup>77</sup>

Chicherin had no choice but to conform, and after a lengthy delay, he replied to Take-Ionesco at length and in irritated tones on 22 October, complaining that Averesco's note did not even confirm that Makhno was still in Rumania. Nevertheless, "as soon as the necessary materials have been assembled, and put into the legal format which you request, we will send you the result."<sup>78</sup>

The People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs then launched into a lengthy attack on the conduct of the Rumanian government over the question of Bessarabia, in which the basic argument was that a government which failed to respect international norms on terri-

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76. This demand was described by later Soviet historians as "mocking" (*Istoria Rumynii*, p.62).

77. *L'Ukraine soviétiste*, p.92.

78. *Ibid.*, p.96.

torial matters was ill-placed to deliver lectures on the international law of extradition to others. Chicherin concluded by affirming that for his government the Makhno case was a security issue. "It is beyond doubt," he added, "that if the bandit Makhno and his accomplices were to be tried in a Bessarabian court they would be condemned to death."<sup>79</sup> The Soviet government hoped that after the formalities were satisfied, the Rumanians would "consider it a duty to satisfy such an elementary and just request."<sup>80</sup>

Take-Ionesco replied on 29 October that he was unable to confirm Makhno's presence in Rumania because he did not know exactly who had been interned. He promised to investigate; in the meantime he awaited the promised documentation in support of the extradition request. As for the Bessarabian and other issues, Take-Ionesco replied firmly, "you know very well that I cannot discuss [these matters] with you," as they concerned the domestic affairs of Rumania.<sup>81</sup>

Chicherin promised in a testy note dated 11 November to furnish documentary and even photographic evidence, via Soviet representatives in Warsaw, in support of the juridical claims of the Russian and Ukrainian governments for Makhno's extradition. He wel-

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79. The Odessa newspaper *Stanok* added sardonically that the Rumanian government had apparently forgotten "the countless executions which it has carried out, for example, in Bessarabia" (quoted in *Istoriia Rumynii*, loc.cit.)

80. *L'Ukraine sovietiste*, p.98.

81. *Ibid.* p.98-99.

comed the Rumanian government's declaration that it followed a policy of "peaceful good-neighbourliness", and then launched again into a lengthy complaint about the Bessarabian issue. Finally he claimed that Makhno was preparing attacks on Ukraine in cooperation with the Petliurists. The area chosen for these operations was Odessa.

"The behaviour of the Rumanian government towards Makhno's bandits is of particular importance to us since we are in possession of documentary evidence that Makhno, from his refuge in Rumania together with Petliura, is planning new attacks by his bands, composed entirely of criminals, on the Ukrainian republic. Documentary evidence, as well as the depositions of prisoners taken during the attacks of bands from the direction of Poland, prove that Odessa was chosen as the scene of operations by Makhno [...] These activities by the White Guards in Rumania and Bessarabia compel us to give the most serious attention to criminal bandits of the Makhno type [...] We are still of the opinion that your behaviour to Makhno is distinguished by a partiality that is wholly inexplicable if your attitude towards Russia and Ukraine were in fact such as you describe."<sup>82</sup>

While this inconclusive exchange dragged on, Makhno was indeed busy talking to his erstwhile enemies, the Petliurists, in what was apparently to be the first of a series of increasingly desperate attempts to organise support for a return to Ukraine.<sup>83</sup>

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82. Ibid., p.99 ff.; J. Degras (ed.), *Soviet documents on foreign policy* (London, 1951-1953), vol.1, p.274-276; *Izvestiia* (16 November 1921).

83. This period is glossed over by both Arshinov (op.cit.) and Volin (op.cit.), presumably because the blatant opportunism revealed reflects badly on claims that Makhno was highly principled politically. However, this is inevitably also a badly documented period. None of the recent accounts (Palič, op.cit.; A. Skirda, *Nestor Makhno, le cosaque de l'anarchie: la lutte pour les soviets libres en Ukraine, 1917-1921* [Paris, 1982]; M. Malet, *Nestor Makhno in the Russian civil war* [London, 1982]), with the exception of Malcolm Menzies (*Makhno: une épopée. Le soulèvement anarchiste en Ukraine, 1918-1921* [Paris, 1972]), pay any significant attention to the considerable but shaky evidence for Makhno's anti-Soviet plotting after August 1921, or to the anarchist de-



Despite the official Rumanian declarations of ignorance of Makhno's whereabouts, he and his wife, together with two aides, had been taken to Bucharest for medical treatment, apparently at the request of the Petliurists, soon after entering the country.<sup>84</sup> The rest of his followers had been put into internment camps.<sup>85</sup>

When Makhno arrived in Bucharest he was taken to the Petliurist mission for talks. Makhno claimed, although the Petliurists apparently doubted the story, that he had originally intended to cross into Poland with a small detachment of well-armed cavalry, near the Zbruch river, in order to join up with the Petliurist headquarters, but one of his men was taken prisoner and the route was betrayed. The only account we have of these conversations is a Petliurist one: the author complains throughout of the evasiveness and vagueness of his interlocutors:

"It is necessary to note that not only the commandant [i.e. Makhno] but also his followers were extremely cautious, failing to speak frankly about their forces, their plans and intentions, and above all the reasons which compelled them to leave Ukraine."<sup>86</sup>

The Makhnovites claimed that the local population supported their

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...Continued...

bates around his defeat.

84. According to one secondary source, Makhno and Halina were briefly interned at Brasov in Rumania, where they met Stepan Matvenko-Sikar, who later emigrated to Brazil. Matvenko-Sikar was astonished at the quantity of gold and diamonds which they had about them (P. Fedenko, *Institute for the Study of the USSR Bulletin* vol.15, no.6 [1968], p.43-44).

85. Petliurist report dated 25 November 1921 (*L'Ukraine soviétiste*, p.123).

86. *Ibid.*, p.123-124.

insurgency "in every way possible", but the Petliurists, noting that the detachment had been compelled to fight its way out of Ukraine without even resting for a single night, felt that this was mere triumphalism. The Bolsheviks, with no other enemies to deal with, had been in a better position to annihilate the *Makhnovshchina* than ever before.<sup>87</sup>

Makhno's tactics were effective when he was able to take advantage of two large armies fighting each other, by working in the rear and attacking them on their exposed flanks, wrote the anonymous author of the Petliurist report. But now those circumstances no longer held, and even the very fact of "[the Makhnovites'] wish to reach an understanding with us [...] truly shows that they have been beaten [...]"<sup>88</sup>

Makhno apparently agreed to the nationalists' conditions for closer cooperation: recognition of the UNR government; subordination of his forces to nationalist command; and acceptance of Petliurist political slogans.<sup>89</sup> But nothing could come of such an accord - the Petliurists, as much as the *Makhnovshchina*, were a defeated movement, and much of their analysis of the insurgents' situation applied with equal force to their own, had they only

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87. *Idem.*

88. *Ibid.*, p.124.

89. Skirda argues plausibly but without documentary support that this agreement was concluded mainly for the eyes of the Rumanian and Polish authorities, which supported the nationalists, and represented the Makhnovites' only long-term hope of avoiding extradition (*op.cit.*, p.309).

been able to see it.<sup>90</sup>

The Petliurists were right: Makhno was no longer a major player. Recovering slowly from his wounds, he apparently continued to live under police supervision in Rumania, and his partisans remained in the internment camps, their fates unrecorded by history. But after eight months of obscurity, according to Rumanian press accounts, Makhno and a small group of partisans were arrested in the Burzaw forests while trying to cross back into Soviet territory, presumably to try to start another uprising. On 11 April 1922, he was expelled from Rumania to Poland, and promptly interned.<sup>91</sup>

While Makhno and his supporters launched a campaign to be allowed to leave Poland for either Czechoslovakia or Germany, the Soviet government again demanded Makhno's extradition.<sup>92</sup> But the Polish government refused to hand him over to the Russian or Ukrainian authorities, ostensibly because they did not consider him to be a political offender.<sup>93</sup>

Whatever schemes Makhno actually hatched in Poland, rumour fol-

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90. *L'Ukraine sovietiste*, p.124-125.

91. Unspecified press reports quoted by Menzies (*op.cit.*, p.217). He also questions whether Makhno was expelled, or escaped from Rumania. Skirda says that the group was passed back and forth from one side of the frontier to the other for the whole night of 12 April, until finally the Poles interned them (*op.cit.*, p.310).

92. *Ibid.*, p.311-312.

93. E. Hurwicz, *op.cit.*, p.273.

lowed him everywhere. According to one near-contemporary source, one story going the rounds in Warsaw was that he had had talks with the Soviet Mission in the Polish capital, during which a plan for Makhno to foster uprisings in eastern Galicia, with the objective of separating it from Poland, was discussed.<sup>94</sup> There may have been more to this scheme than mere rumour, however. The Russian diplomatic defector and former Ukrainian chargé in Austria, Grigorii Besedovskii, states in his memoirs that a meeting was held in 1922 outside Vienna, at the Schloß Liechtenstein, during which the Ukrainian Chargés-d'Affaires from Poland, Germany and Czechoslovakia discussed this concept with him. The diplomats toyed with the idea of making use of the Galician *streltsi*, who were interned near Warsaw, "and also of the famous Makhno, who had already offered his services to our Embassy in Poland."<sup>95</sup> Besedovskii opposed the idea and it was eventually dropped.

Besedovskii's name may be connected to an interesting lead in another possible conspiracy some years later, mention of which occurs in the forged Maxim Litvinov diaries. These were published in the mid-1950s, and in the words of a contemporary reviewer, added "to our understanding of Soviet affairs and of Litvinov's personality about as much as a forged banknote adds to our

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94. *Idem.*

95. G. Besedovskii, *Na putiakh k termidoru* (Paris, 1930), vol.1, p.63-64 [emphasis added].

wealth."<sup>96</sup> However, the likelihood is that the diaries were written up in Paris by none other than Besedovskii, who had definitely been involved as a minor player in other plots with the Makhnovites.<sup>97</sup> It is interesting, therefore, that the diaries, valueless as a conventional historical source, quote a GPU report that in November or December 1929, Ivar Kreuger, a Swedish industrialist, was ready to finance a return to the Soviet Union by Makhno, with a large body of men.<sup>98</sup> In March 1930, the diaries report a meeting in the Bois de Boulogne in Paris between Besedovskii, Makhno and Kreuger, where a possible raid into Podolia was discussed. Kreuger was hoping to trigger off a general insurrection with 1,000 Makhnovites and a handful of machine-guns.<sup>99</sup> In any event, Kreuger died a couple of years later in 1932.<sup>100</sup>

For whatever plot it may have been, on 27 November 1923 Makhno went on trial in Warsaw, accused of having actually attempted to

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96. *Times Literary Supplement* (9 September 1955), p.527. Most other reviewers agreed that the work was a fake: *The Spectator* (9 September 1955), p.344; *New York Times* (6 November 1955), p.56; *Saturday Review* (19 November 1955).

97. Bertram D. Wolfe, "The case of the Litvinov diaries," *Commentary* (August 1956), p.164-171.

98. "M. Litvinov", *Notes for a journal* (London, 1955), p.112.

99. *Ibid.*, p.126-127.

100. Ivar Kreuger (1880-1932) was a Swedish engineer who established a near monopoly of the Swedish match industry between 1913 and 1917. He had "an unshakable belief in his own genius" and believed that he could "influence the world economy." He was either murdered or committed suicide in March 1932, in the midst of financial scandal, having been falsifying his companies' books for over ten years (*Svensk Uppslagbok* [Malmö, 1947-1959], s.v. "Kreuger, Ivar" and "Kreugerkoncernen"). For more detail see Lars Hassbring, *The international development of the Swedish Match Company, 1917-1924* (Stockholm, 1980); and on Soviet involvement with Kreuger, Håkan Lindgren, *Corporate growth: the Swedish match industry in its global setting* (Stockholm, 1980).

foment such a Galician revolt in 1922, and of having offered his services to Russia if another Polish-Soviet war should break out.<sup>101</sup> Galina Kuz'menko was, it seems, involved in the plot, and had opened negotiations with the Ukrainian consulate in Warsaw, which resulted in a note being sent to Moscow.<sup>102</sup>

Makhno's defence lawyer, with little respect for either historical fact or geographical probability, apparently made much play of the *Makhnovshchina's* role in harassing - in particular - Budyenny's 1st Cavalry Army during the 1920 war, when Soviet cavalry threatened Warsaw.<sup>103</sup> Although such harassment of Red troops did take place when they crossed Ukraine, it is unlikely that it had any impact on the course of the war. Nevertheless, Makhno successfully appealed to shared Polish and Ukrainian anti-Russian sentiments, and threw himself on the Polish court's mercy. As a result, in February 1924 he was acquitted, although he was still not permitted to leave Polish territory.<sup>104</sup> Instead, he was sent to Poznan and later to the Free City of Danzig (Gdansk).

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101. Skirda relies (op.cit., p.311-314) on an account of the trial by Arshinov and Volin, "[Makhno before the Polish courts]" in the United States anarchist weekly *Amerikanskie Izvestiia* (28 November 1923), but I have not seen this.

102. This confirms Besedovskii's account (*Frankfurter Zeitung* [no date given], quoted by the *New York Times* [24 February 1924], section II, p.7).

103. Idem.

104. Louis Rich, *New York Times Magazine* (24 February 1924), section IV, p.5. According to Skirda, Pilsudski and the Polish authorities exerted pressure on Makhno to adopt the Petliurist platform "and all will go well for you!" (op.cit., p.311).

After nearly three years in exile, Makhno's star was waning. Life in the Soviet Union was going on without him. The story of his wanderings across central Europe begins to take on the characteristics of a third-rate farce. In Danzig, Makhno allegedly became embroiled in a complex scheme by Bolshevik agents to smuggle him into Germany and thence to the Soviet Embassy in Berlin, which would arrange for him to return to Russia under amnesty. After many twists and turns, this scheme also failed, and Makhno found himself an illegal resident of the German capital before returning to Danzig.<sup>105</sup>

But Makhno's travails were not being entirely ignored in the rest of the world. Russian and Ukrainian anarchists in exile had alerted fellow-libertarians in different countries to his plight when he was on trial, and various international support campaigns had been launched.<sup>106</sup> In April 1925, Russian anarchists in France managed to arrange permission for Makhno to move to Paris.<sup>107</sup>

Makhno's nine years in Paris are of little inherent interest, except for the debates around anarchist theory in which he figured

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105. During his stay in Berlin he was a frequent guest of the libertarian Augustin Souchy, who testified much later that "I never saw him drunk and I know nothing of any womanising" (*Der Spiegel* no.51 [1969], p.164).

106. This had worked in other cases. Volin, for example, had been arrested by the Bolsheviks during the raids in Khar'kov in late 1920, and was only freed in Moscow in January 1922, in precarious health, after foreign anarchists petitioned for his release (E. Goldman, *Living my Life* [New York, 1970], vol.2, p.786-787; P. Avrich, *The Russian anarchists* [Princeton, 1967], p.233).

107. Skirda, *op.cit.*, p.315.

but did not really participate.<sup>108</sup> He lived in a small hotel room with Galina Kuz'menko and their daughter; his health was not good.<sup>109</sup> But two events occurred during those years which caused him considerable mental distress, namely the publication of Kessel's novel accusing him of anti-Semitism, and the assassination of Semen Petliura in a boulevard café in revenge for Petliurist pogroms. Each of these incidents briefly became a *cause célèbre* in Paris, and colourful inventions appeared daily in the French popular press.

The quiet life of penury and deprivation among strangers in a foreign country gradually took its toll on Makhno's already precarious health. He worked as a movie extra, and at any other odd jobs that he could get; Kuz'menko, increasingly frustrated by the conditions of exile, after an unsuccessful attempt to return to the Soviet in Union in 1926 or 1927, settled down to work as a cleaning woman.<sup>110</sup>

Makhno's untreated tuberculosis, combined with poverty and frustration at his situation, eventually killed him.<sup>111</sup> In the high summer of 1934, at 6:00 a.m. on 25 July, having given up all hope of returning to Ukraine, Makhno died in the Tenon Hospital in Pa-

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108. Ibid., p.317-337, and Menzies, op.cit., p.222-252 - both describe the exile in considerable detail.

109. Mett, op.cit., p.1.

110. Mett, op.cit., p.3-4.

111. Skirda, op.cit., p.333.



ris.<sup>112</sup> He was buried, alongside the communards of 1871, at Père Lachaise cemetery, in the presence of some 500 mourners. He was three months short of his 45th birthday, and had spent seven years of his life in prison and 13 in exile. He had been an active revolutionary for the brief period of only four years.

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112. Muromets, "Nestor Makhno." *Probuzhdenie* no.52-53 (1934), p.16.

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XV.           **ANARCHISM AND THE MAKHOVSHCHINA: NATIONALISM, SOCIAL CHARACTER, AND IDEOLOGICAL HERITAGE**

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*Debates in Exile:  
the 'Soviet Anarchists', and the 'Organisational Platform'*

As early as 1922 realists among the Russian anarchists in exile had been forced to recognise that their cause was lost in Russia and Ukraine for the foreseeable future. Most of the movement's members were either dead, silenced, or living abroad; their newspapers and periodicals had been closed down, their clubs dissolved; the remnants of their only organised military force, Makhno's peasant army, had been driven out of Soviet territory into Rumania and demobilised.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, these exiled men and women, most of them highly articulate and politically conscious, were constitutionally unable to recognise defeat, accept matters as they stood and simply get on with the rest of their lives. Rather, they immediately contacted fellow anarchists in their new countries, founded newspapers and journals, and above all conducted a raucous, rancorous and detailed *post mortem* on exactly

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1. Kropotkin's funeral in February 1921 is usually recognised as the last of the great anarchist demonstrations on Soviet soil. See P. Marshall, *Demanding the impossible* (London, 1993), p.334; P. Avrich, *The Russian anarchists* (Princeton, 1967), p.227-228.

where they had gone wrong. Why had they lost this opportunity? Why had the workers and peasants not opted for anarchist ideas? How had the Bolsheviks managed to defeat an anarchist army with conscript forces? Was the fault with them, the anarchists, or was the time simply not ripe?<sup>2</sup>

It was now that Moscow intellectuals such as Volin and articulate urban workers such as Arshinov came into their own. At home in the world of ideas, they wrote books and articles, edited periodicals, sent off letters to the editor by the dozen, indulged in lengthy polemics on fine points of doctrine. Makhno, the semi-literate man of action, the peasant, who could not even speak French, was much less at ease.

Arshinov became the editor of the Russian-language periodical *Delo Truda*, and Makhno, wanting to join the debates, regularly submitted

"[...] endless and confused articles which Arshinov found unacceptable, and was obliged to revise and correct, thus incurring Makhno's wrath. If they were published, it was more from respect for the author's name than because of their own quality."<sup>3</sup>

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2. A recent article argues that although much anarchist historiography is both overly polemical and empirically weak, it deserves to be taken seriously not least for the focus (which it shares with recent revisionist accounts) on the "activity of ordinary men and women," that is to say on social history (E. Acton, "The libertarians vindicated? The libertarian view of the revolution in the light of recent Western research," in E. Frankel, J. Frankel and B. Knei-Paz [eds.], *Revolution in Russia: reassessments of 1917* [Cambridge, 1992], p.390).

3. M. Menzies, *Makhno: une épopée* (Paris, 1972), p.232. Menzies gives virtually no sources, but writes, ambiguously, a little earlier: "We extract what follows from the personal archives of somebody who knew Makhno well in Paris."

Even more irritatingly, Makhno found himself compelled to listen to criticism from people whom he considered armchair theoreticians who had never held a gun or ridden a horse, who had never fought for their beliefs, and who apparently had more respect for Volin and Arshinov than they did for Makhno himself.

His relations with both these men, his only apologists and themselves on mutually hostile terms, were difficult. Although he managed to maintain more-or-less cordial relations with Arshinov until the latter's decision to return to Russia in 1930, the falling-out with Volin was rapid. Since Makhno did not speak French, and never succeeded in learning, Volin quickly assumed in local anarchist circles the role of the chief spokesperson of the movement. In addition, Volin's anecdotes and explanations were told so convincingly and expressed with such animation that

"it seemed that he, and not Makhno, had been the soul of the movement. For those who were ignorant of the background and the lives of the two men, who did not know that Volin had only taken part in the movement for a mere six months, it was conceivable that Makhno had been a remarkable military chief, but improbable that he had been the spiritual guide of the movement."<sup>4</sup>

For his part, Makhno's dislike of Volin's ineffectiveness went back to the days of the revolution. According to one account, he had once upbraided Volin for not having his own opinions on practical matters, for being spineless, for failing to stand up for

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4. Ibid., p.233.

himself.<sup>5</sup> To the contempt he had formerly held for Volin, Makhno now apparently added jealousy and frustrated irritation.<sup>6</sup>

Makhno's personal equilibrium in the difficult conditions of exile was badly upset by the controversies around his name and reputation which accompanied first the publication of Joseph Kessel's novel *Makhno et sa juive*, and second the assassination of Petliura by Schwartzbard and the sensational trial which followed. But a third controversy was also raging in the mid-1920s, much more significant in the long run than the public scandals centred on Makhno's alleged anti-Semitism. Indeed, this particular debate has had an impact on anarchist political thinking even in our own day.

The debate around Petr Arshinov's anarchist "organisational platform", emerged from the context of the dispute about anarchist collaboration with the Soviet regime in the 1920s. These earlier exchanges focused on the specific role of a handful of anarchists who continued to work from within the Soviet government's structures for the realisation of anarchist ideals. Despite the systematic destruction of independent anarchism in Russia and Ukraine after 1921, the role of these individual anarchists inside

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5. The story goes that a Red envoy had been shot by the partisans, and there was some dissension about it. When Volin's opinion was canvassed, he simply replied that if Makhno had agreed, then he did not want to discuss it further. When Makhno heard this, he demanded to know why Volin had not even asked what the man had been condemned for. "And what if [I] were drunk when [I] had the man shot, what then?" (I. Mett-Lazarevich, "Souvenirs sur Nestor Makhno" [Paris, 1948], p.4).

6. Menzies, loc.cit.

the country remained one of the principal topics of debate in the first half of the decade. The so-called "Soviet anarchists" or "anarchist-bolsheviks" were men and women who claimed that they could reconcile personal anarchist convictions with service under the communists. The two most prominent and controversial of these were the Ukrainian Herman Sandomirs'kyi (in Russian transcription German Sandomirskii) and Iuda Grossman, also known as Grossman-Roshchin.<sup>7</sup>

After the usual apprenticeship of a youthful anarchist, involving assassination plots, prison and exile, Sandomirskii had ended up in Moscow in 1918, where he had been a member of the Moscow Federation of Anarchist Groups. Because he knew Western European languages, he was recruited into Narkomindel, the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, where in 1920 he worked at the Balkan desk. He eventually fell victim to Stalin's purges in the 1930s, and was shot in 1937. Grossman-Roshchin was a former member of the terrorist group *Chernoie Znamia*, and had also spent years in exile in Western Europe. Returning to Russia in 1917, he joined the Moscow Federation, but began to defend the Bolsheviks, arguing that they were libertarians at heart and that it was necessary to defend the revolution against reaction and foreign in-

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7. Other prominent anarchist-bolsheviks (in the sense of anarchists who held prominent positions under the communist government), included Victor Serge, Bill Shatov, Aba Gordin, Daniil Novomirskii, and even Volin, who in 1918 allegedly worked briefly in the Department of Education in Khar'kov and Voronezh. See P. Avrich, *op.cit.*, p.198-199. This account of the "Soviet anarchist" controversy follows the broad outline established in H. Goldberg, "The anarchists view the Bolshevik regime, 1918-1922," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1973), p.211-47.

tervention before larger freedoms could become reality. In 1919 he stayed briefly in Guliai-Pole under Makhno's rule,. He died of natural causes in the early 1930s.<sup>8</sup>

During his years as a Soviet functionary, Sandomirskii devoted considerable time and energy to attempts to convince anarchists abroad that his position was intellectually tenable and politically correct, and that the interests of the revolution were best served in the short term by actively supporting the Bolshevik regime. The most public occasion for this was an official visit which Sandomirskii paid to Italy in April 1922, when he was interviewed by Errico Malatesta for the anarchist journal *Umanità Nova* and was subsequently engaged in a published debate by Malatesta and other Italian libertarians.<sup>9</sup>

In the interview, after discussing the famine then affecting Russia and the economic situation in general, Sandomirskii expressed irritation with complaints by anarchists about the absence of political liberties in Russia. At the same time, he criticised the communists for gaoling anarchists, and rejected charges by Karl Radek and others, that the anarchists had only helped the revolu-

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8. In a footnote, Goldman mentions references to Sandomirskii in the forged Maksim Litvinov diary, *Notes for a journal* (London, 1955). The material facts of the controversy around Sandomirskii's position in the Soviet government are on public record, however, and Goldman provides full citations (op.cit., p.213).

9. Errico Malatesta (1853-1932) is widely considered to have been the most important figure in the Italian anarchist movement, and a major theoretician. Although he never published a book, he was a prolific article writer and pamphleteer (Marshall, op.cit., p.345-361).

tion during its earliest days.<sup>10</sup> Challenged by Malatesta on the party's call for a united front, Sandomirskii warned that a coalition with the social democrats was impractical. Personally, he was in favour of a united front made up exclusively of communists, anarchists and syndicalists, both within Russia and in Europe generally.<sup>11</sup>

A few days after the interview appeared, Malatesta added some comments of his own. He pointed out inconsistencies in Sandomirskii's defence of the Soviet government, and patronisingly described the Ukrainian as a "sincere" man who had seemed "embarrassed" by the position in which he found himself. Malatesta claimed that Sandomirskii accepted that charges of tyrannical behaviour against the Soviet government were true, that the government no longer had popular support, and that after the Genoa conference the revolution's moral authority had been eroded, if not lost.<sup>12</sup> Most significantly, however, Malatesta disputed Sandomirskii's proposition that the Bolshevik government must be defended because any regime that replaced it would certainly repre-

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10. For Radek's opinions on this issue, see his *Anarchismus und Sowjetregierung* (Vienna, s.d.); and *Die Anarchisten und die Sowjetrepublik* (Berlin, 1920).

11. *Umanità Nova* [Milan] (30 April 1922), p.1, quoted by Goldman, op.cit., p.215-219.

12. The Genoa Conference (10 April-11 May 1922) was attended by the Allied Powers, Germany and Russia, to discuss Russia's reintegration into the European economy. It ended in failure, as the powers were unable to reach agreement on the war debt, compensation for nationalisation, or credit for Russia. Nevertheless, behind the backs of the Allies, on 16 April Germany signed the Treaty of Rapallo with the Soviet government. See E. H. Carr, *The Bolshevik revolution* (Harmondsworth, 1966), vol.3, p.339-380.



sent a move to the right. Anarchists, argued Malatesta, should not be called upon to choose between two evils: they had, for example, refused to do so during the Great War. Similarly, Sandomirskii had commented that in a choice between defending a "doctrine" or "the revolution" anarchists must opt for the latter. But Malatesta dismissed this argument as specious - if revolutionaries did not follow a developed programme, any opportunist could seize control of the revolutionary process.<sup>13</sup>

There followed an exchange of letters to the editor between Sandomirskii and Malatesta, raising issues which eventually attracted the attention of other individual anarchists and anarchist groups, and sparked a debate in Italian, French and Russian in periodical columns from Berlin and Paris to Milan.<sup>14</sup> It is not necessary to give a detailed blow-by-blow account of this controversy here: sufficient to say that the most vigorous and detailed attack on Sandomirskii came from his compatriot Volin, who sneeringly referred to him as a "Soviet anarchist" and accused him of having supported Kerenskii in 1917 as well as of vacillation after the October revolution. Sandomirskii, wrote Volin, could never have travelled to Italy without government sanction, whatever he might claim about his non-official status. Perhaps, Volin surmised, Sandomirskii had been sent to Italy to disarm left criticism of the Bolsheviks and to muster support for them at the

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13. *Umanità Nova* (4 May 1922), p.1, quoted by Goldman, op.cit., p.219-221.

14. *Umanità Nova* (16, 20 and 21 May 1922), all p.1; quoted in Goldman, op.cit., p.221-227.

forthcoming meeting of the Syndicalist International, due to be held in Berlin in January 1923.

Volin was especially irritated by Sandomirskii's claim that anarchism lacked mass support, and he pointed to the Ukrainian struggles between 1918 and 1921 as evidence to the contrary. Effectively dismissing Sandomirskii's claim to be an anarchist at all, Volin rhetorically asked him, as well Grossman-Roshchin and Victor Serge, to "leave anarchism in peace."<sup>15</sup>

But the debate was far from over. Apart from the Italian Luigi Fabbri, Gaston Leval also intervened, and the French anarchist newspaper *Le Libertaire* took up a strong editorial position, publicly refusing to print a letter which it claimed to have received from Sandomirskii, on the grounds that it insulted Volin.<sup>16</sup> The paper editorialised patronisingly that while it did not dispute the honesty of Sandomirskii's convictions, his claims to be an anarchist were inconsistent with the holding of a high government post, an argument which went straight to the essential

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15. Volin et al., "Agents du gouvernement bolshevique: qu'est-ce que Sandomirskii?" *Le Libertaire* [Paris] (21/28 July 1922), p.2, quoted by Goldman, op.cit., p.227-229.

16. For Fabbri's comments, see *Umanità Nova* (July [sic] 1922), p.3, quoted by Goldman, op.cit., p.229-230. Fabbri is mainly remembered for his ideas on education, birth control and militarism. Leval coined the jibe "dictatorship over the proletariat" to describe the Bolshevik government; he also accompanied the Spanish delegation to the third Comintern Congress in 1921. (Marshall, op.cit., p.449, 477).

point and is difficult to refute.<sup>17</sup>

At this point, for one reason or another - perhaps even because Sandomirskii's unpublished letter had truly been insulting - Volin rolled up his sleeves and took the gloves off. He published a short piece under a provocative title, in which he claimed that Sandomirskii had worked as an interpreter on the Communist side during the unsuccessful negotiations for Makhno's extradition from Rumania in late 1921. Apart from the somewhat vague offence of having interpreted "with zeal", Volin made a more serious charge. The Rumanians had taken the position that Makhno, as an anarchist, was a political refugee, and could not therefore be extradited. But the Soviet negotiator stated, and Sandomirskii duly rendered into French, that Makhno was merely a bandit, since all true anarchists, such as Sandomirskii himself, cooperated with the Russian government. The point is obviously that a direct personal reference to the opinions of an interpreter violates the interpreter's neutrality as a mouthpiece of his or her principal, and forces the interpreter to participate in the conversation, rather than simply to render it into another language. By implication, if Sandomirskii kept quiet, he accepted the reference to his opinions as true. In conclusion, Volin widened the terrain of the debate by mentioning Grossman-Roshchin as a Soviet agent, accusing him of having attempted to infiltrate Guliai-Pole with a

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17. *Le Libertaire* (1/8 December 1922), p.2, quoted by Goldman, op.cit., p.231-232.

Bolshevik mandate in April 1919.<sup>18</sup>

The controversy was no longer simply a clash of ideas or differing interpretations, as it had still been when Malatesta interviewed Sandomirskii. Reputations were being dragged through the mud, and serious accusations were being made in the press. In the small and enclosed universe of the Russian and Ukrainian exiles, these were serious matters.

In an attempt to calm things down and to permit an objective evaluation of Volin's charges, especially against Grossman-Roshchin, some of the Russian anarchists wrote to him in January 1923, suggesting that a three-person commission or "court" of enquiry should be set up to investigate the charges.<sup>19</sup> This proposal was vehemently rejected by Volin, and by the middle of the year most of the major figures in exile had taken up positions for or against it, while the unfortunate Grossman-Roshchin was left to complain in a private letter that he could not obtain any sort of public hearing.<sup>20</sup>

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18. Grossman-Roshchin was allegedly involved in Kamenev's attempt to persuade Makhno not to interfere with food convoys to Russia in April 1919. He reached Guliai-Pole in mid-May, passing through a Bolshevik blockade and allegedly carrying a mandate from Kamenev to prevent Makhno forming an alliance with Grigor'ev. Volin, "Données complémentaires sur les agents bolchevistes," *Le Libertaire* (15/22 December 1922), p.2, quoted by Goldman, op.cit., p.232-233. See also "K voprosu ob anarkho-bol'shevizme i ego roli v revoliutsii," *Anarkhicheskii Vestnik* (July 1923), p.59-63.

19. The letter and other documents were published in *Anarkhicheskii Vestnik* (Anarchist Herald), a periodical set up in Berlin by Volin and his old comrades from the Nabat Federation (Goldman, op.cit., p.236-237).

20. Letter in the G. P. Maksimov archive, Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam, quoted by Goldman, op.cit., p.238-239.

In the midst of all this, Volin published an article in which he finally addressed the political issues at stake. Most Russian anarchists at this time, under the influence of Bakunin and Kropotkin, could be described as "anarchist-communists". This is to say that they wanted rid of political authority and the state; but economically, they wanted some sort of collective ownership of the means of production, not the unfettered capitalism of such later libertarians as F. Hayek or B. Nozick. However, it is clear that the term "anarchist-bolshevik" was used in a quite different sense, and had *political* rather than socio-economic implications. The term "anarchist-bolshevik" should not be, and was not then confused with "anarchist-communist". Anarchist-bolshevism, Volin insisted, was a "renegade phenomenon" posing as a kind of genuine anarchism in order to subvert the revolutionary element in anarchist thinking. It had to be opposed wherever it appeared.<sup>21</sup>

Most interesting of all, however, was Petr Arshinov's contribution to the debate, especially in view of the position he adopted three years later. In an article published in the same issue of *Anarkhicheskii Vestnik*, Arshinov starts from the premise that "anarchism" and the "Russian revolution" are different phrases describing the same phenomenon, and it has been defeated. The duty of the anarchist is to analyse the defeat. Arshinov recognises two factors which helped to create conditions for "anar-

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21. *Anarkhicheskii Vestnik* (July 1923), p.56, quoted by Goldman, *op.cit.*, p.243.

chist-bolshevism", namely the "decadent [and] renegade" mood among anarchists after the defeat of the 1905 revolution, and second, what he terms "Lenin's demagoguery."<sup>22</sup>

Arshinov claims that the defeat of the 1905 revolution created in the minds of Russian anarchists "the psychological prerequisites for desertion from anarchism." However, it can be argued that the opposite was the case, and that far from demoralising the Russian anarchist movement, the events of 1905 and the repression that followed actually swelled the movement's ranks. Indeed, the tactical effectiveness of the general strike and reliance on spontaneous mass action were, if anything, confirmed in 1905. It was precisely in the years of repression which followed 1905 that numerous new anarchist groups sprang up in such areas as the Urals and Ukraine. In 1907 the Bolsheviks were sufficiently concerned to take steps to make sure that anarchists would be excluded from the Second International. Certainly this situation did not last until 1917, but by then a new social dynamic had begun to operate and the anarchist movement was swept up in it.<sup>23</sup>

According to Arshinov, the second factor, Lenin's magnetism, operated against a movement that was already psychologically defeated by the victory of reaction in 1905. Arshinov identifies

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22. Arshinov, "Anarkho-bol'shevizm i ego rol' v russkoi revoliutsii," *Anarkhicheskii Vestnik* (July 1923), p.56-59, quoted by Goldman, op.cit., p.244-245. On the impact of the Lenin cult and Lenin's personality, see N. Tumarkin, *Lenin lives! The Lenin cult in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983).

23. Marshall, op.cit., p.470.

three specific measures taken by the Soviet government, which were accepted and even defended by the anarchist-bolsheviks as necessary for the survival of the revolution, but which should in principle have been unacceptable to individual anarchists. These were the signing of the Brest-Litovsk treaty with Germany in 1918, the repression of the *Makhnovshchina* as a counter-revolutionary bandit movement, and the crushing of the Kronstadt revolt in 1921. By defending the indefensible and helping the Bolsheviks to fend off criticism from the left, argued Arshinov, the anarchist-bolsheviks weakened the anarchist movement as a whole. The controversy dragged on for the rest of 1923, and was never really resolved. It created divisions among the exiled Russian anarchists which never really healed, and which were in due course opened up again by Arshinov himself when he published his suggestion for an organisational platform three years later.

Earlier articles by members of the *Delo Truda* group had prepared the way for the publication of the platform, attacking

"the idea of a 'mixed' organisation, incorporating the different schools of anarchism, which was advocated by other Russian anarchist groups, whose leading spokesman was Voline, and by French groups, which included the brilliant theoretician Sebastian Fauré."<sup>24</sup>

The platform was, therefore, not only an intervention in the process of Russian anarchist politics. It was seen at the time

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24. Juan Gómez Casas, *Anarchist organisation: the history of the FAI* (Montreal, 1986), p.100. Gómez was a Spanish anarchist militant whose book describes events from a participant's viewpoint.

as, and was obviously intended to be, a "strong reaction" against declining anarchist influence in the French trade unions in the 1920s, and against a growing tendency among anarchists towards isolationism and against organisation of any kind. By 1926, the French anarchists had effectively lost touch with the working class. At the same time, the platform was profoundly suspicious of the organised labour movement as it then existed.<sup>25</sup>

The platform was dated 20 June 1926, and was published as a draft proposal, prepared by the shadowy Group of Russian Anarchists Abroad (GRAZ) together with the General Union of Anarchists. The four-page introduction is signed by Petr Arshinov, and he was popularly considered in anarchist circles to have been responsible for the whole.<sup>26</sup> The document consists of three parts, labelled "general", "constructive" and "organisational". The first of these is divided into chapters on class struggle, the necessity for violent social revolution, anarchism and anarchist-communism, the "denial of democracy", the "denial of government and authority", and the role of the masses and the anarchists in the struggle and the revolution. The "constructive" part consists of economic and other proposals for the "first period of the social revolution", more specifically with regard to sectors such as manufacturing, food, land, and defence. The final, and controversial section deals with concrete ways of organising anarchists

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25. For an analysis of this context, especially in Italy, France and Spain, see *ibid.*, p.81-83.

26. *Ibid.*, p.100.



politically.<sup>27</sup>

The platform contained three central planks: the theoretical unity of all individual and organisational members of the Union; tactical unity, to avoid contradictory actions by individuals; and collective responsibility. But the free action of individuals was more important to many anarchists, including Malatesta, than efficiency in action.<sup>28</sup>

Although the publication of the platform in 1926 provoked an uproar, the idea of a centralised and more-or-less uniform anarchist party was not a new one. At the International Anarchist Congress held in Amsterdam in 1907, for example, the idea had been raised in a debate between syndicalists and anarchist-communists. Emma Goldman had taken a firm position:

"I will only accept anarchist organisation on one condition. It is that it should be based on absolute respect for all individual initiatives and should not hamper their free play and development."<sup>29</sup>

The platform begins by pointing out that despite the power of anarchist ideas, and the sacrifice and heroism of individuals, an-

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27. *Organizatsionnaia platforma Vseobshchego Soiuzu Anarkhistov (Proekt)* (Paris, 1926. According to Gómez Casas (op.cit., p.100), the platform was published in a "bilingual Russian and French edition," but I have only seen a Russian text. The platform was also published much later in an Italian edition, edited by Gino Cerrito (*Il ruolo della organizzazione anarchica* [Catania, 1973]).

28. Gómez Casas, op.cit., p.105.

29. Marshall, op.cit., p.444.

archism was generally regarded as "an episode" in revolutionary history. The principle reason for this weakness, the document argues, is the failure of anarchists to develop appropriate organisational methods and principles. It is an error to elevate individualism above the idea of collective responsibility. The document appeals to the authority of both Bakunin and Kropotkin, arguing that neither was opposed *per se* to the idea of an anarchist party. Gómez Casas points out that this a fundamental point. The lack of an organisation in the period after 1917 compelled many anarchist militants to work with or even to join the Bolshevik party - the anarchist-bolsheviks - while others became politically inactive. If ever there was a time for a collective method of organisation, it was then.<sup>30</sup>

The authors recommended, therefore, that a General Union of Anarchists should be established, with a central executive committee that would have the power to coordinate both policy and the implementation of policy. Such a committee would also have some authority over individual members of the union, regardless of their personal beliefs.<sup>31</sup> This was another fundamental point. The platform rejected the idea of a synthesis of anarchist schools of thought as absurd in both theory and practice. In such a union,

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30. Gómez Casas, *op.cit.*, p.102.

31. How to reach and then how to enforce consensus over practical actions has long been a problem for anarchist theory. The Society to Advance Morality, active in China around 1912, employed courteous peer pressure: if an agreement was broken, members raised their hats in silent disapproval (Marshall, *op.cit.*, p.521).

individuals would continue to function individually rather than collectively.<sup>32</sup>

In fact, in a revolutionary period anarchists must be prepared, the platform argues, to lead the masses rather than simply come to their assistance. It is difficult to see what the difference is between this concept and the Bolshevik idea of a revolutionary vanguard: Fabbri called it a hidden dictatorship of the proletariat.<sup>33</sup> Once the revolution is victorious - itself a teleological assumption with rich possibilities for debate - then a strong centralised armed force must be set up to defend it. Although anarchists should not be directly involved in trade union affairs, they must accept the reality of class struggle between capital and labour. Since anarchism is above all a social movement of the working classes, not a set of abstract philosophical principles, anarchists must be ready to work for the victory of labour in that struggle.

However, at that time, most anarchists - including Fauré, Malatesta, Fabbri and others - supported the idea of a synthetic approach. Their reaction to the platform was generally hostile: most anarchists were not prepared to sacrifice local autonomy for the sake of tactical and ideological unity.<sup>34</sup>

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32. Gómez Casas, *op.cit.*, p.102.

33. Not surprisingly, the idea came "under constant attack" (*ibid.*, p.104-105).

34. *Ibid.*, p.102-103. Gómez argues that this was still the case in France and Italy in the 1970s, where anarchists remained weak in the union movement.

Volin and his associates were not long in replying. In a manifesto published early in 1927, Volin accused Arshinov - quite accurately - of wanting to set up an anarchist party, of having dangerous bureaucratic and centralist inclinations, and of "flirting with Bolshevik dogma."<sup>35</sup> Anarchists did not need to copy communist methods of organisation, for the question of organisational method would solve itself organically:

"The first step towards the true unification of our movement, through its serious organisation, must consist of ideological work - far-reaching, amicable, in solidarity and brotherhood - applied to a series of our most important problems: a common attempt to arrive at their clear and clean solution."<sup>36</sup>

Since the organisational platform controversy was of wider interest than the small circle of Russian and Ukrainian exiles, much of the debate was conducted in French. French anarchists criticised the platform mainly on the grounds that it was an attempt to generalise the experience of the Russian revolution, and concrete conditions in France were different.<sup>37</sup> The debate spread to the pages of *Le Libertaire*, which published a vigorous exchange between Malatesta and Makhno, although there is some doubt as to

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35. Volin, *Manifeste*, quoted by Menzies, p.236.

36. Idem.

37. The French anarchist movement at this time was divided into an individualist and communist wing on the one hand, and a syndicalist wing on the other. There was some tension between the two, and Arshinov's platform would have had some resonance as a pro-syndicalist document. Note that *Le Libertaire* had a history of hostility and suspicion towards - at best, tolerance of - the anarcho-syndicalist trend (Marshall, op.cit., p.441-444).

whether Makhno did more than sign texts prepared for him by Arshinov. Aleksandr Berkman chipped in, accusing Makhno of having a "militarist temperament" and of being under Arshinov's influence. As for Arshinov himself, added Berkman prophetically:

"his entire psychology is Bolshevik [...] his nature is absolutely arbitrary and tyrannical, dominating. Which also throws light on his Programme."<sup>38</sup>

But the platform was not rejected out of hand by all anarchists. Another Frenchman commented that:

"[...] if the Russian anarchists - like ourselves in fact - had had a serious organisation, had been grouped together, it would have been more difficult to defeat them, and something would have been left from the effort expended and the influence which they had acquired, because it would have been necessary to talk, to discuss, to deal with them, instead of exterminating them as the Bolsheviks, the Red Fascists, did."<sup>39</sup>

The French anarchists generally were unable to see past their disputes with the anarcho-syndicalists to the general issues raised by Arshinov.<sup>40</sup> When the question of organisation was placed on the agenda of the 10th congress of the Revolutionary Anarcho-Communist Union in 1930, the idea was resoundingly rejected by the delegates.

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38. Menzies, op.cit., p.236.

39. Quoted by *ibid.*, p.236-237.

40. But the platform dismisses anarcho-syndicalism as a solution, since it focuses almost entirely on penetration of the unions, and without an anarchist organisation little can be achieved in the labour movement (Gómez Casas, op.cit., p.103).

Although the debate between Volin and Arshinov continued, via the publication of a few more pamphlets, the initial shock of the organisational platform proposal was over.<sup>41</sup> But the issue remained an important one for the dwindling band of true believers: without an organisation and a practical programme, anarchists could only offer an ideal. For some, that was enough. But the libertarians could not bring themselves to recognise that compromise over non-essentials is the essence of the political process. In 1937 Emma Goldman wrote to the anarchist-bolshevik Aleksandr Shapiro accusing him of making "every possible allowance and excuse for the machinery that was throttling the revolution." Twenty years afterwards, she was still unable to accept that such purism was impractical, and still rejected Shapiro's claim that he had worked for the Bolsheviks as an individual, and in defence of the revolution.<sup>42</sup>

The exile groups - and anarchist ideas themselves - were devastated by the German occupation of France in the second world war. However, they enjoyed a minor renaissance in the 1950s, with the revival of the periodical *Le Libertaire*. Interestingly, the idea that an individual anarchist's freedom might somehow have to be limited in favour of organisational needs and common discipline was still being debated - or perhaps, began to be debated again -

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41. See, inter alia, P. Arshinov et al., *La réponse aux confusionnistes de l'anarchisme* (Paris, 1927); Volin et al., *Réponse de quelques anarchistes russes à la plateforme* (Paris, 1928); and Arshinov, *Novoe v anarkhizme: k chemu prizyvaet organizatsionnaia platforma* (Paris, 1929).

42. Letter from the Emma Goldman Archive, Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam, quoted by Goldman, op.cit., p.255.

in what one scholar has called a "late echo" of the organisational platform controversy.<sup>43</sup> Many of the ideas and problems which had been debated at a theoretical level were worked through in practice, on a small scale, during the student revolts, particularly in France, in 1968.<sup>44</sup>

There are also some indications that anarchist ideas did not die out completely within the Soviet Union, even in the years of Stalinist repression. Solzhenitsyn writes that during his years in the gulag he came across several young anarchists - in other words, not elderly survivors, but converts paying the price for their beliefs.<sup>45</sup> In 1954, when news of Stalin's death spread to the labour camps, it is reported that a black Makhnovite flag was hoisted in the camp at Norilsk.<sup>46</sup>

In the 1970s, when *samizdat* publishing became widespread, classic

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43. D. Novak, "The place of anarchism in the history of political thought," *Review of Politics* vol.20 (1958), p.310. Another late echo was heard in Italy in 1971, at the 10th Congress of the Italian Anarchist Federation (FAI), where limited collective responsibility was adopted (Gómez Casas, *op.cit.*, p.103); two years later the Platform was republished in an Italian edition (Cerrito, *op.cit.*)

44. There is an extensive literature on these events. See especially the contemporary analyses in A. Cockburn and R. Blackburn (eds.), *Student power: problems, diagnosis, action* (Harmondsworth, 1969), especially p.373-378; and P. Seale and M. McConville, *French revolution 1968* (Harmondsworth, 1968). For the most explicit connection between student libertarian views and the experience of the *Makhnovshchina*, see D. and G. Cohn-Bendit, *Obsolete communism: the left-wing alternative* (Harmondsworth, 1969), which includes a chapter on the movement.

45. Marshall, *op.cit.*, p.477.

46. L. Mercier-Vega, *L'incrévable anarchisme* (Paris, 1970), p.15.

anarchist and libertarian texts by Bakunin, Tolstoy and Kropotkin, among others, were again distributed inside the Soviet Union. In 1987 an anarcho-syndicalist periodical, *Obshchina*, began to appear in Moscow, and more recently an anarcho-syndicalist group, as well as a smaller anarchist-communist revolutionary union have both been founded.<sup>47</sup>

### ***Conclusion: the Social Character of the Makhnovshchina***

Apart from the Bolsheviks, the organised revolutionary movement in Russia after October 1917 consisted almost entirely of the two major parties of the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries.<sup>48</sup> The Mensheviks were strongest in the trade unions, and drew their support from among the skilled strata - the printers, the steel workers, the railway workers - in the modern industrialised areas. The Socialist Revolutionaries were heirs to the nineteenth century *narodnik* tradition. After a period of vacillation in the first years of the 20th century, they continued to look for a revolutionary upsurge among the peasantry, the vast majority of the population of the Russian empire.

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47. These are known, by their Russian initials, respectively as KAS and AKRU (Marshall, op.cit., p.478).

48. See L. Schapiro, *The origin of the communist autocracy* (London, 1955) for an account, located in the older "totalitarian" school of historiography, of the various parties and their positions. On the SRs specifically, see O. Radkey, *The agrarian foes of Bolshevism* (New York, 1958) and *The sickle under the hammer* (New York, 1963).



The third source of opposition was the tiny, disorganised and rowdy anarchist movement. The anarchists were heavily penetrated by counter-revolutionary elements, and noisily critical of any practical measure that might sully the revolutionary purity of the toiling masses. They were split into autonomous and quarrelsome groups, and have, not entirely unfairly, been described as "shady and criminal riff-raff."<sup>49</sup>

Anarchism was a tendency, not a coherent ideology. As Peter Marshall has pointed out in a lyrical passage

"[anarchism] does not offer a fixed body of doctrine based on one particular world view. It is a complex and subtle philosophy, embracing many different currents of thought and strategy. Indeed, anarchism is like a river with many currents and eddies, constantly changing and being refreshed by new surges but always moving towards the wide ocean of freedom."<sup>50</sup>

Russian anarchist groups at their most cooperative formed only loose federations, not a disciplined party. The conventional view is that they had little direct influence on the general course of events in 1905 or in either of the revolutions of 1917. As allies of the Bolsheviks during the overthrow of the Provisional Government they were useful, but not indispensable. As opponents later, apart from the *Makhnovshchina*, they were largely impotent.<sup>51</sup> In 1918 the French observer Sadoul dismissed Aleksandr Ge, leader of Moscow's anarchist-communists, with the laconic comment "innocent

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49. *BSE*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Makhnovshchina".

50. Marshall, *op.cit.*, p.3.

51. For the contrary view see P. Avrich, *op.cit.*, p.3-5, 32-34.

and unrealistic. Hasn't got an ounce of common sense. Isn't dangerous."<sup>52</sup> After the storming of Kronstadt, the defeat of Makhno, and the death of Kropotkin in 1921, the movement was ruthlessly crushed. It survived abroad - as we have seen - only as a tiny band of emigrés.

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There have been many cogent critiques of the anarchist position, and some effective defences of it, not always written by anarchists themselves.<sup>53</sup> The polemics between Mikhail Bakunin on the one side and Marx and Engels on the other in the First International rehearse many of the arguments repeated in later debates. The most serious criticism of anarchist theory is a practical one, and Marxists have formulated it often. If the proletarian revolution can and does immediately do away with the political organisation of the state, then the working masses have no means of consolidating their victory. They cannot suppress their enemies, nor carry out the economic revolution without which political success would be meaningless.<sup>54</sup> In 1873 Engels wrote that

"a revolution is certainly the most authoritarian thing there is; it is the act whereby one part of the population imposes its will upon the other part by means of rifles, bayonets and cannon - authoritarian means, if such there be at all; and if the victorious

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52. *Notes sur la révolution bolshevique* (Paris, 1971 reprint) p.296.

53. For the Marxist and Leninist critiques, see for example, *Marx, Engels, Lenin: anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism* (Moscow, 1972). For some of the more interesting defences, see inter alia B. Russell, *Roads to freedom* (London, 1918); A. Carter, *The political theory of anarchism* (London, 1971); and R. Wolff, *In defence of anarchism* (New York, 1970).

54. Engels to T. Cuno (24 January 1872) in K. Marx and F. Engels, *Selected works* (Moscow, 1969-1970) vol.2, p.424-426 (hereafter cited as SW).

party does not want to have fought in vain, it must maintain this rule by means of the terror which its arms inspire in the reactionaries."<sup>55</sup>

Both Engels and Marx himself made the same point repeatedly in other writings in the 1870s, and Lenin was still making it in the summer of 1917.<sup>56</sup>

But this critique is much more than simply a practical one. Since for most anarchists the source of all human oppression is the State *tout court*, rather than the State as an apparatus under the control of particular classes with their roots in the dominant production relations, it follows that to abolish oppression it is enough to abolish the State. But society is not simply a conglomeration of individuals, capable of acting effectively to realise personal objectives: society is not made up of people. If the State could be done away with without changing the underlying economic and social structure, the classes whose struggles are at the heart of the historical process, even in this post-Marxist world, would remain unaffected, and the source of oppression, the dominance of one class over another, would continue to exist.

The question cannot be resolved simply by pointing to the Bolshevik victory in the revolution and civil war, and contrasting it

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55. Engels, "On authority" in *SW* vol.2, p.379.

56. See especially Engels, *Anti-Duhring* (Moscow, 1969), p.332-333; Engels to A. Bebel (18-28 March 1875) in *SW* vol.3, p.34-35; Marx, "Critique of the Gotha programme" in *SW* vol.3, p.25-27; Lenin, *The state and revolution* (Moscow, 1972) p.16-22.

with almost complete anarchist failure. Although the "authoritarians" conquered state power, the problem of bureaucracy, for example, has remained unsolved. It has also been impossible to test the libertarian thesis that the state must be destroyed, not captured by the revolution. Anarchists, and not only in Russia and Ukraine, have usually been a tiny minority with little chance of winning the masses over to their point of view.

Losing a political struggle does not necessarily mean, however, that there is nothing to be said for the defeated point of view. At least one Western academic has recently gone on record arguing that especially from a revisionist, social-historical perspective, there is something to be gained from looking again at the analyses of Volin, Maksimov, Berkman, and Arshinov.<sup>57</sup>

Edward Acton argues that neither the problematic of Soviet Marxism, which explains the revolution mechanistically as the product of a process ineluctably ruled by historical laws; nor the older Western representation of a democratisation process aborted by a Bolshevik conspiracy, can stand close examination any longer. This is certainly common ground among most modern researchers, although the collapse of the old models has yet to filter down

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57. Acton, *op.cit.*, p.390.

completely into the popular consciousness.<sup>58</sup> Acton believes that it is now necessary "to draw into the mainstream" what he terms "a third, decidedly minority, tradition in the historiography: that derived from the 'libertarian' approach."<sup>59</sup>

He goes on to identify several themes from the anarchist historiography of the revolution and civil war which have found echoes in revisionist research over the last 15 years or so:

"By viewing the revolution from below; by emphasising the measure of autonomy, rationality and idealism in the mass movement; by drawing attention to the relative weakness of working-class organisation; by highlighting the 'productivism' in the thought of leading Bolsheviks; and by underlining the connection between the restoration of hierarchical relations at the point of production and the bureaucratisation of mass organisations, the [anarchist] tradition anticipates the findings of much new research."<sup>60</sup>

Acton presents a persuasive case in relation to questions around *working class* organisation, especially regarding the factory committees in 1917 and 1918; the argument is less convincing when it comes to the peasantry, however. He finds a parallel to workers' self-management in the peasant determination

"to drive off the landlord and the government agent, to reintegrate the kulak and to establish the autonomy of the village com-

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58. S. Cohen has described the monolithic nature of old-style Anglo-American "Sovietology" in his *Rethinking the Soviet experience: politics and history since 1917* (New York, 1985), p.3-37. Similarly, R. Suny has summarised the newer social-historical approach in "Revising the old story: the 1917 revolution in light of new sources," in D. Kaiser (ed.), *The workers' revolution in Russia, 1917: the view from below* (Cambridge, 1987), p.1-19.

59. Acton, op.cit., p.388.

60. Ibid., p.401.

In the *Makhnovshchina*, he finds the most fully developed expression of this peasant creative drive. The Makhnovite peasantry, he claims, "asserted full control over their own lives in a network of freely organised, coordinated and disciplined communes."<sup>62</sup> Such communes, he argues, represented a better possibility of restoring agricultural production levels and satisfying the food needs of the towns and cities, than forced grain requisitions and the activities of the divisive *kombedy*, which merely served to "alienate the peasantry, erect barriers between workers and peasants, and exacerbate the food shortage."<sup>63</sup> Indeed, Acton goes so far as to argue that Bolshevik policy towards the peasantry actually prolonged the civil war.

The difficulty lies in the fact that we know almost nothing reliable about the internal organisation of the Makhnovite communes. This is not so much because the only evidence comes from anarchist sources, as because these descriptions are themselves imprecise and inadequate. If the Makhnovite communes were revivals of the old *mir* or *obshchina*, then they could scarcely have been egalitarian; if they were egalitarian, we need to know what the mechanisms were for resolving class conflicts and guaranteeing

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61. *Ibid.*, p.392.

62. *Idem.*

63. *Ibid.*, p.393.

their functionality.<sup>64</sup>

The question of the peasant response to urban food requirements is also more complex than Acton would have us believe. It simply strains credulity to accept that any kind of systematic exchange between the city and the countryside was possible on the voluntaristic basis of mass initiative alone, and the patchy evidence available shows that such exchange was intermittent and constantly broke down in practice.

The other major weakness in the libertarian problematic which has if anything been highlighted by revisionist research is its characterisation of the communist party as a highly centralised and disciplined organisation, in and through which the mass of workers were dominated by a few authoritarian intellectuals. In fairness, Acton recognises this: the party, he writes, "was not a submissive instrument of Lenin's will but a vibrant, chaotic, largely democratic organisation."<sup>65</sup>

Nevertheless, even if the importance of libertarian historiography can be over-argued, Acton's contention that the "view from below" is essential to understanding the historical processes at work is difficult to fault. In the case of the *Makhnovshchina*,

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64. By implication, Acton recognises this later in his essay, when he refers to the "very inadequate" evidence on social organisation under the *Makhnovshchina* (ibid., p.395). See also D. Dahlmann, "Anarchism and the Makhno movement," *Sbornik*, no.11 (1985), p.14-16. I have discussed this question in earlier chapters of this thesis.

65. Acton, op.cit., p.401.

this leaves several vital questions still unanswered: of these, the most significant and complex concern the social character of the movement, both ideologically and in terms of its class composition. Put more simply, we need to find out first, to what extent the supporters of the movement were anarchist militants, and second, whether those supporters were kulaks, middle peasants, poor peasants, artisans, students, workers, teachers and so forth. If it can be shown that the Makhno movement was in some real sense anarchist, which is not the same as saying that its leaders were anarchists, then we can also try to see whether the Makhnovites really resolved the paradox between the institutional and organisational features of the rebellion and its ideology, as is widely claimed in the libertarian historiography discussed above.<sup>66</sup>

In this respect, a useful differentiation with regard to the ideological character of the *Makhnovshchina* has been drawn by John Copp, who argues that there is

"[...] an important distinction to be made here between party activist (those actively attempting to spread the influence and philosophy of anarchism) and those who were sympathetic to the movement [...] With regard to Makhno's movement I would argue that a significant portion of its leadership were members of what I would call the anarchist activist and that much of the rank-and-file was comprised of anarchist sympathisers of varying stripes. Many of this group were attracted by the anarchists' belief in individualism, but even more by their belief in the distribution of land to the peasantry. This distinction would go far toward explaining why

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66. The Spanish anarchists in the 1920s and 1930s "failed both militarily and politically because they could not remain anarchists and take part in governments and total war." G. Woodcock, *Anarchism* (Harmondsworth, 1963) p.370. The same thing can be said of the Mexican anarchists between 1910 and 1920.



much of Makhno's army melted away after three long years of war when the Bolshevik's [sic] introduced NEP."<sup>67</sup>

Taking this argument a step further, the anarchist *actif* group would presumably have consisted of petty-bourgeois and often urbanised elements, while the sympathisers would be predominantly peasants who for one reason or another found the Makhnovite programme congenial at a particular political conjuncture. The "village democracy" described, for instance, in recent research on the Volga provinces, would have jibed very well indeed with much of what we know about Makhnovite social organisation: the difference between the two being that Makhno and his allies possessed a relatively sophisticated theoretical framework to explain their social policy.

A similar implicit distinction between activists and their followers was made by Eric Hobsbawm in work around his otherwise unconvincing construct of "social banditry". Hobsbawm argued that "bandits" (read peasants) do not usually become revolutionaries en masse, because their technical and ideological limitations prevent them from moving past reactive, spur-of-the-moment operations in response to particular pressures. In addition, the organisation of an insurgency does not provide a model which can be generalised to the broader society. "Banditry" provides fighters

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67. J. Copp, "The role of anarchists in the Russian revolution and civil war, 1917-1921: a case study in conspiratorial party behaviour during revolution," (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1993), p.49. However, NEP was only introduced in Ukraine in the autumn of 1921, after Makhno's defeat, so the process could not have been a simple, linear one (*Istoriia Ukrain's'koi RSR* [Kiev, 1967], vol.2, p.178).

and leaders within peasant revolutions, and the "charismatic leader" and intellectuals then graft themselves onto the movement. It is easy, argues Hobsbawm, for such a movement to adopt conservative or reactionary positions because of its inherent programmatic weaknesses.<sup>68</sup> This certainly happened with Grigor'ev's movement; it is difficult to defend in the case of the *Makhnovshchina*.

These arguments may be valid as an ideological characterisation of the *Makhnovshchina*, but it does not take us much further forward in our understanding of its class composition. The conventional wisdom among Soviet, Soviet-oriented and Marxist analysts was for many years that the *Makhnovshchina* was predominantly "kulak." Trotsky argued as late as 1932, for instance, in an article on China, that the Insurgent Army and its ilk were "entirely kulak in spirit" and that the peasants had an essentially petty-bourgeois outlook. Workers, wrote Trotsky, usually sought to socialise expropriated property, while peasants instinctively sought to divide it up amongst themselves. Workers analysed problems at the level of the nation; but peasants thought things through at the local level.<sup>69</sup> Several decades later, in a hostile analysis of the peasant-oriented thought of Fanon, Debray and Marcuse, the British communist writer Jack Woddis argued that

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68. E. Hobsbawm, *Bandits* rev.ed., (Harmondsworth, 1972), p.101-103.

69. L. Trotsky, "Peasant war in China and the proletariat," in his *Writings, 1932* (New York, 1973), p.193-194.

"the petty-bourgeois intellectual apparently finds it easier to identify with the peasant (who is basically petty-bourgeois, too) than with the working-class."<sup>70</sup>

The point is, however, that the argument that the *Makhnovshchina* as a whole was kulak and/or petty-bourgeois in character and composition because its political leaders behaved in a certain way is merely inferential. Indeed, it is hard to disagree with Orlando Figes' caustic comment that the "empirical poverty of this interpretation is such that it does not warrant a detailed critique."<sup>71</sup>

Nevertheless, an attempt has recently been made to use the patchy available data to produce a class analysis of both the "anarchist actif" and the broad mass of anarchist sympathisers in Russia during the revolution. To try to do this with regard to the "anarchist actif", Copp has assembled personal data on the socio-professional backgrounds of some 600 anarchists mentioned in published works by such authors as Volin, Arshinov, Maksimov and others, as well as in contemporary anarchist periodicals.<sup>72</sup> He estimates that this sample represents about 5,5 percent of the total number of anarchist militants in Russia, basing the percentage on Paul Avrich's apparently casual and certainly undocu-

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70. J. Woddis, *New theories of revolution: a commentary on the views of Frantz Fanon, Régis Debray and Herbert Marcuse* (London, 1972), p.211. In fact, Lenin himself dismissed this argument as "vulgar Marxism" in his article "One step forward, two steps back" (*Selected works* [Moscow, 1975], vol.1, p.265 et seq.)

71. Figes, *Peasant Russia, civil war: the Volga countryside in revolution, 1917-1921* (Oxford, 1989), p.322.

72. Copp, *op.cit.*, p.50.

mented remark that

"there appear to have been about ten thousand active anarchists in Russia at the height of the movement, not counting the Tolstoyans or Makhno's peasant movement in the Ukraine or the many thousands of sympathisers [...]"<sup>73</sup>

Unfortunately, Copp's conclusions, in which he generalises from his sample to the anarchist movement as a whole, must be treated with extreme caution because of serious problems with his unsophisticated use of statistical techniques. He focuses on the size of the sample, but fails to recognise that it is inherently skewed. In a note on method, for example, he writes that a sample size of 5,5 percent is

"far more than statistical method suggests is necessary for a random sample to be representative of a total population."<sup>74</sup>

But the 600 anarchists Copp describes cannot by any stretch of the imagination be termed a random sample. First, the sample does not satisfy the basic requirement for randomness, that every mem-

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73. P. Avrich (ed.), *The anarchists in the Russian revolution* (London, 1973), p.14 [emphasis added]. If Copp's sample is 5,5 percent of 10,000, however, his frame must - obviously - be closer to 550 than to 600. Copp also fails to quote or mention Avrich's caveat that the *Makhnovshchina* is excluded from the estimate, while at the same time relying on at least one source which describes a significant number of individuals associated with the *Makhnovshchina*, including Makhno himself. The source, *Goneniia na anarkhizm v sovetskoi Rossii* (Berlin, 1922), describes 181 individuals, or over 30 percent of Copp's frame.

74. Copp, op.cit., p.288n [emphasis added]. But a basic textbook identifies this as the mark of a novice, who "is often more concerned with the size of a sample than he [sic] is with its representativeness" (K. Hopkins and G. Glass, *Basic statistics for the behavioral sciences* [Englewood Cliffs N.J., 1978], p.183 [emphasis in the original]).

ber of a total finite population (i.e. in this case the 10,000 anarchists) must have an equal chance of being chosen. But since the 600 were pre-selected by being mentioned in print, this is obviously not the case. Second, the size of the finite population of 10,000 is actually a guess, and it is impossible to compile, for example, a complete list of the members of this total population, in order to give each one an equal chance of selection. Last, even if the sample were truly random, it is a commonplace of this kind of technique that sample size increases much faster than precision, so most statisticians would want to establish limits of acceptability for standard error and levels of confidence, before making bald comments about the significance of the sample size.

In reality, Copp's "sample" is both non-random and based on accessibility: it is rather a case study, and no generalisations can be made based upon it about Russian anarchists at large. His comparison of his results with work done by other scholars on the composition of the communist party is meaningless, since these are analyses of complete populations based on membership lists, and did not involve sampling methods at all.<sup>75</sup>

Although Copp's attempt to generalise about the whole population of Russian anarchists fails, there is still limited interest in what we can learn about the 550 to 600 individuals in the case study, especially since they include many Makhnovites. It is a

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75. Copp, *op.cit.*, p.51n-52n.

reasonable assumption that the named anarchists were in some way the "actif" of the "actif", and Copp's figures show that 50,5 percent of these were workers, 14,4 percent were students, 11,1 percent were members of the intelligentsia and 10,2 percent were peasants. Only 12 percent of the total were women.<sup>76</sup> Interestingly, in view of the widely-held belief that support for anarchist ideas was most firmly rooted among alienated or dislocated craftworkers and artisans, this group seems to have been numerically insignificant.<sup>77</sup> Although Ukrainians make up only about ten percent of the group as a whole, nearly 57 percent of the Ukrainians were peasants: in other words, although workers made up the majority in the group as a whole, peasants were the majority among Ukrainian anarchists.<sup>78</sup>

In an even less convincing section, Copp tries to characterise the social base of anarchist sympathisers and supporters, as distinguished from the "actif". He starts, however, from the questionable assumption that soviets were both perceived at this time as, and in reality were in some sense "governmental bodies" controlled by the Bolsheviki. This ignores recent research on the democratic functioning of the soviets, as well as the strong orientation of the *Makhnovshchina* towards "free Soviets". To argue as Copp does that anarchist support was under-represented in the

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76. Ibid., p.50.

77. Ibid., p.49.

78. Ibid., p.60.

soviets because of their "official" nature therefore seems highly risky.<sup>79</sup>

It may well have been the case that the social character of the Makhnovite army, for example, was different in important ways in 1918, when recruitment was local, than in late 1919, when Zenon Jaworskyj saw "mostly Kuban Cossacks from the poorer and the middle classes", as well as a former Polish land-owner in the ranks of the insurgents just before Peregonovka.<sup>80</sup>

The *Makhnovshchina* certainly had a broader peasant base in 1919 and 1920 than just the kulaks. That base of support existed largely because the civil war imposed an economic burden on the dwellers in rural areas which they could not support, and because the Bolsheviki consciously and deliberately made a choice in favour of the interests of the urban working class over those of the peasantry which destroyed commodity relations and ultimately led to famine. The living symbols of that choice were the hated grain requisition detachments. But as the Bolsheviki gradually established and asserted effective power over the state apparatus, eliminated the White menace and the Ukrainian nationalist threat, and reestablished commodity relations between town and countryside, they were able to contain the famine, at an enormous cost, and to lead the Russian peasantry and to a lesser extent

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79. Ibid., p.63.

80. Z. Jaworskyj, "Alliance of the First USS Brigade with N. Makhno in 1919," (Ann Arbor, 1973), p.15.

the Ukrainian one as well into a decade of relative stability and prosperity. Although the pacification of the Ukrainian countryside was delayed by the famine and by Russian hostility until the mid-1920s, Makhno's dreams of returning from his Rumanian or Polish exile to lead a new peasant jacquerie remained mere fantasies.<sup>81</sup> The specific conditions of civil war and war communism had disappeared. The Russian and Polish land-owners had been banished, and there was a flowering of Ukrainian language and culture (alongside the repression of Ukrainian political aspirations).<sup>82</sup> It seemed that the dependent Ukrainian form of capitalism had been banished for good. The majority of the Ukrainian peasantry apparently wanted to enjoy the limited spoils of a very limited victory.

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81. Russian policy towards Ukraine was "so prejudiced" in the early 1920s, especially during the famine, that it seemed to some foreign observers that Ukraine was being punished for its unruliness during the civil war (R. Pethybridge, *One step backwards, two steps forward: Soviet society and politics in the New Economic Policy* [Oxford, 1990], p.109).

82. This encouragement of Ukrainian culture occurred especially after August 1923 (Pethybridge, *op.cit.*, p.258).



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**XVI. CONCLUSION**

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This thesis offers a reinterpretation of the history of the Makhnovite revolt. It argues along two principal lines. First, at the level of narrative, it challenges existing accounts of the movement's political and socio-economic record as well as of its military role in the civil war. It thus throws into doubt much of the conventional wisdom enshrined in earlier representations of these histories. Second, it tries to describe the social character of the movement. It argues that this was not, at any time, static or fixed. Rather, it was in a state of continuous flux, both determined by the political and military context of the revolution and war in which the movement operated, and at the same time and at the local level, itself helping to determine that context in significant ways. It is only through an understanding, however tentative or contingent, of the *changing* social character of the *Makhnovshchina*, that it is possible to explain the movement's rapid rise and spread, and its subsequent slow but inevitable collapse.

The thesis also examines the vexed questions of its members' sense of national identity and the nature of their political

ideology. It argues that the coincidence in the movement of a "literary" ideology with a "popular" one, to use the Gramscian distinction, has led to a false depiction of the movement as in a deep sense anarchist.

For several decades after the Bolshevik victory in 1921, the historiography of the Russian civil war focused almost exclusively on the military and the political aspects of the conflict. There were practical as well as ideological reasons for this: the easy availability in the West of the archives, diaries and memoirs of the defeated White officers, alongside the detailed if triumphalist accounts of the victorious Reds, made the writing of military history possible and meaningful. On another level, however, and particularly within a Western problematic which took as its point of departure a characterisation of the Bolshevik party as monolithic, disciplined and dictatorial even in 1917, such historiographical problems as remained were inevitably seen as mere details of narration. The focus on large public events was a natural consequence.

Over two decades have passed since the birth of a "revisionist" historiography. This has focused on private and social histories, looking especially at gender issues, peasant studies and the cultural-national problems of the borderlands. This historiography has irrevocably changed the way in which we look at the civil war, introducing complexity, ambiguity, nuance and subtlety.

It is in the context of this revisionist social history of the

war, which seeks to find in the experience of the war itself some of the major determinants for subsequent developments in the Soviet polity, that the choice was made in this thesis to revisit the traditional terrain of military and political history. It is implicit throughout this account that the older military histories will no longer serve even as narratives, precisely because they are uninformed by any insights derived from the revisionist approach, the perspectives of which can and must change the ways in which we construct knowledge even about battles and the movement of armies.

It is easy to say, so many years afterwards, that the eventual defeat of the *Makhnovshchina* by the Bolsheviks, like the defeat of contemporary peasant revolts in Russia, was inevitable or unavoidable. It is less clear in what ways such a teleology helps us to understand the historical processes whose workings led to that defeat. In any case, military defeat does not necessarily mean that a particular set of political, social or economic objectives have not been achieved, even if only partially. In significant ways, Makhno's movement accomplished much for the revolutionary, if not for the anarchist, cause. It helped prevent a return of the White gentry to Ukraine, it helped force the abandonment of War Communism and the system of grain requisitioning, and indirectly it helped to create the conditions for the cultural flowering of Ukrainian nationalism throughout the 1920s.

The critique of existing historical representations of the *Makhnovshchina* operates at different levels, both generally and

with regard to specific ideologically-determined versions. At the most elementary level, this thesis has shown that the existing texts are unreliable on empirical grounds. The most detailed accounts, those by Makhno's anarchist comrades, are empirically unreliable in suggestive ways. Events are conflated, chronologies confused, whole periods glossed over, logical jumps made, and excuses offered. Although Arshinov's and Volin's texts are fundamental to an understanding of the trajectory of the *Makhnovshchina*, every factual assertion, every reference to a date, must be checked against other sources. In addition, Volin's version relies heavily on Arshinov for the main outline of the story, which he merely embellishes with eye-witness anecdotes from time to time. Indeed, Volin's French text appears in many places to be a word-for-word translation of passages from Arshinov's Russian.

The thesis demonstrates that a comparison of their accounts with contemporary documents shows that both writers seriously misrepresent the sequence of events which led to Makhno's calamitous abandonment of the Red Army front against Denikin in May and June 1919, in order to organise and attend a local anarchist congress in Guliai-Pole.

Arshinov and Volin have been followed in this misrepresentation by many secondary sources. Once a more probable chronology is established, the received interpretation, which presumes Bolshevik perfidy, becomes notably less convincing. A likely alternative is that Makhno did in fact desert his post with his forces, as

the Bolsheviks claimed at the time. This is much more than a mere detail. Anarchist claims for "Makhno-as-victim" of Soviet treachery have been ideologically important at various junctures, such as the French student revolt of 1968, and have relied heavily on this kind of ambiguity. As we saw in another chapter, the question of whether Frunze did or did not specify a deadline for Makhnovite compliance with his orders in November 1920 is a comparable example of an attempt by anarchists to occupy the moral high ground.

Similar difficulties arise around the aftermath of the action against the Whites at Peregonovka in September 1919. Suspicions are first aroused by the vast distances which Makhno's armies are supposed to have covered in such a short time in their rampage back from Uman' to their base on the left bank of the Dnepr. Comparison with accounts of the rate of advance of other armies at this time confirms that something is awry. Studies of other peasant revolts, such as Orlando Figes' path-breaking work on the rural uprisings along the Volga during the civil war, show us the danger of relying too heavily on models of conventional or semi-conventional warfare, with armies facing each other along well-defined frontlines. It seems possible, rather, that this particular White defeat in the west, combined with what we already know of White misrule all over Ukraine, in fact created conditions for a general peasant insurrection which has later come to be presented as the mythical returning march of a victorious peasant army.

The thesis has also described how, in an attempt to rehabilitate the libertarian historiography of the revolution and civil war, it has recently been claimed that, more than any other, this tradition represents "history-from-below", and is therefore compatible with revisionist preoccupations around social historical issues. This may be so in a broad sense, but we have already seen that libertarian accounts are partial, self-serving and contradictory, and that their emphasis on the legacy of the experience of the broad masses does not outweigh the factual unreliability and the analytical reductionism which make them problematic as anything other than historical representations written for political purposes.

Ukrainian nationalist history also suffers from serious methodological weaknesses in its attempt to analyse the Makhno phenomenon. In general, the construct of Ukrainian national identity is its principal reference point, and it determines most of what follows. Reading the texts, we could be forgiven for supposing that in Ukraine, histories were made only by self-consciously Ukrainian actors, for whom their Ukrainian identity was unproblematic; or that Ukrainian territory and Ukrainian identity and their boundaries were synonymous and homogenous. But this was not so. Ukrainian national identity was then - as it is now - constructed at both practical and symbolic levels not only by the actions of "speakers-of-Ukrainian", but also through the very process of representation. Evidence from numerous different sources for the period 1917-1921 suggests that the sense of national identity was weak among most Ukrainian-speakers, and

that the competing histories of this period were made as much by protagonists whose social identities were other, as by "Ukrainians" themselves.

Makhno, a speaker-of-Russian, is claimed by some within this tradition as a Ukrainian nationalist manqué. A related idea is that the *Makhnovshchina* was in certain ways a local manifestation of the nationalist movement, ideologically distorted, as it were, by the specific conditions of the left-bank. Rural and petty-bourgeois nationalism was traditionally stronger on the mainly Ukrainian-speaking right-bank, than on the left bank, with its Russian-speaking working class and its expanding rural proletariat. Ideologically, at least, it stretches credulity to claim that the anarchists, whose fundamental political tenet was the immediate abolition of the state, could have supported the establishment of yet another national state, even for tactical reasons. There is nothing in the available evidence, moreover, to suggest that they did so.

Anti-Russian feeling among the peasants of the left bank was nevertheless strong, and the predominantly urban and Russian Bolshevik party was viewed in the countryside with suspicion. But to conflate peasant anti-Bolshevik and anti-Russian feeling with support for the urban-based Rada or Directory is dangerous. True, it is too facile to discount the depth of peasant suspicion of "the political poison of the cities" to use Makhno's own words. But it was the *Selians'ka Spilka* (Peasant Union), not the urban and petty-bourgeois Ukrainian nationalist parties, which

organised most successfully in the Ukrainian countryside in the spring of 1917.

The reshaping of this nationalist historiographical tradition to embrace other such anti-Russian strata has served, to a certain extent, to disguise the principal political weakness which the Rada and the Directory shared, namely their lack of broadly-based popular appeal. This has had as much to do with the survival of Ukrainian nationalism in exile during the Soviet period as it has with historical "truth". Even on the right bank at the time of the revolution, the social identity of the Ukrainian-speaking peasant centred around a local or provincial rather than a national consciousness, and the intellectual appeals of Petliura or Vynnychenko fell on deaf ears, unlike Makhno's libertarian populism.

The Soviet historiography of the movement has produced little of interest on the civil war, let alone on specific movements such as the *Makhnovshchina*, and as Figes has shown, much work remains to be done in the former Soviet archives, and perhaps even with oral traditions and folk memory. Nonetheless, early studies such as that by M. Kubanin, a scholar associated with L. M. Kritsman's rural Marxists, retain their importance. Elsewhere, throughout the Stalin period and afterwards, by dint of repetition, the universal portrayal in Soviet writing of the Makhno movement and other peasant revolts as kulak in character was taken as given, as was the case with other unsupported characterisations, such as that of Makhno as anti-Semite. Most of this falls away, or at



the very least remains unproven, after an examination of the evidence.

Despite attempts by the later anarchist writers to draw general political conclusions from the experience of the *Makhnovshchina*, the thesis has shown that it was a complex of factors, including the specific character of peasant political economy in Ekaterinoslav and its neighbouring provinces which determined its rise, and its specific form. Changes in that political economy denied the movement any chance of surviving politically or militarily in post-revolutionary Ukrainian society. Other important factors involved included the military balance and, of course, the "accident" of Makhno's own personality.

The thesis has argued that the emergence of an anarchist-led peasant movement in Ekaterinoslav seems to have been at least partly "accidental", in the sense that this was where Makhno, in 1917 a returning political hero and an anarchist, came from. But Ekaterinoslav, together with Kherson and the Tauride, was peculiar in its own way. The province had experienced rapid growth in commercial farming throughout the second half of the nineteenth century and well into the second decade of the twentieth. The area of land under cultivation had increased sharply, and this new land had fallen increasingly into the hands of a few landlords. Poor peasants had thus constituted a growing proportion of the rural population, which was also ethnically mixed, with Ukrainians, Russians, Jews, and even some Bulgars, Greeks, Tatars, and Germans. The poor peasants were increasingly impover-

ished by commercial farming, while the few kulaks and *pomeshchiki* entered a virtuous cycle of accumulation.

Not surprisingly, the peasants of Ukraine in general, but especially of Ekaterinoslav, had a tradition of violent rebellion. These revolts brought together the landless, the poor, and the criminalised, against the growing power of agrarian capitalists. Hobsbawm describes one such revolt in Chernigov province in 1905. But the social banditry model is too general to be of much help here. Although Hobsbawm has claimed that the model describes a universal phenomenon in agrarian societies, and one which specifically expresses popular discontent, his work in fact describes peasant uprisings which are essentially aimed at oppressive land-lords in the context of the rise of early capitalist relations in the countryside. The *Makhnovshchina*, on the contrary, was a revolt, amongst other things, against a worker-led Bolshevik government whose project was quite explicitly to advance the condition of the peasantry, within, it is true, an admittedly *dirigiste* framework. The problem with a conceptualisation of, for example, Makhno as an avenger of social injustice, a kind of Ukrainian Robin Hood, is that it mythologises the historically specific in order to fit it into a general model. The *Makhnovshchina*, to put it bluntly, simply was not like that.

Libertarian historians have understood correctly that for the peasants in the Russian revolution, the major defeat was the loss to the centre, by the end of 1921, of the local, rural power

which they had seized in 1917 and 1918. This resulted largely from the impact of the war itself, with victory going not to peasant guerrillas or to populist Red Guards, but to a huge, conventional standing army. It was guaranteed by the authoritarian practice of the communist bureaucracy which had emerged from the necessities of war, and which itself both underpinned and drew its style from the army.

The desire to return to "village democracy", for all its utopian character, remained strong, and recognition of its potency has given rise to much political wishful thinking. It was interpreted by Ukrainian nationalist historians as an indication of peasant support for their own dream of an independent Ukrainian state, when it was in fact something quite different. Similarly, both contemporary and later anarchists read into the peasant desire for autonomy and into their use of the *mir* in 1917-1918, backing for their own revolutionary agenda. But there is a big difference between desiring local autonomy as the peasants did, on the one hand, and supporting anarchist programmes such as collective production and the abolition of the money economy on the other. The Makhnovites, and indeed the anarchists in general, discovered this difference in practice in the comparison of their experiences under the deeply unpopular War Communism and the much less burdensome NEP.

In general, this thesis has not engaged the debate around the nature of ideology. But it is probably worthwhile pointing out that Gramsci's distinction between "literary" or "intellectual"

ideology, which is systematised, coherent, and non-contradictory, and "popular" ideology, which is contradictory and non-systematic, goes some way towards helping us understand the relationship between the anarchist leadership and the peasant majority in the *Makhnovshchina*. As long as "village democracy" was perceived as a consciously defined and attainable social objective by the peasantry, the two ideological levels coincided; but when this was no longer the case, popular support for the anarchists withered away and they found themselves isolated.

An important factor in this process was the change in Bolshevik agrarian policy in 1921. There is merit in the claim that the replacement of War Communism with the NEP in 1921 was in some sense a tactical retreat by the government, if not quite a victory for peasant rebels in many parts of Russia and Ukraine. For obvious reasons the grain requisition detachments were deeply unpopular in the villages, and their replacement with the tax-in-kind together with a return to commodity exchange of surplus through the market had an immediate effect.

The difficulty here is that we cannot argue in a linear fashion that Makhno's defeat was attributable to the amelioration of peasant grievances by the NEP, for two reasons.

The first of these concerns the chronology of economic policy, and is less significant than some scholars have supposed. The NEP was only introduced in Ukraine in the autumn, six months later than in Russia and after Makhno had crossed into Rumania, because

Ukraine had satisfied less than half of the grain requirements for the first quarter of 1921. In the Ukrainian famine of 1921, famine zones were not declared until after grain quotas had been filled. But the date of NEP's *formal* introduction in Ukraine is immaterial, because the spill-over effect from Russia was almost instantaneous. Petty commodity trading, known as "bagging", spilled over into Ukraine immediately. By April 1921 the Ukrainian rail system was clogged with bagmen, and by May *meshochnichestvo* was threatening to disrupt grain collection in Ukraine altogether. In the circumstances, it seems probable that even the Ukrainian peasantry, which had presented a virtually united anti-Soviet front, on the left bank at least, were taking part in the *tolchok* ("push-and-shove") markets which had sprung up everywhere.

The second reason concerns the mechanisms of political control in the Ukrainian countryside. The main instruments of Soviet rule in Ukrainian villages, into the 1930s, were the poor peasants' committees, the *kombedy* or *komnezamy*, which had been introduced to facilitate grain collection, and which were abolished in Russia in late 1918. The Bolsheviki mistrusted the Ukrainian villager, and Communist support was weak even in such areas as Ekaterinoslav, where poor peasants were numerous. The continuation of the *komnezamy* as instruments of social control, in the effective absence of village soviets, must have militated against the benefits of NEP for the better-off peasants, and undermined its political benefits for the Bolsheviki.

While it is important to give due weight to the complex social changes which eroded support for the *Makhnovshchina*, military factors also played a crucial role, as we saw in earlier chapters. The brutal fact was that the defeat of Wrangel meant that the now battle-hardened Red Army could turn its full attention to mopping-up operations against Makhno and other guerrilla bands. Although these operations were ponderously conducted and were protracted beyond either side's expectations, by the spring of 1921 the final outcome was no longer in doubt.

The increasing militarisation, over time, of the *Makhnovshchina*, which is described in the thesis, parallels a similar process in the Communist Party, and also goes some way at a superficial level to explain apparent changes in Makhno's personal behaviour. From a group of "forest brothers" waging hit-and-run raids against the Austrians, the *Makhnovshchina* had become a highly mobile and effective semi-cavalry army. In the process, military necessity often had to take precedence over political niceties, and Makhno's *dirigisme* in ordering executions, for instance, increasingly contradicted the populist spectacle of troops voting on whether or not to obey their officers' orders.

We should also not underestimate the importance, *pace* Plekhanov, of Makhno as an individual actor in history, especially in 1917, when he was indeed a returning hero in Guliai-Pole, the village's only surviving political prisoner, set free by the Revolution. His luck and his political credibility got him elected to the important local structures, and gave him a platform from which

to propagate his anarchist ideas and to assume a leadership role for which he was personally suited. When it became necessary to take up arms against the Austrians, he was already ideally placed to lead the fighting. This is the period above all when the historical Makhno appears to us as a man motivated by clear political principles.

But the contradictions between anarchist theory and guerrilla warfare can be overcome; those between conventional military activity and anarchism are much more complicated. It is noticeable that reports of Makhno as a drunkard and a womaniser, as an irascible and authoritarian bandit chief, whatever their factual reliability, come mainly from the period in 1920 and 1921, as the circumstances which favoured his ideas changed permanently. Makhno's opportunism in exile, similarly, may have been a mark of desperation. Although he wanted to return home to lead an uprising, conditions in Soviet Ukraine no longer existed in which an uprising could take place, and even the sponsorship of a Kruger or a Petliura was not enough.

The Makhno revolt sprang from the soil of Ekaterinoslav province because of the specific grievances of the local peasantry, many of which were also shared by peasants in revolts in other parts of the Russian empire. Its character was both determined and also partly disguised by the fact of its being led by a charismatic anarchist with a flair for guerrilla warfare. In this circumstance the movement's political goals were articulated in a far more coherent manner than those of other peasant revolts,

as well as through the occasional implementation of libertarian policies. Makhno's luck and his skill as a military leader also enabled him to escape time and again from the traps laid for him. But this was accidental. The character of the movement was still fundamentally that of a peasant revolt, which was aimed at least partly against a transformational socialist project and was thus fundamentally different from similar revolts against the exploitation of the landlords.

Unfortunately, we know next to nothing empirically of the political consciousness of the peasants who made up the majority of the Makhnovites. For this, we would have to draw on folk song, literature, jokes and letters, diaries and oral traditions. This raises another set of fundamental questions, which the thesis has touched on but not addressed, some of which future historians of peasant revolt in Ukraine might like to investigate.

The typology of problems which appear in the different narratives examined in the thesis, whether nationalist, libertarian or Soviet Marxist, raise these questions about the very process by which historical tradition is created or invented. This thesis has offered a major reinterpretation of existing data, but the important insights into the nature of historical discourse which derive from post-modernism point the way to other fertile arenas of research.

Why does Makhno's personality, for example, (his drunkenness, his womanising) assume historical significance only late in the



story? To take another example, it might be argued that the possibly fictive reconstruction by Makhno in exile of his encounter with Lenin and Sverdlov, unsupported as it is by any corroborating documentation, is nonetheless, at the level of discourse, a representation of historical truth.

Post-modernists would argue that what we know about the *Makhnovshchina* is merely one dominant representation of its history among many. We must and do recognise that none of the existing representations of the *Makhnovshchina* have captured or can hope to capture all the facets of its rich history, suppressed for so many years by the Soviet system. The other traditions, which probably co-exist in unexamined archives and in the collective memories of the Ukrainian people, still await re-discovery.

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Note: this is not a comprehensive bibliography of the Makhnovshchina, but rather a list of sources consulted during the preparation of this thesis and cited in the footnotes.

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## VI. NEWSPAPERS

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