

# The Russian Revolution in the Ukraine

(March 1917 — April 1918)

Nestor Makhno



# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Foreward</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>By Way of a Preface...</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Part One</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Chapter One: Establishing contact with the comrades and first attempts at organising revolutionary activity.</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Chapter Two: Organisation of the Peasants' Union</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Chapter Three: Police Archives Rifled</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Chapter Four: Fresh elections to the communal Committee. The notion of control.</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Chapter Five: The teachers' role. Our activity on the communal Committee.</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Chapter Six: The First of May. The agrarian issue as viewed by the peasants</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Chapter Seven: The Workers' Strike</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Chapter Eight: Some Results.</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Chapter Nine: The Campaign against Tenant Farming.</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Chapter Ten: P.A. Kropotkin's Arrival in Russia – Encounter with the Anarchists of Ekaterinoslav.</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>Chapter Eleven: Kornilov's March on Petrograd</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Chapter Twelve: Resistance to the counter-revolution spreads through the villages</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Chapter Thirteen: Visit to the Aleksandrovsk factory workers.</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>Chapter Fourteen: The Overtures of the Departmental Soviet to Gulyai-Polye.</b>	<b>64</b>

<b>Part Two</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Chapter One: The October coup d'état in Russia.</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Chapter Two: Elections to the constituent assembly: Our attitude vis à vis the parties in contention.</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>Chapter Three: The Departmental Congress.</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>Chapter Four: The counter-revolution of the Central Rada.</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>Chapter Five: With the Leftist bloc against the counter-revolution.</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>Chapter Six: The armed peasants rush to the aid of the urban workers. The Aleksandrovsk Revolutionary Committee and the Commission of Inquiry.</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>Chapter Seven: The armed struggle against the Cossacks. Delegation, disarmament of the Cossacks and an understanding with them.</b>	<b>92</b>
<b>Chapter Eight: The Bolshevik-Left SR bloc in Aleksandrovsk. My observations and the consequences of them.</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>Chapter Nine: Abolition of Zemstvo as a 'territorial unit'. Foundation of a Revolutionary Committee by the members of the Soviet. Seeking funds to meet the needs of the Revolution.</b>	<b>104</b>
<b>Chapter Ten: How barter was organised between town and countryside.</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>Chapter Eleven: Our group's new members.</b>	<b>118</b>
<b>Chapter Twelve: The agrarian communes—Their internal organisation—Their enemies.</b>	<b>120</b>
<b>Chapter Thirteen: The successes of the German and Austrian armies and of the troops of the Ukrainian Central Rada. Counter-revolutionary agents. The struggle against them.</b>	<b>125</b>
<b>Chapter Fourteen: Centralising the detachments. Formation of a united front with the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc.</b>	<b>134</b>
<b>Chapter Fifteen: I am urgently summoned to Yegorov's headquarters. Defeat for our fighting front.</b>	<b>137</b>

# Introduction

Although the Russian anarchists of the past are still alive in our hearts today, their actual historical and human experiences seem far off in the night of time. We are talking about only a few decades, yet it is as though the dust of centuries has piled up on these events, preventing us from understanding them. Always victorious in battle, Makhno appears as a fearless knight galloping invincible at the head of the Ukrainian insurgents, first against the white Russians of Denikin or Wrangel, then against Trotsky's Red Army.

Given that the need for revolutionary myths still persists among comrades, things might just stop there. Any romanticised attempt which borders on or even duplicates historical interpretation helps us to live and sometimes to die. But is that really what we want in bringing out this volume?

I don't know. When narrating events of the past, especially those that touch us deeply, it seems indispensable to bear the present day and the air breathed by those who still dream of revolution in mind. If this means anything, it means picking up the threads where they were broken off, taking them from comrades who rebelled so long ago and continuing to weave them under different conditions.

And some people are still fascinated by the big organisation today, just as Makhno—and even more so his closest comrade, Archinov—were in the past. A strong organisation doted with means and men, strategies and detailed programmes, with a high-sounding name and capable of making fierce proclamations and throwing the forces of repression into a panic simply breathing revenge or by merely threatening to shoot fascinates them. The more the movement is lacerated by a thousand internal misunderstandings and diatribes with each one accusing the other of respectability and a lowering of the guard, and words lose their meaning and take on the recondite, almost cryptographical ones dictated by suspicion, the more the organisation and its continual reinforcement becomes a panacea for all evils. The prosthesis extends its malefic shadow, making us feel strong; then, in this new-found strength suspicion is cast on the comrades who were bold enough to refuse and criticise the former as they saw it as nothing but an alibi and a further sign of weakness.

In this first volume of Makhno's memoirs finally published here in English there is constant reference to the Russian anarchists' lack of organisation and effectiveness, remarking that things would have been different (starting from May 1917) if a strong organisation had existed and functioned properly. Thus Makhno writes, 'In the aforementioned coup d'état in Petrograd, Moscow and other industrial towns, anarchists played an exceptionally salient part in the van of the sailors, soldiers and workers. But, for want of structures, they were unable to bring to bear upon the country a revolutionary influence comparable with that of these two parties which had formed a political bloc under the direction of that same guileful Lenin and knew precisely what they had to set about above all else at that time, and the degree of strength and energy at their disposal.' (Part two, Ch. 1)

In fact, as I have pointed out on various occasions, the question of the strong organisation is not only a false problem in the context of the Russian anarchists, but is so generally. I am not underestimating the organisational problem in saying that, merely pointing out that the question of the revolution cannot simply be solved with a clash between two organisations and a final victory for the revolutionary forces.

The more the years pass and capital develops new ways of modernising and restructuring in order to solve problems that seemed insurmountable in the past, the more one realises that it is not at the level of (military and productive) organisational strength that it is necessary to act, but in quite a different sphere. Both the strictly military efforts of the revolutionary struggle and the creation of new productive forms and their capacity to find different solutions, must come through the generalisation of the struggle, i.e. with the widest participation of the masses in the many ways that this is possible.

The Russian comrades—and Makhno's text is obviously impregnated with the revolutionary atmosphere of the time—did not see what is quite obvious to us today. For them the answer was to reinforce the organisation. Makhno said it on more than one occasion, then Archinov was to take the question to its extreme consequences. It would be quite pointless to repeat this today simply because it is bathed in the aura of revolutionary prestige of a great guerrilla fighter. We should not read the following pages like a technical exercise, but rather in the critical light of practice, the only thing that matters for anarchists who are thinking about what needs to be done today instead of talking about what should have been done yesterday.

In the memoirs we are presenting we also come across the latent problem of the 'popular front'. This is actually present throughout the whole narrative, although it only comes to the surface a few times. Makhno writes: '...in spite of the paradox, we should have decided to form a united front with the statist forces. Faithful to anarchist principles we should have been able to overcome all the contradictions and, once the forces of reaction had been destroyed, we would have widened and deepened the course of the Revolution for the greater good of submitted humanity.' (Part Two, end of chapter V). The many forces struggling against the repression—who were always on the point of taking power themselves—include the Ukrainian and Bolshevik socialist revolutionaries and the independentists, who were all different from the strictly military point of view. There can be no doubt that in a situation where one is faced with a common enemy, as was to happen later in Spain, anarchists had to decide whether to struggle alone or to participate in a common 'front' with the other so-called opponents of the raging reaction. The result has always been controversial. There have been (and still are) those who support the united front, and there have been (and still are) those who favour the autonomy of the struggle, that is the specific anarchist organisation with mass structures where anarchists find themselves alongside the people in struggle, not in party-style apparatuses or in specific structures led by functionaries more or less disguised as populist leaders.

This problem risks going the same way as the preceding one. Those who allow themselves to be fascinated by efficiency, believing that the only possible solution to the weakness and inefficiency of anarchists is a strong organisation, could not fail to welcome 'fronts' that (apparently) favour and increase this efficiency. The outcome is unavoidable. The way to frontist militarism is paved. In fact, the bigger the actions carried out the more significant they will appear to the deformed eye of the militaristic point of view. The more this decision is re-enforced, the further one will move from the practices that make the anarchist generalisation of the struggle possible.

A careful consideration of events should lead to different solutions, especially in the light of the Russian and Spanish experiences. I would not say an *a posteriori* refusal of frontism so much as the systematic, preventive decision to attack any authoritarian attempt to control revolutionary forces immediately, no matter where it comes from or with what name it tries to disguise itself. Right from the start of the revolution. This is possible and would reduce the danger of counter-revolutionaries concealing themselves among revolutionaries, because at first their forces are minimal. It is only a question of a few individuals in small, barely visible groups within the rising tide of the generalisation of the clash, chaos and destruction. This is the time to prevent those little islands of authoritarian corruption from gradually gaining strength and taking advantage of the inevitable reduction in revolutionary tension and throwing discredit on all the self-organised forms, proposing those controlled by the party functionaries. But this preventive action can only be brought about by anarchist comrades who have no illusions about big organisations but see the organisational problem differently: small unities, simple base nuclei consisting of anarchists and non-anarchists and linked by informal structures alongside the actions of anarchist groups based on affinity. In a word, an agile, informal organisation with nothing of the heaviness of the big federations which claim to manage the new world that opens up with the advent of the revolution. This perspective is therefore based on the autonomy of the struggle.

Such autonomy implies an informal orientation, not one unique front to put fear into the repressive forces. Repression, as we know by bitter experience, is never afraid unless it finds itself up against the wall. Moreover, as Makhno's case demonstrates, the informal organisation of base nuclei structured autonomously with minimal coordination turned out to be the best response to the repression, thereby dispelling his own organisational preoccupations, at least at a military level. Unfortunately, it is difficult to uproot the efficientist model from the minds of comrades who uphold the authoritarianism of the past, from the Jacobins to the Marxists, that still survives here and there in the world, leading to the last ditch of resistance of oppressed peoples. This model also still circulates among anarchists as we continue in our little performances that attempt to imitate the verbal truculence of days gone by, but without the force of events that assisted and reinforced that truculence. If history was once a tragedy, when it repeats itself it becomes a farce.

But let us return to the question of organisation

The present writer is not against organisation as such. In fact, I have always maintained that there is a need for organisation, otherwise it would be impossible to act even to create the initial conditions of individual autonomy essential to the growth of the revolutionary process.. But that does not say much. Organisation is a means and, within certain limits, it multiplies the strength of the individual, producing a new collective strength which single individuals could never hope to gain from the mere sum of the desires of all. That said, however, this strength can be wasted and get lost in the meandering of an involuntary bureaucracy that ends up suffocating it. The wider and more articulated the organisation becomes, the more a network of ramifications and reciprocal control develops, obstructing the very efficiency one was looking for at the start.

Moreover, once this road has been undertaken there is no turning back. In other words, there is no way to mitigate the consequences of an organisational hypertrophy. One would not get a better organisation by reducing controls and ramifications, merely an ineffective one, that is to say, a dead weight, something that it would be better to get rid of.

An informal organisation that is created autonomously and is free from any external restraints or internal organisation charts, must be born informally. It cannot wait for a magic wand to be waved, or for the work of some theoretician, to make it such.

The other essential point is permanent conflict: waiting for some individual or committee to give practical indications or theoretical illumination on where and how to attack not waiting for unanimous decisions or federal ratification, but attacking right away on the basis of the decisions of the single affinity groups or base nuclei with minimal links between them. It was not by chance that Makhno, who created uncontaminated sympathy for the anarchist guerrilla throughout almost the whole of this century, was called “Batko”, i.e. “Father” by his comrades, a name given to every “condottiere” in Russia. There, as elsewhere, if one does not want to accept a role (and the people have very schematic ideas on the subject), one should not put oneself in the position of not being able to refuse it.

Makhno himself, when speaking of his relations with the peasants’ movement refers, ‘...it was agreed on all sides that the initiatives should always come from me and that I should always hold the reins of these various institutions.’ (Part One Ch 7)

As a charismatic figure the ‘condottiere’, even if he is determined not to abuse his power, i.e. not use it to reinforce his own personal privilege (and this is undoubtedly the case of Makhno who died in poverty in a hospital in Paris) is nevertheless a ‘condottiere’, and his credibility, from which his fame derives and grows, comes from the fact that he is capable of leading people to victory. But what does this leading to victory mean? At the strictly military level it means resolving an armed conflict, killing more enemies than they do us. This kind of accountancy always ends registering a loss. No one wins, everyone is defeated. The only moral justification for attack is the need to destroy the enemy, not to gain victory over him. These two aspects have often been confused. Destroying the enemy means making his projects of control and dominion impossible, establishing a new world that is something *else*, even though it has to pass through the narrow door of that destruction. A new world cannot be conquered with victory. Taking over everything that the enemy possesses, even his life, does not lead to building a better world if one continues to think with the same concepts, albeit in a different hue. We build a new world differently, by carrying different ideas and feelings in our hearts, here and now, not by burying our enemies and emulating the apparent successes of a power apparatus that dominates us and dreaming it capable of working time in our favour this time and supporting our weaknesses.

For anarchists there is no such thing as victory. There is no such thing as a free society that is capable of appearing completely in the future, like Athena from Jove’s head. Perhaps nothing of that society exists yet in anarchist theoretical elaboration. Perhaps it will never be visible, no matter how many victories we accumulate by strengthening our organisations or dreaming of others better able to respond to the needs of the revolution. To win at the military level is no more than a peripheral satisfaction, a sigh of relief, a gloomy patch of light in the blind alley where the heads of the enemies who have always persecuted us start to fall. And then? What will we find in our hearts then? What will we build the society of tomorrow from, if not from the little freedom we have managed to imbue into the very means of destruction we use today? What would have happened if the anarchists had succeeded in defeating the Red Army and the model of Makhnovist free communes had spread all over Russia? Perhaps the free society would have taken hold and developed and we would not have seen all the horrors of real socialism? Perhaps. But only thanks to the presence of other creatively different forces developed by that communitarian nucleus from the start, which would only have become significant had one been able to

immediately get rid of all illusions of a popular front. In the case of the contrary, the anarchists would behave been 'condottieri' like any other sufficiently ideologised party bureaucrat.

To remain prisoners of the ideology of victory means not understanding that any active minority, no matter who they are, can ever really win, as this very victory means the defeat of any possibility of generalised freedom. If we want to talk about winning it must be the masses in revolt, in the first place freely associated in new social creations capable of giving life to incredible different vital formations of a kind that no fantasy, no matter how wild, is capable of imagining from within the repressive rind that oppresses and surrounds us. If winning means a minority of specialists assisted by groups of people sensitised by propaganda to the new ideals who are enduring the new ideas, this enduring will be all the more terrible the more the new carriers of truth are convinced that they have the best possible solution to the social question. There is no worse oppressor than virtue in the place of vice.

So if on the one hand organisational problems are important so as not to consign ourselves to the repression unarmed, on the other they need to be seen for what they are, a means like any other and not the main objective. The struggle has many nuances and only one objective: to act in such a way that it generalises as far as possible. This is the real task of revolutionaries: to begin to develop the struggle, taking on the task and difficulties of the beginning, understanding what everyone else takes longer to see. They must pass to the attack without delay, avoiding falling prey to the illusion of a match fought by two sides with the repression on the one side and the active minority (more or less aware of its own limits and potential) on the other.

This task is inseparably linked to the other of the link between agricultural and industrial production, often indicated in Makhno's text as the solution to the economic problem given the period in the relations to be established and guaranteed between comrades and towns. So he writes: 'The meeting dwelt on this theme: the effecting of changes between town and village without recourse to the good offices of the political authorities of the State. The example had been set: without middlemen, the villages could get to know the town better; and the town the villages. Thus two classes of toilers would come to agreement upon this common objective: the removal from the State of all authority in public functions and the abolition of its social authority—in short, its elimination.

The more this grandiose notion spread among the toilers of the Golyai-Polye region, and the more the latter embraced it, the more they made a stand in the struggle against all of the authoritarian principles which were a hindrance to it. They were trying to establish the theoretical value of such direct exchanges between toilers and sought a means of concretely securing their right to engage in them.

At the same time they divined in this the possibility of effectively undermining the capitalist traits of the Revolution, survivals from tsarist times. So that whenever all of the cloth received had been distributed, the populace of Golyai-Polye looked forward to the inclusion of all basic necessities in quantities adequate to serve the entire region in these exchanges. This would have proved that the Revolution had not only to busy itself with the destruction of the basis of the bourgeois capitalist regime but had also given consideration to prescribing in a hard and fast manner the groundwork of a new, egalitarian society wherein the toilers' self-awareness might grow and develop.'(Part Two, Chapter 10)

This problem has now become very complex, and many comrades prefer to see it only in its aspects of development, or capitalist restructuring. But during the revolutionary phase where many of the essential aspects that guarantee the functioning of capital under the current regime, for



example the prevalence of the structures and mechanisms for financial transactions, the problem would become essential again. Many aspects of the information technology of today would become quite unusable, so a considerable part of production would come to be blocked or destroyed, i.e. the part that cannot quickly be led back to the management of production or consumerism based on the most simple if not primordial, administrative mechanisms.

Once again it is not a question of forcibly imposing a functioning model such as free self-managed exchange as that this model, which anarchists have always been carriers of, could turn out to be inapplicable in future conditions of struggle where unclear interests, confused mixtures in the course of transition, are kept alive by the reactionary forces of capital. If the objective is anarchist communism, the means for reaching it beyond the destructive event are not yet known apart from giving good solutions such as 'taking the lot', with all their limitations. Here again it is not a question of winning, but of making a social formation of which we know almost nothing, function. We cannot start off from the simple substitution of property from capitalist to communist, assuming that the means of production will continue to function in the same way. Modern information technology has made that impossible.

It is therefore not a question of putting ourselves at the head of the old firms and proceeding in a better (more politically correct) way than the capitalists did. In the same way, it is not a question of having the stronger military structure, and therefore winning. Such problems, as fascinating as they are painful, are all there before us in these Memoirs which are a good occasion for thinking about them again, certainly not for deluding ourselves or resolving them.

Alfredo M. Bonanno

# Foreward

The book we are presenting here is a reissue of the first volume of the memoirs of Nestor Makhno, *The Russian Revolution in the Ukraine*. The volume first appeared in French in 1927, before its appearance in a Russian language edition in 1929. Today it is nowhere to be found and does not even feature in the catalogue of the Bibliothèque Nationale. This is the text which we have reprinted. It covers the period from March 1917 to April 1918.

The second and third volumes, on the other hand, have never been translated into nor published in French, save for two excerpts from volume two... 'My conversation with Svendlov' and 'My meeting and conversation with Lenin', which date from June 1918 and which, in translations by Marcel Body, were included in my anthology of anarchism, *Ni Dieu ni Maître*.<sup>1</sup>

It is our intention to publish the yet unpublished French translation of the second and third volumes in the wake of the first volume, which were published in Russian in Paris in 1936 and 1937 respectively. Volume two covers the period from April to June 1918, the third the period from July to December 1918. Makhno did not pursue his memoirs beyond the latter date. The second and third volumes will contain prefaces and notes by Voline whose own monumental *The Unknown Revolution (1917–1921)* which we have already published as part of the same *Changer la Vie* collection, back in early 1969.

At the same time as issuing French translations of the second and third volumes of Makhno's memoirs, our collection will be bringing out an unpublished biography of Nestor Makhno by the English writer Malcolm Menzies, entitled *Makhno une épopée*, where, above all, a superb psychological profile of the hero of the 'makhnovshchina' will be outlined.

---

Pending publication of that biography, let us briefly review the essential milestones of Makhno's life. He was born on 27 October 1889 into a family of poor peasants in the village of Gulyai-Polye<sup>2</sup> in the Aleksandrovsk district, in the Ekaterenoslav jurisdiction, which is to say, in the Southern Ukraine.

His father died when he was just 10 months old and his mother was left alone to raise her 5 small children. At the age of 7 we find young Nestor tending the cows and sheep of the village's peasants. The next year he entered the communal school while continuing to work as a shepherd during the summer.

He was 12 when he had to give up schooling and leave his family in order to seek employment as a farm-hand with some estate owners of German extraction, quite numerous in Ukraine in those days. Subsequently, he found employment as a caster in the Gulyai-Polye foundry.

---

<sup>1</sup> Published by La Cité, Lausanne,—pocket edition in 3 volumes in the 'Petite collection Maspéro (1970). AK edition, 2 vols. See also KSL pamphlet. AK edition, 2 vols (also KSL pamphlet)

<sup>2</sup> See the appendix for Nestor Makhno's own note on Gulyai-Polye.

The 1905 Revolution drew this 16 year old adolescent into the social struggle. From that moment he became a libertarian communist. Three years later he was arrested and sentenced to death for membership of anarchist organisations and involvement in terrorist activities. But the sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. He served his time in the Butyrki, Moscow's central prison. He availed of his lengthy captivity to further his education with the aid of his cell-mate, the better educated Piotr Arshinov. Above all he read Bakunin and Kropotkin. Frequently put in solitary for his rebellious attitudes, he contracted tuberculosis of the lung. The Russian revolution finally freed him on 1 March 1917.

Makhno hastened home to his native village where the peasants indicated that they were well-disposed towards him and they placed their trust in him. He thus became chairman of the region's Peasant Union, the farming commission, the union of metalworkers and woodworkers and finally, and above all, chairman of the local soviet of peasants and workers.

The Ukraine having been occupied by Austro-German armed forces, the former landlords found the lands which the peasants had seized from them since the 1917 Revolution restored to their ownership. The farm workers defended their recent gains by taking up arms. Makhno raised workers' and peasants' militias which spearheaded the fight against both the occupiers and the Ukrainian counter-revolutionary authorities who had sided with them. A price was put on his head and he was forced to go underground. His mother's house was put to the torch and his elder brother was shot, despite his being an invalid.

In June 1918 Nestor Makhno visited Moscow to consult with leading anarchist militants concerning how to conduct revolutionary libertarian activity in the South-Ukrainian peasant milieu. It was on this occasion that he was received in the Kremlin and there met the then secretary-general of the Communist Party, Sverdlov, and Lenin himself.

The first feat of arms by the man who was to become a great libertarian guerrilla fighter was the capture of Gulai-Polye at the end of September 1918. One consequence of the armistice of 11 November 1918 which concluded the Great War was the withdrawal of the occupying forces, and Makhno simultaneously availed himself of the opportunity to stockpile arms and supplies.

---

For the first time in history, the principles of libertarian communism were put into practice in Soviet Ukraine and, insofar as the circumstances of civil war allowed, self-management was practiced. Lands wrested from the old estate owners were worked in common by the peasants, banded together in "communes" or "free labour societies" in which the precepts of fraternity and equality were observed. Everyone, man, woman or child, had to labour according to their abilities. Comrades elected on a temporary basis to managerial positions, then resumed their usual work alongside the other members of the commune.

Each soviet was merely the executor of the wishes of the peasants of the locality who had elected it. Production units were federated by district and the districts federated by region. The soviets were knit into an overall economic system based upon social equality. They had to be absolutely independent of every political party. No politician was to impose his will there under cover of the power of the soviet. Their members had to be authentic toilers, serving the interests of the labouring masses and none other.

When the Makhnovist partisans entered a district they put up posters which read:

‘The liberty of the peasants and workers is theirs and may not be impinged upon. It is up to the peasants and workers themselves to act, to organise, to come to some arrangement among themselves in every facet of their lives, as they themselves perceive and wish... (...). The Makhnovists can only help them by offering them this or that advice or counsel. (...) But in no circumstances can they govern them, nor do they wish to.’

When later, in autumn 1920, Makhno’s men were induced to enter into—on an equal footing—an ephemeral accord with the Bolshevik authorities, they were insistent that the following rider be adopted:

‘In the region where the Makhnovist army is to operate, the worker and peasant population is to create its free institutions for economic and political self-administration. These institutions are to be autonomous and linked on a federal basis, through compacts, with the governmental organs of the soviet republics.’

Dumbfounded, the Bolshevik negotiators deleted this rider from the agreement so as to refer it to Moscow where, of course, it was adjudged ‘absolutely inadmissible’.

---

One of the comparative weaknesses of the Makhnovist movement was the dearth of libertarian intellectuals it contained. But, intermittently at any rate, it did have help from outside. First of all from Kharkov and Kursk, through the anarchists who had amalgamated at the end of 1918 into a combine known as the Nabat (the alarm) of which Voline was the leading light. In April 1919, they held a congress at which they came out ‘...categorically and definitively against any participation in the soviets, these having become purely political organisms, organised on authoritarian, centralist, statist lines’. This pronouncement was regarded by the Bolshevik government as a declaration of war and Nabat had to cease all its activities.

Subsequently, in July, Voline managed to reach Makhno’s headquarters, where, in concert with Piotr Archinov, he took charge of the movement’s cultural and educational service. He chaired one of its congresses, the one held in Aleksandrovsk that October. At it some general theses spelling out the doctrine of the ‘free soviets’ were adopted. Unfortunately those theses have been lost to us.

The congresses of the Makhnovshchina brought together both the peasants’ delegates and the combatant’s delegates. Indeed, the civilian organisation was the extension of an insurgent peasant army practising guerrilla tactics. It was remarkably mobile, capable of covering up to 100 kilometres per day, not only by virtue of its cavalry but also thanks to its infantry who moved around on light spring-loaded horse-drawn vehicles. This army was organised upon the essentially libertarian principles of volunteer troops, the elective principle (which applied to all ranks) and discipline freely assented to. The rules of the latter, devised by teams of partisans then endorsed by general assemblies, were stringently observed by all.

Makhno’s guerrillas harassed the interventionist White armies. As for the Bolsheviks’ Red Guard units, which were soon to be incorporated into a Red Army, these were quite ineffectual. They fought according to the tired old canons of classic bourgeois warfare venturing only along the railroad tracks without ever sallying from their armoured trains, falling back at the first reversal and often neglecting to take all of their own fighters aboard again. Thus they instilled little confidence in the peasants who, isolated in their villages and bereft of weapons, might have been at the mercy of the counter-revolutionaries. ‘The honour of having annihilated Denikin’s

counter-revolution in the autumn of 1919 belongs chiefly to the anarchist insurgents,' wrote Piotr Arshinov, the chronicler of the Makhnovshchina.

But Makhno refused to place his army under the supreme command of Trotsky, the head of the Red Army. So Trotsky turned against Makhno's guerrillas. On 4 June 1919, he drafted an order whereby he banned the forthcoming congress of the Makhnovists whom he accused of setting themselves up against the authority of the soviets in the Ukraine, and he stigmatised any involvement in the congress as an act of 'high treason', ordering that its delegates be arrested. Embarking upon a procedure which the Spanish Stalinists were to espouse 18 years later against the anarchist brigades, he denied arms to Makhno's partisans, evading the duty to render them assistance so as to go on to accuse them of 'betrayal' and of letting themselves be beaten by the White troops. No matter how much respect may be due the memory of that great revolutionary Leon Trotsky, this negative page in his prestigious career should not be glossed over in silence.

Nevertheless, the two armies came to an arrangement on two occasions, whenever the seriousness of the interventionist peril made it imperative that they act in concert, and this came to pass, first in March 1919 against Denikin and then during the summer and autumn of 1920 when there was a threat by Wrangel's white forces which Makhno eventually routed. But as soon as the perceived danger was no more, the Red Army resumed its military operations against Makhno's guerrillas who answered blow for blow.

At the end of November 1920, the Bolshevik authorities had no scruples about orchestrating an ambush. The officers of the Makhnovist army of the Crimea were invited to take part in a military consultation, whereupon they were promptly arrested by the political police, the cheka, and either shot without any semblance of a trial, or disarmed. At the same time a full scale offensive was launched again at Gulyai-Polye. The contest, an increasingly lopsided one between libertarians and 'authoritarians', between a traditional army and a guerrilla force, lingered on for 9 more months. In the end, rendered *hors de combat* by forces that were far superior in number and equipment, Makhno had to give up the contest. He managed to flee to Rumania in August 1921 and thence to reach Paris, where he was to die in July 1935, ailing and impoverished.

One may share the view with Piotr Arshinov that the Makhnovshchina was the prototype of an independent movement of the peasant masses, while our own view is that it was a forerunner of revolutionary guerrilla warfare of the 20th century variety as prosecuted by the Chinese, the Cubans, the Algerians and the Vietnamese.

---

For a long time, with the exception of M. Kubanin's comparatively objective and well-documented book in Russian, the Makhno episode has been passed over in silence or violently misrepresented in the USSR. However, there are intimations of a new approach. Indeed in No 7 of the soviet review *Nory Mir* in 1969, an interview was published, dating from 1935. This interview was with one Stepan Dybetz who headed the USSR automobile industry. An erstwhile metalworker and anarchist, he defected to bolshevism in the autumn of 1918. With a measure of gratitude, Dybetz tells how he met Makhno. His account, some 63 pages long, covers the period from the spring of 1918 up to November 1919. Dybetz's wife had also been an anarchist and, unlike her husband, has remained such. She had previously been in prison in Odessa with the young Makhno in 1905, and Makhno had forgotten nothing of that past. Here is an excerpt from the interview:

---

Makhno began his military activity in the capacity of batko-ataman (head of a small detachment of partisans). He mounted several daring raids behind the White's lines. He put his daring and inventive mind to work, and gradually his reputation grew among the peasants. In this there may perhaps have been a shortcoming on the part of the young soviet authorities which assured him of popularity as a hero and even went so far as to countenance the description of his several thousand-strong troops as a 'Batko Makhno Brigade'.

After Makhno was declared an outlaw by the soviet command of which Dybetz was himself a member, Dybetz and his wife Rosa were one day captured along with other Red Army commanders and commissars by Makhno's men. The latter brought them to Makhno's headquarters.

In the village of Dobrovelichka, Makhno, astride a white charger, greeted the army of prisoners which Kalashnikov brought him. He was of medium height and wore his hair long, and wore a sort of military busby. Kalashnikov and he embraced. Our carts had also drawn to a halt. Finger pointing to us, Kalashnikov said:

*—Look! I bring you the staff of a combat sector.*

*Makhno did not even deign to look at us.*

*—Well then, shoot the lot!*

*Whereupon the anarchist Uralov said:*

*—What? Shoot them? When the Dybetz's are among them, man and wife?*

*—Ah, the Dybetz's! Fetch them here!*

*I was brought before Makhno.*

*Hello, Dybetz.*

*—Hello Makhno.*

*How do you come to be here Dybetz?*

*—Your valiant army dragged me to you like a wild beast in a cage.*

*He smiled.*

*—You know that I now shoot communists, for they have outlawed me?*

*—Well, there you have it. I cannot raise my hand against this old turncoat. Maybe it's weakness on my part, but I will not shoot him. And I order that not a hair on his head be harmed wherever my armies may be. Anyone who lifts his hand against him is to be shot by me personally. Understood?*

*—Understood.*

*—Release Dybetz and his wife and hold the others at my disposal.*

Dybetz and his wife were to be arrested on another occasion but were once again released on Makhno's orders.

Daniel Guerin

## By Way of a Preface...

*I believe a few introductory comments may be of use just as this, the first volume of *The Russian Revolution in the Ukraine* is on the verge of publication.*

*First, I must alert the reader to the absence of a number of important documents which ought to have figured within—resolutions and proclamations from the Gulyai-Polye Peasant's Union, from the Soviet of Peasant and Worker Deputies, and their direct inspiration, Gulyai-Polye's peasant anarchist-communist group.*

*With admirable consistency that group set itself the aim of rallying the peasants and workers of the region beneath its banner. Ever in the van, it offered them guidance, explaining to them the meaning and moment of the events that were taking place and disclosing to them the aims of the toilers generally and those of the anarchist-communists, more closely attuned to the peasant mind, in particular.*

*It is likewise a matter of regret that I do not have the photographs of the peasant anarchist-communist group of Gulyai-Polye that I should have liked to see occupy pride of place among the documents bearing on the Russian revolution in the Ukraine, on the Makhnovist movement spawned by that revolution, the principles which directed it and, finally, the acts which were the consequence of them, alongside short biographical notes.*

*I would honestly have liked to insert in the pages which follow the portraits of these unknown revolutionaries sprung from the very bosom of the Ukrainian people, revolutionaries who, at my instigation and under my supervision, managed to create among the toilers that broad and powerful revolutionary movement at whose head the black flags of the Makhnovists fluttered.*

*Unfortunately I have not yet been able to lay hands on these documents which I will make public as soon as this is feasible for me, so that they may be placed before the toilers of the entire world to await their verdict.*

*My account is wholly consistent with the historical facts whether these relate to the Russian revolution generally or to our role in particular. They will be open to challenge only by those 'historians' who played no effective part in the events described in these memoirs and who, though having remained aloof from the revolution have nonetheless successfully passed themselves off, by the written or spoken word, as people with a thoroughgoing familiarity with all of the minutiae of the great revolution in the estimation of foreign revolutionaries.*

*Such criticisms we will always be able to rebut, for they are built upon sand, and these 'experts' know naught of what they speak, nor against whom they rant.*

*My sole regret is that these memoirs are not being published in the Ukraine and are not appearing in Russian, nor in Ukrainian. This failing is a product of circumstances against which I can avail nothing.*

*The revolution of February 1917 cast wide the gates of Russia's political prisons.*

*Having taken to the streets armed, some blue-shirted, some wearing the grey soldier's cap, the workers and peasants assuredly made a significant contribution to the outcome. From the outset, these toilers had to face up to the Statist socialists who, in concert with the liberal bourgeoisie, had*

*already formed a Provisional 'revolutionary' government and were striving to keep the revolutionary upheaval on the path which it had marked out for it.*

*Then the toilers demanded an immediate amnesty, the first step in any revolution. And the Social Revolutionary A. Kerensky, the Justice minister, bowed to their wishes.*

*Within a few days, all political detainees had been set free and resumed, among the masses of town and countryside, the propaganda activity which they had hitherto engaged in clandestinely in the unbearable atmosphere of the tsarist regime.*

*As for other political prisoners—whom the government of the tsar and of the pomeschiki had immured in dank dungeons, hoping thereby to deprive the mass of toilers of their most advanced elements and thus to stifle any hint of denunciation of the regime's iniquity—I had my freedom restored to me too.*

*Sentenced to life imprisonment, shackled, frequently ill, eight and a half years of incarceration had nonetheless failed to crush my faith in the anarchist cause. Convinced as ever of the coming victory of free labour, equality and solidarity over the slavery created by State and Capital, I emerged from the Butyrki on 2 March 1917 and set to work again two days later, right there in Moscow in the Lefortovo anarchist group. Also, I had not forgotten our own Gulyai-Polye anarchist-communist group, founded 10 or 12 years previously and which was, or so my comrades said, still active despite the loss of many leading militants.*

*I was very much aware of the inadequacies of my theoretical education and of my ignorance of the positive data that might have enabled me resolve social and political issues from an anarchist viewpoint. To be sure, I knew that this was so of nine out of every ten people in our circles: the schools that should have been likely to supply this sort of grounding were cruelly lacking. Nonetheless I was profoundly aware of this shortcoming and endlessly exercised by it.*

*Only the hope that this state of affairs would not endure offered me any consolation and heartened me once more: I was, in fact, firmly convinced that work, open and above board, in the bosom of an intense revolutionary movement, would supply the evidence to demonstrate to anarchists the necessity of a powerful organisation capable of marshalling all anarchist forces for the fray and of building up a movement that was thoroughly coherent and aware of the goal to be achieved. Such was the future that the immense progress of the Russian revolution hinted at to me. Indeed, to my mind, anarchist activity in such times was insolubly linked to the activity of the mass of toilers, they who were most intimately concerned in the triumph of truth and freedom, in the success of another social arrangement, in the reorganisation of human society.*

*I looked forward to the powerful expansion of our movement and its influence upon the final outcome of the Revolution. This idea was especially dear to me.*

*Fortified by this staunch belief, a bare three weeks after my release, I journeyed to Gulyai-Polye where I was born, where I had lived, and where I had left so many dear ones behind. So many beloved things and where I really felt I might act usefully in the bosom of the great family of peasants in whose midst our group had been formed. Though it had lost two thirds of its members to the scaffold, the icy wastes of Siberia or to exile abroad, it was nonetheless still extant.*

*Its original core had almost wholly disappeared, but it had managed to have its ideas pervade the peasants deeply, well beyond the confines of Gulyai-Polye.*

*Great strength of will and a thoroughgoing familiarity with what anarchists pursue are needed to determine what it is possible to wring from a revolution, even a political revolution.*

*It was from here, from Gulyai-Polye, from the bosom of the mass of toilers that the formidable revolutionary strength upon which, if Bakunin, Kropotkin and others are to be believed, revolutionary*



*anarchism should lean, was to come: this it was that would indicate the means whereby to do away with the old regime of slavery and to conjure up a new one wherein slavery would not exist and wherein authority would have no place. Freedom, equality and solidarity will then be the principles that will guide men and human societies in their living and their struggling for greater happiness and prosperity.*

*That notion had never left me during my whole term of imprisonment and it was with that same thought in mind that I was now on my way home to Gulyai-Polye.*

# **Part One**

## Chapter One: Establishing contact with the comrades and first attempts at organising revolutionary activity.

Upon my return I met up with some former comrades from the group. It was through them that I learned that a large number had failed to heed the call. Those who came to see me were: Andrei Semenota (brother of Sasha and Prokop Semenyuta), Moshe Kalinichenko, Filip Krat, Sava Makhno, the brothers Prokop and Grigor Sharovski, Pavel Kostelev, Leon Schneider, Pavel Sokruta, Isidor Lionty, Alexis Marchenko, and Pavel Houndai (Kostelev). The old hands had been joined by some youngsters who had been group members for only two or three years: these I did not know. They used to read anarchist material and, with the aid of an offset copier they clandestinely printed proclamations which they spread all around.

And what numbers of peasant and worker sympathisers with the anarchist ideal came to see me along with them! True, I could not count upon them in the plans I was hatching for the future. No matter. Here before me were my peasant friends, these unknown anarchists, dauntless fighters incapable of lies or deceit. Theirs were real peasant natures: it was hard to win them over, but once won over, once they had grasped the idea and verified the truth of it through their own reasoning, they sang the praises of this new ideal everywhere and at every opportunity.

In truth, I thrilled with reassurance at the sight of them before me; I was moved by a feeling so lively that I conceived the intention of engaging, beginning the morning of the very next day, in active propaganda throughout the entire Gulyai-Polye region, driving out the communal Committee (the coalition government's administrative unit), disbanding the militia and thwarting the formation of any new Committee. I resolved to go into action without further ado.

Nevertheless, towards morning on March 25, when all the peasant men and women who had been arriving since the previous evening to get a glimpse of 'he returned from the dead' as they put it, had left again, all the group members held an impromptu meeting during which I did not, in fact, display so much zeal: in my address the scheme to conduct active propaganda among the peasants and workers and drive out the communal Committee was not given its due emphasis.

The comrades were startled to hear me belabour the need for our group to examine the current state of the anarchist movement in Russia more closely. The kaleidoscope of groups which existed prior to the revolution gave me no grounds for satisfaction. 'A tactic that does not have coordination as its cornerstone is fated to remain futile,' I stated. 'It is incapable of making the most of the workers' strength and of the enthusiasm of the broad masses when the revolution is in its destructive phase.'

In these conditions, anarchists who support such action either cut themselves off from such events and languish in the sectarian propaganda of the groups, or else follow in their wake, taking on only secondary tasks and thereby working to the advantage of their political adversaries.

So, in order to be able to do away with governmental institutions, to dispense in our region with all rights of private ownership of the land, the factories, manufacturers and other undertakings, we must, while taking into account the anarchist movement in the towns, draw closer to the peasant masses so as to assure ourselves of the constancy of their revolutionary enthusiasm on the one hand, and to have them feel on the other that we are with them, unshakeably committed to the ideas that we set before them in the skhods<sup>1</sup> and meetings.

That, comrades, is one of these tactical issues that we will be called upon to study in the near future. We will have to explore it in all its ramifications, for upon its solution will depend the choice of the tactic to be espoused for our activities.

This factor is all the more important for us, in that our group is the only one which has remained in contact with the peasant masses over the past eleven years. So far as I am aware, no other group exists in the neighbourhood. The urban groups of Aleksandrovsk and Ekaterinoslav, boast only a few survivors and in any case their precise whereabouts at present are unknown: some are allegedly in Moscow, the date of their homecoming unknown, while others seem to have left the country for Switzerland, France or America and nothing more has been heard from them. Thus we have only ourselves to rely upon.

Narrow as our familiarity with anarchist teaching may be, we must nonetheless devise upon that basis a plan of action to be undertaken in peasant circles in Gulyai Polye and region. We must set about organising a Peasant Union and place one of the peasants from our group at its head without delay. This ploy has a dual purpose: we will in this way prevent the element hostile to our political ideal from getting a foothold in it; and furthermore we will be constantly able to keep the union briefed on developments and thereby arrive at a complete understanding between it and our group.

In this manner, the peasants will be able to get to grips with the question of agrarian reform and declare the land to be under collective ownership. And that without waiting for the resolution of this question—such an eminently important one as far as they are concerned—by the ‘provisional Government’.

The comrades showed that they were happy with what they had heard. They did not endorse my approach to the subject, however.

Comrade Kalinchenko was witheringly critical of my approach, claiming that while the present revolution was in progress our role as anarchists should be to concentrate upon disseminating our ideas. Especially because such a wide scope for our activities being available, we had to avail of it solely for the purpose of getting the workers to understand our ideal without seeking to enter their organisations.

He said, ‘In this way the peasants will see that we are not seeking to bring them under our influence but that we are merely seeking to afford them an understanding of our ideas so that, drawing their inspiration from our methods and modes of action, they may build a new life with complete independence.’

It was at that point that our discussion ended, for it was 7 am. and I had to go along to the workers’ and peasants’ Skhod-rally at around 10 am., at which the chairman of the communal Committee, Prusinski, was to read a declaration from the district commissar explaining how the change of regime resulting from the Revolution was to be interpreted.

---

<sup>1</sup> Skhod = assembly of the members of a commune.

We simply decided that there were grounds for subjecting my report to analysis and more detailed discussion and we separated: some comrades made their way home, while the rest stayed behind so as to attend the skhod-rally with me.

At ten o'clock I was already in the Market Square with some of them. I ran my eye over the square: the houses, the schools.

I walked into one of the latter and encountered the headmaster. We spoke at length about teaching programmes, something of which I was completely ignorant I admit. I learned that the catechism was part of the curriculum and was strenuously defended by the priests and by a section of the parents. I was outraged at this, not that that prevented me from enrolling some time later on as a member of the Friends of Education Society, a society which subsidised the schools. Indeed I said to myself that in taking an active part in its work I might manage to shake the religious foundations of the teaching.

Only towards noon did I turn up at the skhod-rally, shortly after the address by the sub-Lieutenant Prusinski, the communal Committee chairman. (At the time Gulyai Polye was host to the 8th Serbian regiment, with a detachment of Russian machine-gunners: twelve machine-guns, one hundred and forty-four men and four officers. When the above-mentioned committee had come to be formed, certain of these officers had been invited to join it. One of them, Prusinski, was elected chairman: another, Lieutenant Kudinov, headed the militia. Thus public order in Gulyai-Polye was the responsibility of these two officers.)

Winding up his speech, the Committee chairman invited me to speak in turn, to support his conclusions. I declined this suggestion and spoke on quite another matter.

In my speech, I showed the peasants how it was inconceivable that in revolutionary Gulyai-Polye there should be a communal Committee headed by outsiders to the Commune, persons who, as a result, could not be called to account for their actions. And I suggested that without delay four representatives per sotnia (Gulyai-Polye then consisted of seven districts called *sotnia*) be appointed to look into this matter and many others.

The teachers from the primary school immediately supported my proposal. The school's headmaster placed his establishment at our disposal. It was decided that each sotnia would elect its representatives and a date for the meeting was agreed.

Thus did I renew contacts with active life upon my return from incarceration.

Shortly after, I was invited by the teachers to attend their private meeting. First we got to know each other fully. One of them was a Social-Revolutionary while the remainder, about fifteen in all, belonged to no party at all for the most part. Then we tackled a series of issues relating to the inactivity of the teachers who were, however, itching to take an active role in public life and were seeking a way forward. We resolved to act in concert and, in the interests of the peasants and workers, to found a new Committee in place of the one made up of officers and kulaks<sup>2</sup> elected, not by all of the peasants, but only by the richer ones among them.

I next showed up at our group's meeting where my report, and comrade Kalinichenko's refutation of it, were discussed. In the wake of this debate it was decided that, beginning the very next day, we would start methodical propaganda among the peasants and the workers of the factories and the workshops.

Being not as yet organised, the workers were unable to set up a 'district union' of an anarchist outlook capable of usefully combating the communal Committee and were obliged, willy-nilly,

---

<sup>2</sup> Kulak = peasant whose wealth derived from exploitation of other peasants.

to rally around the latter. So new elections to that Committee had to be preceded with as a matter of urgency. What is more, there had to be intense propaganda in favour of the venture in which we would be involved with a view to bringing influence to bear, thus inducing it to throw down a gauntlet to the communal Committee which was inspired by the coalition government to establish its own control over it.???

‘I see this,’ I told the comrades, ‘as a way of denying the rights of the coalition government and the very principle underlying these communal Committees. What is more, should our action along these lines be successful we will lead the peasants and workers towards a grasp of this truth: they alone, conscious of their revolutionary role, can faithfully embody the notion of autonomy without the tutelage of the political parties or of the government.

This is the ideal chance for we anarchists to search out in practice the solution to a whole series of pressing questions upon which the realisation of our ideal hangs one way or another. albeit it at the cost of many difficulties and perhaps of quite a few false steps, t

It would be an unforgivable mistake for our group to let this moment slip by, for it would thereby divorce itself from the mass of toilers. Now, that is precisely what we should fear most: for at such a time, that would be tantamount to disappearing from the revolutionary struggle and perhaps even in certain instances what would be even worse—to obliging the toilers to abandon our ideas which they are coming around to, and will come around to even more if we remain in their midst marching with them into the fray and onwards to death, or to victory and joy.’

Laughing, the comrades said:

‘Friend, you’re straying from anarchist tactics. We would have liked to hear our movement speak, just as you yourself invited us to at our first meeting.’

‘That’s right, we should listen to that voice and listen to it we will, if only there was a movement. But as yet I see none. And yet I know that we must set to work without delay. I proposed a plan of action to you. You adopted it. So what remains for us to do, if not to set to work.’

So whole weeks elapsed in futile argument. However, each one of us, in keeping with the decision reached, had already begun to work in his own manner, consonant with the plan espoused together.

## Chapter Two: Organisation of the Peasants' Union

Around midweek, the peasants' delegates came together in the schoolhouse to discuss the election of a new communal Committee.

We had prepared a report for this assembly together with some of the teachers, which one of the delegates, Kor Korpussenko, was to read. The report in question had been astutely thought out and was well written.

After consultation with the delegates of the factory workers, the peasants' delegates tabled a motion asking for fresh elections.

I added a few introductory comments to that motion in response to the wishes of the teachers Lebedev and Korpussenko.

The delegates went back to their electors and examined the aforementioned motion along with them and, as soon as the electors accepted it, a date was fixed for the elections.

Meanwhile, our group's members prepared the peasants for the organisation of the Peasants' Union.

At this point, comrade Krylov-Martynov, a delegate from the Regional Committee of the Social Revolutionary Party Peasants' Union turned up, with the intention of setting up a Peasants' Union Committee in Gulyai-Polye.

A former prisoner himself, Krylov-Martynov took an interest in my life. He came to my home and we spoke at length as he took tea with me. He ended up spending the night under my roof.

Meanwhile, I asked the members of our group to convene a skhod to lay the foundations for the organisation of the Peasants' Union.

Krylov-Martynov was a fine orator. He sketched an alluring picture to the peasants of the Social Revolutionaries' future claim to have the land restored to them without compensation—a claim which was to be pursued in the Constituent Assembly imminently due to be convened. The peasants' support was indispensable to them, so he invited the latter to join together in a Peasants' Union and support the Social Revolutionary Party.

I and several other members of our group used this speech as a starting point for spelling out our own point of view.

This is what I told them:

'We anarchists see eye to eye with the Social Revolutionaries as regards your need to organise into a Peasants' Union, but not with an eye to serving the Social Revolutionary Party as a prop in its future contest with the Social Democrats and the Cadets inside the Constituent Assembly, if it is ever summoned!

From our point of view, the Peasants' Union is necessary if the peasants are to be allowed to give their best efforts to the Revolutionary current. In this way they will widen its banks, dredging out a new and deeper bed for it so that, expanding freely, it may spread to a maximum and be effective!

The effects will be the same: the chance for the workers of town and country—whose slave labour and artificially enserfed intellect act as the pedestal of Capital and the organised banditry which is the State—to dispense with all tutelage by political parties in their lives and their struggle for liberty, as well as with their debates within the Constituent Assembly.

The peasants and workers should no longer concern themselves with the Constituent Assembly. It is the enemy of the workers of both field and town. It would be truly criminal for them to look to it for their freedom and happiness.

It is nothing but a gamble for all the political parties. Ask one of those who haunt such dens if ever anyone comes away from one without being taken for a ride?—Never! No one!

The working people, peasants and factory workers who want to send their representatives there ... would also be deceived!

At present they should not spare a thought for the Constituent Assembly, nor organise themselves in such a way as to shore up the political parties, the Social Revolutionary Party included. No! The peasants and workers alike must concern themselves with far more important issues. They must prepare themselves for the restoration of all of the land, factories and plants to the community and, on this new basis build a new life.

The Peasants' Union of Gulyai-Polye, whose foundations we are laying here, will have to work to that end.'

Our attitude did not dishearten the SR delegate from the Regional Committee of the Peasants' Union. He saw fit to agree with us. And the Peasants' Union of Gulyai-Polye was established that very day, March 29 1917.

Its Committee was comprised of 28 members, all peasants: I was included in their number despite my pleas to the contrary. In point of fact I was extremely busy at that time, setting up the office of our group and drafting its Declaration. In response to my pleas, the peasants decided to run me as a candidate in four districts, no less, and I was elected unanimously in each one.

The Peasants' Union Committee was thus formed, and I was elected chairman.

The next move was the enrolment of members. In the space of four or five days all the peasants enrolled without exception, apart from the ones who were landlords of course.

The latter, partisans of private ownership, broke away from the main body of peasants in the hope of forming a separate group. They managed to attract only the most ignorant of their servants to their side, and were counting on holding out until the Constituent and scoring a victory with the aid of the SDs. (At that point, the Russian Social Democrat Party was still in favour of landed property rights.)

In truth, the peasant workers had no need for the peasant proprietors' support. They looked upon them as their hereditary enemies and realised that they would only become inoffensive when their lands were declared communal property by means of forcible expropriation.

Airing this last notion among themselves with unshakeable conviction, the peasants condemned the Constituent Assembly in advance.

And so the Peasants' Union was formed, although it did not embrace all of the peasants of its commune, as a number of farms and hamlets did not belong to it. This circumstance prevented it from setting to work with enough enthusiasm to carry these other communes in its wake and wrest back lands from the pomeschiki and the State by means of organised revolutionary action, before restoring them to the community of toilers.



That is why I left Gulyai-Polye and, together with the secretary of the Union Committee, embarked upon a tour of the villages and hamlets for the purpose of setting up Peasants' Unions there.

Upon my return I reported back to the group on the work accomplished and stressed the revolutionary state of mind I had encountered everywhere and the fact that, in my view, we must give our utmost support and steer cautiously but firmly down the anarchist road.

Everyone in our group was satisfied with the results achieved and each of them recounted what he had done along those lines, and the impression our intensive propaganda was making upon the peasants, etc.

Our secretary, comrade Krat, who had stood in for me during my tour, told us of the visit to Gulyai-Polye of the new instructors come from Aleksandrovsk. They had given speeches in favour of the war and of the Constituent Assembly and had tried to have their resolutions voted through. But the workers and peasants had refused to oblige on the grounds that they were presently in the throes of organisation and that, as a result, they could not welcome any motion emanating from outsiders.

All of these manifestations of an active and conscious life inspired us with joy and confidence and kept alight our enthusiasm and our desire to press on with our revolutionary endeavour untiringly.

## Chapter Three: Police Archives Rifled

Meanwhile, those in charge of the Gulyai-Polye militia office... sublieutenant Kudinov and his secretary, the old steadfast cadet, A. Rambievski... invited me to help them rifle the police archives.

These archives were of quite exceptional interest and I asked our group to second a comrade to join me. Such was the importance that I accorded to this task that I was prepared—for the time being—to abandon any other activity in its favour. Some of my comrades, Kalinichenko and Krat especially, began by poking fun at me and my desire, they said, to rally to the aid of the militia bosses. It was only after lengthy discussion that Kalinichenko came round to seeing that I was right, and he himself came with me. In the archives we discovered documents disclosing who, among the inhabitants of Gulyai-Polye, had kept tabs on the Semenota brothers and other members of our group, and how much these curs had received for their services.

We discovered, among other things, that Piotr Sharovski, a former member of our group, was an agent of the secret police to which he had rendered numerous services.

I passed all these documents on to our group. Unfortunately nearly all of the individuals named in them had been killed in the war. The only ones who remained were Sopliak and Sharovski and the policemen Onichenko and Bugayev who, when off duty, donned civilian clothing and sneaked around courtyards and gardens to spy on all who struck them as suspect.

We noted the names of those still living, being of the opinion that the time had not yet come to execute them: moreover, three of them, Sopliak, Sharovski and Bugayev were not in Gulyai-Polye—they had vanished shortly after my arrival.

I made public the document proving the guilt of P. Sharovski who had betrayed Aleksandr Semenyuta and Marfa Pivel to the police. The documents relating to the three missing culprits were kept secret. We hoped they might return some day and that we might arrest them without too many problems. As for the fourth, Nazar Onichenko, he had been dispatched to the front by the coalition government, but after a time had managed to leave it and gone to live in Gulyai-Polye, without showing his face at communal meetings or gatherings.

Shortly after publication of the document concerning Piotr Sharovski, Nazar Onichenko accosted me right in the heart of Gulyai-Polye. This was the very policeman and secret agent who, during a search of my home, had ordered my mother to be frisked and had struck her when she protested.

Now this cur, sold body and soul to the police, scurried up to me and, whipping off his cap, called out with outstretched hand: 'Nestor Ivanovich! Hello!'

The voice, the mannerisms, the mimicry of this Judas filled me with unspeakable disgust. I began to quiver with hatred and angrily I barked at him, 'Get back, you wretch, get back or I'll take your life!' He hopped aside and turned as white as snow. Automatically my hand reached into my pocket and I clutched my revolver tightly, wondering if I should kill the cur on the spot or whether I should bide my time.

Reason got the better of anger and the thirst for vengeance.

Utterly spent, I let myself collapse on to a chair in the entrance of a neighbouring shop. The shopkeeper came up to me, greeted me and put some questions to me that I was incapable of understanding.

I apologised for having taken his chair and begged him to leave me be. Ten minutes later, I asked a peasant to assist me back to the Peasants' Union Committee.

Having learned of my brush with Onichenko, the members of our group and the members of the Union Committee demanded the publication of the document which proved that, in addition to being in the police (which the peasants very well knew, for he had arrested and beaten a number of them) he was also an agent of the secret police.

One after another, all of the comrades insisted that this document be made known so that they might then kill the culprit.

I strenuously opposed this and begged them to leave him be for the time being, pointing out that there were more dangerous traitors, especially Sopliak who, according to the evidence in our hands, was a specialist in espionage. He had worked for a long time in Gulyai-Polye and at Pologi among the workers of the Depot and had helped keep tabs on comrade Semenota.

Another, Bugayev, was also an accomplished nark. He came and went among the workers and peasants, bearing sparkling seltz water on a wooden tray, that he would sell to them. He was especially visible at the time when the tsar's government had promised a 2,000 rouble reward to whoever delivered Aleksandr Semenyuta to it. More than once, Bugayev, wearing disguise, had gone missing for weeks at a time along with the police commissar Karachenz and Nazar Onichenko. Abandoning their official posts, they would roam the environs of Gulyai-Polye or the quarters of Aleksandrovsk and Ekatorinoslav. Police commissar Karachenz was killed by the comrade A. Semenyuta at the Gulyai-Polye theatre. Bugayev, Sopliak and Sharovski were still alive and were hiding out somewhere in the area.

That was why Nazar Onichenko was not to be touched just yet. One had to arm oneself with patience and try to lay hands on the others who, from what the peasants said, often appeared in Gulyai-Polye.

While asking the comrades not to give Nazar Onichenko any cause for alarm for the time being, I told them it was important to seize all of these curs and kill them, such individuals being a blight upon any community of men. 'One can expect nothing of them, theirs being the most ghastly of crimes, betrayal. A true revolution has to exterminate every last one of them. A free society of fellowship has no need of traitors. They must all perish by their own hands or be killed by the revolution's vanguard.'

Then and there, all my comrades and friends forswore any immediate unmasking of Nazar Onichenko, postponing his execution until a later date.

## Chapter Four: Fresh elections to the communal Committee. The notion of control.

Even as our group busied itself with complying with certain formalities and sharing out the work among its members—who were many (already we numbered more than 80) but lethargic—and drew up a list of the Russian and Ukrainian anarchist publications to which it was to take out subscriptions, the fresh elections to a Gulyai-Polye communal Committee got underway. Once again I was put forward by the peasants as a candidate, along with a number of my comrades, and we were returned.

Some of the peasants abstained from voting whereas others took part in the elections but, in the majority of cases, only voted for the members of our group or for our supporters.

I had to forego this, despite the pleas of the peasants that I should represent them on the communal Committee, not out of principle but because I was unaware of the stance of the urban anarchists in these elections. I had applied to the Moscow comrades for information on this point through our federation's secretary, but had not as yet received any answer.

In any case, there was a much more important reason for my refusal: my lawful election on to the communal Committee would have conflicted with my plans, my intention being to gear the group's and the peasants' activities towards a reduction of the powers of these committees.

Our group had endorsed my plans and it was with the aim of putting them into effect that I had accepted the chairmanship of the Peasants' Union Committee.

Those plans consisted of achieving, within the framework of a practical understanding of revolutionary endeavour, the most intimate unity possible between the peasant toilers and our group, and to prevent the political parties from gaining a foothold in their ranks. To this end, they had to be made to understand that the parties, however revolutionary they might be at that juncture, would inevitably kill any initiative shown in the revolutionary movement should they come to dominate the will of the people. Furthermore, they had to be shown the need to take the communal Committee—a non revolutionary agency acting under the aegis of the government—under their own control without delay; this so that they might at all times be *au fait* with the actions of the Provisional Government and lest they find themselves, in the moment of truth, isolated and bereft of specific intelligence regarding the revolutionary movement in the towns.

Lastly, we had to get them to see that they had to rely upon no one in their most pressing task: the conquest of the land and of the right to freedom and autonomy, and that they had to capitalise upon the present moment and upon the difficulty in which the government found itself because of the political parties' contention with one another, in order to make a reality of their revolutionary anarchist aspirations with all that these implied.

Such, in the broad outline, was the schedule of work which I proposed to the Gulyai-Polye group as soon as I returned from Moscow. I talked about it to all of my comrades, pleading with them to adopt it as the basis of our group's activity in peasant areas.

Thus it was in the name of these principles that I determined to jettison different tactical requirements assumed by the anarchists in the years 1906–1907. During that period in fact, the principles of organisation were sacrificed to the principle of exclusiveness: the anarchists huddled in their circles which, removed from the masses, developed abnormally, were lulled into inactivity and thus lost the chance to intervene effectively in the event of popular uprisings and revolutions.

All my suggestions were accepted by our group which, through its organised action, developed them further and had them embraced, if not by all of the peasants of Gulyai-Polye, then at least by an overwhelming majority of them. It is true that this took several months. We shall set out its ongoing and rewarding action through the successive phases of the revolution in fullest detail further on.

## Chapter Five: The teachers' role. Our activity on the communal Committee.

I mentioned earlier that the teachers of Gulyai-Polye primary school had thrown in their lot with us right from my first speech at the skhod of the peasants and workers. But I omitted to mention that what had made up their minds was that they had heard me say it was shameful for intellectual workers to remain inactive in a time of such revolutionary intensity since our reason for finding the struggle so hard was on account of the meagre part they were playing in the activity.

From then on they set energetically to work. They participated in the elections for the communal Committee, were nominated as candidates and in the end were elected. Six out of fourteen of them were returned by the peasants.

The latter, having gone over the services rendered by the brain workers to the toilers of the town and countryside with the members of our own anarchist-communist group, realised that the role of the primary teachers in the history of the revolutionary movement comprised of three distinct stages.

In 1900 the teachers had set enthusiastically to work, educating the illiterate and poverty-stricken. But the backlash of late 1905 put paid to that fine spurt of solidarity for some 5 or 6 years. Their work in the villages was in ruins. And it was only shortly before the world war that they lifted their heads again to resume their work in the unenlightened villages with a renewed faith and hearts brimming with hope.

But the world war, a bloody assault upon civilisation, forced them to abandon this course. Patriotism had captivated most of them more than it ought to have done and educational endeavour was sacrificed to the war effort.

It is true that only 3 or 4 of the teachers of Gulyai-Polye passed through these three phases: the rest were too young and had not had time to taste these inevitable vagaries of fortune. Now at this point they all hoped to work in concert with the peasants and workers. Certain among them... A. Korpussenko, T. Belo'us, Lebedev, T. Kuzmenko and M:A... though as yet without any experience of revolution, were nonetheless keen to make themselves useful anywhere that that vanguard of the Revolution, the peasants and workers, might find their assistance of use. The fact that the primary teachers had not, in the early months of the revolution, sought to lead them enabled them to get close to these obscure heroes of the liberation and to work with them. To begin with the peasants regarded them with certain misgivings; but when the pace of events hotted up, all were won over with enthusiasm and came together for the triumph of the Revolution. Then the peasants and workers welcomed them into their ranks.

It even came to pass that the peasants elected them on to their communal Committees. By this time, the Peasants' Union had established control over the Gulyai-Polye Committee. This control was exercised by members of the Union on permanent secondment to the communal Committee. I recall that when five of my comrades and myself went there we were afraid lest our

appearance might cause a scandal and that, as monitors delegated by the Peasants' Union, we might have the door slammed in our faces. Nothing of the sort. The more two-faced politicians among the Committee's membership, such as the merchants' representatives, the representatives of the shopkeepers and those of the Jewish community who knew very well why they had joined the communal Committee, welcomed us with open arms, declaring that, from day one of the revolution, they had thought of nothing else but working in concert with the peasants on social issues: but, they claimed, not until then had they found the practical means of showing this to the peasants and making themselves understood by them.

'And now, fortunately, the peasants themselves are pointing the way ahead,' ejaculated one of these duplicitous types: and they acclaimed the peasants in the shape of ourselves!

So, six members of the Union joined the communal Committee. We had to keep a firm hold on this position, so important for the peasants' work, and not let it be influenced by ideas inimical to the peasants' revolutionary objectives. The members of the union immersed there in an assembly which, without orders from the centre or from one of its SR, SD or Cadet agents would not make a move, had to remain unshakeable in their convictions and maintain a steadfast attitude in the face of the problems which the toilers' active role in the Revolution confronted them with. Only the political character of the Revolution was discernible at that point. Nonetheless, month by month the actions of the toilers stamped a new character upon the Revolution and it was to be hoped that it would not be long before it would divest itself of the political accoutrements of its initial stages.

This point especially captivated the attention of the Peasants' Union, judging by the reports from the anarchist-communist group, and this is why, in sending its six members to the Committee, the union issued the following instructions to them:

'The Gulyai-Polye Peasants' Union, in delegating six of its members to sit in permanently on the meetings of the communal Committee and to monitor its policy, takes the line that it would be important for Union members to be able to place themselves at the head of the communal Committee's Farming Section.' (Minutes of the Peasants' Union, April 1917).

This was an issue of very acute concern to the peasants: for the farming sections of the communal Committees, in accordance with directives issued from the centre, were bringing especial pressures to bear upon them to get them to continue payment of farm rents to the pomeschiki, pending the decision of the Constituent Assembly on the matter.

The peasants on the other hand were of the belief that, with a revolution underway and one which had half-emancipated them politically, their slavery and the exploitation of their labour by the pomeschiki drones were at an end. This is why, though poorly organised and ill-equipped for any thorough assimilation of the problems of retrieving the land from the pomeschiki, the monasteries and the State as yet and for the problems of restoring such lands to the community, they badgered the Union's representatives to ensure that they were awarded posts on the Committee's farming section. They demanded as a matter of urgency that the business of the farming section be placed before the members of the anarchist-communist group. But we group members dissuaded them from pressing these wishes for the time being, lest it provoke armed conflict with the Aleksandrovsk authorities. At the same time we determined to conduct intensive propaganda in Gulyai-Polye and in the region, so as to prompt the peasants to demand of the communal Committee that the farming section be abolished and to win the right to organise autonomous farming committees.

They took to this notion with alacrity. However, an order arrived from the centre, declaring that the farming sections were part and parcel of the communal Committees and that their abolition was expressly forbidden, but that, henceforth, they might be referred to under the denomination of farming Departments<sup>1</sup>. Adhering within the communal Committee to the directives from the Peasants' Union, we managed to ensure that the direction of the Farming Department was vested in me. Simultaneously, with the backing of the Union's peasants and of the communal Committee itself, and by agreement with the anarchist-communist group, I became for a time the acting director of this Committee.

It was solely under my influence that our group embarked upon this perilous course. I made my decision after having observed, through the reading of anarchist newspapers and magazines over the first two months of the Revolution, that there was in them no concern with the creation of a mighty formation capable, once the masses were won over, of displaying its organisational talents in the pursuance and defence of the incipient Revolution. I saw the movement I cherished divided as in the past, and I set myself the task of uniting the various groups again in a common action under the prompting of the anarchist-communist group of our enslaved village, most especially because at that point I could already detect a certain disregard for the countryside in the propagandists of the towns.

---

<sup>1</sup> We shall see further on that these farming Departments were redesignated two months later as Farming committees by the very same authorities.



## Chapter Six: The First of May. The agrarian issue as viewed by the peasants

May 1 1917. It was ten years since I had been in a position to take part in this feast of labour: that is why, when it came to the organising of it, I invested a quite special gusto into propaganda among the peasants, the workers and the soldiers from the machine-gunners' detachment.

I collated the documents concerning all that had been done by the urban workers in the dying days of April and made these available to my comrades so that they might have source materials for their addresses to the peasants, workers and soldiers.

The commandant of the 8th Serbian regiment dispatched a delegation to inform us of his wish that his regiment might participate in this workers' celebration alongside the toilers of Gulyai-Polye.

It goes without saying that we did not stand in the way of these wishes. We even permitted the regiment to present itself in battle-dress, for we were counting upon our people—enough, we thought, to disarm it, should the need arise.

The demonstration began in the streets of Gulai Polye from 9 am. onwards. The rallying point for the participants was the Market Square, now the Square of the Martyrs of the Revolution.

A short time afterwards, the anarchists brought news of the revolt of the Petrograd proletariat which on 18–12 April had demanded the resignation of ten capitalist ministers from the government and the transfer of all power to the Soviets of Peasant, Workers and Soldier Deputies, and which had been crushed by the force of arms. This news transformed the character of the demonstration which became hostile to the 'Provisional government' and to its socialist members.

Hastily the commandant of the 8th Serbian Regiment ordered his men back to barracks. A portion of the machine-gunners' detachment declared for the anarchists and lined up with the demonstrators. So numerous were the latter that when a vote was taken on the resolution 'Down with the government, down with all parties ready to inflict this humiliation upon us' and they took to the streets chanting 'The Anarchists' Marching Song', the procession of their closed ranks, 6 to 8 deep, lasted for over 5 hours. So widespread was the hostility towards the government and its agents that the politicians of the communal Committee and the officers from the machine-gunners' detachment—with the exception, though, of two officers especially beloved by the soldiers, the anarchist Pevchenko and the artist Bogdanovich—sought refuge with the staff and the militia which had made not a single arrest since its creation, vanished from Gulyai-Polye.

Addressing the bulk of the demonstrators, the anarchists set out the story of the 'Anarchist Martyrs of Chicago'; the demonstrators honoured their memory by kneeling, then asked the anarchists to lead them without further delay into the fray against the government, all of its servants and the entire bourgeoisie.

The day, however, was not marked by violence. The municipal authorities of Aleksandrovsk and Ekaterinoslav had by then had their attention drawn to Gulyai-Polye, and sought nothing better than to provoke us into battle before we were ready.

The entire month of May was devoted to intense work at the congresses of the peasants of Aleksandrovsk and Gulyai-Polye. At the Aleksandrovsk congress, I declared that the peasants of Gulyai-Polye commune were unwilling to entrust the task of revolution to the communal Committees and that they were taking their village's Committee under their control. And I was specific as to the manner in which this had to be done.

The peasants' delegates to that congress acclaimed the delegates from Gulyai-Polye and promised to follow their example. The SRs who were also present, were satisfied: but the SDs and Cadets pointed out that the action of the Gulyai-Polye peasants with regard to the cc was at odds with the new overall policy of the country; that in a way there linked within it a danger for the revolution, the control over the established local organisations being of a nature to erode the prestige of the local powers-that-be.

One of the peasants cried out: 'That's right! That's precisely what we want! Each of us in his home district, we will do all in our power to undermine the cc's in their governmental ambitions, until such time as we have adapted them to our ideal of justice and induced them to accept our right to freedom and to independence in retrieving lands from the pomeschiki.'

That declaration, emanating from the body of the peasant delegates, was enough to calm the SDs and the Cadets: for they sensed that if they ventured to combat it, the peasant delegates would have walked out of the Congress and there was no way that they wanted to be left behind on their own in the empty hall. At that stage of the revolution, they still cherished hopes of being able to erect dykes against the revolutionary floodwaters of the toilers.

The Aleksandrovsk Congress concluded with an agenda restoring the lands to the peasants without compensation and a local committee was elected. The SRs were delighted by this decision: the SDs and the Cadets made their anger plain.

In making their way homewards, the peasant delegates reached agreement upon organising themselves without the assistance of these political 'barkers' and an undertaking was arranged between the villages to embark upon an armed struggle against the pomeschiki. 'Failing which,' they said, 'the Revolution will be eclipsed and we will be left once more landless.'

When Shramko and I returned from the Congress and had spelled out its results to the Peasants' Union, the latter expressed many regrets about their having sent us, saying: 'It would have been better to have had no part of that Congress, but to have held one here in Gulyai-Polye instead, summoning to it the delegates from the communes of the Aleksandrovsk district. We are convinced that we would have achieved satisfaction in the matter of the land and its being community property more speedily. But it is too late. Let us hope that the Peasants' Union Committee will make our views upon this matter known not only to the peasants of the Aleksandrovsk district but also to those from the adjoining districts of Pavlograd, Mariupol, Berdyansk and Melitopol so that they may know that we do not make do with motions: what we need is action.'

This declaration led to a vote upon a resolution by the Peasants' Union, in which it was stated: 'The peasants of the Gulyai-Polye region deemed it their most absolute right to proclaim the lands of the pomeschiki, the monasteries and the government to be community property and resolved to pass into action in the near future.' An invitation was extended to all to prepare for this act of justice and to carry it into effect.

The reverberations of this carried well beyond the limits of the Ekaterinoslav department. Delegations from other departments began to arrive in Gulyai-Polye. That went on for several weeks. As chairman of the Peasants' Union I got no rest from them. Some comrades belonging to other

groups stood in for me on current business, whilst I busied myself with the delegates, offering advice to some, instructions to others, explaining how they should go about forming Peasants' Unions, preparing to seize back lands and organising, as the peasants should see fit, agrarian communes or the sharing-out of these lands among the needy. Nearly every one of them told me: 'It would be as well if you here in Gulyai-Polye were to be the first to make a start.'

I asked them why. The answer was always the same: 'We have no organisers. We read but little for hardly anything reaches us. We have yet to be visited by propagandists and we would not ever have read even the proclamations of your 'Union' and of the anarchist-communist group, had our sons not sent us them from the Uzovo mines.'

It pained me to hear this complaint from the enslaved villages and I was infuriated at the thought of those comrades who had stayed in the towns, forgetful of the countryside. Yet in Russia and in the Ukraine, the future of the Revolution, whose impetus the Provisional Government had already begun to curb by capturing it and substituting written programmes, utterly vacuous and unusable, for its creative expansion among workers endowed with political awareness, was largely dependent upon the country districts.

And the more that that thought tormented me, the more fervour I put into pressing ahead, reaching, along with other comrades from the group, into the farthest-flung corners, momentarily abandoning all endeavour in Gulyai-Polye, in order to instruct the peasants in the truth of their situation and in the situation of the Revolution which, unless they injected fresh energy into it, ran a serious risk of going under. Thus I spent several days far from Gulyai-Polye.

I was heartened by the hope of seeing P.A. Kropotkin<sup>1</sup> return to Russia: he would have been able to focus the attention of all the comrades upon the enslaved villages. And then, who knows? Uncle Vanya (Rogdaev) might have come back, he who had been so active in the Ukraine in tsarist days: lastly, if Roshchin and others, less well-known but enterprising also were to come back our work might at last blossom in all its dimensions.

The mass of toilers would receive the answers to the questions which preoccupied them. The anarchist voice would reverberate through the enslaved villages which would all rally around its banner in the struggle against the power of the pomeschiki and of the factory bosses, and for a new world of liberty, equality and solidarity among men.

I believed in that idea to the point of fanaticism and, in its name I grew more and more absorbed by the life of the masses, fervently seeking to galvanise the anarchist-communist group of Gulyai-Polye into doing likewise.

---

<sup>1</sup> Piotr Aleksandrovich Kropotkin (1842–1921) (Translator's note)

## Chapter Seven: The Workers' Strike

In the early days of the month of June, anarchists in Aleksandrovsk invited me to a conference, the aim of which was to gather all of the anarchists of Aleksandrovsk together into one Federation. I travelled there on the appointed day. They were all workers by hand or brain. They were divided into anarchist-communists and individualist anarchists: but this division was purely formal, in point of fact they were all revolutionary anarchist-communists and, as such, were dear to me as dearly loved brethren, and I helped them as best I could to come together in a Federation. That Federation established, they promptly set about organising the workers and, for a time, wielded great influence over them.

Upon my return, the workers of the Gulyai-Polye Metalworkers' and Woodworkers' Trades Union asked me to help them set up a Union and to enrol in it myself. When that was done, they begged me to assume the leadership of the strike which they were anticipating.

Thus I was thoroughly occupied, on the one hand by the peasants, on the other by the workers—both groups demanding my assistance. Among the workers some, however, were more *au fait* than I with industrial matters, which was a source of great pleasure to me. I agreed to lead the strike, hoping, during this time, to recruit these like-minded comrades into our group. One of them, V. Antonov, was an SR., but the others belonged to no party; among the latter the two most energetic were Sereguin and Mironov.

Before the strike was declared, the workers of the two foundries, of the mills and of the Kystari-owned<sup>1</sup> workshops organised a meeting and asked me to devise, draft and present a list of their demands to the employers, through the agency of the Soviet of the trades union. In the course of that meeting and of the compilation of the demands, I was able to appreciate that comrades Antonov, Sereguin and Mironov had been at work in the factory Committees in an anarchist capacity for a long time already. The first of them, that is Antonov, was chairman of the Soviet of Workers' Deputies. And if these comrades had not entered our group it was solely because they were overburdened with work in the factories. I objected: since my homecoming from prison, indeed, I had asked that the group be kept at all times *au fait* with the work of all its members. So I persistently urged these comrades to enter our group and henceforth to work inside their factory committees and, in a general way, among the workers in accordance with its directives. They gave in to my arguments and came over to us.

Together, we summoned all of the employers and submitted the workers' demands to them: wage increases of 80% to 100%.

Such a demand provoked genuine wrath in them, and they categorically refused to grant increases of that size. We gave them a day to think it over. During that day, the workers carried on with their work in the workshops and factories. The next day, the employers approached the trade union Soviet with counterproposals involving 35%-40% rises.

---

<sup>1</sup> Small industrialists working from their homes. (Translator's note).

We regarded the offer as a direct affront to the workers, and following lengthy discussions and mutual insult, we invited them to think it over for a further day.

The employers and some of their representatives who knew the statutes of the trade union by heart and were socialists in their heart of hearts, but who had the factory managers behind them, let us down after having given us assurances that, the following day, they would not be coming back with higher percentages than they had offered on this occasion.

We promptly summoned the members of the factory Committees and workshop representatives together to devise a way of bringing work to a halt everywhere simultaneously, at the precise moment when, having come the next day to the trades union Soviet without any new offers, the employers would be making their way homewards again. It was determined that the Soviet would have to post a trustworthy man in the central telephone exchange so as to connect all telephones with mine in order that the employers, returning from the Soviet to the factory and the workshops, might be received by their workers, all of whom would have ceased working.

I suggested a plan for the seizure of all the capital to be found in the various undertakings and in the Gulyai-Polye bank To the members of the Soviet and of the factory Committees. I was sure that we would not be able to maintain our hold on these undertakings and that the communal Committees and government commissars would dispatch regiments which, to avoid being moved up to the German front, would strive to have the government look kindly upon them by shooting the cream of the worker militants, beginning with me.

But as I saw it, it was important to start to put the idea of expropriating capitalist institutions into effect right away, before the Provisional Government had time to curb the workers completely and steer them down the counter-revolutionary road.

However the bulk of the members of the trades union and the factory committees promptly asked me not to put this scheme to the workers. They argued that we were as yet badly prepared for this action and would consequently have the worst of it, thereby achieving nothing but hampering its subsequent realisation at a point when the workers would at last have been equipped for it by us.

Following protracted discussions the members of the group came to the same conclusions, saying that by implementing my suggestions right away, when the peasants for their part could offer the workers no practical support in the expropriation of the pomeschiki's lands, we would risk making an irreparable mistake. These arguments shook me, and I dropped my insistence but clung steadfastly to the notion of taking my suggestion as a ground-plan for the factory committees to train the workers for effecting the expropriation at some time in the future, assuring them that the peasants were also mulling over this question. I told them that we had to devote all of our efforts to coordinating the tendencies of the peasants and those of the workers.

This time my suggestion was accepted and I was elected chairman of the trades union and of the sickness benefit fund. Antonov was especially chosen to be my assistant and to act as my deputy should I be snowed under by the demands of work in the other organisations.

Likewise, the peasants seconded a comrade to me who could stand in for me. But it was agreed on all sides that the initiatives should always come from me and that I should always hold the reins of these various institutions.

The employers from the factories, mills and workshops came back to the Soviet of the trades union with the same opinions and wishes as the day before. After two hours of discussion they stretched their generosity so far as to award wage rises of 45% — 60%.

Whereupon, as the one chairing the meeting, I declared that all the negotiations between us had broken down. 'The Soviet of the trades union has invested me with full powers to assume the direction of all the public undertakings run by you, citizens, but not belonging to you by right: we will give you your explanation in the street, outside each one of those undertakings. I declare this meeting closed!'

I gathered together all of my papers and moved towards the telephone. At which point the boss of the most important factory in Gulyai-Polye, one Mikhail Borisovich Kerner, got to his feet and exclaimed: 'Nestor Ivanovich, you were over hasty in winding up the meeting. In my view the workers' demands are wholly justified. They have a right to have us meet them and, for my own part, I am going to sign right away.'

The other employers and above all their representatives shouted indignantly: 'Mikhail Borisovich, what are you playing at?'

'No, no, gentlemen. You... you may do as you wish, but I, I undertake to meet the demands of my workers,' replied M.B. Kerner.

I called for order and asked: 'Citizens, you have always been on the side of order and legality. Is it legal to reopen the meeting on the issue that prompted its being wound up?' 'Of course! Sure,' replied the employers and their representatives.

'Then I declare the meeting open and I invite you all to endorse a wage rise of 80% — 100%.' And I handed them the texts, all ready and waiting. Then, spent from fatigue and nervous tension, I asked comrade Mironov to take over from me for a moment, and off I went to snatch some rest in another room.

Half an hour later I returned to find the employers in the act of endorsing the texts proposed by me.

When it was all over and they had left the room, I reported our victory to the comrade workers of all the firms over the telephone, announcing that the employers had signed and recommending that they remain at work until evening, promising that members of the trades union Soviet would come that very evening to give them a detailed report on this shared success.

From then, the workers of Gulyai-Polye and its environs took all of the enterprises in which they worked under their control, examining the economic and administrative aspect of the matter and preparing to assume their effective management.

From that day forth, Gulyai-Polye particularly attracted the attention of the Ekaterinaslav Communal Committee, of the Ukraine's chauvinistic Selyanskaya<sup>2</sup> Spilka, of the Soviet of Worker, Peasant and Soldier Deputies, and of the local industrial Committee, not to mention that of the Aleksandrovsk organisations in which the agents of the 'coalition government' were master. Visits to Gulyai-Polye by instructors, organisers and propagandists from these places became more frequent. But they all went away disappointed, thwarted by the action of the anarchist peasants and workers.

---

<sup>2</sup> Spilka=Rada—affiliated rural nationalist organisation (PS).

## Chapter Eight: Some Results.

Let us return to the communal Committee and see what we, as delegates of the Peasants' Union, had been able to achieve in the region, under its auspices.

In the first place, after having assumed the functions of the farming Department, we had tried to make the Department of Provisions an independent unit also, and at one point, when I had won over the whole of the communal Committee, some of my comrades on that Committee and I asked that the militia be abolished—something that we were unable to secure as a result of intervention by the central authority. So we took away its right of arrest and to make searches without warrant and thus limited its role to that of the message boy of the communal Committee.

Next I called together all of the pomeschiki and Kulaki and recovered from them all of the deeds concerning the lands acquired by them. The farming Department drew up a detailed inventory of all the properties held by the pomeschiki and Kulaki in their life of idleness on the basis of these documents.

In the Soviet of Worker and Peasant Deputies, we organised a Committee of the batraki<sup>1</sup> and set up a batrak movement in opposition to the pomeschiki and kulaki who were their exploiters.

We established effective control of the batraki over their own holdings, thereby paving the way for them to join forces with the peasants with an eye to concerted action on the day when the minority of proprietors would be expropriated to the benefit of the mass of toilers.

After that, I stopped looking upon the communal Committee as an institution with the aid of which one could, within the framework of the law as it stood, lawfully obtain whatever was of service to the spread of the Revolution among the peasants of the enslaved villages.

Having put my head together with some comrades, I put it to the whole group that it be established as a principle that all its members had an obligation to conduct propaganda among the peasants and workers so as to persuade them to seek by every means to transform the make-up of their communal Committees which adhered less to the wishes and rights of the peasants and workers than to some order from a government commissar. 'Indeed,' I said, 'these Committees, being territorial units accountable to government, are incapable of being revolutionary units rallying around them the flower of the Revolution. As the latter develops, they must disappear: the proletarian masses will dissolve them. The social revolution demands it.

'Since our eyes are fixed upon it, we must, beginning now, act in the name of its principles and help the peasants and workers to work to this end. The communal Committees cannot, nor should they, ignore the wishes of their electors. Like the orders of the government, all their decisions should be submitted to all of the citizenry at the skhods for approval or rejection.

'We are standing now,' I then said to the group, 'at the end of June, which is to say at the end of a third year of Revolution. That is all the time that we, anarchist peasants and workers, have been working lawfully among the oppressed toilers. It strikes me that in that short span we have already met with some success. Now it is a question of drawing lessons from this, and

---

<sup>1</sup> Batraki farm-hand.

returning to action and clearly indicating our movement's objective. That we must do outside the communal Committee.

At present we are in touch with a whole series of regions where we are bringing our influence to bear: in the Kamyshevat region particularly our comrades have the upper hand completely. That region has already responded to our request for support in our struggle against the Aleksandrovsk local Committee. Its representative, comrade Dudnik, has joined us for the third time to coordinate the activity of the peasants of his region with that of the peasants of Gulyai-Polye.

Day by day, the working people of other regions are lending an ear with growing attention and interest to the voice of Gulyai-Polye and are organising according to its principles, despite opposition from the SRs, the SDs and the Cadets. (At that point, there were as yet no Bolsheviks in the villages).

Thorough examination of the revolution over the past four months shows us it is time to direct our activity along a definite line and to bring it into direct confrontation with that of the politicians—the Right, already in power, and the Left, striving after it. Because the Right Social Revolutionaries and the bourgeoisie are seizing control of the Revolution and are bringing it to an impasse. But then again, right from the early days it was obvious to us who laboured in the enslaved villages, that the Ukrainian village had not yet had time to fully free itself of the burden of slavery and grasp the real meaning of the Revolution. Scarcely had it begun to feel the heavy yoke of ages shaken and already it is on the lookout for roads to its complete economic and political emancipation, and along the way is summoning anarchy to its aid. It would be easy not to see the needs of the enslaved village and not make haste to come to their aid: it would be enough to espouse the viewpoint of the majority of our urban comrades and join with them in saying that the village yearns for a return to the bourgeois, capitalist regime, etc. But I firmly believe that we will not go that far. We have seen our village at work and affirm that there were, and are, revolutionary elements in the peasants' ranks: we need merely aid them to shrug off the statist yoke which has been treacherously placed upon them by the politicians.

Effective assistance can only be given by the revolutionary anarchists. Our movement in the towns—in which our elders place exaggerated hopes—is apparently much too weak to cope with a problem of such tremendous dimensions, and possibly carrying just as serious consequences in its wake. I am certain there are persons capable of great things amongst us. But those capable of taking the responsibility for these great things upon themselves are very few in number. They can be counted. We would do well not to forget this important point. Lots of comrades have already fled, and are still fleeing from responsible work or work demanding a sustained effort. This is the phenomenon which lies behind and maintains the disorganisation in our ranks. Oh! What a threat that disorganisation poses for us! Nothing can stand comparison with it. Indeed, because of it, our best endeavours are frustrated, even now when the Revolution is in progress often being wholly wasted and bringing our movement no benefit at all. This phenomenon has always blighted us anarchists, but today we are more beset by it than ever: it prevents us from having a powerful organisation, vital if we are to play an effective role. Only such an organisation will enable us to respond to the Revolution's cry of suffering. Now, the appeal being sent out today by the enslaved village is an exact translation of that cry of suffering; and were we anarchists organised, we would have heard it and responded to it in time.

It is tiresome and painful to broach this topic, but it is vitally necessary. Those among us, comrades, who have not forgotten the essential aim of the Revolution and are not mesmerised by nebulous and pointless theories, but are honestly striving for the most effective means of



upholding our revolutionary ideal and of injecting it into the masses here and now, will not cease from protesting against this disorganisation, for we understand the immense danger of it. But it is not enough to protest. One must act and untiringly, without, however, neglecting to uphold our ideal at all times and above all, without preventing its spreading to others. Such an approach will abet the anarchist ideal and make it possible to create an organisation that will set our movement on the right lines.'

## Chapter Nine: The Campaign against Tenant Farming.

It was the month of July. The peasants of the Gulyai-Polye region refused to hand over the second instalment of their farm rents to the pomeschiki and the kulaki, intending, once the harvest had been gathered in, to seize back the land from these landlords without exchanging words either with them or the authorities who looked after them, and to share it out afterwards among all who wished to cultivate it, peasant or worker.

Several communes followed Gulyai-Polye's example.

The Aleksandrovsk authorities and their socialist constitutionalist and democrat agents were quite indignant at this. With the technical and financial assistance of the communal Committees and the government commissary the revolutionary communes were inundated by agitator propagandists urging the peasants not to undermine the prestige of the Provisional Government which, they claimed, was deeply concerned with their lot and intended, in the very near future, to summon a Constituent Assembly. Pending the summoning of this 'competent' Assembly and its findings with regard to agrarian reform, no one had any legal right to trespass against the property rights of the pomeschiki and other landowners. And on orders from above, the farming Departments were hastily rechristened farming Committees and broke away from the communal Committees to form independent units. They were awarded the right to collect from the peasants all rents due on the lands leased by them from the pomeschiki and kulaki. The monies collected were to be passed on to the district farm Committee which in turn was to pass them on to the landed proprietors.

The agitator-propagandists of the various parties cynically as to assured the peasants that the pomeschiki and the kulaks still had enormous taxes to pay: 'Our revolutionary government,' they said, 'insists upon payment, and the poor pomeschiki can only raise the money from the peasant to whom they lease their lands.'

The struggle between the anarchist communist group and Peasants' Union on the one side and the agitators/agents, backed by government officials and the agrarian, industrial and commercial bourgeoisie on the other, became one in which no quarter was given.

At the skhods-rallies summoned by order of the government's commissary, the peasants flung the Provisional Government-inspired propagandists off the rostrums and manhandled them for their odious speechifying hypocritically peppered with revolutionary phrases designed solely to distract the peasants from their true goal: the reconquest of the land, their age-old entitlement.

Here and there peasants who had been misled scraped together their last kopecks to pay their rents to the ravenous landlords who enjoyed the backing of the Church, the State and its hireling government. But even those who had been tricked never lost hope of overwhelming their enemies. They lent an even more attentive ear to the appeal of the group of anarchist-communist peasants and from their Union which exhorted them: 'not to yield and to make strenuous efforts to prepare themselves for a more bitter struggle.'

This is what I told several thousand working people assembled in a skhod-rally around this time in Gulyai Polye, drawing my inspiration from the guideline underlying an appeal issued by the anarchist-communist group and the Peasants' Union, the organisations on whose behalf I was speaking.

'Toilers! Peasants, factory workers and you, brain-worker who holds aloof from us! Have you witnessed how, in the space of four months, the bourgeoisie have proved capable of organising themselves and of luring the socialists, who have become their loyal servants, to their sides?

If the propaganda campaign waged in favour of payment of the rents to the pomeschiki, even now in these days of the revolution, does not strike you as proof enough, let me quote some other facts to you, comrades, that will convince you further: on July 3, the Petrograd proletariat rose against the Provisional Government which, in the name of the bourgeoisie's rights, sought to smother the Revolution. To that end, the government had abolished several farm Committees in the Ural region—their actions having been hostile to the bourgeoisie—and tossed their members into prison. With the same purpose in mind, agents of that same government, socialist, pressed the peasants to pay their rents to the pomeschiki before our very eyes. From July 3 to 5, the blood of our worker brothers ran in the streets of Petrograd. The socialists were actively involved in this massacre of our brothers.

Indeed, the socialist Kerenski, minister of War, called up several tens of thousands of Cossacks, those age-old butchers of the toilers, to put down that rising.

Thus, those socialists who are partners in the government lost their heads in the service of the bourgeoisie and, in concert with the Cossacks, slew the finest defenders of our working brothers. In so doing, they incited the latter to deal likewise with them and with the bourgeoisie who induced them to perpetrate this hateful, inexcusable crime.

Where, then, does this crime committed by the enemies of our emancipation and of the peaceful happy life to which we aspire lead us? To mutual extermination and nothing else.

That, comrades, can only harm us all and will, above all, be damaging to the so long awaited and finally arrived Revolution, which however has achieved nothing as yet. The masses have not yet completely awakened from the sloth stamped into them by ages of slavery. Only falteringly are they coming around to the Revolution, which they accept as a *fait accompli*; and it is only with extreme caution that they are demanding their right to freedom and a life independent of the new executioners. But those rights, comrades, lurk, it seems, in the gun barrels and machine-guns of the stronger. Let us be strong then, brother workers, so strong that the enemies of our real liberation sense that strength in us. Onwards, then, striding confidently toward organisation and revolutionary autonomy. The future, a very near future, belongs to us. Let us all be ready for it!

After me, a Ukrainian SR took the floor; he urged the working people of Gulyai-Polye to remember that in order to, '... counterbalance the execrable Provisional Government of Petrograd, 'our' Ukrainian government had been organised in Kiev, in the shape of a Central Rada, a truly revolutionary government, the only lawful one and the only one capable of restoring to our land its freedom and happiness for the Ukrainian people.' In conclusion, he exclaimed, 'Down with the Katzapi<sup>1</sup>, death to those brigands! Long live none but our government, the Central Rada and its Secretariat in our land!'

---

<sup>1</sup> Katzapi. A derogatory term used by the Ukrainians to refer to the Great Russians. (In the text the entire phrase is in Ukrainian — translator's note.)

But the toilers of Gulyai-Polye remained deaf to the exhortation of the Ukrainian Social Revolutionary. Not only that, but they all shouted in chorus: 'Off the platform! We want nothing to do with your government,' and they passed the following resolution later on:

'We salute the courage of the workers felled on July 3–5 in the struggle against the Provisional Government. We, the peasants and workers of Gulyai-Polye, have not forgotten the atrocities of that government. Death and damnation to the Provisional Government, and to the Kiev government, the Central Rada and its Secretariat, those direst foes of mankind's liberty.'

After this speech-making and the motion passed by the peasants and workers, the Russian and Ukrainian chauvinists and the statist socialists cursed me, and with me, the whole anarchist-communist group: for it was impossible thereafter to sing the praises of the various governments in Gulyai-Polye. Indeed, they were regarded by the toilers as hirelings and were constantly interrupted whenever they broached the subject.

So the days passed, one after the other, until whole weeks and months had slipped by: nonetheless, from village to village, my comrades and I pressed on with our propaganda.

Along came the second district Congress of the Peasants' Union, and our Union did not fail to send its two delegates to it, comrade Krat and myself. The Congress was dreary. Mere repetition of what had already been said time and time again. The Russian and Ukrainian SRs there, represented by S.S. Popov and by the teacher Radomski respectively, noisily concluded, in the view of the peasant delegates, an alliance aimed at conquering land and freedom, which is to say that after each of them had read his programme, they positioned themselves in front of the Bureau and shook hands.

The peasant delegates from the communes of Gulyai Polye, Kamyshevat, Rozhdestvensk and Konsko-Rasdorskoye announced to them, 'It's all very well your making ready to fight together for land and freedom, but where and against whom are you going to fight?'

'Everywhere and against any who refuse, without compensation, to surrender the land to the peasants,' was the retort from the SRs. 'But we will round off our struggle in the Constituent Assembly,' stated the SR Popov. 'And in the Pan-Ukrainian sejm,' added the school teacher Radomski.

Whereupon a slight difference erupted between the two SR allies. They swapped views in a half-whisper, while, on the peasant delegate's bench, some delegates chuckled while others were outraged.

In conclusion, the Congress elected from among its members, the delegates to the Departments Congress of the Peasants' Union and of the Soviet of Worker, Peasant and Soldier Deputies. We representatives of Gulyai-Polye took no part in those elections, thereby objecting to this form of nomination; according to us, it should have been up to the peasants directly to select the delegates to the Departmental Congress.

This abstention led to our being dubbed wreckers and to accusations of defying the election laws and, as such, to our being violently taken to task by the Congress leaders, the SRs, the SDs and Cadets who stated that we were the only delegates who did not want what the peasants wanted. Laughter erupted from the peasant representatives' bench, laughter that turned into whistling at the Congress leaders. Once again we delegates from the Gulyai-Polye Peasants' Union objected at the manner of election, stressing the need for the Departmental Congress's being made up of directly elected envoys. That, we said, would show the true feeling and revolutionary strength of the peasants of the various departments. But once again we were dismissed as not understanding the peasants' interests. The Congress leaders suggested that we put our

views to the Departmental Congress. But as we had refused to select our delegates from among those members present our candidacy did not go forward and we thus found ourselves out in the cold.

However, we had many reasons to believe that the organising Bureau of the aforementioned Congress would issue direct invitations to Gulyai-Polye's delegates: for words to this effect had been exchanged between the Peasants' Union of our village and the Peasants' Union Departmental Committee.

The initiative, however, did not come from Gulyai-Polye but from Ekaterinoslav, which, in any case, was only indirectly empowered, so in spite of everything we could not be sure of taking part in the Departmental Congress and made our way home to Gulyai-Polye under the dismal impression of having come off worst this time around.

Nonetheless, our line of conduct at the Congress having been, in our estimation, correct, we were not worried about the revolutionary future of our Peasants' Union. Upon returning, we submitted a report to it, as we also did to the Union of the metalworkers and woodworkers who had taken on an interest in the peasants' congress and had asked to be kept informed of our work: similarly, we reported back to the general communal assembly of the workers and peasants of Gulyai-Polye and district. At the same time we prepared the working people for the sending of delegates to the Departmental Congress, in the absence of an invitation from the latter, so as to record an objection to the attitude of the recently concluded district Congress leaders. By the same token, we wanted to make known to the delegates to the Departmental Congress how the Right SRs, the SDs and the Cadets were seeking to stifle any revolutionary or autonomous action by the peasants, and how their agitator-propagandists, abetted by the government's commissars, were visiting the towns and villages and organising meetings and tricking peasants in order to extract rents from them and for the benefit of the pomeschiki. They thereby reduced the former to even direr straits as, not having participated—as the pomeschiki and kulaki had—in looting and brigandage, they had not been able to amass the sums needed to pay for the hire of the lands that those robbers had appropriated to themselves.

While we were making ready for the Departmental Congress and offering help in the form of advice to the peasants of some communes and districts belonging to other departments, the Peasants' Union Committee received an invitation from the Departmental Soviet of Worker, Peasant, Soldier and Cossack Deputies to delegate two representatives to the Departmental Congress of Soviets and the Union of Worker, Peasant, Soldier and Cossack Deputies on 5 August.

It was decided that an assembly of the Peasants' Union of Gulyai-Polye be held. Meanwhile, the Union Committee drew up a report for presentation to the Departmental Congress.

## Chapter Ten: P.A. Kropotkin's Arrival in Russia — Encounter with the Anarchists of Ekaterinoslav.

It was at this point that we received news of P.A. Kropotkin's arrival in Petrograd. The newspapers had already mentioned it, but we anarchist peasants had placed no trust in that, having received no precise signals that would have enabled us to begin to rally our meagre forces and to assume their combat stations in the Revolution in an organised way.

But now the newspapers and letters arriving from Petrograd were telling us that P.A. Kropotkin, who had suffered a serious illness during his trip from London to Petrograd, had at last arrived at the very heart of the Revolution, in Petrograd. They told of the welcome that had been accorded him by the socialists then in power, Kerensky foremost among them. An indescribable joy seized our group. A general meeting was organised, wholly devoted to debating the question: 'What will our venerable elder Piotr Aleksevich say to us?'

All of us were of the same mind: P.A. would point out the practical means of organising our movement in the countryside. With his sensitivity and his alert understanding, he could not but grasp the overwhelming necessity of the villages' having the support of our revolutionary strength. As a true apostle of anarchism, he would not let slip this unique moment in Russia's history and, availing of his moral sway over our people would waste no time in spelling out the guidelines to which anarchists had to adhere in this Revolution in detail.

I composed a letter of welcome on behalf of our Gulyai-Polye group and sent it to P.A. Kropotkin through the good offices of, I believe, the editors of the newspaper *Burevestnik*. (The Storm Petrel)

In that letter, we greeted P.A. Kropotkin and congratulated him upon his happy homecoming to the country, expressing the certain belief that the country, in the person of its finest representatives, was impatiently awaiting he who had waged a lifelong struggle for the highest ideas of justice, ideas which could not but influence the pursuance and realisation of the Russian Revolution.

We signed it: the Ukrainian anarchist-communist group of Gulyai-Polye village, Ekaterinoslav department.

We expected no reply to our modest letter of welcome, but we awaited with immeasurable impatience and great anxiety, the answer to our questions, knowing that, without one, we would squander our efforts to perhaps absolutely no avail: for it was possible that the other groups were not searching for what we sought, or indeed that they were searching in quite a different direction. It seemed to us that the enslaved countryside posed this direct question: 'Which is the way and what are the means to seize hold of land and, without bowing to any authority, to drive off the parasitical drones who live in comfort and luxury at our expense?'

The answer had been provided by P.A. in his book *The Conquest of Bread*. But the toilers had not read that book, only a handful of circles were familiar with it and now the masses no longer had time to read. It needed a forceful voice to spell out to them clearly in accessible terms, the essential point of the *Conquest of Bread*, lest they lapse into contemplative inertia, and to point the way ahead without delay. But from whom would this vivid, straight and strong talk come? It could only come from an anarchist propagandist, an organiser.

‘But,’ I said, hand on heart, ‘have there ever been anarchist propaganda schools in Russia or in the Ukraine? Not that I have ever been aware of. And if there were any, where, I ask you, where are the vanguard fighters they have turned out?’

Twice over I have travelled through regions belonging to different districts, different departments, and not once did I come across a peasant who, in answer to my question ‘Have you had anarchist orators around here?’ replied ‘Yes, we have had some.’ Everywhere I was told in reply, ‘We have never had any. We are very happy and very grateful to see that you have not forgotten us.’ Where then are the leaven of our movement? In my view, they vegetate in the towns or, all too often, do quite the opposite of what they should be doing.

If the advanced years of P.A. prevented him from taking an active part in the Revolution and from giving fresh impetus to our comrades in the towns, the enslaved countryside would fall once and for all under the rule of the political parties and the Provisional Government. That would spell the end of the Revolution.

This view of mine was shared by those of my comrades who, working in the factories, had not toured the countryside and were ignorant of the real state of mind of the peasants. By contrast, those who were familiar with the countryside were severely critical of me, saying that I lacked confidence in the revolutionary sentiments of the peasants. ‘The countryside,’ they contended, ‘has managed to grasp the intentions of the agent of the sundry socialist and bourgeois parties who came among them on behalf of the Provisional Government so well that, in any event, it will never let itself be led astray.’

To be sure, indications of such a state of mind existed in the countryside, but they were comparatively feeble. The peasants needed to feel supported in these critical times by the revolutionary vigour of the towns if they were to perform useful work, do away with the existing privileged classes and prevent others from appearing in their place.

A fortnight passed thus. No news reached us from Petrograd: we still did not know how P.A. envisaged the role of our movement in the Revolution. Were we on the right lines? Was it right to focus our attentions in the towns, paying little or no heed to the enslaved countryside?

And so we came to the moment when the Departmental Congress of the Soviets of Worker, Peasant, Soldier and Cossack Deputies, and of the Peasants’ Union was due to open.

An assembly of the Peasants’ Union was summoned in Gulyai-Polye, at which the matter of participation in the Congress was gone into. The transformation of the Peasants’ Union into a Peasants’ Soviet held our attention for a long time. It was decided at last that a delegate be sent to the Congress. I was elected to represent the peasants, and comrade Sereguin to represent the workers.

I was particularly happy to be going to Ekaterinoslav where I hoped to contact the anarchist Federation and have personal discussions on all the matters of concern to our group. (What most interested us was, how come the town did not send anarchist propagandists into the villages?)

I deliberately set out a day earlier and made my way straight to the Federation's premises. There I found the secretary, comrade Molchancki, from Odessa, an old comrade whose acquaintance I had made on the chain-gang. This was a delight: we embraced.

Then I jumped down his throat: what were they playing at in the town? Why weren't they sending organisers into the country townships?

Comrade Molchanski, as was his way, gesticulated, got excited and said, 'We haven't the wherewithal, brother. We are weak. We've only just got ourselves organised here and can scarcely manage to meet the needs of the workers in our factories and the soldiers in our garrison. We hope that our strength will grow in time, then we will strengthen our ties with the countryside and get down to forceful propaganda in the villages.'

Whereupon we fell silent for a long time, each of us caught up in his thoughts, pondering the future of our movement in the Revolution. Then comrade Molchanski began to comfort me, assuring me that in the very near future comrades Rogdaev, Roshkin, Arshinov and many others would be arriving in Ekaterinoslav, and that then action would be stepped up and extended to include the villages. Then he accompanied me to the Federation's club, formerly the 'English Club'.

There I found many comrades, some chatting about the Revolution, others reading, and still others setting down to a meal. In short, I found before me the 'anarchist' society which, as a matter of principle, does not countenance any order, any authority and devotes no time to propaganda among the working people of the countryside, who are nonetheless sorely in need of it.

So, I wondered, why have they seized such a luxurious and enormous building from the bourgeoisie? What use can it be to them when, amid this Babel, there is no order, not even in the shouting by which they resolve the Revolution's most serious issues, when their hall is not swept, the chairs knocked over and on the great table, covered with luxurious velvet, crusts of bread, herring-heads and gnawed bones are strewn all around?

My heart tightened with pain at the sight of it. At this point in came comrade I. Tarassiyuk, known as Kabas, assistant to the secretary, comrade Molchanski. Aggrieved, he called out with indignation, 'Whoever ate at this table, get it cleaned up,' and he set about righting the toppled chairs.

The table was cleared intermediately and they began to sweep the room.

On leaving the club I returned to the Federation premises, picked out some pamphlets to take back to Gulyai-Polye, and was preparing to make my way to the Congress office to secure a room free of charge for the duration of our business, when in came a young girl. She was a comrade. She had come to seek an escort to the municipal theatre, someone to back her up in her confrontation with the SD 'Nil' who had a fair number of workers in his retinue. The comrades present said they were busy and, without a word, off she went.

Molchanski asked me, 'Don't you know her? She's a pleasant comrade, full of energy.' I immediately stepped outside and caught her up. I suggested I accompany her to the meeting, but she replied, 'You'll be of no use unless you take to the floor.' I promised to speak.

So she took me by the arm and we moved briskly towards the theatre. Along the way, this charming young comrade confided to me that she had become an anarchist only three years previously. It had not come about of itself. For two years she had read the works of Kropotkin and Bakunin; then she had felt her beliefs take shape. Now she was wholly committed to those ideas and engaged in active propaganda. Up until July she had spoken in front of workers, but had



not dared speak against the anarchists' enemies, the SDs. In July she grew bolder and delivered a speech against the SD 'Nil' at a meeting and had been heckled.

'Now,' she said, I've made up my mind to re-enter the fray against this 'Nil', one of the Social Democratic Party's most brilliant agitators.'

Our conversation was left at that.

At the meeting I spoke against the celebrated 'Nil' under the alias of 'Skromny'(I) (my nickname from my penitentiary days). I spoke badly, though my comrades assured me afterward that I had been fine, that I had simply been a little nervous.

As for my bouncy young comrade, she won over the entire hall with her soft tones which had fine oratorical strength. The audience was captivated by that voice, and the absolute silence which reigned while she spoke turned into furious clapping and cries of approval, 'Excellent, very fine, comrade!'

She did not speak long, forty-three minutes in all, but she succeeded so well in whipping up the mass of her listeners against the theses aired by 'Nil' that when the latter came to reply to those who had spoken against him, the entire hall shouted, 'That's not true! Don't fill our heads with nonsense!—The anarchists speak the truth.—You, you are telling us lies.'

As we made our way back from the meeting, several comrades joined us. The young girl who had spoken told me, 'You know, comrade Skromny,<sup>1</sup> this 'Nil' was driving me crazy with his influence over the workers and I had set myself the task of bringing it to an end at any cost. Just one thing held me back: my youth. The workers display more trust in older comrades. I was scared,' she added, 'that that might prevent me from doing my duty by them.'

I could only wish her further successes in her anarchist endeavours and we parted after having promised to meet again the next day to speak about Gulyai-Polye, about which she had heard a lot of good things.

The meeting delayed my arrival at the Congress office and I was unable to obtain a room at the hotel. So I spent the night in comrade Sereguin's home.

I devoted the whole of the next day to the Congress and was unable to make time to meet the young comrade as I had promised. I was caught up the whole of the next day by the business of the farming Commission. There I met the Left SR, Schneider, dispatched to the Departmental Congress by the Central Pan-Russian Executive Committee of the Soviets of Worker, Peasant, Soldier and Cossack Deputies. He too was elected on to the farming Commission.

Unanimously, and in perfect agreement, the Commission voted that the land be socialised, and this vote was communicated to the Congress office. Next the Commission asked comrade Schneider to report on the situation in Petrograd.

Being pressed for time, he gave only a bare outline and asked us to support the resolution on reorganising the Peasants' Union into Soviets, in Congress. The proposal was later voted through by the Congress.

That was the only question put on the agenda between August 5 and 7 1917 that had not already been anticipated in Gulyai-Polye.

Upon our return, after a series of reports, the Gulyai Polye Peasants' Union was transformed into a Soviet: there was no amendment of its principles, however, nor of its methods with an eye to the struggle for which it was intensively training the peasants: it invited them to help it drive

---

<sup>1</sup> Skromny means modest (Translator's note)

the employers out of the factories and to abolish the property rights of the latter over public undertakings.

While we were involved in these purely formal transformations, the Pan-Russian Democratic Conference was opening in Moscow on August 14: at it our dearly beloved and honoured comrade P.A. Kropotkin appeared on the platform.

Our Gulyai-Polye anarchist-communist group was dumbfounded at this news, though we understood very well how our old friend, after so many years of exertion, constantly exiled and exclusively preoccupied in his old days with humanitarian notions, might have had difficulty, once back in Russia, in refusing to support that conference. But all such considerations were pushed into the background by the tragic circumstance that followed.

Inside ourselves, we condemned our aged friend for his participation in the conference, naively imagining that the aged apostle of revolutionary anarchism was turning into a sentimental old man, seeking peace and quiet and looking for the strength to apply his knowledge to life once more. But that condemnation remained unspoken, and was never made known to our enemies: for, in the deepest recesses of our souls, Kropotkin was still the anarchist movement's greatest and sturdiest theorist for us, its apostle. We knew that, were it not for his advanced years, he would have placed himself in the van of the Russian Revolution and would have been anarchy's unchallenged leader.

Were we right or not? The fact remains that we never ever discussed the problem of Kropotkin's participation in the Pan-Russian Democratic Conference in Moscow with our political enemies.

So we heeded what Kropotkin said and our enthusiasm waned. We did indeed feel that he would always remain dear and close to us, but the Revolution summoned us down a different road. For reasons of a purely artificial nature, the Revolution was passing through a stationary period, it was being garrotted by all of the parties that were partners in the 'Provisional Government'. Now, day by day the latter were becoming stronger and more sure of themselves, posing a standing threat of counter-revolution.

## Chapter Eleven: Kornilov's March on Petrograd

Around August 20 1917, our group looked into the allocation and utilisation of its resources. The meeting was one of its most serious. As I have said before, none of us had sufficient familiarity with anarchist theory. We were all only peasants and workers without any real education. Moreover, the anarchist school did not exist. What little we did know we had extracted over the years from reading the works of Kropotkin and Bakunin or from endless discussion with the peasants, to whom we vouchsafed all that we had read and understood. What we knew we owed above all to comrade Vladimir Antoni, known as 'Zarathustra'.

In the course of this highly important meeting, we reviewed a series of pressing questions and we saw clearly that the Revolution was being strangled by the statism that was threatening to stifle it. It was turning pale, weakening, but clinging to life and might yet emerge from the supreme struggle victorious. Its help would come chiefly from the revolutionary peasant masses, who would throw off the noose and free it of this blight, the Provisional Government, and all its satellite parties.

In short, we arrived at the following conclusions:

From the outset, the Revolution had presented the Russian and Ukrainian anarchist groups with a categorical alternative which urgently required a decision from us today: were we to go to the masses, organise them and create the Revolution with them, or else abstain and forswear the social revolution. It could no longer be a question of sticking to group activity, of making do with bringing out pamphlets and newspapers or organising meetings. With decisive developments on the horizon, the anarchists would be running the risk of finding themselves, if not utterly isolated from the masses, at least trailing in the wake of their movement.

Anarchism, by its very nature, could not take on such a role. The only problem was that lack of understanding and revolutionary zeal in its adepts—groups and federations—was threatening to drag it down that path.

Any party of struggle—and the revolutionary anarchist party more than any other—must strive to carry the masses with it in time of insurrection. Whenever the masses begin to show confidence in it, it must, without letting itself be carried away, follow the tortuous thread of events and seize the moment when it must cast aside the twists of the route followed so far and steer the working people away from them. That was a long-standing method, but not one yet tried by our group. It was one that could only be put into practice once our movement should develop in accordance with a strategic plan devised in advance, without which the various groups would be oblivious of each other and would lack cohesiveness in their action. Such a movement could certainly be conjured up in the very moment of revolution, but it would be impossible to instil in it a life that would last or give it a credo that would steer the rebellious masses towards their ultimate release from economic, political and moral encumbrances. There would be a pointless waste of human

lives sacrificed in a struggle that may be necessary and proper in terms of its aims, but which would also be an unequal one.

Having monitored the anarchist movement in the towns over a period of seven months, our group could no longer ignore the fact that many militants were absolutely smothering the movement and preventing it from ridding itself of its traditional disorganised mass movement.

This is why it was throwing itself with renewed energy into the study of problems so far unresolved by the anarchist movement, such as, for instance, the problem of coordinating the activities of the several groups in the revolutionary struggle in progress. None of the federations from the Russian Revolution of February had devised a solution, yet each one of them was publishing its resolutions and pointing out the new route to be followed.

That is how, after a frantic search for the lodestone-idea in the anarchist writings of Bakunin, Kropotkin and Malatesta, we arrived at the conclusion that our Gulyai-Polye group could neither imitate the urban anarchist movement nor abide by its word. We should count on no one therefore to help the enslaved countryside to find its way during this critical phase of the revolution. No political party should shake the peasants' conviction that they—and they alone—had the power to alter the character of the Revolution, and that neither the parties nor the government in the villages.

The group's members spread out among the peasants and workers retaining nothing but their publicity and information bureau. They helped them find their bearings in the Revolution as it stood by word and deed, and to inject greater intensity into the struggle.

Shortly after this decision as we were already beginning to notice the results of our activities in the region, we were convinced that we had been right as to the cause of the stagnation of the Revolution and as to the criticality of the moment. In point of fact, the Revolution was caught in a noose. It would have been enough to tighten it just a little more in order to strangle the life out of it altogether.

The introduction of capital punishment at the front was ample proof that Revolutionary soldiers were to perish on the outer front while counter-revolutionaries could persist with their handiwork in the very heart of the Revolution. Some military units were absorbing the spirit of the Revolution, were fraternising with the workers in the towns and the peasants in their villages. They were becoming aware that they were the slaves of militarism, and were trying to deploy the artillery and machine-guns in their possession against their enemies—and that was why they were driven out of the rear where they were considered a threat to the growing strength of the reactionaries.

Seeing the course mapped out for the reinforcement of the power of the bourgeoisie who had already recovered from their defeat and were poised to strike back, we were increasingly convinced that the method we had chosen to help the working people get their proper bearings in the welter of revolutionary events, was the right one. It was vital, however, that it be complemented by precise directives.

What did we achieve in this regard? This: from the end of August onwards, the peasants had understood us completely and no longer let their energies be dissipated in different political groupings incapable of achieving anything strong and lasting in the Revolution.

The more the peasants came to understand us, the more solid became their belief in themselves and their direct role: that of abolishing on the one hand, by an act of revolution, the right of private ownership of the land and declaring that land to be the property of the nation, and on the

other, following an understanding with the proletariat of the towns, removing every possibility of new privileges and of the power of the few over others.

## Chapter Twelve: Resistance to the counter-revolution spreads through the villages

So, the bourgeoisie was disarmed and its weaponry divided up among the revolutionary peasants. This was achieved without bloodshed.

A Congress of Soviets, called for the purpose of probing the origins and aims of General Kornilov's movement, was inaugurated. It signified its approval, not merely for the formation by the Gulyai-Polye Soviet and by some other organisations, of a Committee for Defence of the Revolution, but also for all the measures taken by that soviet prior to the summoning of the congress, and it asserted that the time to act had arrived.

It then turned to Kornilov's advance on Petrograd, a march that by then had been halted and it stressed once again that it regarded as criminal the dereliction of the external front. It resolved to maintain that front, necessary if the revolution was to have protection against the external enemy, and invited the toilers to crush the movement of Kornilov's supporters once and for all.

The congress looked into still other problems, endorsed the announcement that private property rights had been abolished in our region, and turned its attention to the agrarian question.

The anarchist-communist group volunteered to read out its report on this issue. It was given a reading by comrades Krat and Andrei Semenota. It dealt mainly with practical measures for abolishing the rights of the pomeschiki and Kulaki over the enormous fine landed estates which they were incapable of cultivating by their own unaided efforts. The anarchist-communist group proposed to expropriate them without further ado, and to organise, upon these estates, free agrarian communes involving, so far as possible, these same pomeschiki and kulaki as participants:—and if the latter refused to join the family of toilers and expressed the wish to go it alone, each toiling on his own behalf, to allocate them their quotient of the national assets which they had purloined and to endow them with the means of making a living without being partners in the agrarian communities.

The Congress asked the farming Committee of Gulyai-Polye to devise a position on the agrarian question.

Comrade Krat was a member of this Committee. With the approval of the other committee members, he spelled out what had been undertaken by them in this sphere, stressing the agreement that existed between their finding and those of the anarchist-communist group that had just been given a hearing, and he pointed out that this question had been written by Gulyai-Polye into the agenda of the regional Congress of farming Committees and that that Congress had accepted their theses as the basis of a study of the matter in hand.

The Congress of soviets, in complete agreement—as I have already said—with the Soviet of the workers' trades union, the farming Committee and the anarchist communist group, scrutinised

both reports with a perfect awareness of its revolutionary duty towards oppressed labour upon whose liberation they had only now determined.

Here is the resolution which it passed on the matter:

‘The regional congress of the toilers of Gulyai-Polye strenuously condemns the pretensions of the Provisional Government of Petrograd and of the Ukrainian Central Rada of Kiev to direct the lives of the toilers and invites local Soviets and the entire proletarian organised populace to ignore all governmental orders.

The people must be sovereign in their own affairs. The time has at last come to make a reality of their age-old dream. Henceforth the land, the factories and plants must belong to the toilers.

The peasants must be masters of the land, the workers masters of the workshops and factories.

It falls to the peasants to expel from their lands all those pomeschiki and Kulaki who refuse to labour with their own hands, and to organise on their rural estates free agrarian communes made up of volunteer peasants and workers. Congress acknowledges that the initiative behind this decision originated from the anarchist-communist group and commends the implementation of the decision to it.

Congress hopes that the local Soviets and farming Committees will place all of the technical means at their disposal wholly at the discretion of that group with a view to the common task to be accomplished.’

Then the Congress expressed the assurance that the consolidation by the toilers of the gains of the revolution, opposition from their enemies notwithstanding, would be followed, not just in our region, but in the whole of the Ukraine and Russia, by the wholesale expropriation of all the collective undertakings enjoyed by the bourgeoisie and the State.

Towards the close of the Congress proceedings, a certain number of communes hitherto loyal to the government, made it known by means of a telephone message sent from Aleksandrovsk that agents of the Aleksandrovsk Communal Committee, of the soviet of Peasant, Worker, Soldier and Cossack Deputies and of the government’s commissar were touring the villages, organising meetings and inviting the peasants to boycott the Congress of Soviets of Gulyai-Polye, which was capable of having mooted issues that only the Constituent Assembly was fitted to pronounce upon, stating indeed that, although comprised of peasants, the Congress was devising to these problems solutions that were contrary to the peasants’ interests, and that the members of its Bureau, averred enemies of the toilers, were utterly ignorant of the laws of the revolution and thus were in revolt against the Provisional Revolutionary Government led by Kerensky, and against the Revolution’s supreme tribunal, the Constituent Assembly.

To these messages I added an envelope received by the Gulyai-Polye communal Committee containing instructions from the government commissar of the said district to prohibit N. Makhno from all social activity in Gulyai-Polye: he was, the document alleged, wanted by the State courts for having divested the pomeschiki and kulaki of their weapons.

Having taken note of all this, the Congress summoned the Bureau of the Gulyai-Polye communal committee and invited it to participate in the discussion of these messages and, above all, of the letter concerning me.

After a welter of abuse directed at the government agents touring the villages and at the government commissar, the assembly passed the following resolution:

‘The Congress of Soviets of the Gulyai-Polye region and the Gulyai-Polye Soviet refuse to acknowledge, for themselves or for the toilers who have endowed them with full powers, any authority and countenance no punishment handed down by the government’s commissar or by

the Aleksandrovsk communal committee and they salute N. Makhno as a friend and pioneer in the matters of revolutionary social issues.

The anarchist N. Makhno has been delegated by the erstwhile Peasants' Union together with six other members, to the communal Committee of Gulyai-Polye for the purpose of monitoring its work on a permanent basis. The Peasants' Soviet, following reorganization of the Union, has confirmed that decision.

Congress endorses the appointment and objects to the unconscionable intrusion of the district Committee and of the commissar into the business of local assemblies.'

(Minutes of the Congress, Book 2, 1917).

This resolution I dispatched to the government commissar, citizen I.K. Mikhno.

But that was not the end of the affair.

The anarchist-communist group asked the Congress for a two-hour suspension of its business, intending, once the session resumed, to deliver an important item concerning the current situation:

An interval of three hours was decided upon. This was used by the delegates to exchange personal opinions. As for our group, it availed of the suspension to organise a meeting and charged me, together with comrade Antonov, to deliver a report on 'counter-revolution in the town and district of Aleksandrovsk.'

We delivered it just as soon as the congress resumed its business.

I see no purpose in reviewing here the ideas contained within it: but I wish with all my heart that those who go to the peasants without knowing them, but with a high opinion of themselves, might listen to the delivery of such reports, if ever any are submitted in the name of our anarchist groups. There is a lot for them to learn from them, and the echo which they draw from the masses of the people will afford them some grasp of the peasants' mentality. Thus will they learn once and for all that the latter will never approach them for advice or permission a propos of anything to do with their own, independent and fruitful revolutionary action.

It is up to us to go to them and to strive to understand them.

After having given the report a hearing, the Congress passed the following resolution:

The Congress of the toilers of the Gulyai-Polye region enjoins the Gulyai-Polye Soviet of Peasant and Worker Deputies regularly to mandate spokesmen N. Makhno and V. Antonov, members of the peasant anarchist-communist group, and to send them as delegates from the Soviet and the Congress to the factory workers and port employees of Aleksandrovsk so that they may discover their true feelings about the antirevolutionary policy pursued by the Executive Committee of the Soviet of Worker and Peasant Deputies elected by them.

'Only thus,' said the Congress in its resolution, 'shall we revolutionary peasants be able to assess the relative strengths of our enemies and ourselves.'

(Extract from the Minutes of the Workers' Congress in Gulyai-Polye, September 1917).

Congress then went on to examine other items on the agenda. Then, once having determined upon publication of the minutes and the sending out of these to the local Soviets, it broke up.

The attitude of the revolutionary peasants vis à vis their lords and masters during the first six months of the Revolution, an attitude reinforced by the September congress, helped to bolster our group's standing in the area.

Increasingly it drew the attention of the communal Committees.

But this was not achieved without a hitch. We expended a lot of effort before we managed to overcome the resistance within the group to the principle of a regular organisation, and our



position in the enslaved villages was firmly established only when we had adopted a sturdy organisation and when every active member of the Bureau acted in concert with the group as a whole.

V. Antonov, Sokruta and Kalinichenko—in the soviet of Worker and Peasant Deputies.

Petrovski, Sereguin, Mironov. P. Sharovski, L. Schneider—in the factory Committees.

N. Makhno, Sereguin, Antonov—on the Soviet of the metalworkers' trades union and their sickness benefit fund.

A. Marchenko, A. Semenyuta, Prokop Sharovski, F. Krat, Isodor Liouty, Pavel Kostelev, the brothers Makhno, Stepan Shepel, Grigor Sereda—on the Peasants' Soviet and the Farming Committee.

This helped to bend all our efforts towards one common objective. Each of us was aware of the goal to be achieved and shouldered his portion of the burden of responsibility.

Moreover, this earned our group a closer attachment to the bulk of the toilers and enabled it the better to get the anarchist idea, in the social sense of the word, over to the peasants along with the necessity of keeping an eye on the attitude of the Provisional Government, the Ukrainian Central Rada and its Secretariat, just when the latter were at their most obstructive towards the practical realisation of revolutionary principles.

The toilers of the region openly declared in their congresses that they were scrupulously monitoring the actions of their oppressors and were making ready to take up arms against them.

From the end of August 1917 onwards, all at the region's Communal Committees began to speak out against certain orders from the government. Drawn up in advance at local gatherings, these objections were passed on to us by delegates and then a final draft was devised.

Nevertheless, and despite the apparent class consciousness of the toilers—a consciousness that was leading them along the road towards moral and material independence and towards unrestricted freedom, for which they stood ready to shed their blood, and which they wanted to feel in them and all about them, thereby achieving a society knowing no authority—despite this tendency so very pronounced in them, the concept of the abolition of private ownership of the land, factories and workshops, enunciated by the Gulyai-Polye Committee for Defence of the Revolution and endorsed by the Regional toilers' congress, could not fully be put into effect.

The Provisional Government, abetted by Kerensky's party (Right Social Revolutionaries and Mensheviks) having, as a result, at their disposal the local authorities and troops who, in this region, held aloof from the masses and were ignorant of their aspirations, ended by gaining the upper hand. It curtailed the revolutionary impetus of the toilers who had gone beyond the programmes of those parties by calling for complete freedom, and it thwarted the implementation of the healthy and productive will of the people.

So it was, for a time at least, that the privileges of the bourgeoisie enjoyed insolent triumph.

Those who, while professing to believe in socialism, looked upon it as merely a game, incontrovertibly had a hand in this outcome. The toilers of Gulyai-Polye, who had boldly striven to become the unchallenged masters of freedom and happiness, this time made do with withholding farm rents from the pomeschiki and with placing lands, tools and livestock under the supervision of the farming Committees until spring so as to prevent the pomeschiki from selling them.

Impotent, bewildered, the toilers were painful to behold. Their manifest inferiority impelled them to look for reinforcements.

But where were these to be found?

In the end they realised that they could rely only on themselves. They closed ranks, seeking to build up sufficient strength to be able to liberate everyone from the obnoxious tyranny of the State.

## Chapter Thirteen: Visit to the Aleksandrovsk factory workers.

Despite the hostility which held sway in all government institutions and in the workers' Soviet of Aleksandrovsk vis à vis the toilers of the Gulyai-Polye region, the delegates from the Gulyai-Polye Soviet and from the Congress, which is to say comrade Antonov and myself, set off to present to the workers of those factories a report on 'counter-revolution in the town and district of Aleksandrovsk,' for we were convinced that revolutionary Gulyai-Polye commanded some influence there.

The authorities received us with diffidence, but did not dare prevent us from visiting all the factories and workshops, familiarising the workers with the thoughts of the peasants, what steps they aimed to take in pursuit of their revolutionary endeavour, and at the same time educating ourselves as to what they thought, the plans they were laying for the future, despite the counter-revolution surrounding them on every side and which, in their name, had spread its activities into the countryside.

So we set off without the slightest misgiving.

The Gulyai-Polye Soviet and the trades union had promised to organise an attack against Aleksandrovsk in the event of the authorities' attempting to place us under arrest.

By way of a beginning, then, we went along to the Soviet and asked the Bureau to indicate the most convenient place in which to start our tour of the factories lest any be left out and lest we waste our time to no purpose.

Having been asked by the Bureau of the Soviet what our purpose was, we produced our mandates. After a short deliberation, they furnished us with the requested information and inspected our mandates. But we did not adhere to the instructions issued by the Soviet.

We went along to the anarchist Federation and invited comrade Nikiforova to act as our guide and aide in our mission and all three of us set off for the factories.

There, we presented our credentials to the factory Committees. The latter promptly summoned all the workers together to listen to what we had to say to them on the peasants' behalf.

For several days we visited the factories and workshops like this, explaining to the work-force the counter-revolutionary activity conducted in their name in the villages, and the resistance to it from the peasants.

They heard us out with especial attentiveness, passed resolutions taking the attitude of their Soviet to task and expressed their gratitude to us and to all from the Gulyai-Polye region for having unmasked the hateful machinations which, in connivance with the governmental organisations, were being pursued in their Soviet's name throughout the entire district.

On more than one occasion our audience included members of the Soviet of Peasant and Worker Deputies, of the communal Committee, agents of the government commissar and even the commissar for war in the flesh—the Social Revolutionary S. Popov. All of these combated

our reports with a vitriol that only those with unchallenged control of the situation could have indulged themselves in.

All to no avail however. The workers told them:

‘We don’t believe you any more, for in letting the bourgeoisie guide you by the nose, you have blinded us to a whole creative aspect of the Revolution. You wanted us to support it, yes, but without our having any right to develop or extend it.’

On the evening of the third day, we still had one more report to deliver at the munitions plants, the erstwhile Badovsky factories.

We went along and asked the sentry to grant us admittance to the military workshops’ Committee: but, without uttering a word he slammed the door in our faces. We shouted to him through the grille that we had come on behalf of the peasants to deliver a message to the soldier-workers. A member of the Soldiers’ Committee was sent for and he informed us through the grille that he knew all that but could not let us in, the war commissar, Social-revolutionary S. Popov, having given instructions that under no pretext were we to get among the soldiers. At this point, some groups of soldiers began to cluster behind the grille and I addressed myself directly to them: ‘Comrade soldiers! Who’s in charge here? The commissar whom you yourselves voted on to the communal Committee? Or yourselves? Aren’t you ashamed, comrades, to have put yourselves in such a position that the representatives of the peasants, your mothers and fathers, your brothers and sisters, are denied access to you!’

Shouts went up from the cluster of soldiers: ‘Where’s the Committee? Bring the Committee here! Let it open the gates and admit the peasants’ representatives. Otherwise we’ll admit them ourselves.’

Some bareheaded soldiers rushed to open the gates to us, ushered us into their mess and showered us with questions about Gulyai-Polye and its activities.

Around ten of them surrounded me and said: ‘We’re all Left Social Revolutionaries; there are also some Bolsheviks and some anarchists among us, but we can do nothing here. At the slightest indication of revolutionary activity we are sent to the front against the Germans and others are sent for in our place. Do what you can to help us, comrade Makhno. We intend to recall from the Soviet of the communal Committee all soldier representatives and to appoint others who reflect our thinking.’

I told them that the peasants had entrusted us with a specific mission and that insofar as it corresponded to their revolutionary viewpoint, they should rejoice at its success and try to make a contribution towards it.

We began our report. The soldiers from the workshops in the rear listened to us eagerly, tried to really understand, put questions and make their delight obvious.

When we invited them to organise themselves and to contact the peasants of the district through the good offices of the Gulyai-Polyai region, and thus to form a united front to take on the counter-revolution, shouts went up: ‘What counter-revolution? All power to the hands of the revolutionaries! From where can the counter-revolution come?’

So shouted Commissar for War, the Social Revolutionary Popov, surrounded by his supporters.

When comrade Antonov said in answer to him that it was precisely this ‘revolutionary power’ that was fomenting counter-revolution, commissar Popov, the Social Revolutionary Martinov and other socialists became embroiled in a heated argument.

It emerged that the rearguard workshops were under the sway of the Social Revolutionaries and Social Democrats. It was not so much a matter of influence in the strict sense, as of constraint wielded by those who wielded the power.

The bulk of the soldiers were torn between several political outlooks, including Right Social Revolutionaries, and Menshevik Social democrats, but these two factions did not amount to a majority. But given that any display of revolutionary opinion—the soldiers told me this again, straight out—even a first offence ran the risk of reprisal in the form of being dispatched to the external front they refrained from speaking and, meanwhile, were prey to the statist power of the Right social Revolutionaries and Menshevik Social Democrats.

I was so moved by the check this kept on them that I immediately asked them to recall all these socialists from all the positions they had entrusted to them and indeed to eject from the workshops any who were on the premises. I promised the soldiers to intercede with the Departmental Commissariat of War to ensure that there was no infringement of their interests: in fact I was acquainted with the Commissar who was the anarcho-syndicalist comrade Grunbaum, a rather fine administrator who displayed revolutionary vigour. If need be, they had to take to the streets to stand by their rights. Gulyai-Polye would always back them up.

My summons heartened the soldiers. They wanted to drive the Social Revolutionaries and Social Democrats out of the workshops on the spot. Had we not opposed this on the prompting of our revolutionary consciences, they would have lynched them.

It was only with the greatest difficulty that we managed to prevent them from perpetrating that act, unworthy to be committed by revolutionaries against other revolutionaries. (However, in the events of 3–5 July, the agents of the government and of these ‘revolutionaries’ had murdered our comrade Assin and many other revolutionaries and anarchists at the villa Durnovo in Petrograd).

The soldier-workers of the rear workshops, in response to our report passed a resolution definitively recalling their representatives from the Soviet and communal Committee of Aleksandrovsk, unless these two institutions had been reorganized by the workers—in addition to another resolution calculated to support the revolutionary toilers of Gulyai-Polye.

Whereupon we left the workshops: the soldiers beseeched us to tell the peasants that they would always be with them in the struggle for freedom and they requested that they be visited more often with similar reports.

It was growing late.

Pressed for time, we snatched a meal in the home of some worker comrades and made our way back to our rooms.

That very night, the commissar for war, Social Revolutionary Popov and the government commissar K.B. Mikhno decided to have the anarchist Nikiforova secretly arrested for having escorted us to the workers without having been mandated by the peasants, and to have her treacherously locked up in prison. Their agents easily discovered her lodgings, seized her and carried her off by car to prison.

But unfortunately for the commissars as soon as morning came the workers learned of the arrest of the anarchist Nikiforova and promptly dispatched to the commissar’s headquarters a delegation charged with insisting upon her immediate release.

The commissars were nowhere to be found.

So the workers of the factories and workshops quit work, and, to the accompaniment of the factory alarm sirens, made their way with banners flying and singing revolutionary songs towards the Soviet of Worker and Peasant Deputies.

While so proceeding and demonstrating their revolutionary solidarity they came across the chairman of the Soviet and Peasant and Worker Deputies, the Social Democrats Mochalyi and laid hands on him. A commission elected on the spot bundled him aboard a hackney cab, proceeded to the prison with him in tow and freed the anarchist Nikiforova.

When the workers' delegation, the Soviet's chairman and the anarchist Nikiforova joined the demonstrators parading in Cathedral Street, the workers picked up the anarchist and, passing her from group to group, carried her in triumph as far as the soviet, rejoicing at her release, congratulating her and cursing the Provisional Government and all its agents.

None of the commissars dared show himself to the workers on the rostrum of the Soviet. The anarchist Nikiforova alone mounted this platform and, with her voice ringing, summoned the workers to the struggle against the Government, for Revolution and for a society freed of all authority.

We concluded our report with an appeal addressed to the workers, inviting them to have done with the Aleksandrovsk Soviet whose antirevolutionary activity had gone too far. We knew its political complexion through the agents encountered in the villages and at congresses and our reports determined its fate in advance. The commissar's insolent treatment of our anarchist comrade, an act which, on the part of serious politicians was inexcusable from the political and above all from the tactical point of view, merely hastened the downfall of the Soviet, of the right SRs, the Menshevik SDs and Cadets who composed it.

Immediately, the workers determined to proceed as rapidly as possible with fresh elections. Within a few days the former representatives were recalled and others elected in their place in the majority of cases. Thus was formed a new Executive Committee of the Soviets of worker and Peasant Deputies of the Aleksandrovsk district.

Even then this new committee was made up not of workers directly committed to the task of their class but rather of people who, while being workers, were very close, in terms of their beliefs, to... in some cases the parties and organisations of the left SRs and Bolsheviks... and in others, a handful among us, the anarchists. The newly elected members broke up into factions and, from the moment they entered the Executive Committee they distorted and, had there not been any anarchists, would have distorted completely the very notion of revolution as perceived by the workers. However this new Soviet was not openly supportive of either the antirevolutionary communal committee of Aleksandrovsk, or of the government's commissar, which both insisted that the Gulyai-Polye communal committee prohibit me from engaging in any social activity on account of my having disarmed the bourgeoisie. Then again, the new Soviet did not ask that we restore to the bourgeoisie the weapons that we had seized from it.

After the fashion of highly-placed political and administrative institutions, it felt the need to ensure that each of its members had a portfolio under his arm, as if it had fallen to them to determine the fate of the Revolution.

And day after day they sat, devising the rules for their conduct. In point of fact, it was a most opportune time for such endeavours: the Bolsheviks and the Left SRs reached agreement on a number of issues and had broached the question of the blockade—a matter which the leaders of the two parties had yet to raise formally, but regarding which one could foresee that their response to it would be in the affirmative.

Comrade Antonov and I left Aleksandrovsk reluctantly. We would both have liked to spend a little more time there working among the workers, a number of whom had been honestly won over to the revolutionary cause. They stood out clearly from the multitude, but were affiliated

to no political party. Their sympathies, though, lay with the anarchists. But we had embarked upon the task of organising among the peasants and, seeing that undertaking prosper, we had to return to it. And so we set off for Gulyai-Polye.

When we got back, we assembled all of the revolutionary, trades and community organisations and gave them a detailed report of our success in Aleksandrovsk. Whereupon a skhod-rally of all toilers was summoned: there too we delivered a detailed report of the welcome which had awaited us from the workers and the attentiveness with which they had listened to what we had told them about the counter-revolution in the town of Aleksandrovsk and in its district. Then we passed on what the workers and soldiers of the rear workshops wanted the peasants and workers of our revolutionary Gulyai-Polye region to know. Our success among the Aleksandrovsk workers delighted everyone.

But the revolutionary toilers thirsted after action.

I suggested to the peasants that they appoint some individuals capable of assisting the farming Committee and proceed, without delay, to share out the estates belonging to the churches, monasteries and pomechiki: for these lands needed to be planted before the winter or tilled for the spring.

They set resolutely to work, but when they arrived in the fields and began the allocation, they discovered that for that year at any rate, each person had to hold on to the lands which he had tilled and planted himself with winter cereals, and it was decided that each one should set aside a given sum for the benefit of the community so as to maintain the public funds which subsidised the needs of the commune: those peasants who might not have done any ploughing would not be expected to contribute anything that year.

Even so, generally speaking they seized hold of the lands in need of ploughing before winter came and divided them up, paying not the slightest heed to the threats from the government's agents. A substantial number of districts, communes and regions followed the example set by the peasants of Gulyai-Polye.

Our own anarchist-communist group and the members of the Soviet of Peasant and Worker Deputies dispatched reliable comrades in every direction with written appeals urging the peasants to act to the same purpose with the utmost energy. We hoped that the local successes of revolutionary direct action would put paid to the agrarian question once and for all, just prior to the summoning of the Constituent Assembly and would thus also determine the fate of private property rights over the factories, workshops and other public enterprises. Indeed, with the example of the peasants before them, the workers would no longer be inclined to remain enslaved to these bosses and undertakings, which they would proclaim community property and place them under the immediate supervision of their 'factory Committees' and 'Unions'.

This would signal the start of the struggle against the political authority of the government (provided the anarchist groups in the towns were ready for it) and thus the demise of the very principles of government would become a fait accompli. It would remain only to bury those principles as thoroughly as possible so that, no longer having any place in life, they might never be resurrected.

In Gulyai-Polye and its environs, public life became frantic in its pace, to the tremendous delight of the revolutionary anarchist peasants and workers.

## Chapter Fourteen: The Overtures of the Departmental Soviet to Gulyai-Polye.

While comrade Antonov and I were in Aleksandrovsk presenting our report on the counter-revolution to the workers in the factories on behalf of the Peasants' Union and the Soviet of Gulyai-Polye, our activity caught the particular attention of the Departmental Executive Committee of the Soviet of Worker, Peasant and Soldier deputies of Ekaterinoslav. With great political astuteness, this Committee did not resort to reprisals as some dull-witted and thoughtless politicians might have done. It employed 'political wisdom'; reaching beyond district perimeters, it suggested to the Gulyai-Polye Soviet that the latter delegate a permanent representative to the Departmental Executive Committee of Soviets.

In the course of debates regarding this suggestion, the Gulyai-Polye Soviet was startled by the following fact: there already was a delegate from Gulyai-Polye on the Departmental Executive Committee, a delegate elected by the Departmental Congress; and the Executive Committee was now suggesting a second, chosen directly by the Soviet of Gulyai-Polye.

This circumstance forced our soviet to revise its previous thinking, according to which it had, from the very outset, clearly sketched out its role in the revolutionary endeavour, namely, the repudiation of all direction from a higher agency as having quite different notions from its own of the very essence of the Revolution. So it seemed that the answer to be delivered to the Departmental Executive Committee of Soviets was, in essence, already in existence for a long time and that it remained only to frame it at a formal meeting and put it down on paper.

However, having turned back to our initial revolutionary ideas, we ran up against problems which, in the course of practical achievements, had derived from them. In fact, they required that we blend completely with the workers so that together we might proclaim our age-old rights over the land, the factories and so on, and so that, again together, we might make them a reality in our lives.

Guided by this idea, we found it crucial to study the Executive Committee's proposal thoroughly and to anticipate what the impact of acceptance or rejection of it might be upon Gulyai-Polye's revolutionary endeavour.

The proposal was subjected to thorough discussion. But first we had to establish precisely what the ties were uniting, a propos of the intensification of the revolutionary movement, the toilers of the Gulyai-Polye region and those of other regions, and to see whether our direct representation on the Executive Committee might not give rise to conflicts of ideas inside our ranks.

In short, it was apparent that Gulyai-Polye's influence was very far-reaching, that the vigorous Kamyshevat region was working hand in hand with us, that many others in the Berdyansk, Marinpol, Pavlograd and Bakhmur jurisdictions were sending us delegates to sound us out on our attitude towards the enemies of the revolution (i.e. the Provisional Government and the Ukrainian Central Rada) and to discover the means we were using in the struggle to recover the



land, factories, and workshops and transfer these wholly to the peasants' and workers' organisations.

Furthermore, a number of toilers from the aforementioned districts had, in their own territories, asserted through revolutionary acts their solidarity with our ideas concerning the agrarian issue and the right of communal committees to resolve for themselves matters of public interest and to insist upon the implementation of their ordinances.

The Gulyai-Polye Soviet of Peasant and Worker Deputies and the anarchist-communist group looked upon all this as the fruits of their concerted efforts.

Preoccupied above all with unity, the Soviet resolved the matter by opting for acceptance and decided to send a trustworthy and capable comrade from the anarchist-communist group to attach himself to the Departmental Executive Committee.

The grounds behind this response were spelled out by members of the Soviet who were not affiliated to our group. They deemed themselves revolutionaries and sympathised with the anarchists, but as toilers and as bold defenders of the rights of labour they remained within the bosom of the peasant and worker masses.

The Resolution might be summarised thus: 'The toilers of the Gulyai-Polye region are among the most steadfast advocates of expropriation of the means of production and consumer products for the benefit of all toilers. But this notion does not make them lose their heads. They recognise that this question, one of the most important ones, can only be successfully resolved if the idea of expropriation is expressed and implemented in several regions simultaneously or, at the very least, at very rapid intervals.

This is why it is important and necessary that the Soviet, the anarchist-communist group and the Soviet of the trades union, being favourably disposed towards our ideas, should utilise their resources to plant it as deeply as possible in the masses of regions sympathetic with Gulyai-Polye in that, at the moment of truth, the support of those regions is of capital significance if we wish to see our theses spread thereafter throughout the whole country.

As the instigator of this great movement, Gulyai-Polye will have to assume the leadership of it, but it will only be able to do so when it has seen the idea realised on its home ground.

From this angle it is important for the Soviet of Peasant and Worker Deputies of Gulyai-Polye to have a direct representative on the Departmental Executive Committee of Soviets.

The anarchist-communist group and the Soviet of the metalworkers' and woodworkers' trades union should, in consequence, not oppose, but rather support us instead.'

It was for these reasons that the anarchist-communist group and the trades union's Soviet pronounced themselves in favour of dispatching a representative to the Departmental Executive Committee: and as the Soviet of Peasant and Worker Deputies was insistent that it should be a member of our group, we designated comrade Leon Schneider, a veteran organiser.

The position was particularly worrying. Kerensky was threatening the left with a backlash. The revolutionary anarchists had to be ready at that precise moment either to launch armed struggle against the Provisional Government or to go to ground.

I was perfectly well aware that, for want of solid organisation, our anarchist movement was weak in the towns and virtually nonexistent in the villages. So our group, as had been decided previously, should not count upon anyone other than itself and be prepared for any eventuality. The Committee issued comrade L. Schneider with papers certifying that he was commissioned to represent it on the Departmental Executive Committee. The anarchist-communist group advised him to work in conjunction with the Ekaterinoslav anarchist Federation. The soviet of the

metalworkers' and woodworkers' trades union awarded him full powers to negotiate with the Ekaterinoslav local industrial Committee to ensure that the Gulyai-Polye foundries might receive, in time and in adequate amounts, the raw materials needed if work was not to grind to a halt at the plant or, if it did have to stop, to ensure that the rundown affected only those branches least essential to the region's population.

And so comrade Schneider, delegate of the Workers' and Peasants' Soviet, set out for Ekaterinoslav to represent revolutionary Gulyai-Polye on the Departmental Executive Committee. He was welcomed with open arms. But at the end of two sittings of the Executive Committee, at which he spoke, the attitude of the Committee's leaders changed abruptly and his position became difficult. Some Committee members asked that he be stripped of the right to participate in decision-making and be left only with the right to participate in discussions.

He pointed out that he had never been entitled to share in the decision-making of the Executive committee in that no such right had been conferred on him by the Gulyai-Polye Soviet. He had only been elected delegate so as to monitor all new measures taken by that Committee in relation to the revolution, and to brief it on what had been done in the same regard by the toilers of Gulyai-Polye: in this way, it would be up to Congress itself to fill in any gaps which might exist in the autonomous revolutionary feats accomplished by the toilers of the various communes or regions.

In the wake of such a frank pronouncement, many members of that Committee asked that the question of the complete exclusion of the Gulyai-Polye representative be included in the agenda. But at this point, such an exclusion would have entailed a boycott of that Committee by Gulyai-Polye and a whole series of like-minded revolutionary regions: it would have been demonstrated to the mass of toilers in the whole department and indeed well beyond its boundaries that the Departmental Executive Committee of Ekaterinoslav was lagging behind the revolutionary masses locally in the work of the Revolution. Now, the boycott procedure is not palatable to anyone in time of acute revolution, but it was especially intimidating to the politicians.

The Departmental Executive Committee of Soviets grasped this very well and reluctantly retained Gulyai-Polye's representative within its ranks, allocating him a seat in some section... the industrial section, if my memory serves me well.

Each week, our delegate would come to Gulyai-Polye to report back to the Soviet of Worker and Peasant Deputies, to the workers' trades union and to his anarchist-communist group and to listen to the discussion of his reports. Then, refreshed and reinvigorated he would be off to spend the whole week in Ekaterinoslav.

Through his good offices, the Soviet of the trades union came to an arrangement with the local industrial Committee and received, in time, the raw materials needed by the plant.

The Regional Congress of Farming Committees set aside a certain number of pomeschiki estates to be turned, with the aid of volunteers, into agrarian communes.

Peasants and workers banded together either on the basis of families or small affinity groups, or groups of 150–200 people, to form genuine free agrarian communes. Joy was on all their faces when they freely debated with one another what they should do while waiting for spring to arrive, what wheat should be planted, which variety would yield the plentiful harvest that was expected and which would be a great help to the Revolution, provided that the weather was fine, without too much drought, with the necessary rain at the desired time to moisten the chernozyom.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Chernozym = Especially fertile black soil.

‘Only the planting of all holdings with good grain, and an abundant harvest will enable us to recover from the devastation of the war and will support the forces of the Revolution,’ the peasants would say.

When asked, ‘And what about the Provisional Government in Petrograd, and the Central Rada with its Kiev Secretariat? Aren’t they outright enemies of the great revolutionary endeavour you wish to support, though?’ their answer was always the same... ‘But we are getting organised precisely in order to drive out the Provisional Government and to prevent the Central Rada and its Kiev Secretariat from coming to power. By spring, we hope to have an end of all these governments in these parts.’ ‘Who are you?’ they were sometimes asked. ‘We peasants and workers. You have been to Aleksandrovsk and seen that, even as we do, the workers want to live free and independent of all authority, all government and of all those other blights from who knows where.’

In September, in the course of our organising work among the peasants and workers, the pomeschic Mikhno, the government’s commissar, dispatched a special envoy to us in Gulyai-Polye with the task of drawing up a dossier on me and on all who were disarming the bourgeoisie of the region.

That envoy ensconced himself in the militia office and asked that all the peasants and workers be summoned, as well as myself, for individual questioning.

But unfortunately for the commissar and his envoy, the Gulyai-Polye militia had only an errand boy’s role and not that of a gendarme. It tipped me off and I myself went to see this envoy, intimating to him that he should gather up his papers forthwith and follow me to the Committee for Defence of the Revolution.

There I had him sit down on a chair and asked him to explain to me, unemotionally and in simple terms, the object of his arrival in Gulyai-Polye. He did what he could to furnish that explanation as calmly as I had commended, but, I know not why, did not seem able to manage it: his lips quivered, his teeth chattered, and he kept on alternately flushing and paling, his eyes fixed on the ground.

Then I invited him to copy down what I was about to say to him. And when, straining to put his hand on some paper, he had written out what I had dictated, I asked him to leave Gulyai-Polyai within 20 minutes and the region within two hours.

And the special envoy from the government commissar of the Aleksandrovsk district departed at speed, a lot more quickly than the committee for Defence of the Revolution and I had been expecting, to rejoin his master in Aleksandrovsk.

From that day on, Gulyai-Polye received no more orders from the central authorities and no more envoys from Aleksandrovsk.

And so the end of September arrived. The great month of October was approaching, the October that gave its name to the second or great Russia’s revolution.

## **Part Two**

# Chapter One: The October coup d'état in Russia.

The further coup d'état in October in Petrograd and in Moscow, and thereafter throughout the whole of Russia only reached us in the Ukraine in late November, early December 1917.

Up until December 1917 the only mention of the October coup d'état made to the toilers in the towns and villages of the Ukraine came in statements from the Central Pan-Russian Executive Committee of the Soviets of Worker, Peasant, Soldier and Cossak Deputies, and in those by the Soviet of the people's commissars, by the revolutionary parties and groups and, in particular, the declarations of two of those parties... the Bolshevik Party and the Left Social Revolutionary Party; for these were the two parties who most astutely capitalised upon this period of the Russian revolution for the sake of achieving their aims. The ground was prepared for this grandiose upheaval, the handiwork of the workers and soldiers in the towns and of the peasants in the countryside, all directed against the Provisional Government and its shameful but fortunately vain efforts to smother the Revolution, by all the groupings which had found a place within the broad parameters of the Russian revolutionary current.

But those two parties... the first of them well organised, the second dancing obediently to the tune of the cunning Lenin... managed to win over the revolutionary masses at the right moment: and luring them behind with the formula: 'Power to the local Soviets of the Worker, Peasant and Soldier Deputies', and complimenting them upon their slogan 'The land to the peasants, the factory and workshop to the workers', they stemmed the Revolution: then, with enormous amounts of paper and huge numbers of printing presses at their disposal, they flooded the towns and the countryside with their manifestoes, statements and programmes.

In the aforementioned coup d'état in Petrograd, Moscow and other industrial towns, anarchists played an exceptionally salient part, in the van of the sailors, soldiers and workers. But, for want of structures they were unable to bring to bear upon the country a revolutionary influence comparable with that of these two parties which had formed a political bloc under the direction of that same guileful Lenin and knew precisely what they had to set about above all else at that time, and the degree of strength and energy at their disposal.

Their voice made itself heard across the country at the key moment, loudly clamouring for the age-old dream of the mass of the toilers: the conquest of land, bread and liberty.

Meanwhile the anarchists, disorganised, were unable to discover a way of exposing the ideological falsehoods and impoverishment of those two parties, to the masses... parties which, in order to seize the reins of the revolution, had recourse to essentially anti-governmental slogans utterly at odds with their underlying principles.

During the period of the counter-revolutionary strivings of the Provisional Government and its direct agents, the right-wing socialists and the Cadets, the masses of the toilers saw the Bolsheviks and the Left Social Revolutionaries as the defenders of their aspirations. They failed to note the deceitfulness and the ulterior motives of those political parties. Only the revolutionary

anarchists, anarcho-communists and anarcho-syndicalists alike, could have taught them to be a little more discerning. But before the Revolution the anarchists, faithful in this respect to an old tradition, had neglected to bring their different groups together into one powerful formation and, come the Revolution, the pressing business of some among the workers and of others among the press, prevented them from giving any serious thought to their weakness and to bringing that weakness to an end by means of the establishment of an organisation which might have enabled them to influence the course of the revolutionary events in the country.

It is true that, shortly after the Revolution began, anarchist Federations and Confederations were formed, but the events of October demonstrated that these had not achieved their aims. It seemed that the communist and syndicalist anarchists ought to have set speedily to work to overhaul the form of their organisation, to render it more stable and more consonant with the social thrust of the Revolution. But alas! Not a thing was done in that regard!

And, partly for that very reason, and partly for other less important reasons, the anarchist movement, so lively and so full of revolutionary zeal, found itself tailing along in the wake of events and sometimes indeed, left out of them, unable to pursue an autonomous cause and to profit the Revolution by their ideas and their tactics.

Thus the political developments of October, developments that were to unleash the second, the great Russian Revolution, only began to make themselves felt in the Ukraine in December 1917.

From October to December, in the towns and villages in the Ukraine, the communal Committees... territorial units... metamorphasised into commissions of the Zemstvo<sup>1</sup>. To be sure the part played by the toilers in this metamorphosis was a minimal one and merely formal. In many regions, the peasants' representatives on the Communal Committees were not carried over on to the zemstvo commissions. Numerous Communal Committees were merely rebaptised as zemstvo commissions without the slightest tinkering with their structure. But officially the territorial unit of each region now was the zemstvo.

Gradually, a segment of the urban workers adopted an expectant attitude.

The peasants deemed this the most opportune moment to overthrow the authorities and to take their fate into their own hands. To this end, the peasants of the Zaporozhiye<sup>2</sup> and along the shores of the sea of Azov closely monitored the coup d'état that spread through the whole of Central Russia in the form of armed attacks against Kerensky's supporters, regarding this as the realisation of what they themselves had already attempted in their villages back in August 1917. Consequently that coup d'état was joyously welcomed and they strove to help it spread into their own territories. However the fact that this coup d'état had brought the Bolsheviks and the Left SRs to power was no cause for celebration by the Ukraine's revolutionary toilers. Unblinkered peasants and workers saw that as a further stage in the interference by authorities in the local revolutionary endeavours and, consequently, as yet another attack upon the People by the Authorities. As for the bulk of the Ukrainian toilers, the peasants of the enslaved villages in particular saw this new government as merely a government like all the rest: and they paid it no heed except when it robbed them through various taxes, recruited soldiers or otherwise interfered violently in their already arduous lives. They were often to be heard speaking their real opinion of the pre-revolutionary and revolutionary authorities. They appeared to be in jest, but in reality were saying with the utmost seriousness, and at all times with suffering and hatred, that

---

<sup>1</sup> Elected local administration along the lines of general councils (Translator's note).

<sup>2</sup> An area downstream from the Dniepr rapids. (Translator's note)

after they had driven off the durak<sup>3</sup> Nikolka Romanov, another durak by the name of Kerensky tried to replace him, but that he too had been seen off. 'Now who's going to act the durak at our expense? Lord Lenin?' they asked. Others stated: 'There is no doing without a durak' (and by that word durak they always meant the government). 'The town exists for that purpose only: its basic principles are bad: they favour the existence of the durak.'

The astute Lenin, having fully understood the town, installed as durak beneath the flag of Dictatorship of the Proletariat a band of people who made a good show of being familiar with that role but were in fact ignorant of it, but who were ready for anything, if only they could be in power and might bend other men and the entire human race to their will.

Lenin managed to raise the role of durak to hitherto unknown heights and thereby draw to himself not only the adepts of the political party closest to his own in terms of its revolutionary activity and historic pugnacity, ... the left SRs, who had become his half-beguiled disciples... but also some anarchists. It is true that this youthful spin-off from the old Social Revolutionary Party... the left SR Party... came to its senses after seven or eight months of servitude and set about resisting Lenin by every means, up to and including armed struggle. But that in no way alters the facts we have mentioned.

---

<sup>3</sup> A word meaning imbecile. (Translator's note).

## Chapter Two: Elections to the constituent assembly: Our attitude vis à vis the parties in contention.

Being hostile to the very idea of a Constituent Assembly, our group waged a campaign against the elections.

Under the impact of our propaganda, the majority of the region's population also repudiated the precept of a Constituent Assembly: a significant portion of it, however, did take part in the elections. This is down to the fact that the socialist parties, the Left SRs and Right SRs, the Menshevik SDs and the Bolshevik SDs, and the powerful Cadet party waged a dogged campaign throughout the country in favour of their lists of candidates. So the population of the country split up into numerous groups, thereby fragmenting its unity, and was split even on the question of socialisation of the land. This played right into the hands of the Cadets and Menshevik SDs who at that time were calling for the repurchase of the land by the peasants.

Our group, upon examining the activities of these parties—activities the upshot of which was the destruction of the unity of toilers—found the SRs and the Bolsheviks preferable to the Cadets and the SDs and, in favour of the former, refrained from active propaganda in favour of a boycott of the elections. To those of its members who wished to participate in the meetings laid on by the parties, it recommended that they advise those toilers who trusted in the Constituent Assembly and were keen to participate in the elections, to cast their votes for the Social Revolutionaries (the Left SRs and Right SRs offered a joint list, no. 3) or for the Bolsheviks (list no. 9).

Though there were numerous lists of candidates in the Ukraine, only three of these were attractive to the toilers... list No 3, that of the social Revolutionaries, list No 5... the Ukrainian list, a miscellaneous rag-bag of chauvinist-socialists and nationalists, and list No 9, that of the Bolsheviks. The SR and Bolsheviks lists (No 3 and No 9) were tremendously successful in those areas where the toilers had actively involved themselves in the election campaign. List no. 5, the 'Ukrainian' list attracted fewer votes than the two lists already mentioned on the left bank of the Dniepr.

The success of the left-wing socialist parties can be explained thus: the Ukrainian toilers, not misled by the policy of the chauvinists, had retained their quite characteristic revolutionary mentality and cast their votes for the revolutionary parties: furthermore, the 'Ukrainian liberation movement' remained entirely confined to a nationalist outlook.

The leaders of that 'movement', excepting two or three of them who, when all is said and done, also ended by going over to German militarism and marching against the Revolution, were the most motley individuals. This meant that into the ranks of the 'Ukrainian liberation movement', and even the most important posts, were drawn people who spoke Ukrainian, but who should have no place in any truly Ukrainian libertarian movement.



This bourgeois and chauvinistic outlook, the political culpability of the leaders of this 'movement' vis à vis the toilers and their dream of seizing freedom and the right to independence through direct revolutionary action inspired the toilers with a detestation of the very precept of the 'Ukrainian liberation movement'.

The revolutionary toilers of the Ukraine detected all of this in time and pitted themselves as a body against this 'movement', showing no pity to anyone who had anything to do with it.

Two or three months after the beginning of their active fight against the chauvinist party which had, in the Ukraine, disfigured the magnificent beginnings of the great Russian revolution, they found that they had been right to embark upon that fight with such speed and intensity.

True, it is not for us here to examine the profile of the Ukrainian chauvinist movement which did the Revolution so much harm. We must merely set out precisely the repercussions which the October coup d'état had, from the second day of its success in Petrograd and Moscow onwards, upon the toilers of the Zaporozhiye and the shores of the sea of Azov and, in particular, upon those of a whole series of regions lying within the districts of Aleksandrovsk, Melitopol, Berdyansk, Mariupol, Bakhmut and Pavlograd and which were under the influence of the Gulyai-Polye Soviet of Worker and Peasant Deputies which they regarded as the trailblazer of the fight against the government.

Having followed the life of those regions with especial interest, let me state that during the first two months following the October coup d'état, which is to say, during November and December, the Ukrainian toilers simply rejoiced at it, and in no way amended their own local activities, while recognising that at the root of that coup d'état there had been the springs of a genuine revolution emanating from the very depths of the enslaved villages and oppressed townships, awakening at last.

Up until October, the Gulyai-Polye region had sought unstintingly to stamp the revolution with as powerful and determined a character as possible and to make it wholly independent of any notion of government.

Even when four official governments were set up in Ekaterinoslav at the end of 1917, each of them seeking to direct the revolutionary masses of the entire department and consequently squabbling and continually at daggers drawn with the rest, dragging the toilers into their fracas, even then the Gulyai-Polye region held aloof and quite independent from these factions which each had a turn at victory over the others.

Early in December, the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc triumphed in Ekaterinoslav. The Gulyai-Polye region acknowledged those parties as revolutionary, but instantly grasped the precise nature of the sentiments by which they were animated. Indeed the toilers declared: 'We have deemed the Bolsheviks and the Left SRs as revolutionaries by virtue of their tremendous activity in the revolution: we salute them as sturdy fighters: but we distrust them, for after triumphing over the bourgeoisie and the right-wing socialist parties that backed it in its counter-revolutionary struggle thanks to the support of our forces, they promptly established 'their' government which is redolent of all the governments which have been stifling us for centuries past. And it does not appear that theirs is in any particular hurry to capitalise upon its triumph in order to finally implement the principles of autonomous labour in the various localities, dispensing with orders or directives from above.

Commissariats are set up everywhere. And they are more reminiscent of police institutions than of egalitarian committees made up of comrades eager to explain to us the best way of or-

ganising ourselves independently, without having to pay heed to leaders who, to date, have lived off our backs and done us nothing but harm.

And since this persuasion of revolutionary government is not to be found now and since in its place police institutions are being set up to issue us with orders instead of advice, it is not going to be any more evident later on. On the contrary, anyone who thinks differently and acts in contradiction with the orders received will in future incur the death penalty or find himself stripped of his freedom, to which we are committed above all else.'

Albeit vague, these impressions were quite correct and the toilers appreciated perfectly well that, at the cost of their blood and their lives, events were in train in which one evil was destroyed only to be replaced, on various pretexts, by another.

That is why they armed themselves in the Ukraine and thereby came closer to those whom they discovered treading out the same course as them, ..the Bolsheviks, the Left Social Revolutionaries and the anarchists.

But these first two groups mentioned knew what they were about and not only did they join forces, but also, each in its domain, they observed a flawless unity of action. This kept them even more before the eyes of the toilers and meant that they came to be described by a single name 'the Bolsheviks', a title under which they were often lumped along with them.

The masses looked upon this amalgam which made up their vanguard and said: 'We salute these revolutionaries with all our hearts: but we have no way of knowing if they will not wind up fighting among themselves to gain mastery over us and subject us wholly to their will. There is that tendency in them and so they are building up to a new and bloody contest by neglecting us toilers with our right to autonomous revolutionary action to a corner, on our knees before their selfish and criminal factional interests.'

And that obliged the revolutionary toilers of Gulyai-Polye to display even greater vigilance than usual.

## Chapter Three: The Departmental Congress.

An assembly of the Gulyai-Polye region's Soviet was organised in advance of the Departmental Congress of the Soviets of Peasant, Worker and Soldier Deputies due to be held in December. All of the delegates who attended were insistent that our representatives to the Departmental Congress be prepared for it, lest they fall under the influence of the agents of the political parties. They were to announce without hesitation that they had not come to the Congress to listen to reports from the government's agents and abide blindly by these, but rather to give an airing themselves to their own reports on the local activity of the toilers and to explain why they were conducting themselves so now and would never again act upon orders that might be handed down to them.

They were to convey our ideas precisely... namely that at that point the first duty of the toilers was to operate in such a way as to free every one of them from the authority of masters—from the mastery of Private Capital as well as from the mastery of Government.

The government, as a power, as a society that could not exist without oppression, pillage and murder, was to disappear beneath the blows of the revolutionary toilers pressing on enthusiastically towards a new free society.

We already knew about the convening of the Departmental Congress. It implied nothing new for us, for we had long since been putting that with which it was to occupy itself into action. It would be the duty of our delegates to bring to the attention of delegates from other regions this fact which, emanating from our own ideas, had to be re-enacted everywhere so that we might be understood by toilers throughout the whole country.

It was only after this stipulation that the delegates were appointed. They were N. Makhno and Mironov.

Then the assembly expressed all of its admiration and gratitude to us, its representatives: 'We have selected you, comrades, with the full consent of those who elected us. In your persons, we send to the Departmental Congress the worthiest of Gulyai-Polye's toilers, the first among equals.

'We are, all of us, certain that you will accomplish your mission as best you can. The instructions which we are issuing you with are not specific. And if we do issue you with them, it is only because we peasants are wont to note the finer aspects of our traditions. This strengthens the ties uniting us on the road of our shared revolutionary gains.'

In Gulyai-Polye such instructions and words along these lines always accompanied the election of delegates to the Departmental Congress or District Congress. If I have singled out this instance in particular, it is because it took place at a time when the Bolshevik camp—inclusive of the Left SRs—had already seized power in Ekaterinoslav and its environs, arrogating to itself, step by step, all of the popular gains of the revolution, and trying to warp the revolution itself.

The toilers of the Gulyai-Polye region were perfectly well aware that at the Departmental Congress in December, the principal role would be played by the agents of the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc, whose professed intentions lifted the veil on a governmental, statist premise.

Now, the workers of Gulyai-Polye had long been wont to reiterate at their reunions that the bloc of revolutionary parties which, they said, gave off a certain smell was not to be trusted, and they cautioned the toilers of other regions against it.

We were a day late in arriving at Ekaterinoslav, following the derailment of our train: but fortunately we were not late for the opening of the Congress. All the delegates were assembled, but the Congress had not yet begun. One sensed a certain disquiet and a measure of agitation in the organisers.

As I indicated above, at this time there were four or five distinct municipal authorities in Ekaterinoslav: the authority still professing to derive its power from Kerensky, the Ukrainians loyal to the Central Rada and its Secretariat, the authority comprised of certain more aligned citizens, the singular power of the sailors who had arrived in instalments from Kronstadt, and, en route, to do battle with Kaledin, had stopped to rest in Ekaterinoslav, and lastly the power of the Soviet of Peasant, Worker and Soldier Deputies, then headed by the syndicalist anarchist Grimbaum, a comrade of the utmost delicacy endowed with a steely determination, who was then, unfortunately, under the sway of the Bolshevik-Left SR power bloc. At this point the authority of the latter was preponderant, at least in the negotiations with the commanders of the "Ukrainian" military formations (the erstwhile Preobrazhensk, Pavlovski and Semenovski regiments which had been dispatched from Petrograd to Ekaterinoslav at this time) so much so that, but for his intervention, the Bolsheviks Kviring, Gopner and Enstein, plus the SR Popov and others would have been unable to achieve a thing and would have been driven out of Ekaterinoslav.

At the time, everything was dependent on the force of arms. Force of arms lay in the hands of the 'Ukrainianised' troops and of the divisions made up of the town's workers and inhabitants. Comrade Grimbaum managed to persuade the high command to side with the Soviet which, thanks to that, became strong enough to summon the Departmental Congress.

It is characteristic that, with the storm at its height, the Bolsheviks and left SRs receded into the background, pushing comrade Grimbaum into the foreground and where... once the storm had passed... he resumed command of events and assumed the leadership of the Departmental Congress.

Thus the Congress only got underway in the afternoon. The next day I took to the floor and presented a report from Gulyai-Polye. In passing, I pointed to the inconsistent action of Ukrainian chauvinists operating in the name of their departmental Selyanska Spilka and I listed to the Congress a series of regions in which the peasants did not at all recognise the policy of that Spilka.

Outraged at what I had said the chauvinists, seven of them, objected to the Congress saying that had been summoned on an unlawful basis, that the regions and communes should not have sent their representatives to it, and that only those representatives who had been selected by District Congresses should be considered as delegates. They demanded that the delegates from Gulyai-Polye be refused the right to speak and that they attend the proceedings as invited guests only.

The peasants' delegates, and Kviring and Enstein along with them, spoke out against any such demand, and the Congress rejected it.

Whereupon the chauvinists stood up with a flourish and left the hall. Their backers, the soldiers' delegates, also stood up and followed them out.

The Congress suspended its business for 3-4 hours. It was learned that the 'Ukrainian Departmental Revolutionary Rada' had held an impromptu meeting on the theme of whether 'to

dissolve the congress and take on the Soviet', a meeting at which the President of the 'Revolutionary Rada', Doctor Feldmann, had pointed out that they could not be sure of being the stronger and might well be beaten.

The Congress, worried by the idea that blood might flow in the streets of Ekaterinoslav at any moment, dispatched delegates to the barracks to the regiments to sound out their feelings. Comrade Grimbaum once again attacked the chauvinists and was backed up by the Ekaterinoslav Anarchist Federation. The anarchist sailors from Kronstadt backed the Congress delegates that day and spoke to the regiments and in the factories and workshops.

At the time, there was in Ekaterinoslav a regiment of the Knights of St George. It had always whistled down the Bolshevik speakers who had gone to see it.

Congress sent us, comrade L. Azensk and myself, to address the soldiers of that regiment and to get them to pass a resolution regarding the Ukrainian chauvinists who were trying to disrupt the Congress, and also to discuss with them a given number of essential points with an eye to concerted action.

I was in no hurry to be whistled down. I had often taken the floor during those nine months of Revolution and that had never happened to me. This time the Bolsheviks predicted to me that my turn had come: however, I was unwilling to shirk this mission. So off we went. A carriage bore us as far as the barracks, we strode into the regimental Committee and, having asked to see its chairman, handed him our credentials from the Congress.

He read these through and having kindly offered us a seat, went off to gather his men together for the meeting.

After 15 or 20 minutes, he returned, to announce to us that all his men had assembled. We were joined by two anarchist comrades at the door... Kronstadt sailors... and all four of us made towards the waiting soldiers.

At the meeting, we had a heated discussion with the officers, one of whom even wept and nipped off his epaulettes, and we got the regiment to pass a resolution in which it was stated that... 'the Knights of St George regiment would defend by force of arms, against any assault, the rights of the Departmental Congress of peasants and workers which had opened its business of December 2 of this year of 1917'.

Similar motions were also passed by the other regiments and detachments.

This outcome was unexpected, not so much by the Congress as by the Bolsheviks. All of the delegates were happy to have the armed forces on their side.

Congress resumed its business and completed it within three days.

It is interesting to note that all of the decisions taken there had already been put into effect in Gulyai-Polye three or four months earlier. Only one clause came as a novelty to us in that we had attributed little importance to it: the Right of the local soviets to a government subsidy. I have to point out that the Bolsheviks and Left SRs caught a lot of people out with this bait. But Gulyai-Polye could not countenance it, for its activities were above all anti-governmental and could not be dependent upon any of the central authorities, all of which had governmental ambitions.

## Chapter Four: The counter-revolution of the Central Rada.

After the closure of the Congress, the delegates made their way homewards.

Comrade Mironov and I went to the anarchist Federation so as to take some good propagandists back with us to the country. But the Federation, though in better circumstances than it had been last August when I had come to attend the peasants' and workers' Congress, was still not strong enough and could only manage to meet the needs of the town and the surrounding communes with difficulty. On the other hand it had arms in great store.. carbines, rifles, cartridges.

For the purpose of revolutionary order, the bloc authorities issued these without keeping a count. The Bolsheviks and Left SRs, cognisant of the anarchists' commitment to the Revolution and knowing that none of them would defect to the camp of the Ukrainian chauvinists in cahoots with the antirevolutionary bourgeoisie, nor to the counter-revolutionary camp generally, always had recourse to the great enthusiasm of the Ekaterinoslav anarchists in times of danger.

The anarchist Federation issued us with several boxes of rifles and cartridges from its great store of weapons.

We ferried these back by train to Gulyai-Polye where we delivered a series of reports on the Congress and the difficulties it had encountered. Then we set about making the same reports in other hamlets and villages.

From that moment on, the denizens of the Gulyai-Polye region began determinedly to arm themselves and to look askance at their new 'revolutionary' masters. A picture of the resistance that might be offered by the new lordlings, the Bolsheviks and Left SRs, to the free development of peasant thinking and peasant action in the enslaved countryside came increasingly into focus, even among those of the toilers who were disposed to place their trust in the Bolsheviks and in the Left SRs.

Through their delegates the peasants and workers learned of the Bolshevik Enstein's having declared: 'The urban proletariat has come to power. It is to be expected that it will create a State of its own, a proletarian State. We Bolsheviks will devote all of our resources to helping it to create just such a State, for only thus will the proletariat be able to win maximum happiness.'

The toilers of Gulyai-Polye interpreted these words to mean that, jettisoning all scruples, the Bolshevik party would, at the peasants' expense, erect its own 'proletarian' State and they anxiously began to follow the course of events underway in the towns.

The peasants began to train in weapons-handling again in the villages.

'Our enemies, the authorities,' they used to say, 'are armed and if the idea should come to them to strip us of the right to live freely and to devise new social forms, they would attack us weapons in hand. As a result, we must know how to handle a rifle so as to reply to them, blow for blow if need be.'

And the peasants went on with their preparations.

Among the Gulyai-Polye peasants, there were some possessed of considerable military training. The young people used to go and train with them in the fields where they practised shooting, manoeuvres, etc.

Among those adept in the handling of weapons and always ready to lend a helping hand to the rest was Yakov Domachenko. He was the encouragement of young and old and he stayed with the peasants right to the very last day, taking part in the fighting and risking his neck. He was wounded several times, but held out to the end in the van of the revolution in this, the peasants' struggle for Bread and Freedom.

Events hotted up. News was reaching us every day. We learned that the Ukrainian Central Rada no longer got along with the Bolshevik Left SR bloc and that, with the popular masses trailing in its wake, it was engaging the bloc in open battle.

Agents from the Central Rada turned up by the dozen and more and more frequently in Gulyai-Polye and throughout the region, preaching a war without quarter against the Katzapi. Uneasily the populace sat up and took note. Representatives from the villages and hamlets of the region approached our anarchist-communist group's bureau, and the Soviet of Peasant and Worker Deputies Daily to seek advice concerning what it might be appropriate to do in an ongoing way to retain, undiluted, their rights over the land and to Bread and Freedom.

Gulyai-Polye's peasant anarchist group delegated two of its members to tour the region and brief the inhabitants of the anarchist view of the matter that was preoccupying them. At the same time it brought pressure to bear (through its members Makhno, Sokruta, Kalinichenko, Antonov, Sereguin and Knat) on the Soviet to urge its members to visit their respective wards so as to sound out local opinion to explain the progress of the Soviet's work and to make known what was to be done in the event of confirmation of the rumours announcing counter-revolution.

The mutual understanding and trust existing between the anarchist-communists and the toilers grew and became stronger and more pronounced.

In my capacity as representative of the Gulyai-Polye Soviet, invested by it with full powers, I dispatched two men to Odessa and to Kiev (regions where the Central Rada's armed forces were embroiled with those of the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc).

On their return, informed as to what was afoot there, we convened a Congress of Soviets within the hour.

It took note of all the intelligence gathered concerning the battle joined between the Rada and the bloc and came to the conclusion that the Rada, for all that it was headed by SRs and SDs, had as its object in the struggle against the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc, not merely the expulsion of the Katzapi from the 'Motherland Ukraine', but also the erasing of '...even the slightest vestiges of the Social Revolution'.

Congress passed the following resolution:  
'Death to the Central Rada'.

This was unhesitatingly put into effect by the peasants and workers of the Gulyai-Polye region.

A few days after the end of the Congress and the delegates' return among them, the Soviet received from Aleksandrovsk a dispatch announcing that the Rada's forces were occupying the town so as to secure the Kichkas bridge for the passage of the Cossack troops being borne away from the front in the direction of the Don so as to join up with General Kaledin's army.

When this bulletin was broken to the toilers, it led to their adopting a unanimous stand.

From all parts, telephone messages and letters, generally very short, but steadfastly and clearly revolutionary, poured in for me, assuring me that the populace stood ready to take back into its

own hands the command of the revolutionary front and expressing the desire to see the anarchist-communist group entrust me with preparing the peasants and place the cream of its organiser members at my disposal to assist me in this task.

The honest and absolute confidence displayed in me by the peasants—I say the peasants without mentioning the workers for in our Gulyai-Polye region the chief role in the Revolution was played by the peasants, whereas the mass of workers remained expectant—disturbed me, despite the sustained effort I made without stint or rest and which exhausted me without even sparing me the time to feel tiredness.

Indeed, their trust never ceased to worry me: I was afraid of being the cause of bloodshed. It was only a clear appreciation that the revolutionary endeavour has to be exempt from all this sentimentality, to which my comrades were prone, that bore me up and I rid myself of doubt.

For my own benefit and that of my comrades, I approached the issue in the following manner: if I am an advocate of anarchy, it would be absolutely criminal on my part to saddle myself, in my revolutionary activity, with a secondary role which would have me tripping along in the wake of other groups and parties often hostile to ours. An anarchist should, during the Revolution above all, stand in the van of the masses who struggle and try to wield enough sway over them to carry them, without curbing their energies, into Labour's true fight against Capital.

I remember having said at one of the group's sessions then:

It is time to put an end to meetings. The time has come to act. That remark is not applicable to us, but it is nonetheless useful that we too should think on it.

60%-70% of our comrades who nonetheless styled themselves anarchists, once having seized back the private homesteads of the pomeschiki, suspended all further propaganda among the peasants. Well now! They have taken the wrong road. From the bosom of their retreats, they cannot have any influence upon the course of events. It is sad to say, but true for all that!

It is crucial that our group escalate its activities among the peasants still further. The haidamaki<sup>1</sup> will be arriving endlessly in Gulyai-Polye. At the point of their bayonets these brutes carry the death of the Revolution and life for its enemies.

We should make up the vanguard in the struggle against these mercenaries of the counter-revolution and carry in our wake the entire labouring population of the region.

So, comrades, prepare yourselves, every one of you, some for local action, others to go to the Congress that our Soviet has urgently summoned for the day after tomorrow. We must become worthy of the trust which the toilers here show in us. And we can only do that by associating ourselves closely with their fight for freedom and independence.

The group knew precisely what it had to do in such a moment. Indefatigably, over several months, it had pressed on and induced the peasants to press on along this road. And I would never have dared broach the matter to it, had not the group itself sought my opinion of the matter.

Two days later, the peasants' delegates turned up for the Congress. I was proposed as its chairman, but I refused the nomination and delivered a report on behalf of the Gulyai-Polye Soviet and the anarchist-communist peasants' group. The Congress discussed all of the points in it and resolved to organise its meagre forces and to hold them ready to respond to the first summons that the Gulyai-Polye Soviet of Peasant and Worker Deputies might issue to them to assemble in Gulyai-Polye itself or in any other place which might be indicated.

---

<sup>1</sup> Troops in the service of the anti-Bolshevik Ukrainian governments during the Revolution.



So we came to the end of the month of December 1917.

## Chapter Five: With the Leftist bloc against the counter-revolution.

On 31 December, for reasons of organisation, I found myself in the village of Pologi where I learned for certain that battle had been joined in Aleksandrovsk between a detachment of Red Guards from the Bogdanov group and some haidamakh units loyal to the Central Rada.

At such a time, to remain inactive was impossible, the more so since the populace was unmistakably hostile to the Rada whose agents roamed the region in pursuit of revolutionaries, labelling these as 'traitors to Mother Ukraine', and stalwarts of the Katzapi... who, to their way of thinking no doubt had to be exterminated as mortal enemies of the Ukrainian tongue.

Such charges offended the peasants who hurled any who voiced them off the rostrum and rained blows on the enemies of fraternal union with the Russian people.

This propaganda impelled the toilers of the Gulyai-Polye region along the road of armed struggle against any Ukrainian separatist venture for people saw in chauvanism—the driving force behind Ukrainian separatism—the death of the Revolution.

While the haidamaki were fighting it out with the Red Guards in Aleksandrovsk, some Cossack echelons had mustered along a line through Alesandrovsk-Apostolovo-Krivoi Rog. They had come from the German front and were on their way to meet up with General Kaledin's army which was on the banks of the Don. Now the insurgency fomented by Kaledin was in reality a resuscitation of the old regime. On the pretext of safeguarding the independence of the Don, he rallied around his banner the darkling supporters of the reaction who aimed, with the Cossack's help, to have done with the Revolution and to restore the Romanov dynasty.

The interminable 2 January 1918 session of the Soviet of the Peasant and Worker Deputies of Gulyai-Polye, in which the metalworkers' and woodworkers' trade union participated, as did the anarchist-communist group, dragged on for 24 hours. It saw impassioned discussion of the steps urgently to be taken to prevent the Cossacks from reaching the Don, for their amalgamation with Kaledin's forces would have created a formidable counter-revolutionary front, representing, for all of the gains of the Revolution, a threat which we peasants could in no way countenance.

That protracted and dismal session inspired all involved in it with one and the same thought: as anarchists we had a duty, paradox or no, to make up our minds to form a united front with the government forces. Faithful to anarchist principles, we might surmount all contradictions and, once having annihilated the dark forces of reaction, we would broaden and deepen the flow of the Revolution for the greater good of an enslaved mankind.

I told them:

'It is vital that each one of us constantly have our intended aim before his eyes and tailor his reaction to this principle: one man ought not to be dominated by another—a principle that opens up our way to peace, freedom, equality and fellowship with the whole human race.

We ought never to lose sight of it and that will enable us to remain loyal to the end to all that we have discussed and agreed here.'

Thus was resolved the problem of our action to come.

## **Chapter Six: The armed peasants rush to the aid of the urban workers. The Aleksandrovsk Revolutionary Committee and the Commission of Inquiry.**

On 3 January 1918, the commander of the Red Guard detachment, Bogdanov, addressed an appeal to the peasants and workers of Gulai-Polye, seeking their assistance.

On the night of 3 January, our group issued the call to arms. That very night I handed over my post as chairman of the Soviet to one of my comrades and assumed command of an anarchist detachment made up of some hundreds of peasants who set off, in battle dress, in the direction of Aleksandrovsk.

I recall that, just before leaving Gulyai-Polye and on my prompting and in the presence of the crowd which had gathered, the detachment chose a commander. I was in fact obliged to decline this position, anticipating that I would not be able to occupy it on a permanent basis, since I would have to see to liaison between town and countryside.

So my brother Sava Makhno was elected in my place.

As we departed, the old people said to their sons who were in the ranks: 'You go to your death. We will not shrink from taking up your weapons and fighting for your beliefs of which we were ignorant a short time ago but which we now embrace. We will defend them unto death, if need be.

Do not forget that, dear sons!'

And these replied:

'God bless you for having raised us. We are strong now and we can fight and assert in life the principles of liberty and solidarity. We will be happy to see our fathers fight for our ideal. But meanwhile stay in your homes, follow our action from afar and should we fail out there, in the struggle against the Revolution's enemies, you will be victorious here—and forever.'

The leave-takings were moving.

Each of us knew the reason why he was setting off and where he was headed. The singing of a revolutionary anthem struck up as, one by one, the trucks taking us to the railway station moved off. Happy grins illuminated the faces of these young revolutionary peasants whom the followers of Marx treated as beasts of burden made solely for obedience. Yet there they were, self-conscious and conscious of their duty towards the Revolution, flying to the aid of the workers upon whom socialists of all hues had been exclusively depending for decades to seize power.

Cognisant of the risk they were running, these peasants nonetheless had no hesitation in making for the town. These were no posturing revolutionaries whose creed boiled down to speechifying—no! these were genuine militants, genuinely enamoured of the anarchist ideal. To

be sure, they might fail, might go astray, but without their honest attachment to the anarchist idea ever weakening.

There were 800–900 of them—and upwards of 300 of them were members of the anarchist group. As they made for the town, they knew that the workers were their brothers and that they became advocates of authority only when, snatched away from the mass of the toilers, they were subject to the influence of the politicians' ideas and actions.

Our detachment reached Aleksandrovsk without mishap. The town was calm. The Red Guards were consigned in their barracks. Some sentries patrolled the streets.

Only the authorities displayed a frantic activity. The Revolutionary Committee made up of Bolsheviks and Left SRs had, at the outset, tried to regiment the life of the workers. But it had been unable to succeed in this: the anarchist Federation barred its way, keeping the workers briefed about all of the activities of the municipal authorities, newly elected. So the Revolutionary Committee decided to concentrate upon setting up a front directed against reactionaries. To this end it asked the Aleksandrovsk anarchist Federation to send it two delegates.

The Federation appointed comrades Yasha and Nikiforova, the latter being promptly elected vice-president of the Revolutionary Committee.

That same day, the Committee asked us to send along a representative of our detachment. After some thought, and consultation with the Aleksandrovsk anarchists who had always been on our side, I was designated. This entry into the Committee was necessary by reason of events. A refusal to have any part of it might, we believed, compromise our whole theoretical and practical endeavour against the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc.

After having sounded the opinion of the workers who had drawn our attention to the prisoners languishing in barred cells, we decided to send a representative to the Revolutionary Committee to secure their immediate release. In the event of a refusal, we would have gone and burst open the prison gates and put the building to the torch.

Then I was designated by our detachment to go along to the Revolutionary Committee which in turn delegated me, together with the Left SR Mingorodsky, the SR Mikhalevsky and others, to see to the release of the detainees. We went along to the prison, went inside, listened to the detainees' complaints, moved on to the Bureau and, following an exchange of views, went our separate ways. Indeed, our team was not complete. The main delegate, the Bolshevik, Lepic, was missing. Even at that stage he had been assigned, behind the scenes, to the chairmanship of the Cheka, though this was not admitted as yet.

I was familiar with that prison, having been twice an inmate, so I knew just how filthy and unbearable it was. It pained me to walk out of there without having freed the inmates. Nonetheless, I took it upon myself to draw up some criticisms addressed to Lepic and I left the prison precincts. I hailed a cab and had myself taken to the Revolutionary Committee.

We met together that same evening and decided to set to work without delay.

The prison was emptied a short time after that.

While retaining our old mandates, we were delegated...SR Mirgonodsky and me... by the Revolutionary Committee to the Commission of the Revolutionary front-line Tribunal attached to Bogdanov's Red Guards. That was the first armed unit to have come from the North to the Ukraine on the pretext of supporting the workers and peasants in their struggle against the reactionary measures of the Central Rada.

I was elected President of the Commission, and comrade Mirgorodsky was elected as secretary by the Red Guards from Petrograd (Vyborg district). The Commission comprised of seven mem-

bers. The chancery of the Red Guards command made a stack of records available to us. These were the dossiers of all who were being held in the Stolypin-type 'prison wagons'.

We were asked to look them over and to record our conclusions. But comrade Mirgorodsky and I objected to this way of going about things. Those members of the Commission who had come from Petrograd endorsed our view, without siding with us, however.

We declared that in all conscience we could not examine these dossiers except in the presence of the accused, they alone being in a position to explain to us the circumstances of their arrest, etc.

This Commission of inquiry, as one might call the revolutionary front-line Tribunal (Commander Bogdanov, moreover, so regarded it) kept me busy for more than three days. I worked frantically at it, taking time off neither to eat nor to sleep. The prisoners were very numerous and of all ranks: generals, colonels, subordinate officers, militia chiefs and ordinary privates from the haidamakh units. They had this much in common... that they were all, or nearly all, avowed enemies of the October Revolution and of any revolution generally and, as a result, they knew what they had been doing.

But they were, for the most part, innocent of the crime with which they were charged. The bulk of them who had been arrested, unarmed, at their homes had no intention of fighting against the Revolution and that we may state with confidence. They had been denounced by rogues who, in order to cover up their own odious counter-revolutionary past had become even more hateful when the Revolution came along by doing a somersault and hypocritically upholding it by turning informer against all who, by virtue of their social rank, had hitherto been outside of the revolutionary movement, but who had nonetheless not hindered its growth.

Now, the Red Guard commanders readily listened to such people, hoping thereby to safeguard their own positions the better.

Thus, in the midst of the Revolution, the cowardice of some linked hands with the zeal of others and that because those who had full powers proved incapable of perceiving the truthfulness of some and the duplicity of others.

The Commission which I headed scrutinised more than 200 dossiers and delivered its findings on each one. In many instances, acknowledging the actively antirevolutionary role played by the accused, it forwarded the dossiers to Bogdanov's staff who dispatched them to Antonov-Ovseenko's headquarters in Kharkov—which meant, in Bolshevik language, that they were to be shot.

Among the detainees questioned, almost all of those acknowledged as culpable showed themselves to be weak and cowardly. With death looming imminent before them, they resorted to the most sordid methods in an attempt to save their skins. Generals were seen to weep. By contrast, some of the colonels professed regret at having been arrested: they claimed that, had the revolutionaries not captured them, they would have been able to rally a sufficient number of volunteers to support General Kaledin and to restore the monarchy. As they were being escorted from the carriage-room where the Commission was in session, they shouted: 'Long live the house of Romanov! Long live the emperor Nicholas Aleksandrovich, lord of all the Russias! May he crush the Revolution!'

It is true that such cases were rare and that only two colonels turned out to be loyal to monarchist and aristocratic principles.

Among the enormous number of accused, one above all has lingered in my memory: he was an army district commander arrested for having, acting on orders from his superiors, mobilised

young conscripts at a time when the Ukrainian Central Rada was experiencing a short-lived victory.

There was no conclusive evidence that he was an enemy of the Revolution. Nonetheless, opinions were divided. Four members of the Commission saw him as a devout and active counter-revolutionary. The other three took a contrary view. It was clear that the district commander was going to be shot. The argument turned stormy. Comrade Mirgorodsky, a Left SR, then suggested to me that we quit the Commission and go back to the Revolutionary Committee.

‘Let it send others in our place,’ he said.

Our Petrograd comrades poked fun at us, arguing that we were not conducting ourselves as revolutionaries. And it was only afterwards that we showed them what it was to act as revolutionaries, and all four backed down from demanding the death penalty and the district commander was acquitted.

Here is another, more characteristic instance: during the scrutiny of the dossiers from Bogdanov’s staff, the Red Guards delivered new prisoners: Commissar Mikhno of the Kerensky government (the man who, 4 or 5 months earlier, had denounced me to the courts for having disarmed the bourgeoisie of Gulai-Polye), militia commander Vassiliev, the prosecutor-general Maximov and Piotr Sharovsky. The latter, a member of our group in Gulai-Polye in 1910 had, around that time, betrayed our comrades Aleksandr Semenyuta and Marfa Pivel to the police and received, in payment for that craven action, 500 out of the 2000 roubles promised by General Security to whomsoever would hand over A. Semenyuta.

My meeting with this erstwhile ‘comrade’ was as depressing as can be. He threw himself on to his knees before me, lifting up his arms and beseeching me: ‘Save me, Nestor Ivanovich. My treachery was involuntary. I talked to a civilian, not realising that he was a Security agent.’

I might have been taken in by his words, had I not had very specific information during my days of hard labour, and had not this information been confirmed to me upon my return to Gulai-Polye by Marfa Pivel who had witnessed the arrest and death of A. Semenyuta. A bullet had lodged in her temple during the episode and, despite her serious wound, serious but happily not fatal... had been arrested.

Sharovsky’s own brothers, Prokop and Grigor, had helped me in 1917 to establish the proof of his act of provocation. Shortly after the death of A. Semenyuta, one of them had participated in the assassination bid by our comrade ‘the Japanese’ on P. Sharovsky. Two shots were fired at him but unfortunately failed to bring him down, for the police came to his aid and found him a haven. Once having recovered from his wounds, he sealed all of the windows of his house, leaving open only the top portion of the casement windows. He fled when I returned to Gulai-Polye.

I spotted him afterwards in Aleksandrovsk moving from one group of workers to another, with a basket on his arm.

When he sighted me, he went to ground.

I then used my influence with the Red Guard commander Bogdanov, asking him to intercede with the revolutionary authorities of the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc to have P. Sharovsky arrested.

Immediately, he dispatched two squads of Red Guards to the spot where I have sighted this individual and they arrested him.

On 6 January 1918, I delivered a detailed report to the Commission of Inquiry (of which I was president) establishing the identity of P. Sharovsky and relating how he had betrayed A. Semenyuta and how much he had been paid for that service.

I then stated that the report was addressed, not to the members of the Commission, but to the SRs and Bolsheviks, so as to bear witness to the guilt of P. Sharovsky and to legitimise the verdict. The Bolshevik members from Petrograd proposed to hand over Sharovsky to commander Bogdanov, but neither I nor the Left SR Mingorodsky would countenance that and we asked the commander to lodge him in a wagon until such a time as I had wound up some outstanding business. At this point, some other comrades from our group turned up... Filip Krat, Sava Makhno, and Pavel Korostelev... and with them, some members of the Aleksandrovska anarchist group. We then subjected Sharovsky to an interrogation, after which one of the comrades put a bullet in his head.

No less distasteful for me was my encounter with erstwhile commissar Mikhno. I had a vague idea how hard it would be for me to establish his wrongdoing vis à vis the revolutionary peasants and workers. On an order bearing his signature as commissar of the Coalition Government, I had been indicted before the courts on revolutionary acts committed by the Committee for Defence of the Revolution in the Gulai-Polye region.

He had demanded of the communal Committee that it ban me from all social activity. Even so, upon receipt of the letter in which I protested in the name of the regional congress of the peasants of Gulai-Polye, he rescinded his decision. I sensed that it would be hard for me to be impartial towards him and I was afraid lest this be damaging towards him... Who had, in tsarist times, been a rather upstanding liberal.

On the other hand, I was firmly convinced that it was hard to accept the killing of a man for the sole reason that he had participated in the coalition government in the capacity of commissar and done his duty as such. Our region had never adhered to his ordinances, which in any case he had not had the power to enforce when the toilers triumphed.

Then the Commission took it upon itself to subject him to the closest questioning reminding him of his attacks, as government agent, on our Committee for Defence of the Revolution and on myself, and set him free.

Quite different was our attitude towards the prosecutor Maximov and the local militia boss Vassiliev.

This pair who represented, in one instance the Tsarist courts and in the other the Coalition Government's police, were acknowledged on the basis of the available evidence, as enemies of the Revolution. On the decision of the commission, both were handed over to Bogdanov's staff.

Those two decisions came to the attention of the Aleksandrovska Revolutionary Committee, then headed by the Bolshevik Mikailevich, the anarchist Maria Nikiforova and several other influential anarchists. This Committee, which had been hastily set up, feared for its very life and tried to play up to those of the bourgeois who had not fled and who, of course, secretly gave their support to prosecutor Maximov and the district police chief Vassiliev.

The chairman arrived hotfoot from the town, together with almost all his committee members and approached our commission, which was then based at commander Bogdanov's headquarters at the Southern railway station to protest at the decision we had reached with regard to the cases of the prosecutor and the militia boss.

It was with the same intent that Maria Nikiforova arrived in Gulai-Polye in the company of some Bolshevik members of the district's Revolutionary Committee and a veritable delegation of Right SRs.

Our Commission grew angry.



According to the documents which Bogdanov's staff had passed on to us, and which had been amassed by dyed-in-the-wool Bolsheviks, it transpired that prosecutor Maximov, in the tsar's day as well as under the coalition of SRs and SDs with the bourgeoisie, had always been a ferocious enemy of the toilers and of their aspirations to freedom. His crime with regard to the Revolution was patently obvious. The documents proved that, among the bourgeois of Aleksandrovsk he had formed a counter-revolutionary Action Committee. But he was an industrial, intelligent sort and, we later discovered, the Bolsheviks intended to recruit him; moreover, they succeeded in this some time afterwards.

When the Red Guards entered Aleksandrovsk, Vassiliev for his part sided with the haidamaki; posted on the roof of his house, he had opened up with a machine-gun on the attackers. He killed and wounded a large number of them. What is more, the town's and district's militia boss, he knew that prisoners were being beaten and had turned a blind eye to it.

It was on the basis of these facts that the Commission had declared Maximov and Vassiliev to be enemies of the Revolution and of the people. By virtue of this finding, they were to have been removed to the staff of the revolutionary army whose commander might have them shot or set free, for the Commission's decisions were not binding upon Bogdanov, the chief of staff. Even so, he generally took our findings into account, promptly released those whom we deemed innocent and shooting the guilty ones.

After having noted the objection by the Revolutionary Committee and received the SR delegation, the Commission asked Bogdanov's staff to return its findings in the case of Maximov and Vassiliev and formally announced that it had decided to retain these two guilty men in its custody, having, it said, come into possession of fresh documents.

The SR comrade Mingorodsky and I went in search of Bogdanov and obtained from him an undertaking that their lives would be spared until such time as the difference which had arisen between the Commission and the Aleksandrovsk Revolutionary Committee would be resolved.

I reported this outcome to the delegation: after which we began, along with the members of the Revolutionary Committee, a discussion that was stormy. Mikhailevich and Maria Nikiforova asked commandant Bogdanov to participate in it. The latter did come along and shared the views of the Commission. The tone became more shrill. The Commission had delivered to Bogdanov's staff the decision in writing to remove the prosecutor and militia boss to a special wagon and to keep them there under close surveillance until it might send for them.

The discussion dragged on for more than six hours. By the end, all of the members of the Revolutionary Committee seemed to approve of our decision, but they pointed out that it failed to take account of the dire circumstances and that it might very well be necessary to have the town of Aleksandrovsk evacuated at any day: for the Don and Kuban Cossacks, abandoning the external front, were following all railroad lines towards the Don in order to rejoin General Kaledin's troops.

Indeed around him were rallying all of the dark forces of counter-revolution and its accomplices: rural small holders, merchants, manufacturers—rampant parasites who were trying, at the expense of the Cossacks (whose womenfolk, children and aged parents were going to be killed and their stanitzi<sup>1</sup> laid waste) to construct an antirevolutionary front to leap to the defence of the tsar and of their own privileges.

---

<sup>1</sup> Stanitza = a Cossack village (Translator's note).

The Revolutionary Committee members spared no effort to try to get the Commission to acknowledge that its decision in the case of Maximov and Vassiliev risked their being executed by commander Bogdanov, the upshot of which would have been that the Committee would lose its prestige as a local revolutionary authority and thereby be prevented, in the event of the town's being abandoned, from reoccupying it afresh, etc.

If I had taken upon myself the thankless role of a member of the Commission of inquiry it was, on the one hand, in order to inform myself and to enlighten the peasants as to the preoccupations of the statist-socialists, with the manner in which, in these grandiose days of revolutionary upheaval, these 'champions of the ideal of justice and equality' were throwing their principles overboard and thought only of the privileges of authority, and, on the other hand, in order to gain a measure of experience in the line to adopt in events of that calibre.

I regarded myself as a militant who had come in from the countryside with the revolutionary peasants for the sole purpose of helping the workers to fight the bands of haidamaki in the pay of the bourgeois and to disarm the Cossacks.

The line of argument pursued by the Bolshevik members of the Revolutionary Committee, the Left Social Revolutionaries and the anarchist Nikiforova struck me as criminal. I said as much to them in no uncertain terms. The SR Mirgorodsky, three Bolshevik comrades from the Petrograd Red Guards (Vyborg district) who were on our Commission, and commandant Bogdanov himself seconded me.

Day was beginning to break. We were all spent. The members of the Revolutionary Committee were palpably hostile to me but did not decide to recall me. The jesuitry which even then impregnated the politics of the greater part of the Bolsheviks and of the Left SRs trailing in their wake, would not let them do so. But they intended to prolong the detention of the prosecutor and militia boss so as, on the one hand, to save them and, on the other, to compromise me in the eyes of the thousands of revolutionary peasants from the proud and loyal Gulai-Polye region. Then they proposed a resolution which 'returned prosecutor Maximov and militia boss Vassiliev to the Revolutionary Committee charged with compilation of more extensive dossier and with scrutiny of the same.'

This hypocritical motion left us beside ourselves, and we resolved to submit the affair to a review in which we would participate. Our decision, following some objections from the Revolutionary Committee, was eventually adopted.

At this point we were tipped off that around twenty echelons of Cossacks were making for Aleksandrovsk, coming from Apostolovo via Nikopol, intending to force a way through to the Don and to join up with Kaledin's army.

When this news was announced, for all that we had been divided all night by the discussion we had held, we agreed upon the rapid transfer of the prosecutor and militia boss to Aleksandrovsk prison, where they were placed in cell no. 6 (in the tsar's day I myself had spent upwards of a year in that very cell. The prosecutor, to whom I complained at the time about the filthy conditions there, about the countless lice and lack of ventilation had replied with a ferocious grin: 'Need a little more air?' Then I overheard him outside in the corridor as he ordered that I be placed in the solitary cell for fifteen days).

So they were locked up there on their own, on the very conditions which they themselves had imposed upon the inmates, namely: one monthly visit from relations, one fortnightly change of linen and a bath, a ban on coming up close to the window and looking out into the courtyard, etc.

Then we split up, each resuming his position: then, having proceeded to kit out our troops we crossed via the Kichkas bridge on to the right bank of the Dniepr to form up a combat line.

## **Chapter Seven: The armed struggle against the Cossacks. Delegation, disarmament of the Cossacks and an understanding with them.**

It was 8 January 1918. It was cold. Towards evening a fine snow began to fall, heralding the thaw. Our combat units assumed their positions and dug trenches. By telephone we came to agreement with the Cossack leaders and persuaded them to appoint some delegates who were to meet with our own midway between the Kichkas and Khortiz stations so as to establish clearly the wishes of both parties.

Our delegation was made up of two commanders from the Bogdanov group, of comrade Boborykin of the sailors' detachment, of Maria Nikiforova of the Aleksandrovsk anarchists' detachment and of myself, representing the revolutionary peasants of the Gulyai-Polye region and the anarchist communist group.

Around 8.00 pm., a locomotive ferried us to the agreed spot. Another locomotive and one carriage bearing the Cossacks' delegation arrived at the same time. The latter delegation comprised, in addition to some officers, of some Cossacks from the ranks. But the latter said not a word and remained tight-lipped. Only the officers spoke: with pride, with haughtiness, sometimes even proffering insults, especially when one of our delegates, comrade Boborykin informed them that we would not allow them to pass, armed, through Aleksandrovsk, in their march towards the Don.

We spent a good hour trying to convince one another and this might have been there yet had not the Cossacks told us bluntly that they did not need to seek our permission to cross the Kichkas bridge and pass through the town of Aleksandrovsk.

'We represent,' one of the delegates told us, '18 echelons of Cossacks from the Don and from Kuban-Labinsk and 6 or 7 echelons of haidamaki of the Ukrainian Central Rada,' (who, they claimed, had set out from Odessa and joined up with them, en route, in order to accompany them as far as the left bank of the Dniepr and there to wage a campaign against the Katzapi).

To this announcement, which was accompanied by foul language, our delegate replied:

'If such be the case, we will take our leave of you. Our talks are at an end. We, representing the peasants, workers and sailors espy in your attitude the desire to provoke a bloody and fratricidal conflict. Come then! We will await you!

Right there and then we stormed out of their carriage and our locomotive ferried us back to our own side.

The Cossack delegation returned to its. (?)

Arriving at our advance lines, we informed the fighters that our negotiations had proved fruitless, that an attack was to be expected at any moment and that, as a result, reconnaissance in advance of each position and right along the front line had to be stepped up.

Along with some of our fighters we then journeyed to about one kilometre from our front lines and we unbolted the tracks in two places: by around 1.00 am., we were all back and, in the grip of great excitement, awaited the Cossacks' attack.

The night was pitch black. The snow that had been falling since morning turned to rain.

It was 2.00 am.. It was raining more and more heavily. However there was no sign of the enemy who had probably decided to await the first light of day. Some of the fighters, stretched out in the trenches they had just dug, were chatting among themselves. But the old hands at soldiering, especially the ones from Gulyai-Polye, told them:

'Be on the lookout, comrades, these Cossacks will try to avail of this foul weather to outflank our positions and seize the Kichkas bridge and Aleksandrovsk.'

Several began to laugh. But their laughter soon died: for shortly after 2.00 am. we were alerted to the fact that tapping on the railway tracks could be heard. It was the forward patrol of Cossacks which had just reached the spot where we had unbolted the tracks. Indeed it was following the tracks, inspecting their condition.

Ten or fifteen minutes later, we made out the noise of a locomotive:

'Here they come!' we heard it whispered in the ranks.

'Quiet!' other voices whispered.

Nerves were on edge. A shudder.

'What a lousy thing war is,' the fighters told one another.

Then I came to squat down beside two of them, and, taking up their idea, I told them:

'Yes, my friends, war is a very lousy business. We all feel that way, but we cannot shirk it.'

'And how come, why do you say that, Nestor Ivanovich?' they insisted.

'As long as the enemies of our freedom,' I went on, 'have recourse to arms, we too will be obliged to reply to them with weapons in hand. Right now we can see that they insist upon fighting us and yet they know very well that the toilers do not want to be wage slaves any longer, but want instead to be free, beyond the reach of all slavery. One would have thought that that should have been enough.'

Our enemies, the pomeschiki, the owners of the factories and workshops, the generals, functionaries, merchants, priests, jailers and the whole crew of police paid to protect these stalwarts of the tsarist regime as well, should have understood and not stood in the way of the toilers who are trying to complete their task of revolutionary liberation.

Now, not only do they not want to understand that, but indeed they try to win over to their side a number of statist-socialists and, in concert with those traitors, they devise new forms of authority to prevent us from gaining our rights to a free and independent life.

All of these drones produce nothing of what they need, but strive to have everything without doing anything and strive to run everything, including the lives of the toilers and always—this is typical—at the expense of the masses. And consequently, it is they who bear the responsibility for this war, and not we. Right now all we are doing is defending ourselves, but that, friends, is not enough. We must not only look to our defences but go on to the offensive in our turn: for self-defence would have been enough if, having overthrown the power of capital and the State, we were living amid plenty and freedom, if the abolished slavery had been replaced by equality and had our enemies not then turned on us with the aim of crushing us and enslaving us once more. But at a time when as yet all we are doing is striving after that goal, we must think about going on to the attack ourselves.

Defence is closely connected with it, to be sure, but that must be the concern of those of our brothers and sisters who, while not in the front lines of the Revolution, merely follow on behind the fighters and, taking up their ideas, spread and intensify the Revolution, which you mistakenly call war.

In which case, the business of defence takes on its true character and justifies all of the blood spilled by the fighters in the course of the destructive phase of the Revolution; for they consolidate their gains without warping either the character or the import of them.'

Just then an order was boomed out: 'Machine-gunner section—Fire!' It was addressed to a detachment of 16–18 machine-guns posted at a bend in the railway line, just behind the lines so as to confront the Cossack echelons at the right time. I disapproved of such waste, but in those days the Red Guard troops, equipped with 3 or 4 times as many machine-guns as they needed, were profligate with them, as evidenced by the manner in which they had set these ones up well beyond the front lines.

When the shooting began, I saw hundreds of fighters who had drawn closer to listen to me, scramble back to their respective positions at a run.

The machine-guns of our side drew violent fire in reply from the enemy. The crack of weapons spread right along our front and illuminated it from end to end. The enemy ceased firing. We also ceased firing.

At that moment I felt profound sadness, which my companions shared. They remembered the cruelty with which the Cossacks had, in 1905–1906, crushed the ventures of toilers who had dared proclaim their demands freely to the *skhods*-assemblies.

If we peasants had not seen things with our very own eyes, we had at least, each one of us, heard tell of them. And this injected fresh courage into the fighters; it incited them to scorn the risk of death, to confront with even more determination these creatures who, in other circumstances were as we were, as all men were, capable of good and evil but who, at present, marched swollen with pride, obedient to their outmoded ideas and led by their generals and officers. These men, abused it is true, were armed, forging a passage through revolutionary territory, a passage towards the 'White' Don, towards General Kaledin, in order to rally to the reaction and to see it triumph over the Revolution which had already cost the toilers so dear. These men were our enemies, ready to lash us with their *nagaiki*<sup>1</sup>, to beat us with rifle butts, to do us to death.

Among our troops, shouts went up, of 'Let's attack! They must be prevented from dismounting from the carriages!'

But soon the Cossacks were once again advancing towards our lines and they opened fire. The retort from our side was so violent and the shooting so accurate that their convoy retreated at all speed, loosing off only a few rifle reports or isolated machine-gun bursts in reply.

In Khortiz railway station the Cossack's commanders had stationed a series of supporting echelons which they had sent out in the wake of the first convoy. It transpired that the train which was retreating at speed collided with one of the ones coming in the opposite direction, derailed it and itself left the tracks. The impact was so severe that many carriages were demolished and their occupants—and horses—killed.

It was this that forced the Cossack command to pull the echelons of troops which had remained in Khoritz Station back towards Nikopol and to send us a 40 man delegation comprised, for the most part, of ordinary troopers, to engage us in talks.

---

<sup>1</sup> Nagaika = a leather crop used by Cossacks (Translator's note).

The delegation, with a white flag at its head, arrived at precisely 3.00 pm., on 8 January 1918. Greeted by irrepressible joy, it was escorted to the sector command, bombarded with questions as to the proposals it brought. It informed us that the Cossack troops were succeeded by several echelons of haidamaki who dreamed of occupying the town of Aleksandrovsk, with the aid of the Don and Kuban Cossacks, and of making sorties from there into the villages and countryside to wipe out the Katzapi and the unconverted Jews who were preventing them from unfurling over the 'Ukrainian Sea' the yellow and blue standard of pogroms and the slaughter of unbelievers.

'But after the failure of our attack yesterday,' the delegation told us, 'after the derailing of the convoys and a comparative assessment of our strength and that of the populace supporting you in this region, the haidamaki have pulled back in the direction of the Nikopol-Apostolovo railway station.'

'As far as we are concerned,' these Cossacks went on, 'we have decided not to follow them, but to enter into talks with you with a view to securing free passage across the territories occupied by you.'

For that reason we agree to lay down our weapons, but leave us our horses, our saddles and, if possible, our sabres.'

Our staff found these conditions unacceptable, understanding perfectly that a saddled mount and a sabre represented the essential equipment of a Cossack whether for a march or for an engagement with the enemy, especially if that enemy turned out to be, as the Revolution's troops were most of the time, an untrained army, a raw and unrefined material.

In the end, the Cossack delegation gave up on the sabres but steadfastly insisted upon retaining the horses and saddles, arguing on the basis of the tradition which forbade the Cossack to reappear either for active service or at his home without his horse and saddle. And our command, in the light of a host of tactical and other considerations, was induced to yield on this point.

Following agreement, one part of the Cossack delegation remained behind with us.

Learning that the Don and Kuban Cossacks had agreed to lay down their arms against the revolutionary front, those Ukrainian haidamaki troops who were retreating along the Nikopol-Apostolov line swung away from Apostolovo towards the Verkhovtsévo-Verkhne-Dneprovsk sector.

Over a two and a half period, the Cossack forces, divided into 18 echelons, were disarmed and they were escorted to Aleksandrovsk where they were revictualled and where an ongoing series of meetings was organised for their benefit. At those meetings, the Bolshevik-left SR bloc strove to recruit them to their way of thinking and exposed them to their finest orators. The latter, revolutionary in the extreme when it came to speechifying, claimed to be: '.. unalterably committed to the work of the Revolution and to its objectives: the effective emancipation of labour, the abolition of the yoke of Capital and the police State.' These charlatans promised the Cossacks complete unmitigated freedom, considerable autonomy for the Don region and other provinces which, under Romanov rule, had been enslaved by every means and which made up the 'one and indivisible' Russia, the 'Holy' Russia of thieves and rogues.

Some of them declaimed pretty words about the national rebirth of each of these enslaved provinces and that unashamedly and despite the presence at these meetings of adversaries who were perfectly well aware that all of these fine words were at odds with the actions of their leaders and that in ventilating them they were lying in the most brazen fashion.

However, the Cossacks generally remained unimpressed, paying little heed to the speeches and laughing now and then.

Then the anarchists took the floor, especially Maria Nikiforova who declared to the Cossacks that they, the anarchists, promised nothing to anyone, that all they wanted was that men should learn to know themselves, to understand their circumstances under the prevailing regime of slavery and finally that they wanted to see them win their freedom for themselves.

‘But, before speaking to you of all this in greater detail, I am obliged to tell you, Cossacks, that hitherto you have been the executioners of the toilers of Russia. Are you going to remain such in the future, or will you at last come to grasp your despicable role and return to the family of toilers which thus far you have refused to acknowledge and which, for a rouble from the tsar or for a glass of wine, you were always ready to crucify alive?’

At that point the Cossacks, several thousand of whom were present there, doffed their papakhi<sup>2</sup> and hung their heads.

Maria Nikiforova went on speaking. Many of the Cossacks were sobbing like children. And lots of intellectuals who had made their way there from Aleksandrovsk and were standing near the rostrum turned to one another and said:

‘My God, how insipid and pitiful the speeches of the Revolutionary Committee’s and the political parties’ representatives seem alongside the speeches of the anarchists and especially Maria Nikiforova’s!’

It cheered us to hear such words from the mouths of those who had, for years past, always given us wide berth.

But it was not for that reason that we told the Cossacks the truth. We merely wanted them to understand the truth so that, drawing their inspiration from it, they might shrug off those who had kept them in check and in whose service they had... since the far-off days when they had first settled on the Don and Donetz, on the Kuban and on the Terek, ... became the bane of every free initiative on the part of the toilers. Yes, the Cossacks had ever been the executioners of the toilers. Many of them had already realised that, but others went on cravenly deploying their sabres and their nagaiki against the enslaved masses.

For the whole of their sojourn in Aleksandrovsk (they spent a further five days there after the meeting) they arrived daily in a crowd at the Federation’s Office seeking further details from the anarchists and answering the questions that the latter put to them. Contacts were established. Some of them left their addresses so that they might receive anarchist publications and that correspondence might be exchanged regarding issues related to the Social Revolution.

The Kuban Cossacks, especially the ones from the Labinsky unit, were among those who displayed the greatest interest, and I know that several of them maintained a long-lived correspondence with our anarchists, seeking explanations from them of this or that question of social organisation, requesting that new publications be sent them and sending money insofar as they were able.

The Don Cossacks too put such requests to us, but never in such great numbers nor with so much interest. This, on the one hand, because they were less advanced and, on the other, because the reaction had erected on their territory a pyre upon which it aimed to sacrifice the Revolution.

While the disarmed Cossacks were in Aleksandrovsk, the revolutionary command suggested to them that they take the side of the Revolution against General Kaledin.

---

<sup>2</sup> Papakha = high Astrakhan bonnet (Translator’s note).



Many of them agreed to this and declared their readiness to take up arms and set out for the front. They were formed up into Sotnia and they were dispatched to Kharkov where they were placed at the disposal of General Antonov-Ovseenko commanding the armies of South Russia.

Others on the other hand stated a wish to see their children and relations again, it being four years since they had laid eyes on them, and they asked to be allowed to go home. The revolutionary command so authorised them. But in point of fact it dispatched them to Kharkov where it had their mounts confiscated.

I do not wish at all to pass judgement upon this move by the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc, for to have allowed saddled horses to pass just then into the zone whence military attacks against the Revolution were originating would have been tantamount to an act of treachery. By agreement with my friends, I reproached the Bolsheviks and Left SRs with just one thing: that from the outset of the negotiations with the Cossacks they had acted, not as revolutionaries but as Jesuits, making promises and failing to honour them. In so doing they might have done the Revolution a lot of damage. And indeed that damage was done: the posting of armoured cars outside the premises where anarchists gathered, the monitoring of revolutionary organisations in the towns and villages already heralded the misdeeds of the two parties which ruled the country and which were revolutionary in name only.

## Chapter Eight: The Bolshevik-Left SR bloc in Aleksandrovsk. My observations and the consequences of them.

The front established for the purpose of arresting the Cossack's advance as they made their way towards the Zaporozhe was dismantled. Nothing more was heard of them on that flank. All revolutionary detachments were switched from the right bank of the Dniepr to the left bank, to Aleksandrovsk and to the surrounding villages.

Given that the aim of Bogdanov's staff was to proceed with their march towards the Crimea and that the town of Aleksandrovsk was thus left defenceless, its inhabitants were forced to look to their own organisation, and the workers set about doing precisely that.

At the prompting of the parties represented on it, the Revolutionary Committee too began to display some revolutionary activity. This first took the form of an unwarranted interference in the local life of the toilers, in the shape of stringent, authoritarian orders communicated by word of mouth or put down in writing.

It also grew bold in matters concerning the town: it levied 18 million roubles from the Aleksandrovsk bourgeoisie. There were fresh arrests, as in the days of the Coalition Government and the Rada, and of course the first ones to suffer by these were the right wing socialists. (As yet they did not venture to lay a finger on anarchists on account of the influence of the latter in the Gulyai-Polye and Kamyshevat regions). On the Committee itself, there were no more references to the 'prison commissar'; in fact the prison had long occupied one of the most important places in the 'Socialist' organisation of life.

I had more than once been seized by an urge to blow it up, but I had not been able to lay my hands on a sufficient supply of dynamite or pyroxylyne. I had mentioned this to the left SR Mirgorodsky and to Maria Nikiforova, but both of them, aghast, tried to overload me with work so as to prevent my contacting the Red Guards whose stocks of explosives were considerable.

I accepted the work with which the Aleksandrovsk Revolutionary Committee burdened me, and saw it through.

But it is not in my nature to let myself be led by the nose while knowing that God knows what is afoot behind my back—the more so in that I was no novice in revolutionary action. Thus I was incapable of working for the sole purpose of being approved by the 'all-knowing' and 'all-powerful' ones of the present moment.

I saw clearly and with assurance that collaboration with the Bolsheviks and Left SRs was becoming impossible for an anarchist, even collaboration in the campaign to defend the Revolution.

Moreover, the revolutionary spirit of the Bolsheviks-Left SRs was beginning to alter visibly: they sought only to lay hands on the Revolution, to reign, in the crudest sense of the word.

Having long observed them at work in Aleksandrovsk, and earlier at the departmental and district congresses of the peasants and workers, where they had a majority at that point, I sensed

that the cohesion of those two parties was a fiction, and that, sooner or later, one of them would have to absorb or brutally gobble up the other, since both supported the principle of the State and its authority over the free community of toilers.

It is true that those toilers, the active factor in the Revolution, failed to grasp this in time. They had such trust in all revolutionaries that they scarcely bothered to go through their ideas with a fine-tooth comb or to monitor their activities. On every occasion one had to attract their attention and explain to them what it was all about. Who was there to do this, if not the anarchists? What connections had they, though, with the mass of toilers at that point in the Russian Revolution?

The vast majority of those who sought to direct this movement were then, if not compliant towards the central authorities of the Bolshevik-Left SR-bloc, then at any rate extraneous to direct action and thereby on the fringes of the Revolution.

This was true of the most prominent anarchist-syndicalists and anarchist-communists (I say nothing of the individualist anarchists who were nonexistent either in Russia or, above all, in the Ukraine).

True, at their own risk and peril, some anarchist groups of peasants and workers did often make belated decisions, and hurled themselves into every front line in the tempest of revolution where they gave of themselves honestly with a burning love for the Revolution and for their ideal. But alas! They perished prematurely and without much benefit to our cause.

How could this have been so? Personally, I have but one answer to offer: 'Not being organised, the anarchists lacked unity of action.' The Bolsheviks and Left SRs, by contrast, capitalised at this time upon the workers' trust in the Revolution, by methodically pursuing their party interests instead of the interests of the toilers.

In another time, in different conditions and different circumstances, they would not have dared to substitute for the common revolutionary endeavour the political recipes of their central committees. But they realised that, in the present context, there was no one around to expose them: the right-wing socialists were then kept in tow by the bourgeoisie and the anarchists alone were left to direct the toilers' strength against these machinations.

But once again we anarchists did not have organised personnel, *au fait* with the issues and problems of the day, to call upon.

The Bolsheviks and Left SRs, under the guidance of the quick-witted Lenin, noted the powerlessness of our movement and rejoiced at it: for the sight of us incapable of pitting the handiwork of the entire toiling populace against their party political interests heartened the statist. They courted the masses more boldly and playing up to them with the slogan of 'All power to the local Soviets' they established, at the masses' expense, their own political power as a statist party, making this preeminent over everything in the revolutionary endeavour, beginning with the toilers who had but recently broken their shackles but who had yet to achieve complete emancipation.

Through their collaboration with the bourgeoisie at a time when all the toilers were opposed to it, the Right SRs and the Menshevik SDs contributed to the success of the Bolsheviks and the Left SRs. At that time, the toilers had not yet repudiated the Right SRs. They were content to broaden the latter's programmes to share the burden of comradeship with the bourgeoisie, and the burden of the acknowledgement of the lawful powers of the Constituent Assembly etc., strove to carry them with them into this collusion.

All such notions peddled by the Right SRs were of themselves unacceptable to the masses. What is more, by this time they were operating openly against the Revolution. The upshot of all this was in the end the toilers opted instead for the Bolsheviks and the Left SRs.

This eventuality, tragic as far as the Revolution was concerned, was familiar to every revolutionary anarchist who, in his direct endeavour, had worked in close conjunction with the peasants and workers and had shared with them the successes and failures of their concerted actions.

Thus, uneasy to see that the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc was not the rallying point that would have been needed at a time when Labour was taking on Capital and governmental Power in an engagement that would be decisive for all who had unselfishly given of their energy and of their lives so as to prepare for and to hasten it, I became more and more profoundly convinced that the Bolsheviks and Left SRs would retreat in the face of a backlash led by the Right-wing socialists (who had meanwhile allied themselves with the bourgeoisie) or would butcher one another for the lion's share of power, but that on no account would they lend the Revolution the assistance it needed to proceed without interference along its creative path.

Convinced of this, I assembled some comrades from the Aleksandrovsk anarchist Federation (who brought along some sympathetic workers and soldiers) and my comrades from the Gulyai-Polye detachment and, with a dead feeling in my soul I confided to them my fears regarding the Revolution which was—as I saw it—threatened with annihilation on every side and most especially from the direction of the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc.

It were better for the Revolution, I told them, that the Bolsheviks and Left SRs had not formed any bloc, for none of their principles could restrain them in their thirst for power which infallibly must lead them on to a falling out and, by dint of their internecine rivalries, to the inflicting of a tremendous wrong upon the Revolution.

'Already,' I told my friends, 'We can see that it is not the people which enjoys freedom, but rather the political parties. The day is not far off when the people will be utterly prostrate beneath their boots. It is not the political parties which will serve the people, but the people who will serve the political parties. Even now we note how often, in issues of direct concern to it, there is merely a passing reference to the people as all decisions are reached directly by the political parties. It behoves the people merely to listen to what governments tell it!'

Then, having vouchsafed to them my impressions and my deep-seated conviction that it was time to prepare for battle, I set before only a tiny intimate band of anarchists and not all the comrades, the plans I had devised since July-August 1917 and which I had in part put into effect in the task of organising the peasants. These might be summarised thus: so long as the peasants aspire to be their own masters, we must approach their autonomous local institutions, explain to them all the steps taken by the socialists in their march towards power, and tell them that the Revolution which they had carried out heralded something quite different: it heralded the right of the masses to freedom and to free labour and destroyed all possible tutelage over them by the authorities.

When the will is there, one can always get through to the peasants: one need only settle among them and work honestly and tirelessly alongside them. When, out of ignorance, they attempt to establish something that may turn into an agency harmful to the development of a free society, it has to be explained to them and they have to be convinced that what they aim to do will be a heavy burden upon them and something else which, while meeting their needs, is at odds... with the anarchist ideal has to be proposed to them.

'Our ideal is very rich and, starting right now, many aspects of it can be put into practice by the peasants for their greater good.'

But some other plans were of quite a different order and concerned conspiratorial work. I did not mention them that day to the comrades, but ceaselessly I prepared the members of the Gulyai-Polye anarchist-communist group in this sense in the hope that whereinsoever, by dint of its intensive work, it might have established links with the population, we might put them into effect at an early date.

In the course of this intimate conversation with the Aleksandrovsk comrades, I resolved to quit the Revolutionary Committee and to go back to Gulyai-Polye with my whole detachment.

That very day I came across comrade Mirgonodslay (a Left SR) and invited him to dine with me at the Federation's restaurant. When he arrived, I could not help myself telling him that, the next day, I would announce to the Revolutionary Committee that my detachment was withdrawing me from the Committee and would be refraining from appointing anyone in my place.

Comrade Maria Nikiforova and several other Federation comrades begged me not to be so hasty about it. Mingorodsky also attempted to reason with me: but I could not go back on a decision which had been taken in conjunction with my detachment and which it remained only to convey formally so that the Committee would not misinterpret it.

At the federation, not everyone was au fait with my decision and when they learned of it they asked me to explain the reason and intention behind my departure. At the time there were also some workers sympathetic to the Left SRs at the Federation. They too were particularly insistent upon my explaining myself.

So I had to reiterate to them what I had already explained to some comrades.

I told them that in my view, the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc had already placed its unity in jeopardy, just when it had scarcely been formed. That, as I saw it, was due on the one hand to the historical and philosophical discrepancy between the Social Revolutionary theory and Marxism and, on the other, to the vanity which induced the parties to seek to devour one another in their overwhelming lust to direct the Revolution.

'It strikes me as quite apparent that the day is not far off when those two parties who presently reign over the country will fall out and fight with one another until they have annihilated one another, taking the Revolution down with them and everything good about it.

Why the devil was I squandering my energy here when I could see the real Revolution being born in the countryside. The peasants are beginning to achieve self-awareness, they're displaying their readiness to struggle for an ideal of justice and they must be helped!' I shouted in a fury, while the comrades grew more and more astonished.

'I do not mean, comrades that you should all go to the peasants. I know you well. You are accustomed to the town and linked to the workers. Work here, but remember that here the Revolution is in the process of throwing direct action overboard in favour of the orders and ordinances of revolutionary committees, whereas in the villages it will not be possible to do so that easily. The soul of Revolution is alive out there, here the soul of counter-revolution. Only intensive organisation of the Revolutionary forces in the villages will be able to prevent the sacrificing of the Revolution.'

My anarchist comrades and their Left SR sympathiser friends replied that time would tell and that, for the moment, the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc was not straying from the path of the workers' and peasants' Revolution: 'It keeps to it solidly. The majority of the toilers see that and support it in its action. To conduct propaganda against it or to foment a revolt would thus open the way for a semi-bourgeois authority of the Kerensky ilk, or, what would be even worse, consolidate

the Central Rada, which has all but completely dodged the struggle for the social emancipation of the toilers—and that would be to commit a crime against the very idea of Revolution.

‘We deplore,’ these comrades of mine continued, ‘your attitude towards the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc, and we would be happy if you would adopt a different approach to this matter. You yourself are forever saying that revolutionaries should always be where the people are, in order to broaden, deepen and prosecute the Revolution.

To date both you and we have done just that. What is there to prevent us from continuing? Each of us knows that if the bloc were to veer to the right, or if it were to try to stop the workers before they have reached their goals ... freedom, equality and independent labour... we would immediately mount a campaign against it. And then each toiler would see and understand that we were right to stand up against the Bolsheviks and the Left SRs.’

I recall that Maria Nikiforova and all the friends who worked alongside her in that town were especially staunch advocates of that line. She herself several times mentioned the name of comrade A. Karelin, saying that prior to leaving Petrograd she had deliberated with him at length upon this matter and that he had told her that that was the best stance we could adopt vis à vis the Bolshevik-Left SR authorities.

However, the reasonably well-founded arguments of my comrades failed to shift me. I was profoundly convinced that the bloc would not, could not survive for long. Apart from those I have already noted, there were other omens. Lenin was acting beyond any control, and that not only uncontrolled by the Left SR party allied to the Bolshevik Party, but also uncontrolled even by the latter, whose leader and creator he was.

Having myself organised the peasants of Gulyai-Polye and region, outside of any Bolshevik or Left SR influence, I drew significant conclusions from this fact.

Indeed, I guessed Lenin’s intention: to turn the left wing of the SRs (who numbered not one single member of the original core-group) into a puppet in his own hands.

This is why I refrained from making any reply to the comrades and simply told them once more that I was going back to Gulyai-Polye all the same.

While we were talking about the bloc and of the Revolution’s future, over which the bloc sought to have the upper hand, the commissar of posts got a telephone message from Gulyai-Polye to me, announcing that agents of the Ukrainian Central Rada had arrived there and that, while professing to be supporters of the soviets, were conducting a strenuous propaganda drive to get the soldiers who had come back from the external front to set up koureni haidamak in Gulyai-Polye and region, and that the chauvinists had already begun to put that organisation into operation.

The message was signed M. Shramko and it helped me to quit the Aleksandrovsk Revolutionary Committee and hasten my departure for Gulyai-Polye.

Once having drafted my official recall, I went to the Committee to hand in this document to the appropriate persons and to say my farewells.

The committee took a dim view of it, and the Bureau deplored it, albeit in moderate terms. When I had explained the reasons for my hasty departure to them along with the whole detachment, comrade Mikhailevich, the chairman of the Committee, asked me to step into an adjoining room with him and said he was overjoyed to see me return to Gulyai-Polye.

‘Your presence there, comrade Makhno, is crucial to say the least. Furthermore, you already know, I believe, that, in accordance with a project of the party’s leadership, we intend to split

the Aleksandrovs district into two administrative units, and it is proposed that one of these be placed under your leadership in Gulyai-Polye, comrade Makhno!’

I said in answer to my ‘benefactor’ that the idea was not one that I found attractive, for it did not fit in with my views on the future and the development of the Revolution.

‘But in any case,’ I added, ‘it presupposes your eventual success, doesn’t it?’

‘But that is assured. All the workers and peasants are with us and they hold everything, everywhere!’ shouted by my erstwhile colleague.

‘By the way, have you read the telephone message I have just received from Gulyai-Polye? Did you understand what it said?’ I retorted.

‘But of course!’

‘It would be better to postpone our conversation until later and to issue the order immediately to the commander of Ekaterinoslav railway station to have a train ready in four hours to take the Gulyai-Polye detachment on board.’

Which was promptly done.

I chatted for a while further with ‘comrade’ Mikhaievich, with the anarchist Maria Nikiforova and other members of the committee. I spoke to them of the revolutionary zeal of the populace which stood ready to do battle: then, having taken my leave of them, I headed towards the railway station where, some minutes behind me, the members of the Committee arrived by car, and the anarchist Maria Nikiforova on horseback. They had come to bid me farewell and to see us off.

I exchanged a few words with the leaders of the Revolutionary Committee. Then the detachment struck up the anthem of the Revolution and the train moved off.

## **Chapter Nine: Abolition of Zemstvo as a 'territorial unit'. Foundation of a Revolutionary Committee by the members of the Soviet. Seeking funds to meet the needs of the Revolution.**

During our absence, when the most energetic peasant revolutionaries, anarchist workers or sympathisers were missing, Gulyai-Polye had received a visit from agents of the Central Rada: they were landowners from the village who had received field promotion to the rank of sublieutenant and who were now being sent out into the countryside, there to preach upon the theme of an independent Ukraine, relying upon the haidamaki and the Cossacks.

We arrived at night and right away, before that night had ended, soldiers returning from the front informed me that they had had a general assembly at which the agents of the Rada had spoken in order to announce that their troops were mustered in Podolya and around Kiev and that they were in a state of combat readiness. Then they had invited the soldiers to organise themselves on the spot and to seize power in that liberated region.

To impress those present, a certain Vulfovich, a self-styled 'maximalist' and a front-line soldier presented to the gathering several anonymous letters asserting that in Gulyai-Polye and neighbourhood, there was a certain Society which could, if the need arose, subsidise the costs of a soldier's organisation, etc.

Not for a single moment did I hesitate in putting an end to this. At 1.00 am., I set off to fetch comrade Kalashnikov, secretary of the anarchist-communist group, and having located him along with some comrades, we discussed everything that the soldiers from the front had reported to me. Then we went to the home of the 'maximalist' Vulfovich and arrested him.

He objected and stated that he would refer the matter to the anarchist-communist group (he knew that from my revolutionary post I occasionally addressed reports to that group, and that we held discussions to see if my actions were not at odds with the task we had assumed in common).

He was sure that his arrest would earn me a reprimand,

Then and there I told him that his freedom would be restored to him just as soon as he had handed over these anonymous letters which mentioned the existence in Gulyai-Polye and its environs, of a Society possessed of the funds to equip troops for the Ukrainian Central Rada. Whereupon the 'maximalist' Vulfovich ceased his protestations and told me that the letters had been given to him an hour before the meeting by citizen Althausen, a hotelier in Gulyai-Polye and uncle to the agent provocateur Naum Althausen who had come to light at the time of the trial of our group.



Citizen Althausen was promptly arrested. I explained the reason why to Althausen and told him that, together with Vulfovich he would be brought by the Soviet for trial before the skhod—assembly of Gulyai-Polye's peasants and workers.

He realised that the situation was taking a serious turn. The skhod-assembly would require of him details concerning the presence in the region of a secret financial agency of the Rada. And he opted to tell the whole truth without further ado.

The Jewish community in Gulyai-Polye, he said, fearing the chauvinists, had determined to make overtures to them by offering financial help so that, in the event of their succeeding, they knew that the Jews supported the Ukraine and those who had fought for her.

Right away he added:

'Take it from me, citizen Makhno, that there is nothing in that that might work to the detriment of the Revolution. It could do harm only to our community, for it will have to pay the money out of its own pocket.' And he pointed to his left pocket.

The comrade members of the Soviet of Peasant and Worker Deputies, having learned that Gulyai-Polye was all agog, hastened to join us. They were outraged to discover that conduct on the part of the Jewish community and demanded that all its leaders be arrested and questioned so as to discover the truth about their infamous conduct.

Appreciating the hatred which disclosure of this act might inspire among the non-Jewish population of Gulyai-Polye, I saw to it that the affair was not allowed to break. Then I advised that we make do with questioning Althausen and thereafter draw up a detailed report for the skhod of the peasants and workers whom we would ask not to hold the entire Jewish community accountable for an act imputable to only a tiny number of them.

The comrades from the soviet, who trusted me and knew that I was incapable of double-dealing, endorsed my suggestions.

'Citizens' Vulfovich and Althausen were thus released straight away.

Anyone who may intend to write the honest and authentic history of Gulyai-Polye and of its redoubtable rebellion, unique in the annals of Revolution—a rebellion which, having sprung from the bosom of the enslaved peasants, supported by the entirety of the toilers in the region, expanded, in response to the attempts to repress it, into a colossal and not yet abated (alas!) revolutionary upheaval—would have needed to attend that Skhod-rally.

As I say, he would have needed to be present to convince himself of the gravity and also of the extreme prudence with which the toilers broached a matter that in other places in the Ukraine, would unfailingly have unleashed pogroms<sup>1</sup> and the massacre of poor innocent Jews who have been persecuted without respite over the centuries in Russia.

It is true that the attitude adopted by the present writer played some part in this, although he did not in any way seek to minimise the implications of the issue and although he clearly exposed all of the ugliness.

It was determined to abandon the Jewish community to its own conscience and to make do, this time around, with a reprimand for the leaders, though a different line would greet any repetition and they would be hauled, in that instance, before a revolutionary tribunal.

Thus was that matter disposed of. The entitlement of the Jews to participate in all congresses of the Soviets, in all debates and decision-making was in no way diminished. Each person, without

---

<sup>1</sup> Pogroms — name given in Russia to popular disturbances targeted against the Jews and accompanied by looting and massacres (Translator's note).

distinction, had an acknowledged right to free expression of his opinion, provided that everybody accepted and respected the right to demolish anything that hindered the development of the social Revolution; for the incipient society required tremendous efforts and exacting sacrifices of each and every one of us.

Hitherto, there had been in existence in Gulyai-Polye a territorial unit known as the zemstvo unit, but that term had fallen into disuse: it had been done away with once and for all by the Soviet which, having arrogated to itself all the social functions, had by agreement with the peasants' skhod, set up a Revolutionary Committee charged with the training and deployment of the revolutionary fighting forces.

The anarchist-communist group, the Left SRs (few and far between) in the region, and the Ukrainian SRs grouped around the Prosvit, with the agronomist Dmitrenko at their head, were invited to join this Committee. As for the Bolsheviks, there were none in Gulyai-Polye nor in the region.

The formation of the above committee was the outcome of suggestions from the anarchist group. As an independent revolutionary unit, insofar as the existence of the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc permitted, it provided us with the means of perfecting the organisation of the peasants in a more reliable fashion. At that time, our strength was not sufficient to enable us to focus our attentions in a more determined way upon the workers and, moreover, we still at that point nurtured a vain faith in our anarchist comrades in the towns. The latter, though, conducted futile discussions in a vacuum without taking the least heed of events, which hampered our task. To remedy this state of affairs, the issue was put to the Soviet as to which of its members should be entrusted with leadership of the Committee. And the Soviet, which wanted to see none but an anarchist in that position, appointed me, although I was little inclined to it. Come what may, I knew that the Committee would abide by the policy line indicated by the anarchist-communist group, scrutinised and finalised by the Soviet and endorsed by the populace. Nonetheless, after lengthy discussions, I wound up accepting the appointment.

After I quit the Soviet, there was a wish to entrust the leadership to comrade Maksim Shramko who was not aligned with any party and who had been chairman of the zemstva Council (a position I had categorically refused and the repeated offer of which, at election times, had made me flee Gulyai-Polye). Shramko then assembled a band of marauders and betook himself to the Kossovtsze-Tikhomirovo estate (some two versts<sup>2</sup> from Gulyai-Polye) which, at my instigation, had been made over to the toilers with a view to establishing an orphanage there. He looted the library which was of some considerable value and only half of which could be recovered afterwards, and carried everything off, down to the windows. This exploit disgraced him in the eyes of the peasants who had until then had a high regard for him. He was put in charge of drawing up an inventory on the estates of the pomeschiki as a prelude to drafting lists for the allocations to be made in spring.

As for the leadership of the Soviet, that was entrusted to Luka Korostelev, an erstwhile active member of our group, for which he had retained his sympathies since the Revolution.

Our group requested a clear definition of the functions of the Revolutionary Committee. The latter stated in the presence of the whole populace that it would dedicate itself mainly to the organising of the toilers so that they might be united in the struggle for the maintenance, expan-

---

<sup>2</sup> Verst — roughly one kilometre (1067 metres in fact) — (Translator's note).

sion and triumph of the Revolution, assailed as it was on every side by its enemies who were trying to make of it a puppet in the hands of the political parties vying one another for power.

Our group then demanded that the battalion of the 48th Berdyansk regiment, billeted in Orekhovo (35 versts from Gulyai-Polye) and made up of supporters either of General Kaledin or of the Ukrainian Central Rada, be disarmed.

The Committee was as yet too weak to undertake such action (and the anarchist-communist group knew it) but it deliberately supported this demand. Then our group contacted the Aleksandrovsk anarchist Federation. They each proceeded from their own localities to Orekhovo and disarmed the battalion.

At this point, the revolutionary authorities of the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc still admired the actions of the anarchists.

General Bogdanov, commanding the (?)bla's armed forces, was jubilant, it was said, and was impatiently awaiting delivery of all the weapons stripped from the battalion; if not to himself then at least to the Aleksandrovsk Revolutionary Committee, especially since the anarchist Maria Nikiforova who had had a hand in the disarmament operation was still a member of that Committee.

But things did not happen that way.

Since the month of July 1917 the Gulyai-Polye anarchist-communist group had steadfastly persisted in its efforts to earn the trust of the peasants, to sustain and develop in them that spirit of freedom and independence that their best members—now dead for the most part—had striven to keep alive over a period of twelve years.

Insisting that it be permitted to speak openly, the group was able to preach its ideal with apostolic conviction and stubbornness in a simple, clear language accessible to the peasants, without recourse to the nebulous circumlocutions of the past. It aimed to achieve its objective and to make a reality of all its aspirations. It decided that the time could not be more favourable for the creation of armed cadres, in the absence of which it would never manage to confound its many enemies. With the backing of the Aleksandrovsk anarchist Federation, all of the weapons... rifles, grenade-launchers, machine-guns, were shipped to Gulyai-Polye and formally surrendered to the Revolutionary Committee.

There was a growing resolve among the toilers of Gulyai-Polye and the surrounding countryside and villages. They sent delegates to us, announcing that everyone, young and old alike, stood ready to take up arms and to defend their freedom and their independence against any authorities, even those of the Bolshevik Left SR bloc if it ever occurred to it to trespass against the new forms of life that the peasants were devising, freely, in their surroundings.

In my capacity as leader of the Revolutionary Committee, it seemed to me that I ought to have been preoccupied exclusively with its affairs, had the Committee been a committee like any other. Now, two or three times each day the anarchist-communist group enjoined me to converse with the peasants' representatives from some village or even some whole region on a variety of issues. For although they sometimes arrived in Gulyai-Polye on personal business, they nonetheless did not fail to present themselves at the group's premises to discover what had not yet been disseminated through its propagandists who were touring the entire region.

Together, we devised plans, seeking the best place to embark upon this or that endeavour and best to bring it to fruition, authorities or no authorities.

‘What joy!’—the peasants used to cry, for instance, as they stepped into the rooms of the group into the Revolutionary Committee and the Soviet of the Peasant and Worker Deputies— ‘We are starting to really feel freedom inside and all around us.’

The workload was assuming colossal proportions. Now the financial wherewithal was entirely lacking.

This situation was of great concern to us, some of my comrades and myself, for, in the initial stages, the organisation of combat forces was quite an expensive business. I knew that we needed only to apply to the Aleksandrovsk Revolutionary Committee and our costs would be covered, but I could not determine upon that, not on the group’s behalf nor upon my own authority, for I had set myself the goal of creating a revolutionary unity among the peasants in a manner wholly independent of every political party and above all of any governmental agency.

It was only after lengthy hesitation that I made up my mind to advance the following proposal. In Gulyai-Polye there was a commerce bank whose funds had been transferred to the State Bank of Aleksandrovsk but which nonetheless continued its accounts business, hoping, even after the October Revolution, to press on with its operations. It could be asked to hand over a given sum to meet the needs of the Revolutionary Committee.

This scheme was evaluated over almost eight days. The group was opposed to it on grounds of principle. It cost me immense effort to get it to agree not to prevent me from putting the question to the Committee. I undertook to assume full responsibility in the event of the businessman’s refusing to comply of their own free will.

In the end the group gave me its agreement but reminded me that, in keeping with its statutes, it might ask me to step down from my position on the Revolutionary Committee and Soviet and restrict myself to the work being done inside the group.

I had always been prepared to do so. Indeed this was the point upon which I had been most insistent whenever we were discussing the clauses concerning the group’s unity and the duties of its members towards it.

Having secured a formal promise that those of its members who belonged to the Revolutionary Committee would not desert me when I asked the businessmen to donate 250,000 roubles—for this I needed the endorsement of the committee and that of the Soviet—I called those two bodies together.

I opened the meeting by announcing that there were rumours circulating according to which the Ukrainian Central Rada was engaged in peace negotiations with the Germans and that the Bolsheviks, who on this count did not see eye to eye with their partners in power, the Left SRs, had hastened to conclude a treaty prejudicial to the Rada and to themselves.

‘It is true,’ I told the gathering, ‘that this report has yet to be confirmed, and that it will be presently. But personally I can even now assert with all certainty that the Rada has indeed put its signature to this dishonest alliance with the German and Austrian emperors, Karl and Wilhelm.’

(Indeed, I was in possession of letters from Odessa and Kholin, delivered by a comrade, confirming this report).

The revolution hangs in the balance. Victory will go to those who are at the ready. We must arm ourselves from head to toe and arm the entire population: otherwise thanks to their alliances the Central Rada and the Bolsheviks will kill off the Revolution. We must make ready to withstand the attack, to break it and salvage what we have won.

We must sweep out of our way any compromise, any act that would make us dependent on the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc, just as we have done with regard to the Central Rada and Kerensky’s

coalition with the bourgeoisie. To achieve this, we must act independently on every one of the Revolution's fronts.'

I then explained that we needed money and that they would be very happy in the Aleksandrovsk Revolutionary Committee if we were to apply to them for it, but that that would be fatal for us, for the district authorities were only waiting for that in order to trespass on our freedom and our independence.

'But we do need money; that money is right here or, at any rate, it can be obtained through the good offices of Gulyai-Polye without the authorities at all being given the impression that we need them or that we will prostrate ourselves at their feet. As long as we have all our wits about us,' I told my listeners, 'that we will never do'.

Some voices asked:

'Tell us then, comrade Makhno, where this money is to be found and how we can lay hands on it for our common endeavour.'

'I'll explain that to you anon, for the moment, I want to dwell upon what I see in our own ranks and in the ranks of our enemies who come in all shapes, it goes without saying, and who battle on every front verbally against the reaction and for freedom, but in fact are against freedom and for the reaction.

Comrades, none of you present here, will deny this fact... that the idea of freedom and of economic and political independence has taken root and is spreading among the peasants. Who helped to set them on that course? I say that it is the Revolution and the dogged, often crushing efforts of the local anarchist-communist group of which I am a member.

What the outcome of this will be, is hard to say at present: around us we see only enemies and few, all too few, friends who moreover are not here. They have ensconced themselves in the towns and show themselves among us only occasionally. These friends are anarchists. They alone do not want to see the villages remain forever under the authority of the towns. But they give to the enslaved countryside but little of what they might give it at the present time.

There are, to be sure, reasons for this, but it is hard to comprehend them and express them here, where the issue is quite a different one. Nonetheless, the anarchists are always with us, in thought at least! (applause and shouts rang out of 'Long live anarchy! Long life to our friends!').

Don't get carried away comrades. I come now to the crux of the matter. The essential point is that we arm ourselves, arm the whole population so as to endow the Revolution with a sufficiently powerful force to enable us to begin ourselves to construct the new society by our own efforts, with our reason, our exertions, our determination.

From autumn 1917 on, the toilers of this region had set about making ready for this: but at the present time the dark forces of reaction pose a deadly threat to them: the authority on the one hand of the Bolsheviks and Left SRs and on the other hand, of the Rada which has concluded—and I have this from a reliable source—an alliance with the emperors of Austria and Germany, THERE lies the danger for the Ukraine and for everything fine that the masses have been able to win thanks to the Revolution.

The arming of the whole populace is possible only if the populace acknowledges the necessity of it. Now, in the course of the past week we have—myself on the Committee and the group's secretary in his Bureau—received many peasants' representatives from the region who all, without exception, put that request to us.

But that is not enough: we have to hear that same wish expressed directly by the peasants' assemblies and to discuss it with the peasants so that it may be realised to the greatest effect and

to that end we have to send out propagandists in every direction. We will, in effect, be tearing the peasants away from the preparations for the spring sowing by taking their carts and their horses away from them or indeed, to avert any such need, we will have to hire these from them. But they will have to be paid. So we need money.

Now we have none, but our enemies do, and right here in Gulyai-Polye: there is money in the homes of the pomeschiki, money with the merchants. Their bank is over yonder, just a couple of steps away from our Committee.

Even so, I have to tell you, comrades, that our coffers are empty. All the money is in the State Bank of Aleksandrovsk. But we can have it. We need only agree to one suggestion.

Throughout the Revolution, the bank of Gulyai-Polye has speculated on labour. In point of fact, it ought to have been expropriated a long time ago, and the money placed in the toilers' community chest. Neither the coalition government of Kerensky nor the Bolshevik-Left SR government have done this so far, and they persist in preventing the revolutionary people's doing it for themselves.

I therefore suggest to the Committee that it pay no heed to the government or the Bolsheviks and Left SRs and require the management of the bank, in the name of the Revolution, to hand over 250 thousand roubles, and within 24 hours at that.'

This motion was carried without discussion, and unanimously.

The following day, I visited the bank and explained the decision to its directors. They begged the committee to give them a period of grace of three days then they summoned a general assembly of investors and, at the strenuous prompting of the SD Sbar, signed the cheques which they had themselves shared out among them on a proportional basis. Those investors who were not there received a visit from a representative of the bank and from a member of the Revolutionary Committee who handed them their cheque for endorsement.

Within four days, all the cheques had been collected. On the fifth day, a Committee member, accompanied by a senior bank representative, journeyed to Aleksandrovsk and collected the sum that was to be paid. Thus did the toilers of Gulyai-Polye ensure the success of the Revolution's first steps by obtaining the money needed for propaganda and the organising of free labour, independent of capital and of the State.

One portion of this sum was made available to the soviet of Peasant and worker Deputies. Another fraction was, at my suggestion, used to found and pay for the upkeep of an orphanage for children left fatherless and motherless by the wartime circumstances. It was installed in a house surrounded by a fine garden: it had belonged to the commissar of police. The third fraction and the largest was retained by the Revolutionary Committee. One half of it was placed temporarily at the disposal of the Supply Section of the Soviet, set up by the Soviet and run, under its supervision and with the approval of the skhod of the peasants and workers, by comrade Sereguin, a member of the anarchist-communist group. So well was this Section able to furnish the population with all necessary consumer items that the central authorities took umbrage at it and placed obstacles in the way of its operations.

## Chapter Ten: How barter was organised between town and countryside.

From the outset, the anarchist-communist group had been insistent that its endeavours must retain an anarchist complexion. Thus its tactics had to be tailored to the requirements of the moment and it had to learn how to reject certain choices in time and to devise alternatives to them.

At the start, this drew objections from those of its members who, while wholeheartedly devoted to the cause, were nonetheless disciples of outmoded approaches, to wit... the refusal of organisation, of unity of action, of the possibility of an anarchist's moving on from theory to practice under a regime that was not anarchist and indeed not genuinely socialist either. They used to say to me: 'Comrade Nestor, you must have brought some statist's views on work back from prison and we are fearful lest you embrace them wholeheartedly and lest we be obliged to go our own separate ways.'

That fear, among others, was frequently voiced by my old friend Moshe Kalinichenko, a member of our group since 1907, an educated worker who had read widely.

Nonetheless, everything that I proposed was accepted and put into effect among the peasants during the year 1917, with the utmost success: indeed, they heeded no other social or political group with as much attention and trust as they did ours. They followed our suggestions in every respect: the agrarian question, the repudiation of authority, the struggle against any tutelage at all.

Clearly this pointed out the way ahead: not to hold aloof from the masses but to melt into them, without ceasing to be oneself, and remaining loyal to one's ideals. At all times to forge ahead, with the toilers, regardless of the countless difficulties which lurked along the way and slowed the movement down.

Thus the group members came around to the idea of collective unity in action and most especially in action that had been thought through and was purposeful. They grew accustomed to trusting one another as a natural thing, used to understanding one another and genuinely appreciating one another in their respective spheres.

These traits—crucial in the life and struggle of any organisation and above all of any anarchist organisation— enabled us to weather the vicissitudes of the life of the Ukraine's toilers during these years when 'governments' proliferated.

This mutual trust spontaneously gave rise to the enthusiasm that allowed each individual's energy and initiative to show itself—with the group channelling these in the direction of goals defined by the common consent.

In this regard, the comrade in charge of the Supply Section displayed the utmost ingenuity.

The group knew enough to appreciate him and charged him to establish, using the official prerogatives afforded him by his duties and on behalf of the toilers of Golyai-Polye region, links with the workers of the textile centres of Moscow and other cities and to arrange direct barter

with them. The latter would have to supply the region's population with clothes of the desired quality and colour in a given quantity, while Golyai-Polye would send them corn and, possibly, other foodstuffs, if they wished.

Comrade Sereguin dispatched agents to the towns and himself visited different regions to meet with workers' delegations which, under the supervision of government officials and Cheka members, were touring the country, seeking to purchase corn.

Within a fortnight, he had established relations with the workers of the Prokhorov and Morozov textile plants and in a spirit of brotherhood he arranged with them that barter would take place on the basis of a reciprocal estimate of common needs, with the peasants sending corn to the workers and the workers supplying the peasants the clothes they needed.

I remember the unbridled joy with which, upon his return to Golyai-Polye and without even taking the time to call in at his home, he rushed to seek me out at the Revolutionary Committee and hugged me, saying: 'You are right, Nestor, to stress the need to blend in with the mass of the toilers and toil alongside them, to advise them and explain to them how and at what point they should act. All the toilers are grateful for it.'

He then asked that comrade Kalashnikov, the group's secretary, and comrade Antonov, chairman of the labour section, be fetched. He told them of the gusto and candour with which the delegation from the Moscow textile plants had welcomed our idea about direct barter. He told of the delegation's delight at learning that the idea of a free society had not perished in the countryside, despite the sacrifices it required: but, he added, the workers sensed dark days ahead and that a sombre threat was looming against their most cherished wishes... for freedom and independence from all governmental oversight.

'Of course, the workers said, we don't let ourselves get discouraged, but we cannot help being saddened by the thought of it.'

He also related to us that the delegation had rapturously greeted everything: the meeting with the peasants, the mutual aid arrangement—but that it had anxiously wondered if the government's officials and agents might not intercept everything that might be sent into the towns.

It had indicated the routes by which produce had to be shipped. Two or three days later, two men appointed by the delegation came to Golyai-Polye to hear on the spot the voice of the peasants of this insurgent region.

There they met with a fraternal welcome and were given assurances that every last one of us would stand by the grandiose principles of the Revolution; the freedom and independence of labour vis à vis authority, capital and the State.

After a few days they made their way back to Moscow.

Comrade Sereguin delivered a report to the skhod-assembly of the peasants: at his request, in which he was supported by the group, I added a few remarks to it. I saw in it the finest example, unique in history, of a mutual understanding between two social strata, the urban proletariat and the rural proletariat.

The skhod enthusiastically endorsed this proposal and, undaunted by the idea of seeing their shipment confiscated by the government agents, the peasants spent several days helping the Supply section to load up the wagons with corn and to start them on their way towards the textile centres.

For the purpose of escorting the shipment to its destination, the anarchist-communist group formed a detachment commanded by comrade Skomski. And, in spite of the obstacles raised by those in charge of the marshalling yards, the corn arrived safely.



About ten days later, the workers of the Moscow textile plants dispatched several wagonloads of cloth to Golyai-Polye. But along the route, officials halted them and directed them to the Aleksandrovsk supply depot. 'Because,' they said, 'without authorisation from the Soviet central authorities, it is forbidden for merchandise to be exchanged between peasants and workers. That is the sole prerogative of the worker and peasant authorities and more precisely of the Soviet: now, the latter has not yet given any lead in direct transactions between peasants and workers.' All of this was to the accompaniment of abuse directed against the toilers of the Golyai-Polye region and GP's anarchist group.

Informed of the incident, comrade Sereguin flew to the Revolutionary Committee and sought my advice as to what should be done to prevent the government's Supply Branch from seizing the cloth destined for the peasants. Because if that were done, we would suffer doubly by it: materially, in that we had sent corn, and morally, on account of the frustration of our beautiful initiative which had been prompted by truly social considerations.

'Help us !' he shouted as he wept with his head in his hands.

Keeping calm, in appearance at any rate, we urgently summoned together the Revolutionary Committee and the Soviet of Peasant and Worker Deputies and we determined to lodge a protest on behalf of these two agencies, with the Aleksandrovsk Supply Section, stating our readiness to denounce the practice as damaging to the Soviet government itself if indeed it truly was solicitous of soviet interests.

At the same time we convened a skhod-rally of peasants. I resolved to dispatch some comrades, Moshe Kalinichenko, A. Marchenko and N. Sokruta, likewise members of the Revolutionary Committee, on behalf of our group, to make it known to the toilers of the region that the government's section had intercepted the cloth which Moscow's textile workers had sent to them.

The group's secretary, briefed by me after consultation with several comrades who attended the skhod, indicated to me that my initiative had been approved.

Then I jotted down on paper the essential points of what they would have to say. I knew them all and knew that each one of them would be able to explain.

Once they had set off, I went with comrades Antonov (chairman of the trades union), Sereguin, Kostelev (chairman of the Soviet) and some members of our group to the general assembly-skhod of the peasants and workers.

It was a veritable reunion of the Zaporozhska Siecha<sup>1</sup> as history has described it to us. The peasants were no longer as ignorant as in those days though, and no longer came together over Church matters and matters of belief. No, they had come together to discuss the trespass against their rights by a handful of individuals in the hire of the government. And they had come along with a full appreciation of their rights.

Comrade Sereguin took the floor. His speech was greeted by unending applause, shouts expressing gratitude for his initiative and cries of outrage at Aleksandrovsk's actions vis à vis Golyai-Polye.

Some others then spoke on behalf of the Soviet, the Revolutionary Committee, the trades union and the anarchist-communist group.

The populace demanded an immediate march on the town so as to drive out the authorities ensconced there who were of no use and downright hindrances to the toilers' undertaking. And these were not empty words. At that point the toilers had at their disposal a sufficient number of

---

<sup>1</sup> Ukrainian educational association (Translator's note).

young revolutionary cadres to occupy the town of Aleksandrovsk militarily and to expel, if not shoot, all of the government's functionaries.

'The Revolution has proclaimed the principles of freedom, equality and free labour,' cried the toilers from the enslaved countryside,—'and we want to see them implemented in life: we will kill all who would oppose all that. For all its Revolutionary complexion, the government of the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc is an impediment to the expansion of the Revolution's creative forces. So either we condemn it to death or we ourselves will die in this contest. But we will not tolerate the government's placing obstacles in the path of the free development of our forces and of the improvement of our social standing. We will not accept the humiliation and oppression which its agents seek to foist upon us in order to triumph over all that is most fine in the Revolution.'

Yes, the populace of Golyai-Polye was truly ready on the day to take on governmental Aleksandrovsk and any who might have opposed us, was it not?

We had, all of us, been in the forefront of the revolutionary battle: we were hardly going to withdraw now! We were revolutionaries by dint of our attachment to the ideal of justice which the Revolution had selected as a weapon. And we had no desire to sully that weapon with compromises with authority. We were trying to cleanse it of the mud with which the two parties in power had covered it... the all too ignorant Bolsheviks and Left SRs. It was up to us to assert and to develop the Revolution in the life and struggle of the toilers.

Though we may not have been sufficiently strong for this grandiose undertaking, pregnant with responsibility, we nonetheless wanted to have a go at it with what resources we did have, well aware, moreover, of what the real outcome of our endeavours would be.

This is why there was not a single one of our comrades who stood out against the march on Aleksandrovsk; on the contrary, we all made ready for it.

Personally, it was my conviction that it would be up to us, to me and to several of my comrades—like Kalinichenko, Isidor-Petr Liouty, S. Karetnik, Sava Makhno, Stepan Shepel—to show ourselves as the first among equals in leading the revolutionary forces into battle. And indeed it looked as if that was how it had to be.

Shouts flew up from the crowd:

'Nestor Ivanovich, let's have your opinion! We cannot fail to reply to this provocation directed against us by the agents of the Aleksandrovsk authorities!'

In my capacity as leader of the region's revolutionary troops, aware of against whom and what of these had to be deployed, I said what I had to say: that the decision of the toilers reflected their ideas, that their ideas were my own and that I would abide by them.

At which point comrade Sereguin was handed a dispatch from the Aleksandrovsk Supply Bureau. It stated that, having taken cognisance of the telegrams from the Revolutionary Committee and the Soviet of Peasant and Worker deputies, the Bureau had conceded that the cloth destined for the Supply Section of the Golyai-Polye soviet had already been paid for and that the Aleksandrovsk office, in agreement with the other soviet agencies in the town, had decided to let the shipment through. It now only remained to dispatch delegates to take charge of the cloth and escort it to Golyai-Polye.

When the contents of this dispatch were made known, joy overwhelmed those present but the idea of armed resistance was not abandoned. The gathering expressed a desire that comrade N. Makhno should organise the armed forces in such a way as to mobilise within 24 hours and to occupy Aleksandrovsk, if comrade Sereguin had not taken delivery of the cloth within two days from then.

‘There is no reason to mobilise just at present,’ the peasants said, ‘and it would be disastrous and improper to unleash the struggle against the authorities artificially, but only when it is necessary: we have it in mind and always will have.’

Twenty-four hours later, comrade Sereguin reported to me at the Revolutionary Committee that he had been informed by the delegate sent to Aleksandrovsk that the cloth seized by the authorities had been restored to its rightful owners and had arrived at Golyai-Polye railway station. He was going to summon a skhod at which he would ask the peasants, as he was authorised to do, to help him to see the removal of the shipment to the General Supply Depot and at which he, along with them, would set the date and establish the means of distributing the cloth that was on its way to them.

He besought me, and other comrades from the Revolutionary Committee and from the anarchist-communist group, to attend that meeting and to help him out by explaining the advantages of such barter between town and village to the populace, if only they might take place on a large scale and include all consumer items.

The meeting dwelt on this theme: the effecting of exchanges between town and village without recourse to the good offices of the political authorities of the State.

The example had been set: without middlemen, the villages could get to know the town better; and the town the villages. Thus two classes of toilers would come to agreement upon this common objective: the removal from the State of all authority in public functions and the abolition of its social authority—in short, its elimination.

The more this grandiose notion spread among the toilers of the Golyai-Polye region, and the more the latter embraced it, the more they made a stand in the struggle against all of the authoritarian principles which were a hindrance to it. They were trying to establish the theoretical value of such direct exchanges between toilers and sought a means of concretely securing their right to engage in them.

At the same time they divined in this the possibility of effectively undermining the capitalist traits of the Revolution, survivals from tsarist times. So that whenever all of the cloth received had been distributed, the populace of Golyai-Polye looked forward to the inclusion of all basic necessities in quantities adequate to serve the entire region in these exchanges. This would have proved that the Revolution had not only to busy itself with the destruction of the basis of the bourgeois capitalist regime but had also given consideration to prescribing in a hard and fast manner the groundwork of a new, egalitarian society wherein the toilers’ self-awareness might grow and develop. Their lives, then, would be committed to the struggle for the triumph of a ‘loftier justice’ calculated to supplant the unfair justice currently in place.

So the toilers of Golyai-Polye strove to come to some arrangement with the toilers of villages elsewhere regarding the implementation of the idea of exchanges between village and town and the reconciling of this with the need to defend the Revolution.

Now, the Revolution’s defences can only be secure and durable if all who do not exploit their fellows grasp its essentially creative character. And that will only be able to come to pass when the populace has realised that after having identified the yoke of the master... the factory-owner and landlord, and of the supreme master... the State, it must itself and on its own account organise its new social and political life and look to its defence. Consequently, the village toilers must link up with their urban counterparts: in this way they will be the more sensible of their part in the creative act of Revolution.

The destructive phase would only conclude once and for all when the creative phase would have begun... and this was a period in which not only the revolutionary vanguard but the entire population, fired by events and striving to help the vanguard by actions and by words to overcome the obstacles which might lie in its path, would have taken part.

During the 10 or 11 months of their active participation in the Revolution, the toilers of the Golyai-Polye region had had many occasions to verify the authenticity of this theory and to implement it in the healthy, free life forged by them day by day.

The local Soviet came to an arrangement with the supply organisations and decided that there were grounds for supporting and developing the idea of exchanges between village and town without the mediation of government officials. Delegates were dispatched to several towns to inquire into various matters and to bring back cloth.

Meanwhile, the peasants began to stockpile corn, flour and other foodstuffs in the general warehouses which henceforth had to have reserves held back for possible future exchange.

This time, however, the peasants' delegates returned empty-handed for the most part. In all of the factories, the authorities of the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc had categorically forbidden the workers' organisations to enter into lasting relations of any sort with the villages. To cater for such relations, said the authorities, there were proletarian statist institutions that had responsibility for industrial and agricultural organisation in town and village, thereby consolidating socialism in the country.

It was only in Moscow that the especially revolutionary workforce of the textile plants secured from their socialist masters the right to barter their merchandise once more against produce from the Golyai-Polye region.

But this time the shipment of the cloth was exceptionally difficult. On several occasions shipments had been halted en route and never reached their destination. The governmental 'prodorgans' had seized them and shunted them around from one railway line to another for over 15 days, until rail shipments were completely paralysed: the formidable German armies were advancing upon Kiev and Odessa under escort from spearhead units of the Central Rada and of the Ukrainian SRs and SDs along with their leaders... the teacher Grushevski and the publicist O. Vinnichenko. They had entered into an alliance with the German and Austrian emperors against the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc and now were guiding their allies across Ukrainian territory, pointing out the shortest and most practicable routes to the Dniepr and the revolutionary front.

But the bloc's government, headed by Lenin, could not have failed to note the capital social implications of the move we had tried to introduce by means of these exchanges.

Note it they did. From the moment they appeared, their socialist government, the left of the left, saw in them a danger just as any other government would and sought by one means or another to curtail the spread of this movement.

To begin with the means favoured were detachments charged with severing all links between countryside and town: then the authorities began to fix the degree of loyalty or revolutionary disloyalty of individuals and of the entire class of toilers, their entitlement to assert their intelligence, their determination, their part in the Revolution being made at their expense.

As we have said, the first shipment of cloth had been distributed to the inhabitants of Golyai-Polye and region by the supply Office and the Cooperative union.

Thus it only remained for the agents of the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc to abandon these products somewhere on the railway track, thereby leaving them at the disposal of the new authorities which were blocking the passage of German and Austrian bayonets, or to speed them to their

destination thereby showing the toilers of town and village that, despite their having fled, their thoughts were for them rather than for the good for nothings who were on their way.

And so the shipment reached Golyai-Polye and was distributed according to the wishes of its residents.

## Chapter Eleven: Our group's new members.

Around mid-February, three sailors from the Black Sea fleet turned up in Golyai-Polye. Two of them were peasants from the village, while the third was a stranger: he had just settled into the home of his father, coachman to the pomeschik Abr. Zhantsep.

All three claimed to be Left Social Revolutionaries. Two of them, Boris Veretelnik (a Golyai-Polye peasant) and E. Polonski (the unknown quantity) were in possession of cards from the Left Social Revolutionary Committee of Sebastopol. The third, Sharoski, another Golyai-Polye peasant, was not affiliated to any party.

From the first day they arrived, they stood out at the general-assembly-skhod by virtue of their vigorous revolutionary attitude. These were the days when the sailors were considered ardent defenders of the Revolution. The populace greeted them with respect and listened with interest to their speechifying.

I had known Boris Veretelnik since childhood: this is why I felt no misgivings when he introduced me to his friends Sharovski, who belonged to no party, and Polonski the Left Social Revolutionary. I introduced all three to the Revolutionary Committee and they were accepted on to it as members of the propaganda section, on condition that all of their activities in the region would be conducted on the Committee's behalf. They found this acceptable and stayed in Golyai-Polye to work.

The Sebastopol Committee of the Left SR. Party recalled comrades Veretelnik and Polonski one fine day but at their request and with the consent of the anarchist-communist group, I sent a letter, on behalf of the Golyai-Polye Revolutionary Committee of course, saying that these two comrades were needed with us.

They were disturbed no more after that.

Shortly afterwards, comrade Boris Veretelnik broke with the Left SR Party and joined Golyai-Polye's peasant anarchist-communist group. Comrade Polonski remained outside it and professed merely to be sympathetic to anarchism. Even so, he worked alongside comrade Veretelnik and others under the aegis of the group, keeping us up to date with all his activity in the region, exactly as all other members did.

To be sure, Polonski's brother, a Bolshevik who was at that time working on the Revolutionary Committee of Bolshey-Tokmak, sent for him on several occasions, promising him a post on the Revolutionary Committee's bureau: but Polonski always refused, having no desire to leave the Golyai-Polye region for, he said, the rebel mentality which prevailed there had riveted him to his revolutionary endeavour, and in this labour he had partly found his bearings again, to his great delight.

So the resources of our group were growing, its activities expanding, all of its members devoting themselves wholeheartedly to their revolutionary mission.

There was nothing that could have stood in the way of their pressing on with the intellectual and moral conquest of the masses.

Our group was always in the van of the Revolution, carrying the toilers in its wake in the fight against the oppressors. It was at all times a model for the autonomous revolutionary action of the peasants and workers. It taught them how to act and showed them the forms that this activity and its practical application might assume in the struggle that was their own.

## Chapter Twelve: The agrarian communes—Their internal organisation—Their enemies.

February-March<sup>1</sup>. The time had come to share out all that had been seized from the pomeschiki in autumn 1917 (livestock and tools alike) and to settle upon their estates peasant and worker volunteers organised as agrarian communes. All of the region's toilers were alive to the importance of such a move, to the construction of a new life as well as to its defences. Under the supervision of the Revolutionary Committee, former front-line soldiers set about depositing with the community chest all of the equipment and animals which had belonged to the pomeschiki, leaving each pomeschik with two pairs of horses, one or two cows (according to the size of his family), one plough, one seed-drill, one mower, etc. while the peasants took to the fields to complete the parcelling out of the lands. At the same time, some peasants and workers who had set themselves up back in autumn as agrarian communes, left their villages and along with their whole families, took possession of the erstwhile estates of the pomeschiki, paying no heed to the fact that in the wake of an agreement with the emperors of Austria and Germany, the Red Guard combat units of the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc were evacuating the Ukraine and abandoning it, with its feeble detachments of revolutionary fighters, to an unequal contest with German and Austrian regulars backed by the armed bands of Central-Rada.

Scarcely had they settled in than without delay they set about organising their forces: some were employed on springtime farm chores, while others set up combat units designed to defend the Revolution and the gains in which the toilers of these parts had set a model for the entire country.

The bulk of these agrarian communes were made up of peasants; some contained peasants and workers alike. They were founded primarily on the basis of equality and solidarity between their members. Everyone, men and women alike, worked in concert with a clear conscience whether they toiled in the fields or were employed in domestic duties.

Cooking was communal. So was the refectory. But the urge of one of the members to prepare his own meal for himself and his children, or to take part in the communal preparation of meals and then take it home with him met with no opposition. Each individual, or even an entire group was free to make what provision it chose for his food, provided always that all of the other commune members had prior notification so that the steps required by these changes might be implemented in the kitchens and in the larders.

There was an equal obligation upon all members to rise early and set promptly to work with the oxen, horses or other domestic tasks.

---

<sup>1</sup> That is, of 1918 (Translator's note).



Each one had the right to absent himself, whenever he so desired, but he had to warn his nearest workmate so that the latter might stand in for him during his absence. This applied to working days. On rest days (Sundays) members would absent themselves on a rota basis.

The work schedule was worked out at meetings in which everyone participated; consequently they then knew precisely what was to be done.

That left only the educational question outstanding, for the communes did not wish to re-establish schooling along the old lines: from a selection of new options, they plumped for the anarchist schooling of F. Ferrer of which the communes had heard a lot of talk through the many reports and pamphlets distributed by the anarchist-communist group. But there was a shortage of individuals conversant with the methods of that school and the communes attempted to get some from the town, with our group acting as intermediary. It was determined that should this prove impossible, we should make do, for the first year, with attracting persons capable of teaching.

Within a radius of 7 to 10 versts around Gulyai-Polye, there were four of these agrarian communes. And lots of others in the region as a whole. If I dwell most especially upon these four, it is because I organised them myself. All these fine ventures in the early days were launched under my supervision, and all important issues were always referred to me in advance.

As a member of one of them—the most important one, maybe—I spent two days per week helping out in all its tasks; during the spring planting, I helped with the hoeing or planting otherwise I involved myself with the farm work or lent a helping hand to the mechanic at the electricity station.

Four days I spent working in Gulyai-Polye in the anarchist-communist group and on the Revolutionary Committee. I was asked to do so by all of the group's members and all the agrarian communes, in view of the requirements of the moment which made it necessary for all revolutionaries to rally round and bond together to fight against the forces of reaction arriving from the West in the shape of the German and Austro-Hungarian imperial armies and the troops of the Rada.

In every commune, there were some anarchist peasants, but the majority of the membership was not anarchist. However, they displayed that anarchist solidarity of which they alone are capable in everyday life with their simple natures not yet reached by the political poison from the towns—which always give off a whiff of lying and treachery which even many comrades who style themselves anarchists are not spared.

Each commune comprised about ten families and included 100, 200 or 300 members in all. By decision of the regional congress of agrarian communes, each one received a normal allotment of land—which is to say as much land as its members could cultivate—located in the immediate neighbourhood. In addition, they received the livestock and farm implements which already existed on these estates.

And so the commune toilers set to work, to the sound of free and joyous songs, reflecting the spirit of the Revolution and of those among them who had perished in its cause or who had, over many a long year, pressed on with the struggle for the great ideal of justice which was fated to triumph over evil and to become the torch of humanity. They sowed and did the gardening full of self-confidence, determined that they would not allow the former estate-owners to seize back the land which they had won from those who, without their ever having worked on it, had possessed the title to it by government licence and who were now striving to recover it.

The inhabitants of neighbouring hamlets and villages, still partly bereft of consciousness and under the sway of the kulaki, were jealous of the communards and more than one showed an urge to wrest everything back: livestock and tools, so as to share them out among themselves.

‘The free communards will always be able to buy them back from us later, should they so wish,’ they said. But such views were severely judged at the skhod-rallies and at all the congresses, by the overwhelming majority of toilers who saw in the organising of these communes the happy overture to a new social life which, as the Revolution approached the high point of its triumphant progress, would only develop, grow and give a fillip to the establishment of a kindred society, if not in the whole country then at least in all of the villages and hamlets in the region.

They looked upon the free commune arrangement as the loftiest form of social justice: even so, for the most part, they did not make up their minds to adopt it immediately, pleading the approach of German and Austrian troops, their own disorganised condition and their inability to defend this system against new authorities, revolutionary or otherwise.

For this reason the region’s revolutionary toilers made do with trying to support by one means or another those bolder souls among them who had organised themselves on the erstwhile estates of the pomeschiki, into free agrarian communes and were living an independent life there on a novel basis. A fraction of the pomeschiki, kulaks and German settlers realised that, one way or another, the masters who had in their possession these thousands upon thousands of dessyatins<sup>2</sup> and worked thanks to the labour of others, would not be able to stay much longer. Wasting no more time, they rallied round the Revolution and organised their social life upon quite new foundations, which is to say they dispensed with batraki<sup>3</sup> and the right to lease out their lands.

The joy of the oppressed was dawning on all the liberated estates, and the toilers, who had for so long been humiliated by political, economic and social inequality, were beginning to come to life and to understand their slavery and were bending all of their efforts to struggling free completely and forever from this shame. Already it looked as if this liberation was on the brink of becoming an accomplished fact, the masses themselves having set about making a reality of it. The notion of freedom, equality and fellowship among men was finally beginning to permeate the very lives of the toilers and thus put paid to any possibility of further servitude,—yet at this very moment, the governmental messengers of the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc, abetted by Lenin’s political guile, peddled with growing frenzy the idea that they had a right to dispose of the Revolution and to subject the whole populace to their government—which, they claimed, was the sole defender of the ageless desires of the masses.

This lust for power had so brutalised the Statist socialists that for a time they set aside their fundamental differences over the peace of Brest-Litovsk which they had concluded with the German and Austro-Hungarian emperors and which had been greeted with hostility by the revolutionary populace. They temporarily neglected that capital issue and the turbulent discussions sparked by it for now another, no less important problem was looming before them. How could this remain the pioneers and leaders of the Revolution in the eyes of the masses without losing ground manage to distort the very idea of social revolution, to see their secret aspirations realised... the diversion of the Revolution from its autonomous, creative course and its complete enslavement to Statist doctrines, as emerging from the ordinances and directives of the party’s central Committee and the government?

---

<sup>2</sup> Dessyatin—around one hectare (1092 sq. metres) (Translator’s note).

<sup>3</sup> Farm labourers. (Translator’s note).

It was quite apparent that in the orientation they had stamped upon the great Russian revolution, there was no place for freely organised autonomous agrarian communities on conquered estates, nor for the transfer of workshops, factories, printing-works and other concerns into the hands of the workers.

Acts emanating directly from the toilers reflected their anarchist tendencies clearly. And that was what scared the left-wing statist socialists most: for the toilers of village and town were marshalling their forces precisely for that purpose and were preparing to unleash an anarchist revolt against the very principle of the State so as to strip the latter of its main functions and restore these to their autonomous local authorities.

In so doing, the toilers were displaying great daring and though their revolt was not yet thoroughly organised, it was at least being pursued tenaciously.

If, along this way, they had encountered effective help from revolutionary anarchists, they might have succeeded in fully realising their dreams and would have attracted all of the active forces of the Revolution to their side. This would have put paid to the myopic, incoherent action of the new socialist leaders which, along with Lenin, Ustinov and company, were trying to foist upon the mass of the toilers. And the Bolsheviks' ignoble terror, directed against humanity in general and in particular against those who clung to their personal convictions and who ventured to pass judgement upon them and their so-called 'proletarian' government, would never have appeared in Russia, nor in the Ukraine, nor in the other Bolshevik Republics.

Alas! we revolutionary anarchists have never been capable of embracing the people's great acts of revolution in their full dimensions, of grasping their full implications and of helping them to develop them to their full extent and effect. And here again we were also powerless and that quite simply on account of the absence, in these most crucial days of the Revolution, of an organisation, however rickety.

By contrast, the left-wing State socialists, though they did not side wholeheartedly with the direct revolutionary actions of the toilers, nonetheless quickly grasped them. They acknowledged that, from the point of view of their principles, they could not back them for such popular acts, if they were to come to fruition, would put paid to their dreams of power and compel them to step down from the governmental peaks which these new masters had reached by climbing on the backs of the direct defenders of the Revolution. So they wasted no time in making their move, which is to say that they not only allowed Lenin's government to bridle the revolutionary toilers of town and countryside by means of decrees handed down from above, but took a personal hand in this, thereby contributing to disorganising them just when they were, succeeding in efficiently marshalling their forces for the first time. These leftist parties brought about a halt in the process of destruction on which basis exclusively the process of rebuilding can base its launch and attain its full development: such a development and thus the Revolution was thwarted from reaching its last phase, can only be a swing against all that is outmoded and rotten in the old society and everything that is quite useless in a human society in the healthy sense, but which always tends, in times of great psychological upsets, under the most varied aspects and forms, hastily and superficially camouflaged, to carve out a place for itself again in the new, free social arrangements.

These left-wing statist socialists, capitalising upon the childlike candour of the Russian, Ukrainian and other people, abused their trust. Statist principles made the toilers deviate from their path of broadening and intensifying the Revolution and brought disorganization into

the incipient free society, thereby warping individual and social traits and consequently, slowing the process of its realisation.

It was this fact and none other that led to slothfulness on the part of supporters of the toilers' liberation, while their enemies, reviving, speedily organised themselves and set to work with an eye on the balance of forces.

In most instances, such moments are favourable to the new authorities: then they can easily captivate the toilers, that dedicated vanguard of the Revolution and distance them from the broad, creative revolutionary front which grows up outside them. It was precisely in such circumstances that the Ukrainian toilers were steered away from it. The policy of the Brest-Litovsk treaty with the German and Austro-Hungarian emperors made a large contribution to this. (It is time to point out that the Left SRs protested strenuously against the treaty but, as allies of the Bolsheviks in their endeavour of captivating and misleading the toilers, they kowtowed to the fait accompli. Just like the Bolsheviks and indeed along with them, they pulled all of the armed Red Guard detachments out of the Ukraine, in accordance with the Brest-Litovsk treaty.).

Following the conclusion of this treaty, all of the Revolution's armed forces, made up of Russian workers and peasants, were withdrawn from the front by the government of the "Soviets", dominated at that time by the two socialist parties, the Bolsheviks and the Left SRs. And in withdrawing they offered scarcely any resistance to the German and Austro-Hungarian counter-revolutionary monarchist armies or to the Central Rada's detachments.

As for the Ukrainian toilers, these were left, for the most part, utterly disarmed and at the mercy of the executioners of the Revolution as the revolutionary command pulled its weaponry out of the Ukraine or, in its flight, abandoned those weapons to the German troops.

The withdrawal of revolutionary troops from Ukrainian territory lasted for months. During this time, those divisional commanders among them who had not yet been touched by the poison of these political parties did what they could to arm the populace. But the circumstances were quite adverse, and this is why all the weapons could not be handed over to the populace and used by it against the advance of the counter-revolutionary forces. Indeed the withdrawal of the Red Guards turned into an outright rout and the abandoned territories were most often occupied that very day by the forces of reaction, without the populace's even having had any time to organise itself into combat units.

## **Chapter Thirteen: The successes of the German and Austrian armies and of the troops of the Ukrainian Central Rada. Counter-revolutionary agents. The struggle against them.**

In March 1918, the city of Kiev and the bulk of the Ukraine lying on the right bank of the Dniepr were occupied by the German and Austro-Hungarian monarchist expeditionary armies. Following agreement with the Central Rada, led by the Ukrainian socialists under the chairmanship of the very old SR Professor M. Grushevski, these armies invaded our territory and launched their odious attack on the Revolution.

With the direct help of the Rada and its agents, the monarchist command of the German and Austro-Hungarian troops covered the whole of the Ukraine with a counter-revolutionary espionage network. Those troops, along with the troops of the Central Rada, were still on the right bank of the Dniepr but already the whole part of the Ukraine lying on its left bank was infested with their many informers, spies and provocateurs.

At this time not a day went by in Gulyai-Polye proper, and in its environs, without some meeting during which an attempt was made to induce the toilers to turn away from the Revolution.

The logical outcome of the invasion of the most revolutionary area of the Ukraine (i.e. the left bank of the Dniepr) by spies and provocateurs was that all of Gulyai-Polye 's chauvinists banded together into one organisation of a 'revolutionary' complexion which described itself as 'social revolutionary'.

Its leaders were the agronomist Dmitrenko, P. Semenynta-Riabko, A. Volokh and Prikhdko. These four were sublieutenants. Most of them were big estate owners and one of them, Volkov, owned a cloth factory.

These landlord-sub-lieutenants had long regarded the work of the revolution with fury as it stripped them of their estates for the benefit of the community. However, they styled themselves revolutionaries and under this flag of convenience they campaigned against the activities of the Revolutionary Committee, the Soviet and the farming Committee. Becoming solidly convinced that the inspirator behind these bodies, the one who had shown them the way in agrarian and sociopolitical affairs, was the peasant anarchist-communist group, they attempted, at first secretly behind the scenes but later openly to represent anarchists generally and the Gulyai-Polye group in particular as 'robbers' and 'brigands' who were heedless of 'the laws of the Revolution and of the limits beyond which it should not have gone'.

These 'revolutionaries' cited in evidence the other regions where the anarchists had not penetrated the ranks of the toilers and where the populace had not sought to resolve the land question

without the Provisional Government. 'Whereas here in our own Gulyai-Polye and adjoining regions,' these 'revolutionaries' argued, 'that question was resolved by brigandage back in 1917. And all this is down to the anarchists'.

Such charges, ventilated by folk professing to follow the socialist flag, served only to undermine themselves and their ideas.

The peasants of Gulyai-Polye had been consistently in contact with the anarchists over two years in the days of secret revolutionary activity: later, they had seen them at close quarters for a year, quite openly in the van of the revolution and they were confident that they would always remain on their side. And they all hooted down these phoney revolutionaries who mistakenly insulted us by comparing us to robbers and brigands.

As for ourselves, we merely set the work achieved by our enemies with the toilers in the months gone by alongside the feats achieved during that time by numerous anarchist peasants and workers in the organising of agrarian communes on the former estates of the pomeschiki.

Acknowledging that the anarchists were right in their very conception of the Revolution and of the toilers' entitlement to complete self-liberation from all the bonds of slavery, the village toilers continued to press ahead themselves with the revolutionary endeavour, despite the snares laid for them by their enemies.

Equality, freedom of opinion and independence for each and every individual in Gulyai-Polye and region bore fruit: the toilers became conscious of their dignity and came to appreciate what their role was in life and in the struggle against their oppressors, whether right or left. However, such conduct made the statists uneasy: terrified by the prospect of their authoritarian principles coming to grief, they began to take action against the toilers and in so doing did not shrink from resorting to every weapon within their grasp.

Even as the chauvinists' 'revolutionary' organisation in Gulyai-Polye was embarking upon its impudent campaign against the anarchists, the victorious progress of the German and Austro-Hungarian counter-revolutionary armies, preceded by the equally counter-revolutionary detachments of the Central Rada was already, throughout the Ukrainian territory located on the right bank of the Dniepr, baying at the heels of the Revolution which had been utterly disarmed by the Brest-Litovsk treaty concluded between the Bolshevik Party and the supposed masters of the aforementioned armies, the German Wilhelm and Karl of Austria-Hungary. I cannot say whether the Ukrainian social-chauvinist leaders who had embraced such a treaty were fully cognisant of their odious attitude vis à vis the Revolution. But their disciples assuredly had not realised this: for they clung to that shameful alliance and to the armed assistance which it offered them, this being the only means of releasing the Ukraine from the Revolution and of reestablishing tsarism on Ukrainian soil.

Gulyai-Polye's chauvinistic social 'revolutionaries' announced day in and day out at their meetings that the German and Austro-Hungarian armies and the detachments of the Ukrainian Central Rada were approaching, trampling and crushing underfoot all of the resources of the revolution: and as the toilers, who took the view that freedom of speech as a right as inalienable as freedom of opinion, made no move to hamper them in their odious propaganda, they derived some comfort from this and organised a general assembly-skhod.

It promised to be of the utmost interest. Its organisers were to have raised the following question at it: who among the toilers of Gulyai-Polye are supporters of the Central RADA (and thus of German and Austro-Hungarian militarism, which was spearheading an army of 600,000 men

against the Revolution), and who among them are not? And in the latter instance, under what flag do they line up?

All of the operators racked their brains for arguments, plumbing the depths. They lied without the least sense of shame. 'For 'Mother Ukraine', for her independent government, her prisons, jailers and executioners everything had to perish without resistance... both the Revolution and the freedom and the toilers of town and village who have defended them.

'Otherwise, in the event of resistance,' said these social-chauvinist speakers, 'we will eradicate all of it by force, with the help of allies, our brethren.' (They meant Wilhelm II of Germany and Karl of Austria-Hungary, together with their armies.)

Those who do not resist the powerful armies of our own allies will receive from the German command, and through the Rada, sugar, cloth, footwear which thousands of trains are bringing in their wake. (There was a complete shortage of these items just at that time.)

But for those who resist, there will be no quarter! Their villages and towns will be utterly destroyed by fire; the population will be taken away into captivity and one in ten prisoners will be shot.

And the remainder? For their treachery, the rest will suffer terrible chastisement at the hands of their own brother Ukrainians!

Hearing these pronouncements, I took the floor and asked that all of the speakers belonging to the meeting organisers' party give accurate information in their speeches.

Then I directed some explanatory comments to the citizens there present apropos of the assertions advanced by the advocates of the shameful alliance between the Central Rada and the emperors, and I drew certain conclusions from what the speakers and those who had contradicted them had had to say.

The meeting backfired on the intentions of the people who had organised it and to the detriment of all the notions they had argued and championed at it. By an absolutely overwhelming majority a resolution was passed urging all toilers to support active armed struggle against the Central Rada and the German and Austro-Hungarian armies of counter-revolution.

This was not to the satisfaction of the meeting's organisers. They asked the assembly to specify the flag under which this struggle was to be waged against the Rada and the allies who had 'fraternally' offered them a hand in their endeavour for the wellbeing of the Ukraine.

The assembly acceded to their request. A vote was taken and basically the demonstrators split into three groups, one of which sided with the meeting's organisers which is to say with the Central Rada, while another took the side of the Left SR, Mirgorodsky and the third kept faith with the anarchist-communist peasant movement of Gulyai-Polye .

When an attempt was made to count the support of each group, the faction which had come out on behalf of the left SR Mirgorodsky sided, as also did its leader momentarily, with the supporters of the meeting's organisers.

(It was hard to comprehend Migorodsky's role on this occasion: when an attempt was made to question him about his position, he was able to offer no satisfactory explanation and acknowledged the error of his Jesuitical manoeuvre only after the meeting had been wound up).

However, despite the amalgamation of these two factions, the backers of the Central Rada found themselves absolutely in the minority. The resolution passed by the citizens present at the meeting was ratified by them and supplemented by even more direct attacks on the Rada and the German armies who were marching in step with it.

Then the leader of the Ukrainian chauvinist organisation, the self-styled 'revolutionary socialist', sublieutenant Pavel Semenyuta-Riabko mounted the rostrum and in belligerent tones announced to the toilers:

'No matter! You will rue it some day. But not everybody will be forgiven, especially the anarchists! The time is not far off when our army will enter Gulyai-Polye. We will explain ourselves then. Bear it in mind that our allies, the Germans, are mighty! They will help us to restore order in the country and you will see no more anarchists in these parts!'

These hysterical cries and threats outraged all of the toilers. The anarchist peasants wasted no time in speaking out and announced that they were accepting the challenge. 'But we ask,' one of them said, 'that sublieutenant Semenyuta-Riabko give details as to the German's arrival in Gulyai-Polye.'

Whereupon the requested information was given.

'The Germans will assist the Ukrainian Central Rada in enforcing its laws on the country and in reestablishing order, which means that anarchists will be imprisoned. It is in prison that you will be able to preach your ideas!' shouted the sublieutenant, beside himself.

From the ranks of his listeners some voices cried: 'Down! Away with him!'

Once again the anarchists designated one of their number to announce to one and all that they could now see clearly that the chauvinist organisation was depending upon the arrival in Gulyai-Polye of the German counter-revolutionary armies. With the aid of that brute force, it anticipated 'chastising' the Revolution.

'No—not the Revolution, just the Bolsheviks and anarchists,' rang out one voice from the group of Ukrainian SR chauvinists.

'Well, get this, you socialist gentlemen! We anarchists will respond to your hateful challenge!' declared our group's secretary.

The meeting closed with these words. The toilers, with a sense of indignation at sublieutenant Semenyuta-Riabko's threats, made their own way home, outraged.

His backers surrounded him and encouraged by the laughter of their leaders, mischievously called after the departing toilers... 'Get along home. As for us, we're going to wait for the anarchists' response.'

3 or 4 hours later, on behalf of the anarchist group, I formally put the following question to the Gulyai-Polye Revolutionary Committee.. as defender of the unity and solidarity of revolutionaries, what was its view of the threat made to the anarchists by the Ukrainian chauvinist organisation? Did the committee believe it was to be taken seriously, or not?

The Committee examined the issue that very day and its answer to the group was that it ascribed no significance to the threats.

The chauvinists' organisation it argued, was not a revolutionary organisation and aside from pointless palaver it was not in a position to do the least damage to the work of the Revolution. Nonetheless, the anarchist-communist group did not approve of this attitude and once again stated, in a formal note addressed to the Committee, that it was unthinkable that in an endeavour of unity and equality there should be a place for opinions at odds with the principles of revolutionary solidarity. The note demanded that it issue an appeal to the populace soundly condemning the chauvinists' counter-revolutionary organisation and their threats against the anarchists.

The group announced that if the Revolutionary Committee failed to act, it would find itself compelled to withdraw its members from that Committee and could not any longer support it in any way in the future.



Some of those who belonged to it asked me whether I endorsed the group's demands and whether I would abide by its decision if it recalled its members. When I told them that those demands were justified and that, though not a delegate to the Revolutionary Committee but rather to the Soviet, I would abide by its decision, whatever it might be and would do my best to have it enforced in its entirety. All of the Committee's members unanimously and without discussion resolved to examine our two notes once again and to summon the leaders of the chauvinist organisation in an attempt to heal the rift that had arisen between them and the anarchists.

But by then it was too late.

Our group made it known to the Revolutionary Committee that it was declaring terror against all who might dare, then or in the future, following possible victory for the counter-revolution, to persecute the anarchist ideal or its nameless defenders. The first move in this policy was the execution of sublieutenant Semenyuta-Riabko and this had just been carried out.

In fact, even as this announcement was being made, the leader of the Ukrainian chauvinists had been killed by members of the group. The news of this execution shook the Revolutionary Committee to its very foundations. Its members were dumbstruck, unable either to act or to speak and they seemed utterly stunned, whereas our representatives handled the business in hand with calm. Towards 10.00 am. the next day, a delegation of chauvinists came to the Committee to seek my advice and to ask me to intercede in the conflict between the Ukrainian organisation—they no longer called themselves chauvinists—and the anarchist group.

When I broached this matter later with the members of the Committee, they all refused to consider the affair, declaring that sublieutenant Semenyuta-Riabko, bedazzled by the successes of the Austro-German counter-revolutionary armies, had lost his head, which had prevented him from understanding that the Revolution was not yet definitively beaten and would not forgive any who desired its downfall.

For the chauvinist leader to have threatened the anarchists with the arrival of German troops and with imprisonment had been an act of blatant injustice to the Revolution which almost the entire people defended. The execution of one who had supported the counter-revolution which was drawing near, borne on the bayonets of the German and Austro-Hungarian armies and of the Central Rada's marauders, had been nothing more than an act of defending the revolution.

But it had come too late.

The anarchists ought to have killed that luminary of the counter-revolution in the very instant when he had made his threat against them.

'The leader of the Ukrainian chauvinist organisation being an enemy of the Revolution, our view,' said the Committee members, 'is that it is quite out of order for us to concern ourselves with this incident and to make any mention of it in our minutes.'

By agreement with his organisation and on its behalf, sublieutenant Semenyuta-Riabko had hurled an ignoble gauntlet at the anarchists' heads; it was therefore up to that organisation to settle the affair, to take back the gauntlet and to frame a precise expression of its social and political tenets. Only then might it be admitted on to the Revolutionary Committee and might similar conflicts be averted in the future.'

So the delegation left the Committee and returned to their comrades to report the blame laid at the door of the whole Ukrainian chauvinist organisation.

I have to say that I personally had not approved that response, but had been unable to raise any objection while the delegation was present. It was only after its departure that once again I stated to the members of the Revolutionary Committee that I looked upon them as the expression of

revolutionary unity and solidarity and that, in my view, they could have entered into negotiations with the organisations which asked it to sit in judgement of mistakes by their representatives—mistakes leading to conflicts such as the one we had just sampled with the chauvinists, and that their leader had paid for with his death.

Earlier, at the time of the group's first inquiry regarding the Committee's stance vis à vis the gauntlet thrown down to the anarchists, I had insisted upon the necessity of the Committee's intervening in that dispute. But the bulk of the Committee members had objected, arguing that if the Committee kept out of it, the whole episode would be speedily forgotten by everyone.

I reiterated that now: had the Committee, at the right time, supported my desire to uphold our group's revolutionary dignity as well as its own,—and it was not ignorant of the ties binding the one to the other in the defence and development of the Revolution—then, quite possibly, our group would not have taken the life of the Ukrainian Central Rada's agent.

'It is true that it is now too late to talk about it,' I told my Committee comrades, 'but it is not too late to act and thereby to avert the killings with which the chauvinists might react to this execution and which — let me state it here openly — will unleash terror against all who, out of stupidity, will have become the agents of the dark shadows of the Rada and its allies.'

During this same meeting, the Committee appointed three of its members... Moshe Kalinichenko, Pavel Sokruta and myself... to join the chauvinists and our group in forming a mixed team to look for ways of preventing killings, from whatever quarter they might come.

The chairman of the Prosvita,<sup>1</sup> a certain Dmitrenko a steadfast Social Revolutionary, was asked to represent the chauvinists on this team.

Our group was represented by its secretary, comrade A. Kalashnikov.

Following discussions, it emerged that the Ukrainian organisation was dissociating itself utterly from sublieutenant Semenyuta-Riabko's actions.

Its representative, Dmitrenko, declared that Semenyuta-Riabko's challenge had to be explained in terms of his rough-and ready enthusiasm and his painful attachment to his people. The Gulyai-Polye Ukrainian organisation deplored his actions as contrary to its ideas.

Now, Dmitrenko was not sincere. This declaration of his was nothing more nor less than a political ploy.

We had grasped this and our group's secretary, comrade Kalashnikov retorted that... 'in the threat voiced we detected the desire by the entire chauvinist organisation to lay into the anarchists on account of their tenacious fight against the invasion of the territory by the German and Austro-Hungarian armies and the troops of the Central Rada.

The anarchist group deemed it its duty to eliminate the instigator of this understanding, directed against the anarchists and against their ideas. It killed him and in future stood ready to kill any such malefactors.'

Later I attended a meeting where I asked my comrades to forswear terror, but I was met with a flood of reproaches. Several of them believed they saw in my words an attempts to defend the actions of counter-revolutionaries and were not sparing in their mockery of me.

This effrontery irked me, but the independence of mind which it indicated delighted me: for it gave me a greater sensation of my activity among the younger members' not having been a waste of effort.

---

<sup>1</sup> Prosvita (Light of Hope)—Ukrainian nationalist propaganda agency (P.S.).

In spite of everything, my observations for or against terror furnished the basis for a review of this issue: following a series of meetings and serious discussions among comrades, the group abandoned its initial decision and recorded in its minutes that, as long as the revolution's enemies merely shouted without taking up arms, the projected terrorist actions would not be put into force.

For a long time, our younger members were unwilling to take this resolution in and referring to me they hinted more than once that... 'comrade Makhno sought to turn the most inveterate revolutionaries into counter-revolutionaries. In so doing he dealt a severe blow to the unity of the group,' etc.

However, such was the importance of the moment that desertion from our ranks could not be countenanced. Indeed this was a time when counter-revolution, born of the bayonets of German troops, was clearly gaining an upper hand over the defenders of the Revolution who were by now represented only by a few scattered detachments of Red Guards. Consequently, in a region such as Gulyai-Polye, which could still call upon considerable forces to safeguard the Revolution efforts had to be directed along quite different lines.

With even greater clarity and emphasis, the understanding between the various factions had to be affirmed, along with equality and freedom of opinion: for Gulyai-Polye was then a base where the real defence forces of the Revolution were forming up.

This is why I paid no heed to the naive protestations of my young friends. Looming before me, in all of its ramifications, I saw a much more important issue: how to organise volunteer battalions to fight the Central Rada and its allies, the German and Austro-Hungarian armies, comprising 600,000 men in all.

I felt that the Revolutionary Committee had been negligent in this area and I insisted upon all of the detachments at its disposal in Gulyai-Polye and region being dubbed volunteer battalions and their strength increased to 1500 men.

As I saw it, our anarchist-communist group had to show the way in this as in other matters. Otherwise it would be condemned to be left behind by events. It would drift away from the toilers of the enslaved countryside and like hundreds of other anarchist groups in Russia would be reduced to wielding no influence upon ideas capable of offering guidance to the masses of those who, while believing in the Revolution, had not had time to appreciate its precise import, nor to learn how to defend it against the deviations stamped upon it by the leaders of political socialism.

The group thought upon this and in the organisation of these armed forces, displayed first-class fighting qualities.

In the towns and villages, other groups however were wasting their time on pointless debates like:

'Keeping faith with its principles can an anarchist group set up revolutionary combat units or can it not? Would it not be preferable for it to steer clear of such an undertaking, making do with not preventing its members from participating in it on an individual basis?' To which the Gulyai-Polye peasant group replied with the following exhortation:

'Revolutionary toilers, form volunteer battalions for the welfare of the Revolution! The statist socialists have betrayed it in the Ukraine and are leading the dark forces of foreign countries against it! To smash the reaction's attack, the immense force which the workers represent has to be organised.

Only by setting up volunteer battalions will they triumph over the machinations of their enemies, right and left!’

The Revolutionary Committee and all of the region’s soviets took up our watchword and engaged in active propaganda in its cause.

There were, it is true, and especially in the Ukrainian chauvinist faction, some individuals who opposed it. But by now the discussions were merely and sheerly theoretical: in any event, they no longer hinged upon the bayonets of the German and Austro-Hungarian counter-revolutionary armies and did not take the form of threats directed against opponents of the Central Rada’s criminal policy. That policy was targeted against the toilers of the Ukraine and against those of their gains which were asserting themselves ever more clearly as the Revolution developed and towards which they forged ahead, surmounting the most formidable obstacles raised by their enemies:—on the right, the bourgeoisie, on the left, the statist socialists who strove to capitalise upon the occasion to misrepresent the aims of the Revolution and thereby to bring it completely under their control.

Times were dire indeed. It seemed that all of us, group members and members of the peasant’s and workers’ revolutionary organisations, felt that. And yet a scandal erupted over the trades union of the metalworkers and woodworkers: its members demanded that the group and the Soviet of Peasant and Worker Deputy’s recall comrade Leon Schneider whom they had sent to the Departmental Soviet of Peasant, Worker and Soldier Deputies.

The grounds for this demand were that comrade Leon Schneider was not fulfilling his mandate and that as a result the factories and mills of Gulyai-Polye as well as smithies, locksmiths’ and other workshops were not receiving supplies of iron, cast-iron, coal and other necessary raw materials at all, or were only receiving them very belatedly.

In view of such allegations against one of its office-holders, the group, following agreement with the Soviet of Peasant and Worker Deputies, recalled Leon Schneider so that he might give an account of the reasons why he was being thwarted from performing his mission.

Now, comrade L. Schneider had already had time to succumb to the contagious, chaotic and irresponsible devil-may-care attitude of certain of our urban anarchist comrades. So his reply was that he was unable to return to Gulyai-Polye, being, he claimed, overloaded with work by the departmental Soviet: he invited the group to appoint another representative in his place.

Such an attitude by a member of the anarchist-communist group, so highly regarded by the toilers, prompted us to send him an urgent dispatch demanding that he return immediately to Gulyai-Polye where he would have had to explain himself before the group, the soviet of Peasant and Worker Deputies and the trades union. If he failed to obey, the group would be obliged to dispatch two comrades to fetch him.

He knew that this was no empty threat and that it would shortly be followed up by an execution order. He would be hunted down for having compromised the group in the eyes of the Soviet of Peasant and Worker Deputies and the trades Union and thus, in the eyes of all toilers, and a bullet from a rifle might very well be the conclusion to it all.

Two days after receipt of this laconic telegram, comrade Schneider was back in Gulyai-Polye and making his report to the soviets and to the group. He was stripped of his mandate and returned to the Kerner plant where his post awaited him.

While we were embroiled in the sorting-out of the Leon Schneider case, the Central Rada’s agents and the agents of the German and Austrian armies which they were leading against the Ukrainian revolution, wasted no time.

They got wind of the episode and peddled their own version of it to meetings here, there and everywhere.

Their misrepresentations had to be steadfastly counteracted. We had to go into every village and hamlet, attend all of the meetings organised by these agents of the Central Rada or of General Eichorn, which cost us quite a bit of time and forced us to neglect the short-term aims of our group: the creation of a combat front against the counter-revolution.

## **Chapter Fourteen: Centralising the detachments. Formation of a united front with the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc.**

The pace of events was quickening. The German and Austro-Hungarian armies under the command of General Eichorn, were already drawing near to the town of Katerinoslav: moreover, shells were hurled across the Dniepr from the area of the Kichkas bridge towards the town of Aleksandrovsk which lay 80 versts from Gulyai-Polye .

The Red Guard detachments commanded by General Yegorev, just like the many autonomous detachments which received only weapons and munitions from him and from the leader of the Red reserve armies of 'S. Russia', Belinkeyvich, at their own risk and peril, most often in sectors where there was no enemy presence, were urgently called back from the Crimea towards the Verkhne-Tokmak-Pologi region. Moreover, it could no longer be a question of calling up troops from the echelons as and when required. These had been withdrawn from the front much too prematurely, and this had clearly had an impact on their pugnaciousness. Now they were talking of getting as far away as possible from that front, to branch-lines such as Yessinovataya, or Ilovaysk. In point of fact, two days later, they were moved up to meet the enemy armies which, he said in passing, were still on the right bank of the Dniepr.

A certain number of autonomous detachments and a group of Red Guards from the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc heroically repulsed the enemy's attempts to cross the river. But their capabilities were being curtailed by lack of rest, lack of sleep and also by exhaustion of their ammunition supply. Which gave rise to anxiety in Gulyai-Polye and in the region, and then in all the neighbouring regions.

The agents of the swelling reaction popped up again and became more outspoken in their remarks against the Soviets, against the Revolution and against the toilers who saw in it their own emancipation and strove to contribute by one method or another to its development.

These developments had a depressing effect upon the toilers. In many hamlets and villages, there surfaced that disarray which always appears in the ranks of the masses when they are not informed in time of the position taken up in the fight by their revolutionary vanguard.

The disarray prevailing in the region led to weakness and hesitation in Gulyai-Polye itself. Night and day it was the scene of meetings by the Soviet of Peasant and Worker deputies, the trades union, the Revolutionary Committee and the anarchist group. All of them sought my advice and badgered me to tell them what they should do.

And what could I tell them in a moment of such gravity, except to advise them to get a grip of themselves and to meet the counter-revolution with acts at least as energetic and determined as were their words?

To those in attendance at the extraordinary meeting I stressed the necessity of the immediate issuance of an appeal in the name of the organisations that they represented, giving the toilers

an exact explanation of the current circumstances of the Revolution and what had to be done to rescue it. This appeal was published. It urged the toilers to organise armed resistance to the Central Rada which claimed to be eager to liberate them, and to the German armies which were marching alongside it.

The entire population of the region responded to this vehement exhortation. Everywhere, young folk and their elders poured into their local Soviets and into our very village, to enlist in and to form volunteer battalions without delay. The inhabitants of Gulyai-Polye proper formed a battalion comprised of six companies, each of which was 200–220 men strong.

The Jewish community furnished one company which also made up part of the Gulyai-Polye battalion. Out of its own membership and sympathisers, the anarchist-communist group formed a detachment of some hundreds of men armed with rifles, revolvers and sabres: half of them possessed saddled mounts. This detachment was placed at the disposal of the Revolutionary Committee.

On the prompting of the very highly respected doctor Abraham Isaakovich Loss, the toilers of Gulyai-Polye set up medical teams, makeshift hospitals and divided the various medical-aid duties on the revolutionary front among themselves.

For myself, I paid a 24-hour visit to the headquarters of the reserve Red Armies of 'South Russia', Belinkeyvich; I briefed him as to the current objectives of the Gulyai-Polye Revolutionary Committee, and brought him up to date on the organising of the revolution's defences, an activity which at that point occupied pride of place in the attentions of that Committee and of our anarchist-communist group.

Comrade Belinkeyvich paid the fullest attention to what I had to say and promised to go to Gulyai-Polye with me the very next day to see how he might be of help to the Revolutionary Committee and to our anarchist-communist group. But I did not make this promise. I insisted that he give me his answer immediately: could he supply our volunteers with weapons?

Seeing how impatient I was to resolve this matter as speedily as possible, he journeyed to Gulyai-Polye with me that very day.

Thus he was able to confirm for himself on the spot the accuracy of what I had told him and he promised the Committee that he would approach the appropriate individual immediately, and to report back promptly to it concerning the way in which the high command of the reserve Red Armies might be of help to revolutionary Gulyai-Polye.

Returning to Pologi, I had comrade Belinkeyvich call in at Commune No 1 and steered him out into the fields where the free 'communards' were to be found. He watched them at work, asked them the reasons which had prompted them to espouse that lifestyle and was stirred to the very depths of his soul.

En route from the fields back to the 'communards' refectory for the evening meal, Belinkeyvich shook me by the hand and told me: 'From the very outset, I felt tremendous confidence in you, comrade Makhno, and I must ask you now to send your men this very night to fetch from my headquarters the weapons, rifles and machine-guns required by your Gulyai-Polye battalion.'

This promise delighted me and I immediately told comrade Polonski, commandant of the Gulyai-Polye volunteer battalion, and comrade Marchenko, member of the Revolutionary Committee, by telephone, to go to Pologi without delay, to the headquarters of commander Belinkeyvich, to take delivery of the arms and munitions for shipment to Gulyai-Polye.

As we took our leave of each other, comrade Belinkeyvich and I, we promised to help each other out in our revolutionary undertaking. In the eventuality of a retreat, he undertook to place at the disposal of the 'communards' some reserve echelons so that they might fall back in time.

And so the dark days rolled by.

The next day, along with some gunners, I went to Gulyai-Polye's railway station to inspect what we had been sent by Belinkeyvich's headquarters. There we saw six cannon (four of the French type and two of the Russian model), 3000 rifles, 2 carriage-loads of cartridges and 9 wagonloads of shells for the artillery pieces.

Our delight was indescribable. We wasted no time in removing the most urgently needed equipment to the Revolutionary Committee and shared it among the companies, then we made ready to depart for the front to take on the Central Rada and its allies, the German and Austro-Hungarian emperors.

The appeal issued by the Committee, the Soviet of Peasant and Workers Deputies and the anarchist-communist group, urging the region's toilers to waste no time in forming volunteer battalions, came to the notice of the command of the Red Guards who promptly dispatched a delegate by special train to have talks with me and to discover what resources the Revolutionary Committee of the proud Gulyai-Polye region could call upon and when these troops, moved by the spirit of anarchism, might be dispatched to the front.

I examined this issue with him into the night of 8 April 1918, at the very time when Lenin and Trotsky were in the Kremlin discussing the annihilation of the anarchist groups in Moscow and thereafter in the whole of Russia (by that time they had already lost interest in the Ukraine). The envoy from the commander of the Ekaterinoslav Red Guards was haunted by the notion that these armed detachments were... in keeping with the Brest-Litovsk treaty... going to be pulled out of the front lines of the revolutionary front and moved nearer the Russian frontier, at a time when the hastily cobbled together battalions of Ukrainian toilers had not yet been trained for combat and were falling back on every side. Speaking for myself, I promised him that I would see to it that, from the following morning on, the revolutionary troops would begin to move up to the front.

After his departure I received the news that the Red Guards were also in retreat in the Aleksandrovsk sector. The Aleksandrovsk command begged Gulyai-Polye's volunteer battalions to come to their aid. Having consulted with the Revolutionary Committee and the anarchist-communist group, I dispatched the detachment formed by the group to Aleksandrovsk, as well as a mixed battalion made up of the peasants from the hamlets nearest Aleksandrovsk. The unit dispatched by our group was a cavalry detachment. The Red Guard command had, in fact, virtually no cavalry at its disposal.

Our detachment was soon sent into the Ekaterinoslav combat zone and from there, on my orders, into the Chaplino area. At the same time, the volunteer battalions from Gulyai-Polye, Konsko-Razdorskoye, Shanzharo-Turkenovsk and elsewhere hastily made ready to set out for the front.



## Chapter Fifteen: I am urgently summoned to Yegorov's headquarters. Defeat for our fighting front.

Circumstances could not have been more critical: the Ukrainian chauvinist movement seemed extinct and nothing more was heard of it. Silently, its members obeyed the mass of the populace, doing what was required of them.

Artillery, then infantry, were organised and we thought of joining battle, until it was noticed that the artillery pieces lacked automatic sights.

I immediately telegraphed Belinkevich, asking him for new sights, but no response was forthcoming: that very night the SR agronomist Dmitrenko, together with two young Ukrainian zealots, P. Kovalenko and Mitika Konoplia, had cut the telephone and telegraph lines<sup>1</sup> and thus prevented me from communicating with the Red Guard command. I reported this odious action to all of the peasants. After a few hours, communications were restored and I was passed a message from Belinkevich to the effect that the sights and munitions had to be in Gulyai-Polye in certain wagons: in fact they were all discovered and delivered to the appropriate persons.

During this time there appeared in Gulyai-Polye a proclamation from the chauvinist-socialists explaining the Central Rada's alliance with their German 'brethren' who had come to help the Ukraine's sons to 'free her from the yoke of Katzapi'.

It concluded with an exhortation to the populace, urging it to assist the Central Rada and the "fraternal" German and Austro-Hungarian armies to crush the enemy.

Simultaneously, rumours reached Gulyai-Polye confirming that the German armies were laying waste all towns and villages whose inhabitants opposed their progress and that by contrast they were supplying indispensable items, above all sugar, footwear and cloth to all who rallied to them.

More and more often and more and more loudly one heard: 'And what if it turns out that the Germans really do put villages to the torch? Would they burn Gulyai-Polye? What would we do then with our children and our old people?' And, in the wake of these lamentations, some agent of the Central Rada would let slip the word 'delegation' which would then be taken up and repeated by the inhabitants of Gulyai-Polye, one after another.

The word drew my attention. I called together the members of the Revolutionary Committee, those of the Soviet of Peasant Worker Deputies and the anarchist-communist group and I proposed that an appeal with the following lines at its head be published: 'The traitor's soul and the tyrant's conscience are as black as a winter's night.' Then a rally would be organised to explain to the entire populace the provocative significance of the term 'delegation'.

At the same time I learned, on the one hand, that some supporters of the Central Rada had just turned up in Gulyai-Polye and were trying to peddle the line that, on their way back from

---

<sup>1</sup> This action only became known 4 months later and Dmitrenko was shot.

the external front they had been imprisoned by the Bolsheviks and had just broken loose: and, on the other, that under the supervision of the father of one of these self-styled escapees, Tikhon Byk, our village was preparing to send a delegation to the German command.

So I asked the comrades to call this meeting as speedily as possible and set off in search of Tikhon Byk, from whom I demanded further details of this 'delegation'. For a long time he steadfastly refused, but whenever he realised that it was pointless he told me not to meddle in that matter: 'it's the people's business'. I did not insist and left him, once having told him that for such an act the people itself would wring its neck, his neck and the necks of all who would leap to his defence.

The appeal was published and the meeting summoned: at it everyone agreed to seek an immediate departure for the front. During this gathering, I was brought a telegram from the commander of the Red Guard detachment, Yegorov, urgently summoning me to his headquarters in the Verkhne-Tokmak-Federovka region.

At the same time, Commune No 2, of which I was a member, informed me that about ten sailors belonging to the staff of the reserve Red Armies of 'South Russia' had arrived by car, absolutely drunk and had killed one of its members and that it was vital they be driven out of there without violence. I set off at haste and managed to persuade them that they should quit the commune. Then I made my way to Pologi railway station where I caught the train for Yegorov's headquarters.

Half way there, I was informed that he had fallen back in the direction of Uzovo: so I took the Verkhne-Tokmak-Tsarekonstantinovka branch-line. At Tsarekon-stantinovka, I encountered Belinkeyvich and his reserve armies who were withdrawing from Pologi and had also lost contact with Yegorov's headquarters and did not expect to re-establish it before nightfall. I was upset that I had not been able to reach the headquarters in the desired time and... the thought that, whatever the circumstances might be, I had to be in Gulyai-Polye by the morning of 16 April merely added to my unease. I was about to decide to waste no more time on locating him and to go back to Gulyai-Polye when Belinkeyvich told me: 'If comrade Yegorov has sent for you, you must try to see him before you set off for the front. He has probably decided not to send your battalion into the Chaplino sector in that that sector has already been partially evacuated by our forces.'

I was dumbfounded by this news. I decided to wait until nightfall and until comrade Belinkeyvich had re-established contact with Yegorov's headquarters.

Around 9.00 pm., I sent a telephone message to the headquarters staff in Gulyai-Polye and to the Revolutionary Committee to alert them to the fact that I had been delayed for an indefinite period.

At midnight, I received news from Pologi, via Tsarekonstantinovka, to the effect that our village had been treacherously delivered into the hands of the Germans and to the Central Rada troops marching alongside them.

I placed no credence in this odd titbit, which bore no signature. However at 1.00 am., I telephoned Pologi and asked if indeed it had been they who had sent the telephone message to me. The telephonist's reply was: 'Yes, two young people under arms came into my place and one of them handed me the message which you have received. He refused to append any signature.'

I tried to get through to Gulyai-Polye but I was informed that Gulyai-Polye was not answering.

So I made ready to go there myself, but at that very moment received the news that Yegorov's headquarters were located in Volnovaha, some 45 to 50 versts from Tsarekonstantinovka. I made up my mind to go there: but when I got there, it was to learn that he had already left for Dolia. I

telegraphed: 'Is Yegerov's headquarters to remain in Dolia long?' and received the reply that he had already set off again for Taganrog.

I walked out of the telegraph office and towards the locomotive. At which point the echelon of Belinkevich's headquarters staff arrived at the station and I saw my nephew Toms, son of my elder brother, step out of it; with a distraught look he offered a letter to me.

I quickly tore open the envelope and read the following, dated some days previously: 'Nestor Ivanovich, scarcely had you left Gulyai-Polye than Tikhan Byk left also along with some chauvinists. Two stories are circulating here: some say that they have set off after to you, intending to do you to death in a craven fashion. In view of which, be very careful during your return journey, especially in Pologi railway station. Others speculate that Tikhan Byk has gone in a secret delegation to the German armies. Immediately following his departure, I sent two of our friends to his home. His wife claimed that he had set off to visit relations for a couple of days. Even as I was putting these lines to paper, I have just been informed that a delegation from the Central Rada and the German armies have just turned up in Gulyai-Polye. But it is in hiding for the moment, and not showing itself to the populace. I have taken every step to lay hands on it, but am not sure of success in this. So come back quickly: here, without you, we are all sad and depressed.'

The letter was signed: 'Your faithful B. Veretelnik,' and dated 15 April.

I made to question my nephew about events in Gulyai-Polye but my voice broke and, shutting my eyes, I let myself drop on to a bench, gesturing to him that I did not want to hear a word said. Some minutes after, I boarded my carriage and set off for Tsarekonstantinovka—Pologi Gulyai-Polye.

Following the fall-back by the Red Guard echelons, I was delayed by 3 or 4 hours between Volnovaha and Tsarekonstantinovka. Upon my arrival in the latter township, I received fresh news from Gulyai-Polye ... even more unsettling news at that. I read: "My dear Nestor Ivanovich, on the night of 1st April, on a forged instruction bearing your signature, the anarchists' detachment was recalled from Chaplain and disarmed on route. All our Gulyai-Polye comrades, all the members of the Revolutionary Committee and of the Soviet of Peasant and Worker Deputies were arrested and await surrender to the German military authorities and to the authorities of the Central Rada, for execution. The betrayal was the handiwork of chauvinists A. Volokh, I. Volkov, Ossip Solovey, artillery commander V. Sharovski and others. Three hours before we were arrested, the Jewish company had been designated to mount guard on the garrison. The wretched traitors, by a subterfuge, forced the Jews to perform this ignominious task.

At the moment of arrest, we were all stripped of our weapons and even received some blows from rifle-butts. Some of our people, not yet disarmed, loosed off some shots in reply.

Our friend Aleksis Marchenko was captured by the very leaders of this treason, but he managed to give them the slip. Whereupon a squad of young Jews was sent out to hunt him down. Marchenko replied by firing some gunshots, hurling two or three bombs at them and disappeared. But he was caught 15 versts from Gulyai-Polye by the Jews from the Mezhyrychi (No 4) settlement, brought back to Gulyai-Polye and delivered into the hands of the traitors' headquarters staff.

All of the peasants are crestfallen. Hatred towards the Jews is widespread.

I have given this letter to the sentry Sh... informing him through whom to get it to you. Should you receive it, come quickly, with some detachment, to rescue us.

Your faithful B. Veretelnik

16 April. 9.00 am.

While I read this letter through, Maria Nikiforova's detachment arrived at the station in Tsarekonstantinovka. I briefed her on the events which had just occurred in Gulyai-Polye. She promptly telephoned the commander of a Red Guard detachment, a sailor by the name of Polupanov, who had just then engaged in battle the so-called 'White Guard' invalids from Mariupol. Maria Nikiforova suggested that he fall back to Tsarekonstantinovka so as to join her there in leading an attack against Gulyai-Polye.

The sailor Polupanov's answer was that he could not pull back and he advised her to evacuate the Tsarekonstantinovka-Pologi region as speedily as possible unless she wanted the Germans to cut off her retreat.

But in the interim the sailor Stopanov's detachment showed up, and, a short time later, Petrenka's Siberian detachment, comprising two echelons of cavalry and infantry.

Upon being asked by Maria Nikiforova to return with her to Pologi and thence, under the protection of two armoured vehicles, to Gulyai-Polye, the sailor Spepanov declared that, once he had yoked several wagonloads of fugitives—for whom he was accountable to the commander of the reserve Red Armies of 'South Russia', comrade Belinkeyvich,—to his echelon, he would be continuing his way towards Taganrog. And, to be sure, he promptly set off.

Maria Nikiforova and Petrenko then resolved to return to Pologi and to occupy Gulyai-Polye forcibly in order to release all of the anarchists and other revolutionaries under arrest there and also to lead out of the village, if they so desired, the abused revolutionary armed forces and, at any rate, to carry off the weapons there lest they fall into the German's hands.

While these detachments were preparing to move off, and I was frantically scanning the platform tearing my hair and bitterly regretting having in the first place dispatched the detachment formed by our group to the front, I received a third letter from comrade Veretelnik.

In this one, he told me: 'My dear friend Nestor Ivanovich, the infamous leaders of the treason, terrified by I know what, have released me as well as comrade Gorev, on condition, however, that we do not leave Gulyai-Polye.'

Comrade Gorev and I have availed of this circumstance to organise, in each sotnia, a meeting with the participation of the old peasants. At these gatherings the peasants passed resolutions demanding the immediate release of all arrested individuals and above all of the anarchists, and sent these to the traitor's headquarters. All our comrades were freed.

Numerous young Jewish workers and the entire bourgeoisie, with the exceptions of M. E. Hellbuch and Levy<sup>2</sup> have fled out of a fear of vengeance (however, nobody here would have harmed them, for all our comrades fully understand that the leaders of the treason deliberately cast them in this role so as to be able to orchestrate a pogrom against them thereafter).

The Germans are bearing down on Gulyai-Polye. Our comrades have gone into hiding in groups. The peasants are hastily spiriting away the rifles, machine-guns and munitions and fleeing, some into the fields, some into neighbouring villages.

Some of my friends and I intend to stay in Gulyai-Polye to the bitter end. Maybe we can manage to kill Leon Schneider. When our comrades were arrested at the group's Bureau, he strode in at the head of the haidamaki, tore our banner into shreds, ripping down and tramping upon the portraits of Kropotkin, Bakunin and Sasha Semenota. This despicable act was witnessed by many workers, peasants and peasant women.

---

<sup>2</sup> Both these men, wealthy but honest Jews had always, in their lives, abided by the decisions taken at the skhods-general meetings of the toilers and had always condemned the old regime.

I have not, myself, seen L. Schneider, but I hear it said on every side that he delivered an infamous address to the haidamaki. We shall speak of that again later. Take good care not to fall into the clutches of the Germans. It would be better if you refrained from coming to Gulyai-Polye. You can no longer do anything for us: the Germans have occupied the townships of Orekhovo and Pokrovskoye and will very likely be among us in two or three hours time.

We will meet with you again.

For the time being, be cautious.

Your faithful B. Veretelnik'

16 April, 3.00 pm.

Scarcely had I finished reading this letter than I rushed over to Maria Nikiforova and, together, we scurried towards comrade Petrenko. I read it to them both and told them that, in my opinion, the time was no longer right for us to go to Gulyai-Polye, which must be occupied by the Germans. As for driving them out with our detachments alone, that was not even to be dreamed of and moreover, they would probably not even have let us get that far.

'If it is true,' I said, 'that they have occupied the township of Orekhovo, the likelihood is that they are, even now, bearing down upon Gulyai-Polye and if it is true that the Red Guards have abandoned Chaplino to them and are evacuating Grishino, then already Gulyai-Polye must be behind the German's lines.'

Though comrades Nikiforova and Petnenko had begun by poking fun at me, saying that I was wholly ignorant of their strategies and that I did not know the fighting prowess of their detachments, they nonetheless made haste to turn their locomotives towards Volnovaha: as for Pologi and Gulyai-Polye, they no longer even came into it.

Whenever I asked them: 'Why such haste? Could you have received disquieting news from this sector?', Maria Nikiforova answered that the Germans had occupied Pologi and Verkhne-Tokmak railway station and had surrounded comrade Mokrousov's anarchist detachment on the Verkhne-Tokmak-Berdiansk line.

'If you wish,' she told me, 'climb aboard my carriage. I am about to order my echelon to carry on with its journey towards Volnovaha-Uzovo.' And in a half-whisper and half a smile on her lips she added, as if apologetically: 'You were quite right to say that it was too late for us to make for Gulyai-Polye. All of the routes leading to it are occupied by the Germans.'

However, I declined to fall back with Maria Nikiforova's detachment. I told her that I reckoned I would stay there for the time being, especially as Petrenko's detachment had decided to spend the night there. I hoped to see one of my comrades from Gulyai-Polye arrive during that time. Indeed, the first time I had been told that Gulyai-Polye had been delivered by treachery into the hands of the Germans, I had sent Aleksandr Lepechenko there with the specific task of personally explaining to the 'communards' what direction they should flee in, and had recommended him to flee along with them. As for comrades Gorev, Veretelnik, Marchenko, Polonski, Kalashnikov, Petrovski, Liouty, Sava Makhno, S. Shepel, M. Kalinichenko, P. Sokruta and others, he was to have urged them to clear out of Gulyai-Polye as quickly as possible and to make for the Red front, where they would find me.

During Petrenko's detachment's stopover at Tsarekonstantinovka station, I saw a number of comrades arrive who had stayed in Gulyai-Polye up until the arrival of German and Austro-Hungarian troops as marauders in advance of a detachment from the Ukrainian Central Rada. They gave me an account of all that had happened during the two days which had followed my

departure with tears in their eyes, they related the despicable treachery of our comrade Leon Schneider and told of the Jewish regiment, misled by the traitor's leadership.

They also told me of the entry of the German and Austro-Hungarian armies and of the Central Rada's detachment's entry into our village and of how their agents, Gulyai-Polye citizens, sublieutenants in the pay of the Rada... A. Volokh, I. Volkov, L. Sahnno-Prihodka (SR), Pidoyma and a number of others more insignificant and stupid, such as Ossip Solovey, V. Sharovski (an SR), the agronomist Dmitrenko, had made ready to welcome the executioners of the Revolution, Germans and Austro-Hungarians, in the hope of being able to show them by their deeds that they too knew how to strangle the Revolution and its best features.

These *nec plus ultra* Ukrainian patriots, 'the flower of the population', were ready to ape the example of the German and Austrian soldiery who, leaving behind in their country and prey to hunger and cold their fathers and mothers, wives and children, had come here to kill their fellows; and not content with supporting these criminals (conscious and otherwise) these destroyers of the revolutionary achievement, they sought to do even worse: they stood ready to set out in the van of these assassins and incendiaries to combat the toilers of the Ukraine, to drown them in blood, if only their lords and masters of the moment, come treacherously under cover of the socialist flag, would allow them to keep their sublieutenant's gold epaulettes and their title deeds to the land.

These champions of the occupation of revolutionary territory by enemy armies, these wild-eyed advocates of the toilers' extermination, returned to the counter-revolutionary bands, as they passed through the streets of Gulyai-Polye the machine-guns, some hundreds of rifles and our artillery pieces!

The commander of these bands thanked them for their 'loyalty'. These contemptible eulogists of the idea of occupation, just like all who had, as they had done, prepared the way for the counter-revolutionary regime, did not disguise their delight at this acknowledgement by the mighty.

What a burden of shame!

What thoughts of vengeance it sparked in the soul of revolutionaries! Vengeance on all who trample upon the enslaved, tormented people, crushed politically and socially!.

No more pity for the toilers' enemies! No more mercy for all who would venture to resist our revolutionary activity!

The remainder of my memoirs will demonstrate to the reader how events followed one upon the other at a ferocious rate.

The Anarchist Library  
Anti-Copyright



Nestor Makhno  
The Russian Revolution in the Ukraine  
(March 1917 — April 1918)  
1926

[https://archive.elephanteditions.net/library/  
nestor-makhno-the-russian-revolution-in-the-ukraine](https://archive.elephanteditions.net/library/nestor-makhno-the-russian-revolution-in-the-ukraine)

Translated by Paul Sharkey. Introduction by Alfredo M. Bonanno, translated by Jean Weir.

**[theanarchistlibrary.org](http://theanarchistlibrary.org)**