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# The Makhnovists & The Russian Revolution

Organization, Peasantry & Anarchism

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9. Soviet and Ukrainian money must be accepted equally with other monies. Those guilty of violation of this are subject to revolutionary punishment.

10. The exchange of work products and goods will remain free; for the time being this activity will not be taken over by the worker-peasant organizations. But at the same time, it is proposed that the exchange of work products take place chiefly BETWEEN WORKING PEOPLE.

11. All individuals deliberately obstructing the distribution of this declaration will be considered counter-revolutionary.

**Revolutionary Military Soviet and Command Staff of the  
Revolutionary Insurgent Army of the Ukraine (Makhnovist)**

January 7, 1920.

transfer will be carried out in an orderly fashion determined in common at peasant assemblies, which must remember in this matter not only each of their own personal interests, but also bear in mind the common interest of all the oppressed, working peasantry.

3. Factories, workshops, mines and other tools and means of production become the property of the working class as a whole, which will run all enterprises themselves, through their trade unions, getting production under way and striving to tie together all industry in the country in a single, unitary organization.

4. It is being proposed that all peasant and worker organizations start construction of free worker-peasant soviets. Only laborers who are contributing work necessary to the social economy should participate in the soviets. Representatives of political organizations have no place in worker-peasant soviets, since in their participation in a workers' soviet will transform the latter into deputies of the party and can lead to the downfall of the soviet system.

5. The existence of the Cheka, of party committees and similar compulsory authoritative and disciplinary institutions is intolerable in the midst of free peasants and workers.

6. Freedom of speech, press, assembly, unions and the like are inalienable rights of every worker and any restriction on them is a counter-revolutionary act.

7. State militia, policemen and armies are abolished. Instead of them the people will organize their own self-defense. Self-defense can be organized only by workers and peasants.

8. The worker-peasant soviets, the self-defense groups of workers and peasants and also every peasant and worker must not permit any counter-revolutionary manifestation whatsoever by the bourgeoisie and officers. Nor should they tolerate the appearance of banditry. Everyone convicted of counter-revolution or banditry will be shot on the spot.

The 1917 Russian Revolution experienced a tremendous rise in worker/peasant self-management. Through the pressures of WWI, Revolution and Civil War, the peoples of that great land mass discovered that with the destruction of one regime came another and that neither functioned in the interests of the masses. Anarchism, as both a philosophical principle and as an active social/political movement arose from the freedoms gained once the Bolshevik party destroyed the old, despised monarchy, combined with the repression at the hands of Bolsheviks that merely replaced one hated regime with another. Further, this government was now using the rhetoric of being the voice of the proletariat. The Anarchists of 1917–1921 saw their own fears and hatred of institutions realized in the dictatorship of the Bolshevik party. As Alexander Berkman stated in 1922: "...it is the would-be friends of Russia and of the Russian Revolution who have done the greatest harm to the Revolution, to the Russian people, and to the best interests of the working masses of the world, by their exercise of zeal untempered by truth."<sup>1</sup> This "zeal" manifested itself in the suppression of political factions outside of the Bolshevik party, as well as the outright brutality inflicted upon the working class, whom the Party had explicitly expressed that it was representing.

Anarchism, by definition, is a "political [and social] theory holding all forms of governmental authority to be unnecessary and undesirable and advocating a society based on voluntary cooperation and free association of individuals and groups."<sup>2</sup> However, for my purposes here, I simply define anarchism as a locally-initiated and controlled self-governing movement that fights any and all external coercion and control. It becomes evident that such a philosophy can become a natural option when a society is faced with such extreme conditions as those found

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander Berkman, *Life of an Anarchist*, Four Walls Eight Windows, 1992, p.241

<sup>2</sup> Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 10<sup>th</sup> Ed., Merriam-Webster Inc, 1993

in Russia in 1917. The Anarchist movement took place in varying degrees all across Russia, but for the purpose of this paper I shall only focus on the anarchist strains in Petrograd, Ukraine and Kronstadt. All three of these formed around different social groups that had experienced diverse social and political pressures. "[There] was not a uniform process throughout the Empire...Both workers and soldiers came to reject the authority of any but their own organizations; soviets, factory committees, garrison committees. The peasantry began to reject all outside authority, retreating into village self-government and causing immense economic disruption. The growth of separatism amongst members of national minorities was marked, leading to demands for separate national military units and to the creation of their own local organizations."<sup>3</sup>

I am mainly concerned with the first-hand accounts of Anarchists as well as the comparison of these with contemporary political historians. I therefore hope to persuade the reader that not only did the Bolsheviks and political historians regard the masses (even the Kronstadt sailors) as "dark" and easily manipulated, but that they have portrayed the peasants and Kronstadt sailors as having had no real social complaints that constituted any political program. I am suggesting here that the real social and political complaints of the real majority of Russia was so extreme that it led them to a belief in, and need for, anarchism. Whether it be the anarcho-communism of the Ukraine, the anarcho-syndicalism of the factory workers or the anarcho-individualism of the Kronstadt sailors, all were united in their denial of (the Bolshevik) government. Indeed, the Anarchist movement is sometimes considered more threatening to Russia than even the Bolsheviks, and it is from this point of contention that I expect to prove the political historians otherwise.

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<sup>3</sup> Harold Shukman, *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of the Russian Revolution*, Basil Blackwell, 1988, p.134

by the bourgeois-landlord authority on the one hand and the Bolshevik-Communist dictatorship on the other.

Setting for itself one goal-the battle for total liberation of the working people of the Ukraine from the oppression of various authorities and the creation of a TRUE SOVIET SOCIALIST ORDER, the insurgent Makhnovist army fought stubbornly on several fronts for the achievement of these goals and at the present time is bringing to a victorious conclusion the struggle against the Denikinist army, liberating region after region, in which every coercive power and every coercive organization is in the process of being removed,

Many peasants and workers are asking: What will happen now? What is to be done? How shall we treat the decrees of the exiled authorities, etc.

All of these questions will be answered finally and in detail at the All-Ukrainian worker-peasant Congress, which must convene immediately, as soon as there is an opportunity for the workers and peasants to come together. This congress will map out and decide all the urgent questions of peasant-worker life.

In view of the fact that the congress will be convened at an indefinite time, the insurgent Makhnovist army finds it necessary to put up the following announcement concerning worker-peasant life:

1. All decrees of the Denikin (volunteer) authority are abolished. Those decrees of the Communist authority which conflict with the interests of the peasants and workers are also repealed.

Note: Which decrees of the Communist authority are harmful to the working people must be decided by the working people themselves — the peasants in assemblies, the workers in their factories and workshops.

2. The lands of the service gentry, of the monasteries, of the princes and other enemies of the toiling masses, with all their live stock and goods, are passed on to the use of those peasants who support themselves solely through their own labor. This

- Abolition of martial law; freedom of speech, press and assembly for all who labour.
- Free election of shop and factory committees (zahvkomi), of labour, union and soviet representatives.
- Call meetings, pass resolutions, send your delegates to the authorities and work for the realization of your demands.

Alexander Berkman, *Life of an Anarchist*, p.226

### **Proclamation of the Socialist Workers of the Nevsky District, February 28, 1921 (concluding paragraph)**

We know who is afraid of the Constituent Assembly. It is they who will no longer be able to rob the people. Instead they will have to answer before the representatives of the people for their deceit, their robberies, and all their crimes.

Down with the hated Communists!

Down with the Soviet Government!

Long live the Constituent Assembly!

Alexander Berkman, *Life of an Anarchist*, p.226

### **Declaration of the Revolutionary Insurgent Army of the Ukraine (Makhnovist) January 7, 1920**

To all the peasants and workers of the Ukraine.

To be sent by telegraph, telephone or post to all villages, rural districts, and governments of the Ukraine. To be read at peasant gatherings, in factories and in workshops.

Fellow workers! The Revolutionary Insurgent Army of the Ukraine (Makhnovist) was called into existence as a protest against the oppression of the workers and peasants

In the wake of the 1917 February Revolution, grass-roots activism [Anarchism] sprung up amidst the unshackled freedom felt by many peasants and workers. The cities quickly established their own system of democratic free associations usually calling themselves “Committees of Public Organizations” or “Committees of Public Safety.”<sup>4</sup> The townsfolk themselves who supported the Revolution then proceeded “either at the order of the local committee or soviet, or on their own initiative,...began to arrest tsarist officials, [and] to occupy government buildings, and to disarm policemen at their posts.”<sup>5</sup> This local initiative reveals the popularity of the February Revolution in that coercive measures were not yet used to “activate” the populace and that, in turn, action and pluralist politics were still being glorified (by the Provisional Government and the Bolsheviks) as a democratic socialist necessity. Further, Democratic Socialism appears to be what the majority of the populace wanted. But Democratic Socialism meant clearly local, worker/peasant control over their own production. “Power to the Soviets!”<sup>6</sup> meant to many the end of a(n imposed) governmental body and the creation of a mass democratic system of socialized and locally controlled factories and farms. It seems unrealistic to believe that the majority of the populace (85% being peasant) would have been willing to accept the new “power” of the worker soviets<sup>7</sup>, a soviet that was imposed from the outside and representing the industrialized working classes. This is true even in the case of many workers who wanted to establish a Con-

<sup>4</sup> Shukman, Blackwell Encyclopedia, p.132

<sup>5</sup> Shukman, Blackwell Encyclopedia, p.132

<sup>6</sup> “It was the SR Maximalists alone who in 1905 developed a fully fledged ideology of soviet power and democracy...they championed a ‘communalist’ or soviet ‘Republic of Toilers’, giving grounds for their claim of 1917 to have been the originators of ‘All Power to the Soviets.’” Shukman, Blackwell Encyclopedia, p.135

<sup>7</sup> “The professed political aim of all soviets was not, however, ‘soviet power,’ but the convocation of a Constituent Assembly and the establishment of a democratic republic.” Shukman, Blackwell Encyclopedia, p.135

stituent Assembly that would represent the populace rather than creating another dictatorship of the proletarians. In V.M. Eikhenbaum's (Volin) book *The Unknown Revolution*, he documented "the efforts of workers, peasants, and intellectuals to inaugurate a free society based on local initiative and autonomy. [And that] Libertarian opposition to the new Soviet dictatorship, above all in Kronstadt and the Ukraine, received extensive treatment."<sup>8</sup> It becomes apparent that the reason the Constituent Assembly was created and then promptly closed by the Bolsheviks was because the Bolsheviks understood that the majority of the populace did not support "Soviet Power" but rather local "democratic", self-governing power. A country that was predominantly rural, whose factories were either ruined, closed or struggling to survive, and whose citizens were still struggling against any forms of authority, could not advocate a dictatorship of the proletariat. Therefore the anarchism of the peasants, and especially the workers and sailors was seen as a threat to the Bolshevik quest for power and therefore its enemy in peacetime.

In the cities, local committees that developed soon after the February Revolution "generally began as very small, informal groups of important local figures. They almost always included representatives of the municipal duma and local heroes of "society" (such as veterans of the First and Second Dumas, or army officers shunted into the reserve under suspicion of liberalism)."<sup>9</sup> The very fact that the local heroes selected for the committees, and later for the Constituent Assembly, were those who expressed or represented radical local self-government and democracy, suggests that the larger peasant and worker body politic had a political agenda in mind and that they were politically active in expressing that agenda.

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<sup>8</sup> Paul Avrich, *Anarchist Portraits*, Princeton University Press, 1988, p.133

<sup>9</sup> Shukman, *Blackwell Encyclopedia*, p.132

but that once in power, like any government, its only goals were to sustain itself. "The Bolsheviks are Marxists. Though in the October days they had accepted and proclaimed anarchist watchwords (direct action by the people, free Soviets, and so forth), it was not their social philosophy that dictated this attitude. They had felt the popular pulse-the rising waves of the Revolution had carried them far beyond their theories. But they remained Marxists. At heart they had no faith in the people and their creative initiative."<sup>40</sup> This creative initiative was a program of Anarchism, whether it be communistic, individualistic or syndicalistic. The majority of the people whether peasant, factory worker, or sailor had become revolutionary enough politically, and frustrated enough socially, to understand that Government, especially Bolshevik, was unnecessary and extremely harmful to the People's Revolution of February 1917.

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## Appendix

### Strikers' Proclamations, Petrograd, February 27<sup>th</sup>, 1921

A complete change is necessary in the policies of the Government. First of all, the workers and peasants need freedom. They don't want to live by the decrees of the Bolsheviks; they want to control their own destinies.

Comrades, preserve revolutionary order! Determinedly and in an organized manner demand-

- Liberation of all arrested socialists and non-partisan workingmen.

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<sup>40</sup> Berkman, *Life of an Anarchist*, p.246



In contrast to this analysis is Richard Pipes, who in his analysis of anarchism among the peasants and workers, not only rejects the idea that the peasants may have actually believed in the anarchist principles held by Makhno in the Ukraine, the sailors in Kronstadt, and the workers in Petrograd, but that the peasants, sailors and workers were simply “dark masses” who were controlled and heavily influenced by conspiratorial anarchists. Rather than seeing a developing politicalization of the masses, Pipes sees only a negative chaos that is destroying all of Russia. Pipes suggests that the Kronstadt sailors were not acting in accordance with any real principles of local self-government and the rights of the people, but rather he almost favors the Bolsheviks in exclaiming that “...the government, jointly with the [Petrograd] Soviet,...quelled incipient violence at Kronstadt. The garrison at this naval base near Petrograd was under strong anarchist influence but its political organization was in the hands of the Bolsheviks headed by F.F. Raskolnikov and S.G. Roshal. [But that] the sailors had their grievance, namely the government’s forceful ejection of anarchists from the villa of ex-Minister Peter Durnovo...”<sup>38</sup> As if this were their only grievance with the government, Pipes goes on to portray “the anarchists at the villa [as having] behaved in so disorderly a fashion that on June 19 troops were sent to retake it and arrest the squatters. Incited by the anarchists, the sailors threatened on June 23 to march on Petrograd to free the prisoners.”<sup>39</sup>

Pipes’ fundamental distrust of the workers and peasants, and the belief that they are politically feeble, is reminiscent of the Bolshevik Party’s distrust of the masses and its need for centralized control of the them in order to keep itself in power. Alexander Berkman makes note of the fact that the Bolsheviks used revolutionary populist rhetoric in order to gain power,

<sup>38</sup> Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, Vintage Books, 1990, p.420

<sup>39</sup> Pipes, *Russian Revolution*, p.420

Many communities, especially peasant, would realize that local self-government worked and that a larger system of control was unnecessary. The degree to which the peasants came to believe this and the degree to which the Provisional Government saw local self-management as a threat, resulted in an increasing pressure<sup>10</sup> on the local committees by the Provisional Government<sup>11</sup> and later outright oppression by the Bolshevik Party.

However, the movements of Anarchism varied from the city to the countryside. Because of the large percentage of workers in the cities, there was an anarchistic “soviet” mentality that sought to achieve worker control over factories as well as having a voice in a mass democracy. Civil Rights were of the utmost importance. The strain of the October Revolution was that oppressions committed against the working class “in the name of the working class” caused many to lose hope in any form of government, especially one controlled by the Bolsheviks. Although many anarchists in the city of Petrograd felt that the Bolsheviks were intending on establishing a government equally as oppressive as the Provisional Government or the Monarchy, they supported the Bolsheviks in the months before October in their quest to sabotage and get rid of the Provisional Government. After the October coup, the Anarchists, although appalled, felt that their presence would help create a strong libertarian element in the Bolshevik Government. Fur-

<sup>10</sup> “They [peasants] have no control of the village Soviet; the kombed (Committee of Poverty organized by the Bolsheviks) carries on with a merciless hand, and the common muzhik is afraid to speak his mind, for he’d be reported by some Communist and dragged off to prison.” Berkman, *Life of an Anarchist*, p.185, speaking with a Jewish peasant on the Latvian border.

<sup>11</sup> “...the first serious challenge to the committees’ power came from above—from the Provisional Government...[whose] concern was to stave off anarchy by replacing ‘revolutionary’ organs with a new ‘legal’ institutional structure...[thus displaying the Provisional Governments’] ideological adherence to the unitary and relatively centralized state.” Shukman, *Blackwell Encyclopedia*, p.133

ther, many felt that as long as there was a civil war going on, revolutionists should not turn their back on them because there are even worse anti-revolutionary elements (as well as the Allies) wanting to see the Revolution fail.

Alexander Berkman, in March 1920, gives an extraordinary account of his struggle with the Bolsheviks' tendency toward authoritarianism when he states that: "I saw much that was wrong and evil, the dangerous tendency to bureaucracy, the inequality and injustice. But Russia-I am convinced-would outgrow these evils with the return of a more ordered life, if the Allies would cease their interference and lift the blockade."<sup>12</sup> Berkman describes the terrible conditions that the Bolshevik government was facing-starvation, structural collapse, disappearing proletarian support,etc.,-but he also realizes that the Bolsheviks are not interested in "propaganda by deed". He paints a picture of Lenin as "a practical idealist" bent upon the realization of his Communist dream by whatever means, and subordinating to it every ethical and humanitarian consideration. A man sincerely convinced that evil methods may serve a good purpose and be justified by it."<sup>13</sup>

Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman joined the expedition of the Museum of the Revolution whose goal it was to collect historical information about the revolution. In so doing, Berkman discovers the Russia of the countryside and the lives of the peasants struggling under yet another oppressive government. In Karkov, a former professor complains that although the Bolsheviks want teachers, that they will only accept teachers that adhere to the Communist ideology.<sup>14</sup> There is also the complaints of a man in Ukraine who sees the Allied blockade and White forces as being the only elements that have kept the Bolsheviks in power:

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<sup>12</sup> Berkman, *Life of an Anarchist*, p.183, March 9, 1920

<sup>13</sup> Berkman, *Life of an Anarchist*, p.184

<sup>14</sup> Berkman, *Life of an Anarchist*, p.189

developed from extreme social and political situations. Sheila Fitzpatrick, in her book on the Russian Revolution portrays the masses as having just such a natural political and social development. It is in her view of the Russian Revolution, as a social historian, that allows for respect to be given to the masses of people who were fighting for social and political freedoms. She views the Anarchists as having had the natural support of the workers and peasants. In her book *The Russian Revolution*, Fitzpatrick describes this movement by the workers themselves. She states that "...the factory committees took over [the factories in order] to save the workers from unemployment, when the owner or manager abandoned the plant or threatened to close it because it was losing money. As such events became more common, the definition of workers' control moved closer to something like workers' self-management."<sup>35</sup> Fitzpatrick notes that because of the growing fallout between the workers and the government, that real grievances were developed and that a program<sup>36</sup> of self-management became every more necessary in the eyes of the working classes. Instead of foreign anarchistic elements conspiring to get worker support, it was the conditions in Petrograd that caused the workers to become more militant. Workers angered by "...the Bolsheviks [who had gained] influence in the factory committees...[that] there was an emerging sense in the working class that 'soviet power' meant that the workers should be sole masters in the district, the city, and perhaps the country as a whole...this was closer to anarchism or anarcho-syndicalism than to Bolshevism, and the Bolshevik leaders did not in fact share the view that direct workers'democracy through factory committees and the soviets was a plausible or desirable alternative to their own concept of party-led 'proletarian dictatorship'."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, Oxford University Press, 1994, p.54

<sup>36</sup> see last page for "Petrograd Strikers' Proclamation"

<sup>37</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Russian Revolution*, p.56

sailors, Zhelezniakov among them, rushed from Kronstadt to defend their fellow revolutionaries, who had meanwhile barricaded themselves in the villa against a government attack. For the next two weeks the anarchists remained entrenched in the villa, in defiance of both the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet. But after some of them broke into a nearby jail and liberated the inmates, Minister Pereverzev ordered a raid on the house, during which an anarchist workman was killed<sup>32</sup> and many anarchists taken captive and placed in prison.

The workers in Petrograd, having tired of the closed factories, had tried to set up meetings to deal with the problems of fuel shortage and poor rations, but the Bolshevik Government prevented the meetings from occurring. On February 28, when the strike was taking place, the extent of the demands were “for winter clothing and more regular issue of rations. Some of the circulars protest against the suppression of factory meetings. ‘The people want to take counsel together to find means of relief.’”<sup>33</sup> Indeed, the people wanted to be allowed to take the situation into their own hands and fix the problems themselves. They were not demanding that the government protect them from this or that, nor did they want the government to provide anything. The people were more and more wanting to be left alone to deal with their own predicaments. The next day, proclamations were issued by the strikers that were more radical. The strikers were now demanding “a complete change...in the policies of the Government.”<sup>34</sup>

This growing distrust of the Bolshevik Government became a critique of government in general. Peasants, workers and sailors decided for themselves that only they could govern themselves. This, therefore, reveals a political awareness that

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<sup>32</sup> Avrich, Portraits, p.107–108

<sup>33</sup> Berkman, Life of an Anarchist, p.206

<sup>34</sup> Berkman, Life of an Anarchist, p.206

“The Communists cannot last much longer. Russia is on the verge of utter economic collapse. The old food reserves are exhausted; production has almost ceased. Militarization of toil has failed. Trotsky’s calculations of the progressive increase of the output on the ‘labor front’ have been exploded like Bolshevik prophecies of world revolution. The factory is not a battlefield. Converting the country into a camp of forced labor is not conducive to creative effort. It has divided the people into slaves and slave drivers, and created a powerful class of Soviet bureaucrats. Most significant of all, it has turned even the more advanced workers against the Communists. Now the Bolsheviks can count neither on the peasant nor on the proletariat; the whole country is against them. But for the stupid policy of the Allies, they would have been swept away long ago. The blockade and invasions have played into their hands. The Bolsheviks need war to keep them in power.” Alexander Berkman, Life of an Anarchist, p.198

In Petrograd, with the first Conference of the Red Trade Unions in July 1921 (held simultaneously with the Congress of the Comintern), Berkman remarks that the “most sanguine and confident are the latest arrivals, secluded in the atmosphere of the Luxe and entirely unfamiliar with the life and thought of the people.”<sup>15</sup> The trade unionists that were from other countries were here to support the Bolshevik Government because they were considered to be “revolutionary.” However, Berkman described the way the Bolshevik Government disguised reality for the visitors by providing the best rations<sup>16</sup> and lodgings for them. The Bolsheviks also gave “guided” tours of [staged] Russian factories, hospitals and schools in which only the most loyal Bolshevik was appointed as the guide. Berkman worked to convince the foreign visitors that Russian anarchists had

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<sup>15</sup> Berkman, Life of an Anarchist, p.217

<sup>16</sup> [the Bolsheviks had] “divided the population of Russia into 36 categories, according to the ration and wages received.” Berkman, Life of an Anarchist, p.242

been imprisoned<sup>17</sup> and that the Bolshevik Government was simply another oppressive one.

Berkman suggests that the Bolshevik coup and dictatorship “made a new revolution, the Third Revolution, necessary.”<sup>18</sup> This Third Revolution was to be a social revolution as opposed to the two political revolutions that had already taken place that year. This social revolution makes sense when one considers the almost apolitical stance of anarchist society. The Third Revolution theory created a separation in the anarchist (and trade unionist) camp by making them choose between dealing with (supporting) the Bolshevik “revolutionary” government and committing themselves to a declaration of war against it. When the imprisoned anarchists staged a hunger strike “to the death”, Berkman describes the position that the anarchists at the congress were placed in: “Like a bombshell came Bukharin’s attack upon the Anarchists in the closing hour of the Trade Union Congress. Though not a delegate, he secured the platform and in the name of the Communist Party denounced the hunger strikers as counter-revolutionists. The whole Anarchist movement of Russia, he declared, is criminal banditism waging warfare against the Soviet Republic; it is identical with [Nestor] Makhno and his povstantsi who are exterminating Communists and fighting against the Revolution.”<sup>19</sup> Such was the rhetoric of the Bolshevik Government against the actions of the People striving for freedom. The Makhnovist forces in the Ukraine were used against the White forces until there no longer remained a monarchist threat. Once completed, the Bolsheviks turned on the Makhnovist

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<sup>17</sup> “The prisons and concentration camps are filled with alleged counter-revolutionists and speculators, 95 per cent of whom are starved workers, simple peasants, and even children of 10 to 14 years of age.” Berkman, *Life of an Anarchist*, p.249 “Initiative is frowned upon, free effort systematically discouraged.” Berkman, *Life of an Anarchist*, p.249

<sup>18</sup> Berkman, *Life of an Anarchist*, p.233

<sup>19</sup> Berkman, *Life of an Anarchist*, p.220

stance against the Bolsheviks as well as the essential rights that they had fought for in 1917 and were now demanding. Because of the sailors heroic efforts in the 1917 Revolutions, they were considered the “reddest of the red.”<sup>30</sup> Therefore, their defiance of the Bolshevik Government and a call for its overthrow was a significant symbol of the anti-revolutionary nature of the Bolshevik regime and its failure to win support for its continued existence. For the anarchists of the time, Kronstadt, “termed the Second Paris Commune, “was the “last episode in Russia of the communalist tradition... There was the same libertarian atmosphere, the same rejection of centralized power, the same spontaneous formation of councils and committees, the same appeal for workers’ control, the same acts of heroism, the same failure to take the offensive, and the same bloody outcome.”<sup>31</sup> That bloody outcome was simply a part of the continued suppression of civil liberties that had been enjoyed by the populace after the February Revolution of 1917.

The Rebellion began as a commune of sailors who had taken it upon themselves to appropriate a villa that had been owned by the former governor of Moscow, P.P. Durnovo. The “anarchists established it as a “revolutionary commune and ‘house of rest’, with rooms for reading and discussion and a garden used as a playground for their children. Yet the villa was left undisturbed until June 5, 1917, when a number of its anarchist occupants tried to seize the printing plant of a middle-class newspaper. The First Congress of Soviets, then in session in the capital, denounced the raiders as ‘criminals who call themselves anarchists,’ and on June 7, P.N. Pereverzev, the minister of justice in the Provisional Government, ordered the anarchists to evacuate the house immediately. The next day fifty

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made the fleet a conscript force with a significant (if not predominant factory-worker component and an unusually large number of literate men.” Shukman, *Blackwell Encyclopedia*, p.48

<sup>30</sup> Shukman, *Blackwell Encyclopedia* , p.177

<sup>31</sup> Avrich, *Portraits*, p.238

saw fit, that his Insurgent Army would not “dictate to them or order them to do anything.” Free speech, press, and assembly were proclaimed, although Makhno would not countenance organizations that sought to impose political authority, and he accordingly dissolved the Bolshevik revolutionary committees, instructing their members to “take up some honest trade.”<sup>26</sup> Many of the village inhabitants kept the peasant armies going by feeding and housing them when they came through their village. Further, the village people would alert the Makhnovist armies to any enemy encampments as well as any news of Red or White troop movements.

There has been suggestions by political historians that the Makhnovist movement was supporting within it anti-semitism and Jewish pogroms. However, Makhno seems to have not only looked down upon such acts but that in his anarchist movement has sought to educate the populace that such acts were anti-revolutionary and not to be tolerated in his army. It is suggested that “Makhno’s supporters were not all anarchists, and he was constantly having to intervene to curb the expression of anti-Semitic feelings among the peasants, to whom the Jew was a traditional scapegoat and the Jewish moneylender or peddler a symbol of the economic order they were aiming to destroy.”<sup>27</sup> Further, although the majority of the peasants were Ukrainian, there were peasants from Great Russia, the Caucasus, Greeks, and a “considerable number of Jews [who also] took part in the Makhnovist movement.”<sup>28</sup>

The Kronstadt Rebellion and bloody defeat of 1921 became the symbolic end of democratic, and some say anarchist<sup>29</sup>, freedom. The sailors of Kronstadt were to be the heroes of many workers, peasants and anarchists due mainly to their heroic

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<sup>26</sup> Avrich, Portraits, p.119

<sup>27</sup> James Joll, *The Anarchists*, Harvard University Press, 1980, p.169

<sup>28</sup> Avrich, Portraits, p.123

<sup>29</sup> “One factor leading to revolutionary conditions in the fleet was increased mechanization [begun by the Tsar at the Turn of the Century]. This

forces and demonized them in the eyes of the revolutionary proletariat. Once the proletariat attempted to fight for their rights as workers, the Bolsheviks accused them of being anarchists or in cahoots with White forces. This accusation opened the eyes of many workers and sailors to the oppressive situation that was forming in the Bolshevik Government.

In the Ukraine, peasant armies had formed around the need to fight against the brutality being inflicted on the Ukrainian population by the German Armies, the White Armies and the Red Armies. One figure that became a prominent leader in the peasant armies was Nestor Makhno. Makhno was from a peasant family in Ukraine and understood the struggles that peasants had faced while under the Tsarist government. He sought to fight all forms of government authority, including the Provisional Government, and, later, the Communists. Because of his brave fighting abilities and his philosophy of worker and peasant self-government, he became a popular figure among the people. As opposed to past revolutionary leaders in Russia, where the “ideologists and organizers of the forms and goals of the revolution were invariably neither workers nor peasants, but elements foreign to the workers and peasants, generally intermediaries who hesitated between the ruling class of the dying epoch and the proletariat of the cities and fields.”<sup>20</sup> Nestor Makhno was one of the people and therefore, allowed him, even in the bloodiest of battles, to keep a strong fighting army that had very few desertions.

Peasant anarchism in the Ukraine meant fighting all foreign authority. The first of these foreign encroachments was the German armies after the March 18 Brest-Litovsk Treaty which signed over the Ukrainian lands to the German. Most of the anarchists felt that the treaty was “a humiliating capitulation to the forces of reaction, a betrayal of the worldwide revolu-

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<sup>20</sup> Peter Arshinov, *History of the Makhnovist Movement (1918–1921)*, Black and Red Solidarity, 1974, p.31

tion.”<sup>21</sup> In the Ukraine, the treaty created even more feelings of betrayal. The Germans returned the Ukrainian nobles and gentry to their former power and set up an autocratic government led by Hetman Skoropadsky. Through this government, the Germans were able to loot the Ukraine of all of its agricultural and mining products. In order to fight against the German and Ukrainian elite government, the peasants formed small armed detachments that hid in the forests during the harvest season in order to kill any officials who would come to the village trying to requisition the grain.

When the war was over, the Germans retreated and the reactionary Ukrainian government fled. Makhno was able to take advantage of the void of authority by attempting to reconstruct society on libertarian<sup>22</sup> lines. In January, February, and April of 1919, the Makhnovists held a series of Regional Congresses of Peasants, Workers, and Insurgents to “discuss economic and military matters and to supervise the task of reconstruction.”<sup>23</sup> Reconstruction for Makhno was based upon his philosophy of anarcho-libertarianism, a philosophy that he had acquired from his friendship with Peter Arshinov. A libertarian society meant that the peasants and workers were to be allowed to control their own factories, establish their own schools (teaching in the language that they wanted), and an end to food requisitioning. “In his efforts to reconstruct society along libertarian lines, Makhno also encouraged experiments in workers’ self-management whenever the occasion offered. For example, when railway workers of Aleksandrovsk complained that they

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<sup>21</sup> Paul Avrich, *Anarchist Portraits*, p.128

<sup>22</sup> “According to Emma Goldman, Makhno’s object was to establish a libertarian society in the south that would serve as a model for the whole of Russia. Interestingly, Trotsky once noted that he and Lenin had toyed with the idea of allotting a piece of territory to Makhno for this purpose, but the project foundered when fighting broke out between the anarchist guerrillas and the Bolshevik forces in the Ukraine.” Avrich, *Portraits*, p.118

<sup>23</sup> Avrich, *Portraits*, p.114

had not been paid for many weeks, he advised them to take control of the railroad and charge the users what seemed a fair price for their services.”<sup>24</sup> Many outside of the the anarchist peasant movement felt that these experiments were useless. This “uselessness” appears to be reasoned on the premise that the majority of people are not socially and politically revolutionary enough to establish a non-hierarchical oppressive government if left to their own devices. I will discuss later how both the Bolsheviks and the political historians adhere to this doctrine.

Once the Red and White Armies became a more dominant force in the region, the peasant armies again took up arms. As Makhno’s reputation grew, several peasant armies easily accepted Makhno’s lead and combined their forces. Although desertion was high in both the Red and White Armies, in the Makhnovist Armies, because of his reputation as a brave man of the people who had shown many times that he was representing their interest, desertion was very low. When fighting became particularly futile, “the Makhnovists would bury their weapons, make their way singly back to their villages, and take up work in the fields, awaiting a signal to unearth a new cache of arms and spring up again in an unexpected quarter.”<sup>25</sup> The strength of the Makhnovist armies was due also to the extreme conditions of fighting against two forces of oppression that caused many peasants and workers to see a common bond-fighting for freedom of local self-government.

While Makhno’s troops traversed villages, he did not pillage and destroy the crops and homes of its inhabitants. On the contrary, “his first act on entering a town-after throwing open the prisons-was to dispel any impression that he had come to introduce a new form of political rule...[announcing to] the inhabitants that they were now free to organize their lives as they

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<sup>24</sup> Avrich, *Portraits*, p.120

<sup>25</sup> Avrich, *Portraits*, p.113