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The Warrior

Nestor Makhno, the bandit who saved Moscow

Max Nomad

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Contents

The Revolution of 1917	8
The “Little Father”	11
The White Peril	15
The “Jew-Killer”	17
Black and Red	19
The Grigoriev Affair	23
Leon Trotsky’s Crusade	25
Outlawed	27
The Great Battle	31
The “Bandit Army”	34
The Great Experiment	37
The Aftermath	41
The Struggle for the Peasant	43
Between Trotsky and Wrangel	46
The Last Fight	51

References

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ter the Revolution of 1917, in charge of Makhno's educational and propaganda activities. In 1935 he rejoined the Bolsheviks whom he had left in 1906 when he became an Anarchist. He is the author of an extensive History of the Makhnovist Movement — a book that has been translated into many languages and has become one of the classics of international anarchist literature. In recounting the struggles between Makhno and the Bolsheviks the present writer has largely accepted the facts as given by Peter Arshinov. Strange as it may appear, Arshinov's desertion to his former bitter enemies was in reality not an act of renegacy. The experience of the Makhnovist movement, as well as of some of the Anarchist uprisings in Spain between 1931 and 1933, have shown that anarchism in action is bound to assume forms usually termed Jacobinism, Blanquism or Bolshevism; in other words, that in one form or another, it will resort to the establishment of a revolutionary government and thus become untrue to the main tenet of its own philosophy. After fifteen years of starvation and exile he apparently drew the conclusion which permitted him both to remain consistent with himself and to jump upon the big bandwagon. That conclusion was quite simple: once the point at issue was the question of what group of professional revolutionists was to get supreme power in a collectivist system of society — a combination of *declassé* intellectuals and ex-workers, or a similar combination of ex-workers and peasant ex-noncoms — it was no longer a matter of principle, but merely of personal preferences, whether that power was wielded in the name of Marx and Stalin, or in that of Bakunin and Arshinov.

If one is to believe the report of the Moscow correspondent of the Paris *Le Temps*, there was not a single word about Makhno's death in the press of the Soviet Union. To the growing Russian generation to whom Trotsky is a traitor and a counterrevolutionist, Makhno, if his name is known at all, is just one of the petty, contemptible bandits who infested the Ukraine during the civil war, and helped the Whites in their struggle against the Revolution.

Present-day Paris is the great political cemetery for shattered hopes and broken ambitions. Liberal German professors and Spanish Left-wing Anarchists, Russian "Whites" and Polish Socialists, Chinese followers of Trotsky and Armenian Nationalists, Austrian Monarchists and Italian Fascist dissenters, sometimes sit at the same few tables of a cheap restaurant unknown to each other. Paris is hospitable to all of them, provided they leave French affairs alone, and comply with the police regulations.

One of those walking political corpses, the Ukrainian Nestor Makhno, actually died late in 1934 — almost forgotten by most of his contemporaries. For years he had worn the unenviable halo of a bloodthirsty ruffian, a leader of counterrevolutionary cutthroats and the most dreaded organizer of anti-Semitic pogroms. Yet anyone who was anxious to see him could meet him every Saturday night in the Russian-Jewish Anarchist Workers' Club of Paris.

The contrast between his personal and political affiliations on the one hand, and the stories spread about him on the other, is characteristic of the many contradictions surrounding that strange figure. That short, insignificant-looking invalid, with the pallor of a consumptive in his last stage, had fifteen years before been one of the most heroic and glamorous figures of the Russian civil war. A semi-educated worker not endowed with any gift of eloquence, he had aroused millions of Ukrainian peasants to a life-and-death struggle against their despoilers. A "lifer" at nineteen, who had never had regular military training, he had dealt that deadly blow to the White Army which greatly contributed to its final destruction. Organizer of an anarchist guerrilla band, and later division general in the Red Army, he had dared the anger of the then almighty Trotsky, who ordered him shot at sight.

Several years later, in misery and near-oblivion, he was coughing and drinking himself to death in a Paris slum district, only a few miles away from his ancient foe, now fallen from grace and denigrated in his country like himself. Yet, he had only to compromise a little with his principles — or perhaps with his own ambi-

tions? — and he would have been still alive at present, the idol of budding military heroes, chief of the Soviet Union's cavalry, or perhaps even Trotsky's successor in the supreme command of the Red Army.

Nestor Ivanovich Makhno was born in 1889, the youngest son of a poor Ukrainian peasant. At that time his native village, Gulyai Polye, was an unknown place in the province of Ekaterinoslav, about sixty miles north of the Sea of Azov. Thirty years later he was to put that place on the map. It became his "capital," the center of his operations, from which he went out to free the Ukraine of all her masters, German invaders, Ukrainian bourgeois nationalists, Tsarist generals and Bolshevik bureaucrats.

He lost his father when he was hardly one year old, and had to earn his living after the age of seven. Tending the cattle and sheep of the local peasants, working hard as a farm laborer and later as a painter in a foundry shop, four winters of public school was all the training he had. He never was a schoolteacher, as a persistent legend has it — apparently in order to brand him as an "intellectual."

The first Russian Revolution, that of 1905, aroused in him those sentiments of active protest which were to determine the whole pattern of his life. Only the most extreme expression of that protest would satisfy his longing for justice and revenge. He found it in the Anarchist movement. Russian Anarchism of those years had its orthodox main current, and its various Right Wing and Left Wing "deviations," just as the other revolutionary parties and organizations. It was weaker numerically than either the Mensheviks, the Bolsheviks, or the Populist "Social-Revolutionists." But it towered above the anarchist movements in other countries. Its communists, whether or not they understood the intricacies of their respective philosophies, were mostly fanatical men of action, and not merely dreamers and hairsplitters. Their protest against "the double yoke of Capital and State" found its expression in terrorist acts against the representatives of these two forces, while the Marxists were altogether opposed to individual terrorism and the Social-

just as the Bolsheviks seem to think that the transfer of all the good things of life from the expropriated capitalists to a newly enthroned officeholders' class is identical with the "emancipation of the proletariat."

Makhno was particularly bitter when writing about the Ukraine, his homeland, whose liberator he had hoped to become. Her inclusion in the Soviet Union was in his opinion comparable to her occupation by the German and Austrian armies during the World War — only camouflaged by "Bolshevik hot air." He considered as sheer hypocrisy that clause of the Soviet Constitution of 1923 which granted self-determination to each of the constituent republics, including the right of withdrawal from the Union. For anyone caught in the "act" of advocating such a withdrawal would never get another chance of advocating anything at all. Unwittingly he gave vent to the nationalist longings of most of his countrymen. For in the remote recesses of their hearts even the Ukrainian Communists dream of the well-being their country might enjoy if it did not have to share its enormous wealth with the rest of the Soviet Union. They seem to be perfectly oblivious to the words of the Gospel that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

When in 1934 Makhno breathed his last in a Paris hospital, he left few mourners outside of Spain, where the powerful anarcho-syndicalist movement has erected him a monument in the hearts of a million organized workers. Of the old comrades of his heroic days hardly more than two have survived. The Jewish intellectual V. M. Eichenbaum ("Volin") has remained faithful to his old anarchist hatred of Bolshevism, against which he issued in 1934 a French pamphlet under the title Red Fascism. A poetical soul rather than a theoretical thinker, he has preferred the loneliness of exile and the quixotic devotion to a vague and inconsistent gospel to surrender to the modern Jacobin Bonapartists of a spurious communism. The other of the two, the Russian metal-worker Peter Arshinov, was a revolutionary terrorist in the days of the Tsar, and later, af-

part of the Revolution which his heroism had saved, disappointment with the moribund state of the anarchist movement — all this was gradually breaking him physically and mentally. At times the consoling bottle became his only escape from suicide or worse. He lost many of his old friends and admirers. It was chiefly the assistance of the Spanish Anarchists which kept him from actual starvation.

It was exactly at that time that the French novelist and Soviet propagandist, Henri Barbusse, charged him with being a paid agent of the Allied Governments. A similar charge, that the French had supported Makhno with arms and ammunition, was brought by General Slashchev, once Wrangel's right-hand man and pogrom-monger, who later made up his mind to change his masters and to become a professor at the Soviet Military Academy. (The official Soviet historian, though quoting that accusation, doubted its veracity.) The unceasing stream of slander and vilification has well-nigh succeeded in blackening his name forever. As if all of this were not enough, a spurious diary of "Makhno's wife" was published by the Soviet press presenting the *Batko* as a drunken wretch staggering on the village roads of his territory and playing the accordion to the amused and disgusted peasants. And last but not least there was the persistent accusation of Jew-killing, coupled with an abundant stream of novels and short stories depicting the hero of Gulyai Polye as an unspeakable ruffian and a bloodthirsty, lecherous bandit.

In Paris Makhno wrote his reminiscences, and he contributed to a Russian anarchist monthly in Paris, which printed his articles in deference to his name rather than to their contents. His theoretical schooling was rather rudimentary and his style primitive. He would call the State "a disgusting institution" and deprecate the military importance of his old foe Trotsky by calling him a "sergeant-major." He seemed to have believed that if men calling themselves Anarchists were entrusted with power and authority, the social system established by them would abolish all authority;

Revolutionists applied it only against the organs of the Tsarist Government.

As a member of one of these Anarchist groups Makhno participated in a minor terrorist exploit that claimed the life of a police captain. Condemned to death, he escaped the gallows due to the fact that he was not yet twenty. The Moscow penitentiary in which he was supposed to spend the rest of his life did not succeed in breaking his spirit or calming his fiery temperament — even though his hands and feet were chained most of the time. Always at war with the prison guards, he was a frequent guest in the damp, unheated disciplinary cells. His lungs became affected, and the constant realization that he was doomed, anyhow, might have still added to his reckless courage and contempt of death. When at peace with his guards, he used the prison library to extend his rudimentary education. A smattering of Russian literature and grammar, some history — perhaps some treatises on the technique of warfare? — and he had those scant elements of knowledge which made his later career possible.

The Revolution of 1917

At last the Revolution of 1917 opened the doors of his prison after nine years. He returned to his native village, where quite naturally he became the most respected personage in spite of his youthful age of twenty-eight. His Anarchism notwithstanding, he became vice-president of the autonomous local administration, and chairman of the local union of peasants and rural laborers. In August, 1917, three months before the Bolshevik revolution, he anticipated its main feature — by initiating the forcible expropriation of all big landholders.

At that time the Ukraine was ruled by a nationalist party usually called after the name of its leader, Simeon Petlura, whose aspirations tended towards independence, or at least very broad autonomy. The Bolshevik revolution was for them the pretext for complete separation. During the Brest-Litovsk peace negotiations early in 1918, they sided with the Central Powers in order to obtain their assistance against the Russian Communists who had occupied the Ukraine by January, 1918. The Germans actually helped them to drive out the Bolsheviks, but they would not permit them to remain in power. To the Prussian Junkers this typical nationalist party of prosperous peasants, headed by obscure country lawyers, insurance agents and schoolteachers, had the same taint of radical plebeianism as had the Russian Reds. Whatever their opposition to Socialist or Communist philosophy, Petlura and his men would certainly have made no attempts to return the land to the Polish and Russian nobles from whom it was seized. (There were practically no Ukrainians among the big landholders in the Ukraine.) After a few weeks of power the parliamentary government of the national-

Exile and Death

Bleeding from many wounds, his army reduced to a mere handful, Makhno sought refuge in Rumanian territory. This happened in August, 1921. He was immediately arrested and placed in a concentration camp. In official Soviet history this became evidence of his “alliance with the Rumanian King.” Less than a year later he escaped to Poland. He was interned in the Warsaw prison and accused of fomenting a rebellion of the four million Ukrainians of Galicia in order to bring that territory under Soviet rule! This was at least as good as his “alliance with the Rumanian King.”

Even in foreign prisons and in exile Makhno remained a spectre haunting his former Bolshevik allies. Through their ambassador, Christian Rakovsky — who later was possibly ashamed of it — they insistently demanded his extradition as a “bandit,” though they hardly made such requests with regard to the “White” generals, Denikin and Wrangel, whom he had helped to destroy. For reasons of their own Poland and Rumania refused, just as for similar reasons the Kaiser’s Government permitted Lenin and his friends to cross Germany in that famous “sealed car.” At the same time the Polish-Russian Communist Felix Kon had the sad courage to call the heroic Anarchist “the White-Guardist Hetman.” Felix Kon had spent sixteen years of his life at hard labor in Tsarist penitentiaries; yet a few years of participation in the power of the Tsar’s successors made him sink below the level of his former persecutors.

At last by 1923 Makhno was able to leave Poland and find refuge in France. Then came years of misery and despair. Consumption, never-healing wounds, brooding over the black ingratitude on the

even further than that — toward a sort of Anarchist Ukraine and even Russia. Who knows?

Makhno's hopes were not realized. True, he had some moments of triumph, as when in one case he was joined by an entire Red Cavalry brigade with its commanding staff. But these were exceptions. His own army hardly ever exceeded three thousand men, harassed continually and sometimes even surrounded by an enemy fifty times stronger. It was an eight months' march into almost certain annihilation, with his men gradually succumbing to bullets, disease, and hardships. Cut off from his native base, he often made extended raids into central and eastern Russia, as far as the Volga and the Don Rivers. Was he thinking of Stenka Razin and Emelyan Pugachev, rebel leaders of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, who had aroused millions of peasants against their masters and seriously threatened the rule of the Tsars?

Paradoxical as it may sound, it was the Kronstadt sailors' revolt of March, 1921, and, shortly afterwards, the peasant uprising in the province of Tambov, which spelled the doom of Makhno's hopes. These revolts, on Russian territory proper, had been animated by the same spirit of peasant dissatisfaction against the crude food seizures, which caused the Ukrainian peasants to support the Anarchist *Batko*. Lenin saw the writing on the wall, and inaugurated the New Economic Policy, with its Single Agricultural Tax as a substitute for the hated requisitions. This measure either reconciled or placated the great majority of the peasants. Their chief grievance removed, they were no longer interested in supplying man power and material support for an armed struggle against the Government. Left to his own resources, Makhno remained isolated with his faithful troop of adventurous dare-devils — forced to resort to "requisitions" whenever the food they needed was not supplied voluntarily.

ist party was "liquidated" by the military authorities of the Central Powers. The place of Petlura was taken by a German puppet, the Russian-Ukrainian General Skoropadsky. That general went out to organize a semi-absolutist monarchist administration, fit for a near-Asiatic German colony. He assumed the historical Ukrainian Cossack title of "Hetman" and was slated to become the founder of a new dynasty.

Makhno had to go into hiding and was soon back in Moscow. He consulted his better-read anarchist comrades, expecting from them some concrete advice for his future revolutionary activities. But his friends were very vague and left him theoretically in the air. Anarchism is a very revolutionary theory for nonrevolutionary times.¹ It has little to offer when it comes to immediate realizations, for the anarchists themselves are aware that the time for their lofty ideal has not come as yet. So Makhno decided to rely on his own intuition, so to speak. His only adviser was the metal worker Peter Arshinov, an active terrorist and Makhno's fellow-prisoner prior to 1917, who had a certain gift of writing and of spinning revolutionary theories.

In the meantime the German foraging expeditions in the Ukraine, covered by the authority of the Hetman's administration, were driving the peasants to revolt. These had sullenly submitted to the return of the land they had seized, but they would rather destroy their own crops than let them be carried away by the German and Austrian invaders. In retaliation the German militarists resorted to those punitive measures which had made their name dreaded in their Central African colonies. In turn, the peasants in many places replied by forming guerrilla bands which, while harassing the invaders, were at the same time committing unspeakable massacres among the Jewish population as well.

¹ In 1936 Leon Trotsky aptly characterized this aspect of anarchism by comparing that theory to those raincoats which are excellent except when it rains.

This was particularly the case in the northern provinces where practically all the trade was in the hands of the Jews.

In July, 1918, Makhno returned secretly to his native district. He too was going to start a guerrilla campaign against the peasants' enemies. But it was not to be under the Ukrainian chauvinist slogans of the nationalist schoolteachers and ex-officers of the north, who egged the peasants on against the Russians, the Poles and the Jews.

Makhno's revolutionary-internationalist propaganda fell on propitious ground in the southeastern Ukraine. The Jews constituted a minority among the merchants of his region, and the social classes were not separated along racial lines as in the north, where the bulk of the Ukrainian-speaking peasantry was faced by Polish landed noblemen, Russian big landowners and government officials, and Jewish traders. In fact there was a great mixture of various nationalities in the southeast, including Greeks and Bulgars, the predominating element being of course the Ukrainians.

The Last Fight

With his special cavalry detachment, or bodyguard, of one hundred and fifty to two hundred men, Makhno broke through the Red Army lines which had been gradually encircling Gulyai Polye. As in former days, the magnetism of his name immediately attracted various unattached guerrilla bands as well as Red Army soldiers, who deserted to the outlaw. Soon he had fifteen hundred cavalrymen and one thousand infantry. With this midget army he immediately turned upon his pursuers, who were out for his head. The first weeks were rather encouraging for the Rebel. The Red Army soldiers, mostly peasants, were not very eager to fight a man whom they dimly suspected to be the champion of their rights, their own flesh and blood. They showed little fight and this enabled Makhno to be often victorious over a numerically much superior foe.

Sometimes he would take twice as many prisoners as he himself had men. But only a small part of that number were ready to enter his ranks as volunteers. The rest were sent "home." A few days later they were, of course, again in the Red Army; special commissions had been established to take care of the released prisoners. The Red Army authorities did not have the same compunctions with regard to the prisoners taken from Makhno. As a rule, they had them shot in order to prevent the contamination of the Red Army soldiers. Such is civil war.

For a while Makhno and his friends had illusions that they would be able to win. They hoped that after a few victories a part of the Red Army would pass over to them, while the rest would retire northward and leave their territory alone. Maybe their hopes went

Leon Trotsky, Chief of the Red Army, and Christian Rakovsky, President of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic, were the two men wholly responsible for the action taken against their most fearless allies in the struggle against the Whites. Seven years later they were both arrested, ostracized, and exiled as “counter-revolutionists.”

The “Little Father”

Makhno’s beginnings were modest enough. With his first group of five men he attacked the manor of a Russian noble family, several of whose members served as police officers. Aside from the lives of the inhabitants they took several rifles, horses, and police uniforms. They increased their band, and at the next opportunity their uniforms gained them access to a ball of the local aristocratic gentry at which they killed off all the participants. Wherever they went the peasants gladly changed their horses. The next day they would reappear in another province, sixty or seventy miles away, and exterminate the officers and special guards, Germans, Austrians or natives. Mercy was shown only to the private soldiers of those armies.

It took only a few weeks and Makhno and his growing band became the terror of the respectable people — the symbol of the peasants’ revenge. Hundreds of manors were destroyed, thousands of those whom the farmers considered as their enemies were killed. Makhno’s reputation grew and drew larger and larger armed forces into his ranks. Guerrilla bands which hitherto had acted independently under leaders of their own, joined Makhno and accepted his command.

He was not merely a guerrilla leader but an agitator as well. Tirelessly he launched leaflets and appeals, addressed to the peasants, the enemy soldiers, the Cossacks. The word “Anarchy,” in the meaning of “No-government,” was not mentioned in his propaganda. But the gist of that idea was expressed in simple words voicing hostility to any central government that would rule them either from Moscow or from Kiev, either in the name of a “proletarian dictator-

ship,” or in the name of a bourgeois-democratic Ukrainian People’s Republic. Unsophisticated young Makhno, like most of the other Anarchists, was of course unaware of the fact that the Anarchy he adored was at bottom a misnomer; that it was merely the extreme form of democracy, with every village and district enjoying the greatest autonomy and having the right to decide its own destinies and to elect its own authorities. To what extent such an ideal might be realized under the present highly complicated social conditions, is another question which need not be discussed here.

Less than two months after he started his great punitive expedition, he achieved a feat which was the crowning of the legend that had already begun to form around his name. On September 30, 1918, while heading a small force of thirty men, and in possession of only one machine gun, he found himself opposed by a force of one thousand Austrian soldiers and special guards composed of the sons of rich farmers. A strategic ruse and a reckless attack succeeded in routing an enemy who outnumbered him thirty to one. His men, who at that encounter expected to die, proclaimed him then and there their *Batko*, the Ukrainian equivalent for “Little Father,” carrying the additional meaning of supreme military chieftain. Local peasants, as well as guerrilla detachments from other sections, fascinated by this heroic feat, likewise decided to declare him the *Batko* of all revolutionary guerrilla forces of the South.

In the meantime the World War was coming to an end. By November, 1918, the Germans and the Austrians began to withdraw their armies from the Ukraine — about half a million men. Deprived of their support, the “Hetman” Skoropadsky was unable to stand on his own feet. “Free” once again, the Ukraine became the object of a bloody civil war, with three claimants presenting their titles. The first in the field were the Ukrainian nationalist followers of Petlura, the idol of the educated middle classes and of the rich peasantry. With the help of the numerous guerrilla bands of the northern provinces they had forced the “Hetman” to flee, and had taken Kiev, the ancient capital of the Ukraine. Their rule

calls an interesting conversation which, as a political prisoner, he had at the time with Samsonov, one of the heads of the Cheka. To Volin’s remark that the Bolshevik treatment of Makhno at the time when they had an agreement with him was an act of treachery, Samsonov replied: “*You consider this treachery? We knew how to use Makhno when we needed him; and when he became useless to us, we contrived to liquidate him.*”

There were also official reasons for that course of action, which sounded better than Samsonov’s cynical admission. Makhno, it was declared, was mobilizing the peasants and preparing a new army to fight against the Soviet Government. He refused to go to the Caucasus front to which he had been ordered by the supreme military command, and instead of fighting in the Crimea against Wrangel, he was fighting in the rear against the Red Army. The Makhnovists, on the other hand, deny all these allegations. The official Soviet historian Kubanin admits that the Red Army attacked Makhno “before he had the time to strike.” So it was a case of “preventive killing.” [336]

It may very well be that Trotsky and his subordinates actually believed that Makhno had such intentions to rise against the Soviet Government. The dissatisfaction of the peasants all over the Soviet Republic was growing. It was to express itself three months later in the Kronstadt and Tambov rebellions. The situation was certainly very propitious for the spread of a Makhnovist *Jacquerie* all over the Ukraine and even over the rest of Russia.

The executions in the Crimea were accompanied by simultaneous mass arrests of all Anarchists and Makhnovists throughout the Ukraine. It was all carefully prepared many days in advance. Red soldiers who in the ensuing fights were captured by the insurgents had with them undated leaflets entitled “Forward against Makhno!” These leaflets, they admitted, were given to them on November 15 and 16, that is on the very day on which Makhno’s men had just broken into Wrangel’s stronghold and taken his capital Simferopol!

autonomous and federative connection, based on agreements with the government organs of the Soviet Republics.” That last point was subject to confirmation by the central authorities of the Soviet Republic. Needless to say, it never was accepted — though no reasons were given.

The Soviet press was in no great hurry to publish the agreement, for it gave the lie to all its former assertions that Makhno was an ally of Wrangel, that he was a bandit, and the like. It was only when the Makhno troops threatened to balk that the agreement was published — in two weekly installments, although the whole document contained no more than five hundred words. Moreover, its military clauses were published first, and the political clauses a week later. The Anarchists charge, quite plausibly, that this was done deliberately in order to prevent the readers from grasping the full significance of the agreement. At the same time the Ukrainian Soviet papers published the statement that Makhno had never negotiated with Wrangel and that former reports to that effect were based on wrong information.

Within three weeks, Wrangel’s troops were cleared out from Makhno’s territory, and after that the *Batko*’s men took a prominent part in the Crimean campaign that drove Wrangel into the sea. On November 15, Simferopol, the capital of the Crimea, was taken and the fate of the Whites sealed forever. Ten days later the chief commander of Makhno’s troops in the Crimea and all of his staff members were arrested by the Bolsheviks and shot. Only the commander of the cavalry escaped by breaking through the Red Army detachments that were to arrest him. But of his fine fifteen hundred horsemen, the pride of Makhno’s troops, only two hundred and fifty had remained alive, when eleven days later they re-joined Makhno in Gulyai Polye. The *Batko* had not taken part in the Crimean offensive. He had a shattered leg from one of his previous campaigns and had to remain at his headquarters.

The well-known Russian Anarchist, V. M. Eichenbaum (“Volin”), in his preface to Arshinov’s history of the Makhno movement, re-

lasted hardly more than two months. For no sooner had Petlura begun to organize his own administration and his own regular army, than the Russian Red troops swooped down upon them from the north. Kiev was Russian again.

While those changes were going on in the north, Makhno took advantage of the disintegration of the German and Austrian armies to get as much military equipment as possible. As a result, he could soon organize a few regiments of infantry and cavalry and even a battery of artillery. He had also a large number of machine guns. Had he only accepted the invitation of the Ukrainian nationalists, he would have become one of the most celebrated generals in their army, then in the process of formation. But a “kulak” Ukraine, headed by schoolteachers and lawyers, was not the acme of his aspirations.

He had his first armed conflict with them when with four hundred men he went out to take Ekaterinoslav (now renamed Dniepropetrovsk), the provincial capital of his own home region. The Bolsheviks in one of the near-by localities placed a number of armed workers at his disposal. A military ruse delivered the city into the hands of his men. They boarded a freight train, crossed the Dnieper bridge and seized the railway station in the center of the city. Had his enemies had but the slightest suspicion, not one of its disguised passengers would have remained alive. [309]

Another military ruse, which distinguished his later campaigns during the various phases of the Civil War, has remained inseparably connected with his name. His boys, wearing plain peasant garb, would enter a city or other urban settlement to sell their cabbage on the market place. At a whistle’s blow, the buggies with the cabbage were upside down, the concealed machine guns were in operation, and the city was occupied before the Whites could think of organizing any defense.

It was because his men were practically all peasants that they could often get out of situations which no other guerrilla army would have survived. Cornered, they would individually slink back

to their villages, bury their arms, take up their work in their fields as if nothing had happened — only to reassemble at the next signal.

The Ukrainian Nationalists who established a regular front against Makhno's little "republic" soon disappeared as a concrete danger. Their troops, consisting either of former guerrilla fighters or of mobilized peasants, were easily "demoralized" by the contact with the wild men from the South. Soon the vast territories north of Gulyai Polye were left to themselves, as it were, without strong governmental authority and without garrisons.

peasants to throw in their lot with the Whites. Tragically enough, that brigade was headed by a sincere, though naive, revolutionist. Misguided by the Bolshevik accusations and by Wrangel's bragging, he had actually thought he was serving the cause of Makhno by going over to the Whites. When he found out his mistake, he came over to his old leader in order to die at his hand. But Makhno induced him to bring over the whole staff of his brigade, examined the men in the presence of a representative of the Red Army, and used the information obtained to launch a terrific unexpected attack that broke up Wrangel's "invincible" Drozdov Brigade.

In the meantime the war with Poland took an unexpected turn. At the very doors of Warsaw, the Polish Army, vigorously supported by the French, had defeated the Red Army and nullified most of its previous victories. General Wrangel, hitherto considered a negligible quantity, became an actual menace. Large sections of the South were in his hands. This decided the Soviet authorities to consider Makhno's proposals for joint action, which they had spurned two months before.

The written agreement concluded in the middle of October, 1920, between the Red Army and the "outlaws," contained a political and a military section. In the political section, the Bolsheviks promised the immediate liberation of all arrested Makhnovists and other Anarchists, granting them full freedom of oral and printed propaganda. Moreover, the Anarchists could participate in the preparations for the forthcoming All-Ukrainian Soviet Conference, and be elected to the various Soviet bodies. The military agreement, which incorporated the "Insurgents" in the Red Army, contained an interesting clause barring detachments of the Red Army from entrance into Makhno's ranks: an evidence of the great attraction which the romantic halo of these fearless fighters exerted upon many members of the Soviet armed forces. An unsigned clause of the political agreement demanded local autonomy for Makhno's territory, or, as the clause put it, "the establishment ... of free organs of political and economic self-government, their

Between Trotsky and Wrangel

The war with Poland encouraged those White elements which had remained in the Crimea and entrenched themselves behind the impregnable isthmus of Perekop. Headed by General Wrangel, whom the English and French kept supplied with ammunition through the Black Sea ports, they invaded the Ukraine, threatening the territory so dear to Makhno. In the course of the summer, 1920, Makhno made repeated counterattacks against Wrangel, but more often than not he would get between two fires. The Red Army, sure of its victory over the Poles, left unanswered all his offers to collaborate with them against the Whites. They had even men to spare for the pursuit of the indomitable rebel and thus thwarted his attacks against the last “White” hope of the Allied powers.

Very much that happened during that year looked like an exact repetition of the events of the preceding year. Just as before Makhno had been accused of having opened the front to Denikin, he was now declared to have made an alliance with Wrangel. The fact of the matter was that Wrangel repeatedly sent to him officers offering him complete territorial autonomy, on condition that Makhno would join his forces against the Bolsheviks. Messengers of this kind were shot immediately. The leader of the Whites, aware of Makhno’s prestige among the local peasantry, now engaged upon a very subtle game. He pretended that Makhno was with him, and organized spurious “Makhnovist” groups working among the peasantry. As a result, orders were given by Makhno to kill any Wrangel man taken prisoner.

Eventually Wrangel went even as far as to set afoot a special “Tenth Brigade named after *Batko* Makhno,” in order to induce the

The White Peril

In the meantime a new danger began to threaten Makhno. The old Tsarist generals had retired to the southeastern corners of European Russia, the Caucasus and the Don Region. Thousands of officers of the old army flocked to their banners and formed the nucleus of the White Army. They found willing recruits among some of the semi-savage mountain tribes as well as among the Cossacks. Emboldened by the material support on the part of the Allied powers, they began to move north and westward.

It was an adversary much more serious than the enemies he had met before. The few regiments Makhno had raised by that time — not more than twenty thousand men — were not sufficient to stem that force. His Anarchism now faced a very ticklish situation. To increase the ranks of the fighters the “Conference of Workers, Peasants and Insurgents” of his region, held in February, 1919, decided to declare a “voluntary mobilization” of all able-bodied men coming within certain age classes. The word “voluntary” saved the purity of Makhno’s Anarchist principles. His own paper, the *Road to Freedom* (May 24, 1919) explained the meaning of that word to the effect that the peasants had voluntarily decided to be mobilized, and that therefore nobody was permitted to refuse service. The conference elected a Regional Military Revolutionary Soviet of Peasants, Workers and Insurgents, which for all practical purposes formed the government of the region. Yet it all went under the name of Anarchism.

Fighting the White Army was a tough job. The mobilization had given Makhno a certain reserve of young men, but no new soldiers. His supply of arms was limited, and he could get new ones only

from the enemies he killed. But that adversary fought well. Two White regiments consisted exclusively of former officers — desperate characters, and therefore excellent soldiers. Moreover, the enemy adopted Makhno's tactics of sudden cavalry raids in the rear, and even greatly "improved" upon them. His foes terrorized the peaceful population and murdered all those suspected of supporting the *Batko*. It was also at that time that the Whites began a systematic extermination of the Jewish population, though the latter as a whole took no part in the fights between the Whites, the Reds, and the Greens. (The "Greens" was the general term — sometimes incorrectly applied to Makhno as well — under which all the peasant guerrilla forces were usually designated.)

and looked with a certain contempt upon their own infantry. And the *Batko* himself, as in the good old feudal times, was surrounded by a chosen troop of crack bodyguards, wielding the absolute authority of a primitive chieftain — or of a party chief in a totalitarian state.

Makhno's friends, in facing the "kulak" charge coming from the Bolsheviks, had and still have always an answer ready, which, though not a refutation, was at least an effective rejoinder. They pointed to the fact that the alleged proletarian regime established by Lenin's disciples has created a new sort of swivel-chair "kulaks" whose privileges with regard to the rest of the population greatly exceeded those of the village kulaks over the other peasants. It was their allusion to the economic advantages enjoyed by the ever growing number of officeholders, technicians, specialists, party organizers, in short, the new hierarchy now ruling the Soviet Republic.

But whatever the rights or the wrongs in that controversy between the Makhnovists and the Bolsheviks, the blow dealt to the *Batko* through the establishment of the "Committees of the Poor" was a very painful one. Some of the leaders and members of the "Committees" went rather far in their new loyalty. Not only did they become part of the Soviet administrative apparatus which was opposed by the great mass of the peasantry, but some of them also to all practical purposes became informers helping the Bolshevik secret police to hunt down and to execute wounded Makhno soldiers who were being taken care of by the local peasantry.

Makhno retaliated in kind and gave no quarter to those who helped his enemies. Human life grew cheaper and cheaper as the struggle went on. The *Batko's* heart became hardened and he sometimes ordered executions where some generosity would have bestowed more credit upon him and his movement. The fact that the Bolsheviks had preceded him with the bad example was no excuse. For he claimed to be fighting for a better cause.

desired results, for the requisitions of grain, cattle, and horses continued. And not only did the peasants never get any pay for what the Government took away — they often saw with great indignation how the seized fodder, instead of being used, was left to rot at the railway stations, because of either inefficiency or sabotage.

The next step of the Bolsheviks was to carry the class war into the very village. They supported the landless and near-landless as against the middle and more prosperous strata, organized them in “Committees of the Poor” and let them have a share in the grain seized from the other peasants. That Bolshevik stratagem failed to establish equal land distribution in the rural regions, nor was such a redistribution intended. The aim was to create within the village a sort of auxiliary force that would help in the forcible grain requisitions by the authorities. It was a very subtle move, and it placed Makhno in an awkward position.

Makhno could have counteracted the Bolshevik inroads among the poorer sections of the peasantry by putting an end to the economic inequalities within the rural population. However, he was not prepared to go as far as that — for the time being, at least. The *Batko* was apparently afraid lest such a measure, with its ensuing internecine conflicts within the village, should break the backbone of his military resistance. His wish was to maintain a sort of united front of the entire peasantry until the Bolshevik officeholders had been forced to leave his countryside alone. After that he and his Anarchist assistants would have possibly attempted to inaugurate a collective form of agriculture.

So he maintained the existing inequalities, and thus to a certain extent justified the gibes of his Bolshevik enemies and the criticism of his anarcho-syndicalist cousins — to wit, that in spite of all his Anarchist verbiage, he was at bottom a typical peasant rebel whose movement, if victorious, would not have gone beyond the establishment of a farmers’ republic. That very un-Anarchist element of inequality was conspicuous within his military forces as well. Makhno’s horsemen constituted a sort of “Anarchist” nobility,

The “Jew-Killer”

The fact that pogroms took place in that region has given rise to an almost ineradicable general belief that these anti-Jewish massacres were fostered and organized by Makhno. Writers like the well-known Russian emigre and French author, J. Kessel, have vied with Soviet novelists like Pilnyak and Veresayev, in representing him in their stories as a pogrom-monger. Jewish publications all over the world have continually voiced that accusation. A special book published in Moscow in 1926, about the Jewish Pogroms of 1918–1921, features his picture at the head of its album of “famous” Jew-killers. When in 1927 Petlura, the emigre leader of the Ukrainian Nationalists, was killed in Paris in retaliation for the pogroms committed by the guerrilla bands in northern Ukraine, Makhno, who was then in Paris, might have easily suffered the same fate at the hands of some fanatical and misinformed avenger of Jewish wrongs. Yet the official records published by Soviet historians expressly deny his guilt in this respect.

However, there was the proverbial fire behind the smoke of slander directed against Makhno. Anti-Jewish feeling — just as anti-Greek or anti-Armenian feeling among many Moslem populations — was very strong all over the Ukraine, as part of the old class antagonism between peasant and trader. The *Batko*’s men were not exempt from it. There was a case when a few Makhno soldiers on furlough — and a Makhno soldier on furlough was just a Ukrainian peasant — seeing two decomposed corpses near a Jewish settlement, attacked its inhabitants and killed thirty persons in the belief that the dead men were their comrades who had been murdered by

the Jews. The commander of that troop was shot by Makhno. Another of his men was shot for merely displaying a hand-written poster bearing the legend "Beat the Jews, Save Russia!" (Occasionally pogroms were committed by Red Army soldiers as well, as can be seen from Red Cavalry, the famous epic of Budenny's Red horsemen by the well-known Soviet writer Babel.) The explanation of Makhno's particularly tragic reputation lies partly in the fact that very often bands of ordinary robbers operating in Makhno's territory would assume the name of the Anarchist's dreaded followers in order to intimidate the population.

The permanent slur on his name actually poisoned Makhno's life for the rest of his days. In 1926 Anarchist papers in various languages published his appeal "To the Jews of All Countries," a pathetic document proving irrefutably his complete innocence of all these charges. In fact, nothing was further from him than any racial feeling. Not only were "some of his best friends" Jews, but a Jewish intellectual, V. M. Eichenbaum ("Volin"), was for a few months Chairman of his Military Revolutionary Council and editor of Makhno's proclamations; a Jewish worker was the vice-president of his local administrative body in his "capital," Gulyai Polye; his artillery battery was manned exclusively by Jewish city workers, all of whom sooner or later perished at the hands of the Whites.

For six months, from January, 1919, to June, 1919, Makhno's troops held a large front, nearly seventy miles long, stretching northward from Mariupol on the Azov Sea. Some of his attacks drove the White invaders nearly one hundred miles back to their strongly defended bases in Taganrog and Rostov on the Don. All the sadistic bestiality of which the Whites were capable they vented on their Makhnovist prisoners, sometimes even roasting them alive on red-hot iron sheets. It is hard to imagine what they would have done to Makhno himself, upon whose head they placed a prize of half a million rubles.

The Struggle for the Peasant

The terrific onslaughts of the retreating Whites, typhus, and finally the fights with the Red Army had greatly reduced Makhno's forces. He had now perhaps not more than five thousand armed men left. However, he had with him the full sympathy of the local population. That sympathy was one of the manifestations of the peasants' aversion to the Central Government. A similar sullen mood, directed against the Government authorities, prevailed in other sections of the Soviet Republic as well. It expressed the peasants' protest against the food requisitions which the rural population regarded as outright robbery. In the course of nine months about one thousand Soviet officials entrusted with grain requisitions in Makhno's territory were killed by the embittered peasants. The official Soviet historian calls those villages which most strenuously objected to, and prevented, those seizures "bandit villages," without realizing all the unconscious humor of that designation. Moreover, the same historian a few pages further on frankly admits that sometimes a good half of the Red Army soldiers were in favor of Makhno, that is of the "bandits." Another Soviet historian, Yakovlev, speaking about Makhno's great prestige in his territory, says that the Communists could not find anybody in the villages "who could be our ally in the struggle against the bandits." The peasants, in their blindness, apparently did not see the "bandits" in quite the same light.

By 1920 the Soviet Government conceived an idea of how to placate the rural population. Most of the land which had been set aside for the formation of "Soviet farms," that is State-owned grain factories, was distributed among the peasants. This failed to bring the

conceded by the Soviet historian Kubanin for what it actually was: a means of tearing Makhno's men from their native territory, and converting them into a regular Red Army troop. It meant for the Bolsheviks the extinguishing of that ever-smoldering hearth of a peasant "counterrevolution," and for the Anarchists the end of their hopes for a Third Revolution.

Makhno's Revolutionary Military Committee refused to leave the territory. Moreover, half of his army, including the staff, was sick with typhus, the *Batko* practically unconscious most of the time. That refusal meant war. By the middle of January, 1920, the insurgent army and its leaders were again outlawed "for betraying the Revolution." It was the beginning of a war of extermination which lasted nine months — until once more the Red Army needed the "outlaw's" help.

That internecine fight was one of the darkest chapters of the Russian Revolution. The Bolsheviks seldom took prisoners. Even ordinary soldiers from Makhno's army were executed. Makhno's army made distinctions. Privates were either incorporated or released as soon as they were taken. The officers were invariably shot and so were also all Communist Party militants. The Bolsheviks had begun the procedure in the occupied Makhnovist villages by shooting every peasant who in some way was suspected of wrong sympathies.

Not all of the prominent Makhnovists were shot upon capture. In some of the more "hopeful" cases, secret police methods, the constant threat of execution and the application of torture, so the Anarchists charge, would induce the prisoners to turn traitors. It is from the ranks of these that attempts upon Makhno's life were organized as the simplest method of "liquidating" his movement.

Black and Red

At that time Makhno's sentiments toward Soviet Russia were of the friendliest. After one of the battles in which the Whites were utterly routed, about one hundred carloads of grain fell into his hands. The booty was sent to Petrograd and to Moscow, which at that time were greatly in need of food. In turn, the Soviet press had only the kindest and most complimentary words for the heroic guerrilla leader of the South, who had been tirelessly fighting against the German and Austrian invaders, against the Cossack dictator Skoropadsky, against the Ukrainian Nationalists of the Petlura brand, and finally against the White generals. And in the meantime the Red Army was continually pressing south, destroying Petlura's power on the way and establishing Bolshevik authorities everywhere — until it found itself face to face with the mysterious insurgent leader.

The Bolsheviks had in their ranks many Anarchists who, carried away by the great mass upheaval, had thrown in their lot with their former opponents. These Anarchists saw in Bolshevism the inevitable first step, necessary for sweeping away the debris of the old semi-feudal and capitalist Russia. This step accomplished, they would be able to take the next step toward real freedom and equality, which they would achieve without violence, by the sheer power of persuasion in the competitive struggle for the mind and the heart of the masses. Had not Lenin himself, leaning upon famous passages of Marx and Engels, promised, as it were, that the State — as a machine of compulsion — would disappear in a higher phase of the revolutionary process?

True, the airs some of the Communist Commissars were assuming as soon as they got power were anything but reassuring as to their intention ever to cease to be the masters of one hundred and fifty million people. On the other hand, many of the half-converted Anarchists began to feel quite comfortable in their new role of near-Commissars, while those who would not compromise had to undergo all the rigors reserved for the “enemies of the Revolution.”

Makhno and his friends felt the difficulty of their situation. Here was the merciless White enemy, ready to bring back the old Tsarist system and to destroy the last vestiges of the progress achieved by the upheaval of 1917. That White enemy had to be destroyed, and a union with the Red Army would certainly accelerate that result. No doubt, this would expose all Russia and the Ukraine to the authoritarian rule of the modern Jacobins. But Makhno and his friends hoped the struggle they would have to fight out with the Bolsheviks would not assume violent forms. They were sure that the Ukrainian peasants, having the choice between the “free Soviets” inaugurated by Makhno and the centralist administration of the Bolsheviks, would know to whom to give their preference. And if they had any misgivings about the coming peaceful character of their differences with the Communists, they had only to think of the reality of the White danger, in order to discard their apprehensions about the intentions of Russia’s new masters.

The Bolshevik proposal to incorporate the “Insurgents” with the Red Army was accepted. It was not a complete surrender. The organization of Makhno’s army remained unchanged, except for the introduction of political commissars appointed by the Moscow authorities. Subject to the Supreme Command of the Red Army only with regard to military operations, it maintained its old name of “Revolutionary Insurgent Army,” and kept its black Anarchist flag. One of the most important points for Makhno was the stipulation that his army should remain at the anti-White front in the South-east and not be transferred anywhere else. [314]

The Aftermath

Looking back upon Makhno’s lost opportunities, Peter Arshinov, the *Batko*’s chief propagandist and historian, bewails his friend’s lack of statesmanship which eventually caused his ruin. Many old-time guerrilla bands from northern Ukraine had begun to join his ranks, and so did some Red Army detachments. Another military leader would have used his victory and his prestige for extending the borders of his territory, for creating a large army that could hold its own against the Bolsheviks and the Tsarists alike. Not so Makhno. Did he shrink from this task because it would have meant the complete relinquishment of his Anarchist principles, which in the preceding process had not remained pure anyway? Did he hope, after the crushing defeat he had dealt their mortal enemies, that the Bolsheviks, prompted by gratitude, would permit him to live his own life in the territory he had liberated so many times, and to build his Anarchist commune, his free peasant Soviet Republic, in the three southern provinces of the Ukraine?

In the beginning everything seemed full of promise for future , harmony. There were joint meetings at which both armies celebrated their victory over the common foe. That was in the latter part of December, 1919. Then all of a sudden Makhno’s troops were ordered to the Polish front. There was no real war with the Poles at that time. The latter were still waiting for the complete extermination of the White forces — ready to attack Russia and the Ukraine after all danger of a Tsarist restoration was removed. Consequently, there was no military necessity to send Makhno against the Poles. His transfer — though it was a piece of grim Red Army humor to “transfer” a man who was still technically an “outlaw” — is frankly

To uncover conspiracies of this kind Makhno's army had a special "Intelligence Department." That military term, however, covered something that to all practical purposes was nothing but the Anarchist edition of the Bolshevik Cheka. Communists have charged it with all the arbitrariness, cruelty, tortures, and summary executions which the anti-Communists or communist dissenters have usually attributed to the Soviet secret police, that is, to the Cheka and to its successor, the G.P.U. And it seems that to a certain extent there was a lot of truth in the accusations of both sides. As an Anarchist, Makhno recognized neither police, nor prisons, nor courts of law. His "Intelligence Department" comprised all of these services in one. True, that service was supposed to apply only to army matters — but in times of revolution and civil war everything falls under this all-embracing head. Thus the first phase of Anarchism, as attempted in that section of the Ukraine, assumed the form of a military dictatorship with a strong personal tinge, Makhno being, in his own words, "the first among equals."

During all that time, — that is in the course of October and part of November, 1919, — both cities were continually attacked by the armored trains of the Whites. Then came a number of reverses. Half of the insurgent army became sick with typhus, which was then raging all over Russia. A large section of the White Army, on its retreat from the North in the direction of the Crimea, drove Makhno out of Ekaterinoslav. The Bolsheviks, following in the wake of the retreating White Armies, soon reoccupied all of northern Ukraine. Another few days and Makhno would face the Bolsheviks again.

One very important matter remained unmentioned in the agreement. It was the political status of the Makhno territory. The *Batko* took it for granted that its political autonomy would not be touched and that the peasants would be permitted to live their lives without any interference on the part of the Bolshevik central and local authorities. The Bolsheviks were determined not to permit any such "nonsense," but they proceeded cautiously in order not to hurt their allies' feelings right at the start. No Communist officials were installed at Gulyai Polye, Makhno's "capital" so to speak. But when they tried to establish their institutions in other localities, there ensued bloody conflicts with the population.

The Soviet authorities became suspicious and their press began to speak of "kulaks" and "counterrevolutionaries." But there was no open break as yet. The calling by Makhno's "Military Revolutionary Council" of an autonomous regional Soviet Conference brought the matter to a head. This assertion of administrative independence the authorities of the Red Army considered nothing short of rebellion. In a telegram sent to the Conference, Dybenko, one of the commanders of the Red Army, declared that no such conferences would be tolerated, that they were openly counterrevolutionary in character, and that their organizers would be subject to the severest measures.

The Conference was not intimidated, and replied in a long dignified letter which disputed Dybenko's authority to interfere with local affairs. At that time Makhno was division commander in the Red Army, like Dybenko himself, and was not subject to the latter but to the General Staff of the Second Army. With particular bitterness the signatories pointed out that the conference was not an assemblage of counterrevolutionists but of those "who first raised the banner of the social revolution in the Ukraine, and had gone further to the left than the Bolsheviks."

The attacks in the Soviet press became more outspoken. At about that time General Shkuro, the most notorious pogrom-monger in Denikin's army, wrote a letter to Makhno complimenting him on his valor and inviting him to join the Whites. Shkuro had been

fooled by a prisoner who, to win time in the hope of fleeing, had told him the cock-and-bull story of Makhno's reactionary propensities. That invitation was immediately reprinted, with much caustic comment, in Makhno's paper *Road to Freedom*. The Bolshevik press likewise carried that letter — adding that it was intercepted by Red soldiers, and presenting it as evidence of negotiations going on between Shkuro and Makhno. This piece of "journalism" was a sort of propagandist preparation for the forthcoming military attack upon the disrespectful rebels.

A last attempt to bring Makhno to "his senses" was made by one of the then highest personages of the Soviet regime. It was Leo Kamenev, with Zinoviev once one of the two chief assistants of Lenin, and later, with the same Zinoviev and with Stalin, for a short while one of Russia's ruling triumvirate. In the name of the Council for the Defense of the Republic, the soft-spoken Kamenev tried to convince Makhno that the existence of the regional Military Revolutionary Soviet — Makhno's civilian government, as it were — was incompatible with the whole structure of the Soviet Republic. But Makhno was not convinced. Yet, there was no official break, and Kamenev kissed Makhno on parting, assuring him and his comrades that there would always be a common ground between the Bolsheviks and such true revolutionists as the Makhnovtsy.

money of all the various regimes that for a time had controlled that region — the Ukrainian bourgeois Nationalists, the Russian Whites, and the Bolsheviks. Even the old Tsarist notes were accepted. This suited the peasants, who had accumulated the most variegated assortment of worthless paper money — for every successive government annulled its predecessor's currency. But this was no solution of the problem; so one of the Anarchist theorists, who for a while had been the Chairman of Makhno's Revolutionary Military Council, expressed his bewilderment in the pathetically naive remark: "How is it that people cannot solve the financial problem if there are money notes in so large numbers?" On the whole, however, Makhno, who accepted his "assessments" in all currencies, kept the White money and distributed the Soviet notes.

Makhno's rule, in Ekaterinoslav and Alexandrovsk, the two important cities which were in his power for about four to six weeks, had this distinctive feature: It proclaimed complete freedom of the press. The Makhnovists had two daily papers during that period, one in Russian — the city workers in the Ukraine are mostly Russians — and one in Ukrainian for the rural population. Every political party that could afford it had its paper, the Right Social-Revolutionists, the Left Social-Revolutionists, the Bolsheviks. News of a military character could be published only when obtained from the daily organ of the occupational army.

However, Makhno would stand for no nonsense if any of the political groups showed any desire to impose its own will upon the population. In Alexandrovsk the Bolshevik Revolutionary Committee proposed to Makhno a sort of division of power. They would take care of the civilian administration while the *Batko* would be in charge of the military end of it. The reply they got was to the effect that they would be put against the wall immediately if they made the slightest attempt to play at government. The commander of one of his regiments became involved in one of those attempts to seize power from within. Makhno had him shot jointly with the other participants of the conspiracy.

The first contact with reality showed that matters were not as simple as that. Large numbers of industrial workers were quite far from developing that self-activity through their trade unions — a sort of syndicalism — which Makhno urged upon them with paternal benevolence. They were still under the sway of Right Wing Socialists whose great longing was the re-establishment of the Constituent Assembly with the good old private capitalist system. Their delegates voiced these sentiments at the Workers' and Peasants' Conference at Alexandrovsk, and were insulted by Makhno as bourgeois lackeys in the same way as they would have been at a Bolshevik conference.

The workers' opposition to their Anarchist tutors was not based merely upon ideological differences as to the future political and economic organization of the country. There were very concrete practical difficulties. The railway workers demanded to be paid. Makhno gave them very friendly advice to the effect that they themselves should organize the traffic and get their reward from the passengers and freight shippers. This was rather cruel fun, or at least involuntary humor. In those days the trains were used almost exclusively for military purposes, and the army transport was expressly exempt from all charges. The workers of the small trades could barter shoes, clothing and other commodities against food, but the miners and metal workers, producing for the country at large but not for the peasants' direct needs, had to shift for themselves. To provide for them Makhno would have had to give them "something for nothing," that is do what the Bolsheviks did: force the rural population to feed the cities. Which, in turn, would have discredited him among the peasants; for by acting in that manner he would be doing exactly what the farmers held against all the preceding governments.

And then there was the Babylonian confusion in the financial system of that Anarchist republic which left all of Makhno's advisers in helpless despair. Makhno did not issue his own money. That would certainly be unanarchistic; so he recognized the paper

The Grigoriev Affair

A few days after Kamenev's departure, Makhno received an urgent, half-threatening and half-complimentary telegram from his recent visitor. Grigoriev, a commander of one of the Soviet armies in the Southern Ukraine, had rebelled and begun to organize pogroms. A former Tsarist officer, he had first served the Ukrainian Nationalists against the German-made dictator Skoropadsky; had later joined the Bolsheviks against Petlura, and was now up in arms, either to become the supreme ruler of the Ukraine himself or to hitch his car to the rising star of the Whites. Makhno was requested to show his loyalty and to issue a proclamation condemning Grigoriev's action.

Makhno was indignant at the tone of the message. He replied in kind, reasserting his loyalty to the Revolution and adding some impertinent remarks about the commissars and secret police who suppressed all activities of his Anarchist friends. He was going to find out first whether the accusations against Grigoriev were well-founded. At the same time he issued a circular to his own troops in which he as much as hinted that he was not interested in the domestic quarrels for power between an ex-Bolshevik guerrilla leader and his superiors.

Makhno had of course good reasons for not standing at attention as soon as he got his orders. He had himself been accused of "counterrevolution"; attempts to seize him and his staff had been made by one of his subordinates who it was suspected had acted upon instructions from "higher up." He had also been warned of a deadly trap that awaited him if he visited some Soviet institution on Bolshevik territory proper. The Bolsheviks no longer trusted him, and

he reciprocated their sentiments. But the chief reasons for his disobedience were of a military character. Grigoriev was active in the western section of Southern Ukraine. An expedition against him would have meant for Makhno the loss of his base, the exposure of his own territory to an invasion by the Whites from the East, whom he was just holding at bay on an eighty-mile front. Nor did he want to engage in a fight with Grigoriev's men, whom he hoped to win over without bloodshed.

Grigoriev's campaign lasted nearly three months. He did not make great headway, but his pogroms and his fights with Red Army detachments helped the cause of the Whites. By July the latter had occupied most of the Ukraine. Makhno, forced out of his native grounds — and at the same time outlawed by the Bolsheviks — found himself in the territory haunted by Grigoriev's bands. He joined forces with the unscrupulous adventurer — each of the two leaders waiting for a chance to get at the other's throat and to incorporate his men. Having at last intercepted messages which his "ally" had exchanged with the Whites, Makhno took the initiative by unmasking him at a public meeting and killing him before he could pull the trigger.

The winning over of Grigoriev's men was not an unmixed blessing. Occasionally these would show inclinations to revert to the anti-Semitic procedures of their recent leader. But whoever actually gave vent to his suppressed desires in this direction would never get a chance to do it again. [317]

The Great Experiment

Makhno's return after the victorious battle of Uman was the great triumph and revenge of his life. Dividing his troops into three more or less parallel columns, he sent them on a swift trek back to the Eastern confines of the Ukraine to accomplish the destruction of Denikin's rear in the southeasternmost corner of Russia. On the way his soldiers paid their visits to all the towns and cities which were still in the hands of the White authorities. Unaware of what had happened, bureaucrats, officers of local garrisons, landed noblemen, priests — all felt now the deadly hand of the underdog's anger. Jewish merchants were of course subject to "requisitions" just as other capitalists. There was no religious or race discrimination, even though, generally speaking, the sentiment of the fighting peasants was rather hostile to the Jews. But there were no pogroms. Some attempts were made in this direction, chiefly by partisans who had joined Makhno from other bands. But the leader would not stand for such "larks" and repressed them mercilessly.

During this campaign Makhno was able to seize and to hold for weeks some large industrial centers such as Ekaterinoslav and Alexandrovsk. He made desperate efforts to show the world an example of constructive anarchism. The establishment of new bureaucratic authorities was avoided. The population was to be stimulated to establish their own forms of local self-government. Meetings were held to explain the anarchist idea of a life based upon voluntary agreements between the city and country, and between the toilers employed in the various branches of the country's industrial life.

diers declared they would obey orders only after they had made sure that their officers were sober when they issued them. In the days gone by similar stories were reported in the Western press about conditions in the Bolshevik army as well.

Leon Trotsky's Crusade

Many things, however, had occurred before that happy ending of the Grigoriev affair. The Bolsheviks, though appreciating Makhno's help in the struggle against the Whites, had their apprehensions. Behind his Anarchism and his demand for local autonomy they saw not merely a more or less Utopian protest against the "State"; they saw in it also the beginning of an organized struggle of the peasant against the grain seizures practiced by the Soviet authorities. Makhno's "Anarchism" appealed to the entire peasant population, because it meant to them the nonpayment of taxes for the support of a bureaucracy which they considered unnecessary, and of the city populations which gave them nothing in exchange.

It was about this time that Trotsky, as the supreme commander of the Red Army, visited the Ukraine. He saw the potential danger to his conception of the Revolution if Makhno's peasant anarchism should be allowed to spread. So he started a campaign of abuse in his Red Army paper printed on his famous train. "Scratch a follower of Makhno," he wrote, "and you will find a follower of Grigoriev. More often than not you don't even have to scratch: A frantic kulak or a petty speculator barking at the Communists frankly sticks out on the surface." That unwarranted insult called forth much indignation in Makhno's region. This is admitted by the official Bolshevik historian Kubanin who characterizes that remark as one of Trotsky's "customary venomous phrases." In later years, when the leader of the Red Army fell from grace, similar venomous samples of official journalism calling him the "vanguard of international counterrevolution" and an "agent of the Nazis" might have given

the Great Exile occasion to think about the inscrutable ways of historic justice.

Following up his argument, Leon Trotsky insisted that all the talk about “No-government” was only a cunning device covering up the Anarchists’ ambition to establish a government of their own, which in essence would be a government of the rich peasants. The great orator’s view that Anarchists in charge of a given territory would invariably establish a government of their own was no doubt justified. The rudiments of such an “Anarchist” government, which claimed not to be one, were already in evidence. It would have become a government not unlike that of the Bolsheviks, only probably giving more scope to local autonomy. Trotsky’s assumption that it would become a government of “kulaks” — whether correct or not — was at any rate quite amusing in view of his own later struggles within the Russian Communist Party. For it was he who seven years later was to raise that same “kulak” charge against Stalin and the majority of the party.

What Trotsky did not want to see was the social difference in the officeholding personnel of the Bolshevik and the Makhnovist-Anarchist states. The Bolsheviks represented the new bureaucracy issued from the ranks of the educated lower middle classes, largely intellectuals and semi-intellectuals, with a growing participation of self-educated ex-workers. The upper crust of the Makhno movement contained no intellectuals at all — except for one lone journalist, V. M. Eichenbaum, known under the name of Volin, who was with them for a few months. All their leaders and militants were, like Makhno, semi-educated peasants and workers. The rivalry for revolutionary leadership between lower middle class intellectuals, on the one hand, and self-educated workers, on the other, has been of old standing not only in Russia but in the Western countries as well.

study made of that period, charged Makhno and his men with systematic banditism. Under their army rules, he said, Makhno’s boys were permitted to rob two days in a month; but these two days were always extended to thirty. The official Soviet record published in 1927 says that Rakovsky was entirely wrong in making that statement. (Rakovsky, once one of the highest Soviet dignitaries, had in the meantime fallen from grace as a member of Trotsky’s opposition of 1926.) In fact, the official Soviet historian says, there were fewer robberies at the time when Makhno held the big city of Ekaterinoslav than at any other time.

Of course there were seizures of large stores of shoes, cloth, sugar, and other goods whenever an enemy city was taken. But there was no combatant group that did not act likewise. What was taken on those occasions was distributed among the peasants, after the immediate army needs were satisfied. This won Makhno the sympathy of the rural population; but in the opinion of the Bolshevik historian it was bad military tactics, for the army did not have enough supplies left for rainy days.

The organization of Makhno’s troops was modeled entirely after that of the Red Army. Their officers — “commanders” in the terminology of the Bolsheviks and the Anarchists — were almost without exception former “noncoms” who had got their training during the World War. The spirit pervading the men was extremely “democratic,” so to speak. The “bandits” maintained that feature of the first Red Guards which has often been derided by friends and enemies of Soviet Russia alike. The Revolutionary Military Council, the supreme authority of that anti-authoritarian venture, was elected by all the men assembled. So were also the political commissars attached to the various formations, to watch the loyalty of the commanders and to remain in contact with the rank and file. At that time there were no longer elections in the Red Army, and obedience was as strict there as in any other army. The official Soviet historian, in order to ridicule the state of discipline in Makhno’s army, tells the yarn of how in one of the *Batko*’s divisions the sol-

The “Bandit Army”

The victory at Uman and its further developments at last supplied Makhno with large stores of military equipment, cannons, shells, machine guns, motor lorries, even airplanes. Until that time he had never received even as much as a rifle from the Red Army. He could expand, arming all the enthusiastic young bloods among the peasantry that began to stream to him from all sides. Soon he had as many as forty thousand infantry and fifteen thousand cavalrymen. His foot troops — and his one thousand machine guns — moved on light carts, and with the general sympathy of the peasants surrounding him, he could change his horses continually and make thirty-six to sixty miles daily. Thus he was always able to outdistance the regular armies, which had to proceed at a much lower speed. And in addition to that he had an enormous army of “spies.” Women, boys, ragged old men — in fact, the entire peasant population formed his “intelligence department” and reported to him continually the doings of the enemy. Those who have read about the exploits of the heroic peasant armies in the so-called Soviet regions of China can find there an exact analogy to what was going on in the ever-changing and elusive territory of Makhno’s armies.

Those armies had to live. All the food they needed was given to them voluntarily by the peasants who knew that Makhno’s men were fighting for their cause. Of course, there were things the peasants could not supply, such as shoes, trousers or other articles. These had to be “requisitioned.” But Makhno gave strict orders never to take from private persons more than was absolutely necessary for the needs of the men engaged in the search. Christian Rakovsky, then chief of the Ukrainian Soviet Government, in a

Outlawed

Trotsky’s opportunity to strike came soon enough. Another regional conference called by Makhno’s Revolutionary Military Council elicited from him an order holding out court-martial to all those who would participate in that assembly. In his opinion, that Conference was a prelude to a counterrevolutionary mutiny like that of Grigoriev’s, leading eventually to “the opening of the front to the Whites, before whom the Makhno brigade is invariably retreating owing to the incapacity, the criminality and the treason on the part of the leaders.”

Ever since that time the “opening of the front to Denikin” became one of the stock assertions of official Communist historiography with regard to Makhno. An opening of the front there actually was, but it came from another direction. The initial retreat of Makhno’s men from the position held against the White commander Denikin was caused by the attitude of the Soviet Army authorities. They did not trust their Anarchist allies and had reduced their supply of ammunition to well-nigh one-sixth of the amount necessary.¹ Yet at the same time the Bolsheviks expected them to risk complete extermination by fighting with mere swords and rifle butts against the best French and British cannon and machine guns. Moreover, Trotsky had openly expressed the idea that he would

¹ Seventeen years later, during the Spanish civil war, Stalin, in sending military assistance to the Loyalists, pursued the same tactics with regard to the Anarchist troops fighting against the Fascists. The Anarchists, who constitute a very important section of Spain’s organized labor, were refused cannon, airplanes and all the heavier equipment, and were accused of “inactivity” and even cowardice when in spite of their suicidal heroism they failed to make headway against a superior enemy on the Aragon front.

rather lose all of the Ukraine to Denikin than permit the further spread of “Makhnovshchina.” He knew that the latter, having the support of the peasant masses, would eventually be harder to fight than the Whites who were hated by the entire population.

As a result of Trotsky’s aforementioned order, Makhno was deposed from his command as Division General within the Red Army. The *Batko* was unwilling to start an internecine struggle while the common enemy was threatening the Revolution. He complied, outwardly at least, by sending his letter of resignation in which he wrote that he was tired of being continually treated as “a bandit, an associate of Grigoriev, and conspirator against the Soviet Republic for the purpose of re-establishing the capitalist system.”

He left, taking with him his faithful personal guard of two hundred crack horsemen. Before his departure, however, he wrote an appeal to all his former fellow insurgents, giving the reasons for his resignation, and enjoining them to continue the struggle, even though they would have to do it as soldiers of the Red Army. The officers of his regiment decided to submit to the higher Red Army command, but at the same time there was an understanding among them that at a given moment they would all unite again under the command of their old leader.

Makhno had good reasons for going into hiding. From other Division Generals of the Red Army he had received a warning that Trotsky had given orders to arrest him. Apparently there was to be a public trial, followed by a death sentence for “treason.” Klementi Voroshilov, the present Soviet Commissar of Defense, accompanied by a detachment of Cheka men, went out to capture the fugitives. But his armored train was ambushed by the Whites and they would all have perished had not the outlaw come to the rescue of his would-be executioner. Voroshilov — through his couriers — thanked Makhno and invited him to discuss further plans for an anti-White campaign. Makhno’s reply read as follows:

The Anarchist historians and Makhno himself, who with bitter pride insists upon this fact, cannot be accused of braggadocio. The historical dates speak for themselves. The battle at Uman, in which Makhno completely destroyed Denikin’s Southern Army, took place on September 25. The Whites’ victorious march toward Moscow turned into a retreat about two weeks later. General Denikin, the head of the White Army, says that Makhno’s revolt “had the effect of disorganizing our rear and weakening the front at the most critical period of its existence.” A similar statement is made in the official Soviet history of the Makhno episode. There it is said that Makhno, “having hastened Denikin’s penetration into the Ukraine, blew him up from within by taking part of the Eka-terinoslav and Taurida provinces ... and cutting off Denikin’s army from its supply bases... The taking of Berdiansk and Mariupol by Makhno cut Denikin’s outside connections through these ports.” In general, however, official Soviet historiography is reticent about this great achievement; just as it is silent at present about the historical role of Trotsky, who, in turn, in the days of his own glory had clamored most for Makhno’s head. Such has always been the gratitude of revolutions to their nonconformist sons.

Uman — about a hundred miles from the Rumanian border. That city was then in the hands of the Ukrainian Nationalists. They had raised their heads after the retreat of the Bolsheviks and were now trying to wrest the country from the Russian Whites. There was no love lost between the Nationalists (“Petlurovists”) and the Makhnovists. For a while, however, in the face of the oncoming Tsarist invader, they concluded a sort of truce, the Nationalists promising to take over Makhno’s eight thousand wounded soldiers. However, they did not trust each other. Makhno was convinced that his bourgeois fellow Ukrainians would sooner or later betray him to the Whites. The Nationalists, in turn, were afraid Makhno would “corrupt” their troops and repeat the trick he played on Grigoriev.

Soon enough Makhno’s men found themselves entirely surrounded by that section of the White Army that pursued them. Not mere defeat, but complete extermination seemed unavoidable. What happened, however, 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. It may truly be said — incredible though it may appear — that on that night the semi-educated ex-laborer, the Anarchist outlaw, decided the fate of Russia. The ruse with which he routed a superior army, the complete annihilation of his pursuers, the attack upon their ammunition base, the blowing up of an artillery depot at Berdiansk — all these feats actually broke the backbone of Denikin’s advance toward the North, where the seizure of Moscow by his main army had been expected for the month of December. Threatened at their very base, with the immense supply of ammunitions and the main railway line in the South cut off by Makhno, the Whites had to slow up their forced advance toward Moscow. They were compelled to withdraw one division and half of their best cavalry forces and to direct them against the Southern insurgents. This enabled the Red Army to attack and to beat the Whites exactly at the point where these had weakened their lines by sending their men against Makhno.

I know of Trotsky’s order [to arrest me] and the role imposed upon your conscience, Comrade Voroshilov, in connection with that order. I, therefore, consider it impossible to discuss with you plans for a further campaign. But these are my own plans: I intend to get in the rear of Denikin’s army and to attempt his destruction. This is important just now when he has undertaken a decisive advance on all fronts.

Your former friend in the struggle for the triumph of the Revolution,

June 15, 1919
Batko Makhno

On the very same day members of Makhno’s staff and of his local government were arrested by that punitive expedition and executed two days later. The whole movement was outlawed. This, however, did not subdue the spirit of the “boys” who had remained in the Red Army after the departure of their leader. Makhno’s successor in the command, who had been appointed by the Bolsheviks, was killed by his own men. Even “regular” Red Army soldiers who had never served under the hero of Gulyai Polye clamored for his leadership. They did not trust their own officers, many of whom had been taken over from the Tsarist army, and had betrayed them at the first opportunity.

A short time afterwards Makhno was visited in his No Man’s Land by a Soviet military commissar who invited him to defend the city of Alexandrovsk. That place was an important strategic point necessary for the safe retreat of the Red Army from the Crimea. Makhno’s outlaw troop had in the meantime been increased considerably by many refugees from his native district, as well as by various independent guerrilla bands and deserting Red Army detachments. The Red Army had no reserves in that district; so the

proposal practically meant that Makhno should subject himself to complete extermination on the part of the Whites for the defense of those who were out for his head. He demanded a public retraction of the order, which declared him a counterrevolutionary and an outlaw. This was refused, and he was proscribed again, anyone having the right to kill him at sight. At the same time the White generalissimo Denikin placed a price upon his head.

The Great Battle

The White advance was gradually pushing the Red Army out of the Ukraine. The Bolshevik evacuation proceeded practically without a struggle. Possibly this was necessary because of the greater importance of the defense of Central Russia proper. But many Ukrainians were very bitter about it. In their opinion, the Bolsheviks were interested solely in taking away as much man power and as much rolling stock as possible, leaving the rest to the tender mercies of the Tsarists. It was this situation which made Makhno's comeback possible.

He gave up his plan to get behind Denikin's lines and communicated secretly with the officers of his former troops who had remained with the Red Army. Upon his word they organized a general revolt against their Bolshevik superiors and joined their old leader. That bloodless mutiny meant a complete breaking-up of the Crimean Red Army coming from the South. It was what the Bolshevik historians call Makhno's "betrayal" and opening of the front to the Whites. In the meantime Makhno had "liquidated" Grigoriev in the manner described before. He had now an army of about fifteen thousand men.

And now his offensive against the Whites started all over again. Sometimes he would push them back over fifty miles to the East, and on one of these occasions he took from them three armored trains. But he was very short of cartridges, and two of his three offensives were undertaken solely for the purpose of getting ammunition. The pressure by the White Army grew heavier and heavier. Makhno had to blow up his armored trains and retreat along village roads. After a month of this trek he finally reached the city of