

The neo-Makhnovist revolutionary project in Ukraine

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The 1994 formation of the Revolutionary Confederation of Anarcho-Syndicalists — “Nestor Makhno” (RKAS)

Despite intense KGB repression, the anarchist movement in the USSR and its colonies and satellite states began reviving underground in the 1970s, gathered momentum as protests escalated in the late 1980s, and when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 and lost its former colonies including the Ukraine, that collapse precipitated a flowering of anarchist organising. However, the promise of glasnost for a freer society has been tarnished by what seems to be an inexorable rightward drift of the Russian state and society driven by the old KGB elite in cahoots with robber-baron oligarchs and reactionary politicians. This has been reflected socially in the rise of neo-fascist, neo-Stalinist and national-bolshevik movements, intense racism against ethnic non-Russians, homophobia and other plagues. Not least, the Russian state has moved to bloodily suppress secessionist movements (as its predecessor state had in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968), especially with the Chechen Wars of 1994–1996 and of 1999–2000. In a private conversation in 2005, a Russian intelligence agent told me in no uncertain terms that Russia under former KGB lieutenant-colonel Vladimir Putin fully intended to recover all of its lost colonies, a political position termed revanchism.

Against this backdrop, the anarchist movement in the former USSR has had a hell of a time fighting for its existence. Today, probably the largest — though synthesist — new anarchist organisation in the former Soviet Empire is the Autonomous Action (AD) network, which by 2010 had sections or at least members in the cities of Belorechensk, Chelyabinsk, Irkutsk, Izhevsk, Kaliningrad, Kazimov, Kolomna, Krasnodar, Moscow, Murmansk, Novgorod, Novorossisk, Rostov-on-Don, St Petersburg, Sochi, Tyumen, Volgograd, Voronezh, Yaroslavl, and Yoshkar. There is also an AD section in Armenia (the Autonomous Action — “Breakthrough” Group, AD-GP) and supporter groups in Belarus, Lithuania, Kazakhstan and Ukraine. The Revolutionary Union of Anarcho-Communists (AKRU) and other groups in the Moscow area joined the AD in 1991. In south Russia in 2003, the more hardline Federation of Anarcho-Communists (FAK) was founded, apparently from an AD split, in the cities of Rostov-on-Don, Taganrog, Krasnodar and Stavropol, with the journal *Protest* at its mouthpiece. There are also unaffiliated anarcho-syndicalist unions springing up in places like Kazakstan such as the Alma Ata Anarchist Alliance (AAAA) and Libertarian Almaty, in Siberia such as the Siberian Confederation of Labour (SKT), which split from the KRAS in 1995 with the aid of the Swedish Central Workers’ Organisation (SAC), growing to 6,000 members by the year 2000, and the Anarcho-Syndicalist Confederation of Irkutsk (ASKI) founded in 2007, and in Ukraine, the Anarchist Federation of Eastern Ukraine (AFEU), and the Revolutionary Confederation of Anarcho-Syndicalists — “N.I. Makhno” (RKAS), which was founded in 1994 and had attained 2,000 members by the year 2000; the SKT and the RKAS supported the independent revolutionary International Libertarian Solidarity (ILS) founded in Madrid in 2001, which was the seedbed of the anarkismo.net project established by ILS member organisations in 2003.

The neo-Makhnovist RKAS continued to grow, though its organisational discipline horrified synthesist anarchists such as those from the declining anarcho-syndicalist International Workers’ Association (IWA), one of whose correspondents characterises it as a “platformist party and psychosect.”¹ But the critique is revealing in that it makes it obvious that the organisational practice

¹ The article, Caution: platformist party and and psychosect in one bottle!, is online at <http://eretik-samizdat.blogspot.com/2013/01/caution-pla...html>

of the RKAS derives directly from the historical Makhnovist movement, the 1918–1921 Revolutionary Insurgent Army of the Ukraine (RPAU in its Cyrillic acronym). For example, the RKAS established “a small General Confederation of Labour of Anarcho-syndicalists” (CGT-AU), formed defensive ideological-paramilitary Black Guard squads, trained in martial arts, and co-ordinated its activities via an Organisational Bureau (Orgbureau): “The structure of the Orgbureau includes the Secretary General and his deputy, the international secretary, the editor of the central press organ (the newspaper Anarchy), the commander of the ‘party’ militia – the Black Guard, the finance director, the Head of [the] Media Centre of RKAS and the representative of [the] ‘workers’ union created by RKAS.” Thus the Orgbureau performs roughly the same function as did the RPAU’s Military-Revolutionary Soviet, and is linked to the anarcho-syndicalist CGT-AU and RKAS co-operatives in Donetsk and Kiev (the potential seedbeds of future soviets), while the Black Guard in turn has its own territorial unit and command structure: the writer quotes RKAS Secretary General Sergei “Samurai” Shevchenko as stating “the creation of self-defence force organization (something like a ‘party’ militia) is a very important area of our organic development. Thus the Black Guard was conceived as a force ([a] federation of territorial units in sections with a common leading staff) on the basis of ideology, the constant training of personal combat skills of fighters and teamwork... as well as a consistent practice in street conditions.” This appears to replicate the military unit structure and General Staff (Shtarm) of the RPAU.

And in echo of the RPAU’s Culture and Propaganda Soviet, the KultProSoviet, the RKAS has its own Anarchist School and its own paper for political education and propaganda – Shevchenko explicitly states the organisation’s objective of creating “a communal-family subculture”: the RKAS Congress of 2010 stated: “One of our main objectives is to create RKAS’s own subculture of anarcho-syndicalism, based on the principles of brotherhood, unity and clanism”; the IWA critic seems to hint that such “clanism” means ethnocentrism, but the original Makhnovists also drew on libertarian elements of the clan traditions of both Zaporizhzhian peasants and of the Don Cossacks to legitimise their movement. The claim that RKAS’ ranks include a confused melange of ‘counterculturalists,’ ‘insurrectionalists,’ adherents of ‘anarcho-capitalism’ and even nationalists” would seem improbable, given its stress on internal ideological coherence; and the only proof of the presence of “nationalists” in its ranks offered is a single member seen wearing a T-shirt saying “I am Russian,” which is surely tolerable for an ethnic minority within a Ukrainian-majority movement. Somewhat like the disciplinary functions of the RPAU’s Commission for Anti-Makhnovist Activities (KAD), the RKAS also has its “Arbitral Tribunal” which arbitrates on members accused of breaking the organisation’s codes. Some of this may be considered organisational overbuild, but with RKAS sections and supporters in Ukraine, Russia, Bulgaria and Georgia, and with anarchist-communism having prefigurative praxis at its heart, it would seem unduly harsh to criticise the RKAS for borrowing their organisational structure directly from the most successful libertarian communist mass movement of their country’s history.

The 2011 splinter off RKAS of the International Union of Anarchists (MSA)

In 2011, the Donetsk city sections of the RKAS split away to form what they called the International Union of Anarchists (MSA), which today claims organised “Local Council” sections in Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, Latvia, Spain, and Israel/Palestine, and links to organisations and in-

dividuals in Germany, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, France, Sweden, Tunisia and Syria.² The MSA is mistakenly viewed by the IWA writer as an RKAS initiative, rather than a splinter and is criticised as an attempt to establish a “rival international” but there is nothing in anarchist ethics that prevents the development of parallel structures based on free association and federalism. According to its website, the MSA’s stated goal is the elimination of the state, hired labor, inequality, and private property, along with the widespread replacement of commodity-money relations with relations based upon principles of mutual equality and fraternity. This is to be achieved through the collaborative planning of self-managing teams of workers, tenants and consumers, along with the implementation of business activities in accordance with the principle of “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs in the economic empowerment of society...”

The MSA’s founding Memorandum of Association (2011) states that, “Denying the possibility of anarcho-communist revolution in single separated countries, and for the further coordination of actions of anarchistic organisations, we create the MSA.” The founding organisations such as RKAS “act due to their own memorandums, taking into account historically based sociologically-cultural traits” but are co-ordinated by a “Council” which reviews applications for membership (all active members have to be in consensus about a new member joining). “In case of need, the Council initiates preparations, discussions and approves decisions, actions, documents (programmes, memorandums, methodical recommendations), publishing and other kinds of activity, which are universal inside of MSA and made by all participating organisations. All controversial cases must be solved by negotiations; arbitration is possible by demand.” The MSA Programme, posted online in April 2014, aims at “an activity directed at creating a self-governing social system based on freedom, equality and cooperation. The purpose of [the UIA] assumes the destruction of the state, statism, social hierarchy, coercive (administrative) powers, the existing capitalist system, and all types of discrimination, coercion and exploitation. We recognise the preparation and implementation of a social revolution based on anarchist doctrine as means of achieving this goal.” [Texts slightly edited for clarity – Michael Schmidt].

Shevchenko’s take on the MSA splinter is naturally severe, claiming that using the excuse of “anti-authoritarianism,” the splinter group “freed themselves from the ‘dictatorship of the RKAS Organisational Bureau,’ which had made them go to mines and factories and distribute [the RKAS] Anarchy newspaper, deal with trade unions and cooperatives, and build a well-disciplined Black Guard, [and] freed themselves from RKAS conference decisions, which put forth really constructive socio political tasks...”³ He claimed by June 2014 the anti-organisationists had effectively disappeared: “... where are all these new, unimaginable anti-authoritarian units, the creators of which weakened RKAS systematically and broke the anarchist movement into pieces by their arrival, thus not giving it any opportunity to organise itself into a strong, mass political organisation? Are they still sticking stickers, drawing graffiti no one wants, playing football and going to concerts?... This is the way naughty children behave, arranging holidays of disobedience and riots for the sake of their petty insults and games... the old illnesses of being anti-organisational, destructive and irresponsible, which are brought to the level of a virtue and which undermine any constructive work. Anarchists, due to such absolutely absurd mistakes, have thus failed to es-

² The MSA’s website in Russian and English is at www.an-com.org

³ An interview with Sergei “Samurai” Shevchenko by Autonomous Action (AD), June 2014, is online at: www.anarkismo.net/article/27241

establish the organisation. And all the attempts to establish the organisation within the framework of the RKAS project have given rise to a real Crusade against ‘authoritarianism and extremism’. Both the situation in February 2013 and the current one have clearly shown all the helplessness of that amorphous form of infantile, subcultural anarchism, no matter what name it gave itself in the face of real historical events.”

The post-split position of the RKAS majority

The IWA writer notes that the RKAS Congress of 2011 “decided to solve the questions about the division of responsibilities along the way, through horizontal and vertical connections within the organisation”: this is upheld as being evidence of “vertical structures” in the organisation, but at most it points to a very Makhnovist-like blend of vertical linkages where needed (military command-and-control), and horizontal linkages where needed (the submission of the militia to broader formations). In line with this, Shevchenko’s vision of a post-revolutionary society recognises the need for administrative and educational functions: “Do you think, there will be no teachers, directors or leading managers in an anarchist society? Just the vector of relations will change. Power over other people will be substituted by regulation of processes, and privileges will be replaced by a voluntary responsibility.” The RKAS practice of “entryism” into and recruiting among the “reformist-bureaucratic Independent Trade Union of Miners,” or the “anarcho-capitalist” Union of Anarchists of Ukraine (SAU), a weird registered political party that contests elections, is obviously controversial, but is hardly an unknown syndicalist tactic, that of capturing members of mainstream organisations for the revolution — and by the early 2000s, RKAS militants lead strike committees and workers’ councils on the mines of the Donetz Basin as their forebears had done during the Ukrainian Revolution. The organisation went through a slump in 2004 but was reformed with vigour in 2007, publishing a Programme of the RKAS⁴ which echoed the famous IWW Preamble in its recognition of only two, mutually hostile, classes — the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, though the boundaries between them “are not resistant (hereditary) and clearly drawn” — the results of which class structure was the “inequality of men in the actual possibilities to satisfy their needs (material and spiritual); [that] the vast majority of people can have no influence on decisions that touch on the main areas of private and social life; [and] the inevitability of wars, economic crises, unemployment, etc., etc.”

“So, the real and only alternative to the state-capitalist order is the stateless socialist society,” which the RKAS defined as “a Soviet order (= Soviet system) according to our expectations [that] is no power of any party, not a ‘party parliament’, but the most perfect constructive form of stateless socialist self-management, which practical implementation took place in the experience of the Makhnovist movement (1918–1920) and the Spanish Revolution (1936–1939). Meetings of residents and factory workers freely choose their environment, their institutions of territorial and economic self-management — Councils — as exclusively technical and coordinating bodies, whose members in its activities, in the decisions of the running of meetings of their constituents, are accountable towards them, all privileges are stripped away and representatives may be recalled at any time and replaced. The inner life of each such territorial and economic unit is determined solely by its participants. Representatives of local Councils unite in a City Council or — in

⁴ The Programme of the Revolutionary Confederation of Anarcho-Syndicalists — Nestor Makhno is online in German at: www.syndikalismusforschung.info/rkas.htm. The translation is my own.

rural districts — in an economic County Council. In the scope of an area these Councils form a Federation; the union of Federations formed on the territory of the whole country, the national Confederation. The duties of the county, city, regional and national associations of Councils consist in the coordination of economic and social life in the necessary questions — primarily the planning and realisation of the national distribution of raw materials, energy, finished products, etc. The decisions of these associations are developed due to free agreements of representatives, representing the union of the local units; they affect only common problems. The economy of socialism, which is managed in the interests of all members of society, and not the owner and not even the collective farm level, must say goodbye to the chaotic, disorganised economy of capitalism, of its aspirations to profit at any cost, with its undue waste of forces and resources, including competition.” This is classic anarchist horizontal federalism, run on directly democratic principles, and RKAS proposed to achieve this vision through a conventional Platformist focus on specific anarchist organisations engaging in daily activities acting as a revolutionary gymnasium, through which immediate gains build class confidence and capacity for self-management and the ultimate, transformative “Social Revolution,” which it defined as a mass proletarian expropriation of the state and capital, rejecting any transitional state or “dictatorship of the proletariat” in favour of self-managing society in their own right.

The nameless IWA correspondent went further in their accusations, however, reporting that public debates took place between RKAS militants and “neo-fascists” in the city of Voronezh, adding the news of the “participation of its [RKAS] representatives [in the] Kiev Congress of National-‘Communists’ and National-‘Anarchists’ in the summer of 2012”. But this may merely demonstrate that RKAS was unafraid to debate its positions with all political factions in order to win the battle of ideas and create militants — in its Programme, the RKAS position was explicit, that its militants undertook to “fight against nationalism in all its manifestations, against fascism, militarism, clericalism and other anti-human movements and phenomena.” Hardly the position of an organisation friendly to national-Bolshevism or national-anarchism. Again, let’s not forget that the original Makhnovists, while driven by specific anarchist-communist cores, were a heterogeneous organisation of the revolutionary left: and here is perhaps the only confusion in their structure, between mimicking Makno’s specifically anarchist-communist GAK organisation of tendency, and the mixed organisation of class of the Makhnovists themselves.

Direct Action, the Autonomous Workers’ Union (ACT) and the Maidan

The most severe test of the modern Ukrainian anarchist movement’s tactics, strategies and politics came in 2014 with the invasion of the Crimea by Russian forces, cloaked as “separatists” who wanted reunification with Russia, and the south-east of the country’s descent into a low-level civil war as a result. The descent of parts of Ukraine into fratricidal war was precipitated by massed public demonstrations in Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square) in the capital Kiev, starting in November 2013, against President Viktor Yanukovich’s geopolitical reorientation away from the European Union towards Russia’s Customs Union. The demonstrations quickly escalated — provoked by swiftly-passed anti-protests laws — into demands for his resignation, and by February 2014, pitched battles were being fought between government forces and pro-European integration protestors occupying the Maidan and several key government build-

ings. According to an analysis by Kirill Buketov of the Global Labour Institute,⁵ “the Maidan, ” as the movement itself became known — in echo of “the Square,” referring to Tahrir Square in Cairo, the heart of the Arab Spring uprising in Egypt in 2011–2012 — was overwhelmingly participated in by apolitical people, with a tiny fraction of 7% comprising “politicals” ranging from anarchists to nostalgic Stalinists and “right-wing ultras.” These last were a thorn in the side of the anarchists, forcibly preventing them from establishing a defensive Anarchist Squadron, Buketov stated, though this defeat seems to have turned them towards involvement in the Student’s Assembly, which became “fully controlled by the anarchist students’ union Direct Action, and all of the Assembly’s slogans were social ones. Socialist agitation was under way at the Assembly, there were lectures, socially relevant films were shown.”

Direct Action is on comradely terms with the Autonomous Workers’ Union (ACT),⁶ formed in 2011 by anarchist and libertarian Marxist members of Direct Action; it currently does not have the critical mass necessary to establish a true union structure, but is a revolutionary syndicalist initiative that by April 2014 had locals in Kiev (about 25 members) and Kharkiv (about 15 members). Despite the ACT’s links to the Maidan’s Student’s Assembly, Buketov’s report points to a deeper problem with the Maidan movement, that it was overwhelmingly middle-class: “The weakness of the Maidan was insufficient involvement of trade unions and the working class. Only 5–7% of all Maidan participants could be categorised as workers, which, come to think of it, is natural: participation in a public protest is extremely complicated for workers” because as bread-winners, their priority is retaining their jobs. So, it is quite logical that the bulk of the protest movement was formed by students, pensioners, office clerks, civil servants, small entrepreneurs, etc. Furthermore, none of the Kiev left bothered to start agitation in workplaces, to try to bridge the protests and the workers’ community. The free trade unions’ call for a general political strike just hung in midair.” An ACT member said in an interview that “social issues regarding the workers’ rights are not on the agenda at all. The working class, as a class, does not take part in these events at all. The workers naturally do take sides, but they are not organised in class-like organisations, in unions, as such they just don’t participate in these events. And they have good reasons for this, because both sides just talk about the cultural, political issues, which don’t have any direct connection to [the] needs of an average worker.”

But far more severe problems loomed for the Euro-integrationist project of the Maidan, sometimes called Euromaidan because of its stance: firstly the swift rise to dominance of right-wing extremists within and outside its ranks; and secondly, the unfolding West-versus-Russia imperialist battle over spheres of influence that used Ukraine as a battlefield and its people as their cannon-fodder. In a January 2014 interview, RKAS’ Shevchenko noted that “The Maidan militants consist mainly of activists of the so-called Right Sector [a 10,000-strong Ukrainian ultranationalist-fascist paramilitary coalition]... On the street, extreme nationalists and neo-Nazis rule. They have a unique opportunity to get a baptism of fire and be tempered in battles with the police. They set the tone of ‘the revolutionary Maidan.’ They are followed by the common people. The rightists organise, unite, throw slogans and conduct a strategy. And they get support from most citizens who came to the Maidan and who, at the beginning, wanted ‘just’ to express their dissatisfaction with the current government. In the evening of January 19, the Maidan split into ‘the legals’ [around

⁵ The report is online here: <https://libcom.org/news/libertarian-spirit-left-maidan-...62014>

⁶ A report describing the ACT is online at: <http://openfsm.net/projects/ukraine-crisis-and-solution...union> and its website is <http://avtonomia.net/>

the parliamentary opposition] and ‘the illegals... the radicals leading the street fighting...’⁷ Buke-tov noted that “despite a large number of the left involved in the Maidan there was practically no coordination among them. Having joined the protests later than the right-wingers, the left instantly rushed into the thick of it and did not have time to create their own organisational structures — unlike the Right[...] Sector which managed to do that.”

In Kharkiv, however, the ACT announced that as of February, it had been working within the Co-ordinating Council (Koordrada) of the city’s Maidan.⁸ The ACT Kharkiv described the Koordrada (KR) as “a free association of all public organisations actively involved in Euromaidan. [The] Koordrada... is a horizontal structure in which all issues are resolved by consensus... 95% of it consists of liberals and the moderate right and left viewpoints. No Right Sector... nor ultra nor parliamentary parties are in Koordrada (in this respect, Kharkiv is an exception). Currently, KR is engaged in trying to create an independent media, while it attempts to rebuild Maidan [via] veche (popular assemblies)... Another direction of the KR in which anarchists take part are discussions with ‘Antimaidan’: they are for the Russian language, [but] against conflict with Russia, and against [the right-populist parliamentary party] Svoboda, etc. And the people who come to Antimaidan are from two sides — the Communists, and pro-Russian activists [an ACT member said the Communist Party of the Ukraine “for many years has had nothing to do with communism, its political programme and agenda [can be] rather described as conservative”]. Pro-Russian sentiment exists among the masses here, but it does not prevail. Further developments will depend on the behavior of Russian and Ukrainian troops. In the case of more or less peaceful developments, KR will perform independent grassroots building, pressuring authorities and trying to reduce their powers.” However, peace was not forthcoming and the ACT soon inevitably found itself fighting the Antimaidan when the latter attacked the Kharkiv Maidan.

The 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea, the Ukrainian state funding of fascist armed units, and the RKAS core goes underground

As veteran IWA activist Antti Rautianen said in May 2014,⁹ although the Kharkiv Maidan insertion was in his view the “most successful anarchist intervention,” the conflict with the Antimaidan saw “anarchists... fighting side by side with liberals and fascists. I do not want to criticize the Kharkiv anarchists; after all they made, perhaps, the most serious attempt among Ukrainian anarchists to influence the course of events, but this was hardly the fight, and these were hardly the allies, they wanted. And so, comes the point when desertion becomes imperative, and that is when civil war begins. As of now, it’s still too early to make any final assessment of the anarchist attempts to influence Maidan, but after the beginning of a civil war, Maidan will no longer play a role. From now on, assembly will gradually turn to the army, and assault rifles will replace Molotov cocktails. Military discipline will replace spontaneous organisation.” And this brings us to the rapid militarisation of the crisis in Ukraine. The toppling of the pro-Russian Yanukovich government precipitated Russia’s military invasion, then annexation, of the Crimean peninsula.

⁷ The interview is online at: <https://linksunten.indymedia.org/en/node/104379>

⁸ The statement is online at: <https://libcom.org/forums/news/kharkiv-anarchists-worki...32014>

⁹ The article, Anarchism in the Context of Civil War, is online at: https://avtonom.org/en/author_columns/anarchism-context...l-war

Rautianen claims that “none of the fears of ‘fascist takeover’ have materialised. Fascists gained very little real power, and in Ukraine their historical role will now be that of storm-troopers for liberal reforms demanded by the IMF and the European Union — that is, pension cuts, an up to five times increase in consumer gas prices, and others. Fascism in Ukraine has a powerful tradition, but it has been incapable of proceeding with its own agenda in the revolutionary wave. It is highly likely that the Svoboda party will completely discredit itself in front of its voters. But anyone attempting to intervene, anarchists included, could have encountered the same fate — that is, to be sidelined after all their effort. During the protests, anarchists and the ‘left’ were looking towards the Right Sector with envy, but in the end all the visibility and notoriety, for which they paid dearly, was not enough to help the Right Sector gain any real influence.”

And yet, with the openly ultranationalist and white supremacist Azov Battalion of about 500 volunteers, formed under the aegis of the Ukrainian Ministry Internal Affairs and armed with tanks¹⁰ and heavy weapons sponsored by Ukraine’s third-richest oligarch, Igor Kolomoysky, Governor of the Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, engaging in open combat with Russian-backed separatists, concerns have been expressed about the role such fascists will perform in Ukrainian public life after the crisis is over. Ukraine has a strong fascist minority, that usually draws inspiration from the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) which collaborated with the Nazis and participated in anti-Semitic genocide during World War II (the latter used a red-and-black flag, divided horizontally, which is confusingly similar to the anarcho-syndicalist red-and-black, divided diagonally). Clearly, the crisis has escalated into a partial civil war in at least the Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts, with over 2,000 deaths. Much of the heaviest fighting has been taking place in the city of Donetsk and Shevchenko reported in his June 2014 interview that RKAS, already weakened by the anti-organisationist faction and the 2011 MSA split, decided to tactically dissolve and go underground: “As far as RKAS... is concerned, it does not exist anymore in the quality you have known it until now. Officially, but tacitly, RKAS was disbanded and its nucleus made the switch to illegal operations. Why did this happen? It happened because in the form RKAS had existed up to date, it did not meet the requirements of the time being. Though, in the same way, the whole anarchist movement — both in Russia and Ukraine — does not meet the requirements of today; and RKAS being a part of this movement hasn’t managed to overcome all those vices, which make the contemporary ‘anarcho-movement’ be not of the moment. All these years we’ve tried to create an effective project in the medium [term] where the project of such a kind was doomed to failure. RKAS was such a project. And time showed us the complete futility of our attempts... Coming back to the fate of RKAS, I can say that its disappearance is just a tactical step. Perhaps, RKAS will re-emerge in a new capacity, taking into account all the mistakes and being modernized according to the situation; perhaps we will create something brand new or a couple of variants. But the spirit of RKAS and the idea of that kind of anarchism which we have been trying to achieve for more than 20 years now, will live on. We are not surrendering and we are not disappearing. For now, we have dissolved in time and space. For a little while.”

The ideological confusion that crippled the RKAS, led it to fail its sternest test — the Maidan uprising and the civil war over eastern Ukraine. Shevchenko is unsparing in his analysis: “I firmly believe that any social revolution is possible only in the presence of two factors. These are: mas-

¹⁰ The Wikipedia entry on the Azov Battalion is at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Azov_Battalion. I have assumed their armament with tanks from the Battalion’s propaganda images, but this may be incorrect.

sive public demand for radical change and the political organization of anarchist of the revolutionary wing, which will be able to organize and direct the process of change and consolidate its results. If the first factor is more or less present, and activity by the population has increased, the subjective factor is still absent. Political revolution is taking place. And political forces and those who are called the big bourgeoisie — or with a modern twist, the oligarchs — will take advantage of its results. But if we are talking about social revolution, then there is no serious demand for it, people, even if they see the changes, they see these changes only within the framework of purely political changes. And even those timid shoots of anti-authoritarian social revolutionism, which are not supported by a strong anti-authoritarian revolutionary organisation, will be crushed by the political agenda of the bourgeois and nationalist parties. I have already talked about the absence of anarchist organisation. This is the main problem of the modern anarchist movement and the cause of its collapse against the background of current developments. The things that are happening now in Ukraine and the fact that anarchists here have been unable to use the situation because they denied common sense for years and were enthralled by subcultural, anti-organisational illusions, provides much food for self-analysis. And it confirms all the conclusions and efforts which supporters of the project called 'RKAS — N.I. Makhno' attempted to carry out. The fact that it failed says a lot and answers the following question: 'Is it possible for anarchists to hope now to switch the activity of the masses to the plane of the social revolution?'. The organisation is a very important medium for the existence of ideas. It is an incubator, a school, a mutual aid society and a productive platform for ideas and projects; but most importantly, it is a tool of realising those ideas, it is an instrument of influence and an instrument of struggle. It cannot be replaced with affinity groups. Read Makhno, Arshinov, Volin, Bookchin, finally, and everything becomes clear. Anarchists now, like in 1917, have missed a unique opportunity to head the process.”

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