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Fight Fibs! Fight Inventions!

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June 23, 2009

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Two letters sent to the RCG's paper **Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!** a few years back in response to a disgraceful review of an anarchist pamphlet and their lies on the Makhnovist movement. Neither was published, unsurprisingly.

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than violate the rights of property? A strange position for a “communist” to take.

German talks about “class principles” and a “class line” while defending the Bolshevik dictatorship *over* the Russian workers and peasants. This shows he has no idea what he is talking about. The Red Army was not “defending the fledgling Soviet socialist state,” it was defending the party dictatorship *over* the soviets, defending state capitalism against socialism. He argues that “anarchist politics” are “exposed” as “radical liberalism, with no class content whatsoever.” The opposite is the case. Anarchist opposition to Bolshevik tyranny was based on clear class lines, resisting a new set of “red” bosses lording it over the workers. As the Makhnovists pointed out in their propaganda.

German’s falsification of history (in the best Stalinist fashion) shows that it is Leninism which has no working class content. Once in power, it quickly became the “dictatorship *over* the proletariat” — enforced by the militarised Red Army and secret police and defended to this day by the likes of German. Hence German’s falsifications, lies and distortions — an honest account of anarchism would make his readers question Leninism and its claims to stand for working class liberty and power.

yours in disgust,

Iain

Makhnovists six months before, after the latter had played the key role in defeating Denikin. This Bolshevik created conflict, incidentally, encouraged the Whites under Wrangel to renew their attack (so much for the Red Army “defending” against “imperialist invasion!”). He also complains that the Makhnovist leaflets cannot be considered as “an example of anti-militarism.” This ignores the fact that the Red Army was identical to a capitalist military machine, based on officers appointed from above and used to crush working class resistance to the (new) boss class. Red militarism is still militarism and a threat to the liberty of the masses.

He then states that the Makhnovists were “brigands” and that “they lived off plunder.” Rarely do “brigands” proclaim socio-political ideals and aims, yet the Makhnovists did just that. They proclaimed and implemented free soviets, socialisation and self-management while the Bolsheviks proclaimed and implemented party dictatorship, state control and one-man management. German’s comment is, moreover, deeply ironic, given that the Bolshevik regime “lived off plunder.” They plundered the peasants crops by armed force. They also plundered the workers, stealing both their means of production and the product of their labour (by nationalisation and appointing one-man management with “dictatorial” powers). The Bolsheviks ultimate act of plunder was, of course, stealing the revolution from the Russian masses.

Given this, the Makhnovists appear in a good light. Surrounded by enemies, they often had to supply themselves with what was available (like the Red Army). Yet their relations to the peasantry were excellent (unlikely, if they were “brigands”) and looters were shot (Makhno opposed looting from the start, incidentally). So to assert that the Makhnovists were “brigands” is a lie, pure and simple. Moreover, German’s logic seems strange. Presumably, he would have preferred the Makhnovists to fight the Whites without equipment

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I'm sorry that this letter is so long. Lying takes little space, refuting lies takes much more. I hope that you do not use the length of this letter as an excuse not to print it. After all, you would not want to keep your readers in the same ignorance you claim the anarchist "leadership" imposes on other anarchists, would you? But, looking at "The Anarchist School of Falsification" review, I have my doubts you would have the honesty and revolutionary principles to publish my letter. I hope you will prove me wrong, but I will not hold my breath.

yours in disgust,
Iain McKay

Second Letter

Dear FRFI

I see your falsification of history knows no bounds. German give as references to the assertion that the Makhnovists were pogromists two references. Usually, with references, you provide book titles and page numbers. It is obvious why this was not done by Jimmy German as the references he gives do not support his assertions.

Looking at the first one (unnamed, but which I take as E.H. Carr's "*The Bolshevik Revolution*"), there is no reference to pogroms carried out by the Makhnovists (looking in the index for "Makhno"). Perhaps German could enlighten us with the exact reference he had in mind, if this one is the wrong one? As far as the second one goes, Avrich does **not** mention it in "*The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution*" (he addresses the issue in "*Anarchist Portraits*," concluding such charges are false). So German is exposed as a liar (yet again, — see the unpublished letter I sent to **FRFI** before).

German complains that the Makhnovists calling upon Red Army troops to desert was "an act of war." Yet this call was made in June 1920, after the Bolsheviks had **attacked** the

Then there is the strange inclusion of Proudhon in the diatribe. Yes, anarchists know he was sexist and racist and we all reject these aspects of his ideas. So to mention him suggests that the “reviewer” ran out of ideas and is as irrelevant to a critique of anarchism as mentioning the racism and homophobia of, say, Engels. Or, perhaps, Marxists (like Engels) consider Mexicans “lazy” and support US imperialism against them? Or consider that peoples dominated by other countries should “grateful” that the imperialist nation has “taken the trouble to civilise them” (as Engels did as regards the Germans and Slavs). Or, like Engels, see a positive side to genocide (as “the Austrian Germans and Magyars will be set free and wreck a bloody revenge on the Slav barbarians. The general war which will then break out will ... wipe out all these petty hidebound nations, down to their very names ... [and this war] will result in the disappearance from the face of the earth ... of entire reactionary peoples. And that, too, is a step forward”)

But, then again, for Marxists racism against Slavs is usually not worthy of note. What about Blacks? Well, Marx was of the opinion that “the main stock of [slave] Negroes in Jamaica always consisted of freshly imported barbarians ... [while] the present generation of Negroes in America is a native product, more or less Yankeeified, English speaking, etc., and hence capable of being emancipated.” Obviously, only whites have a valid culture and have the duty to bring up the less fortunate in their own image. Perhaps this explains Marx and Engels support for “progressive” imperialism in so many non-capitalist nations?

But all that is as irrelevant as Proudhon’s racism and sexism. Any serious critique of Marxism would start with the positions held by modern Marxists, not the personal failings of the likes of Marx and Engels. That the reviewer simply attacks the failings of individual anarchists and slanders others shows that he is unable to critique anarchism as a theory and as a movement. If he could, he would not have to swoop to personal attacks, repeat lies and, dare I say, falsify history.

First Letter

Dear FRFI

It seems doubly ironic that you entitled your rant against anarchism “the anarchist school of falsification” (issue no. 174). Firstly, this rant was falsely presented as a review of an anarchist pamphlet and, secondly, the article was itself riddled with falsehoods.

It claims that “most anarchists have little knowledge” of their own history, then talks about Kropotkin and the syndicalist Jouhaux supporting the allies in the First World War. Both these facts are contained in the pamphlet you claim to be reviewing! Kropotkin is on page 19 and page 12 talks about the betrayal of the French CGT leadership. Presumably the pamphlet “falsifies” history by informing its readers the facts you imply we “cloak”? How dishonest.

Then, of course, you fail to mention that while Kropotkin and Jouhaux supported the war, the vast majority of anarchists did not. Malatesta, Berkman, Goldman and Rocker, for example, opposed Kropotkin’s position and took a “no war but the class war” line. Perhaps your reviewer did not mention this fact because he was felt guilty that while the bulk of the pre-war Marxist movement supported their governments in the war, almost all anarchists did not? The dishonesty is, yet again, clear.

Moreover, given that the reviewer is keen to present Marxist anti-imperialist credentials, it seems strange that he goes not note Marx’s opinion, at the start of the Franco-Prussian war, that the “French need a thrashing,” in part because Prussia’s “domination over the French on the world stage would mean likewise the dominance of our theory over that of Proudhon, etc.” Significantly, it was **Bakunin** who raised the idea of turning the imperialist war into a revolutionary war just, as before, he raised the banner of national liberation against imperialist domination while Marx and Engels opposed many such movements.

Space excludes replying to the many other distortions and downright lies in the “review”. Firstly, the article “Against War and Capitalism” does not “deny the existence of imperialism,” as claimed. Rather, it attacks the ideology of “anti-imperialism,” which is not the same thing. Similarly, its comment on “anti-imperialists” supporting the Taliban is obviously a reference to the war against Afghanistan in 2002, not to the war in the 1980s (where “anti-imperialists” like the RCG supported the “progressive” imperialism of the USSR). For the reviewer to state “This is a lie!” is simply to lie himself. As for the Spanish revolution, well, there can be no anarchists who do not know that the CNT leadership joined the government — all they have to do is read the numerous anarchist works explaining why this happened and why it was a mistake.

However, the greatest lie is the author’s assertion that the Makhnovists “joined the counter-revolutionary White and imperialist armies” and “carried out pogroms against Jewish communities.” Making such a claim is, truly, to falsify history. Little wonder there is no attempt to provide such serious assertions with any sort of evidence — for there is none.

Did the Makhnovists join the Whites? Far from it. Marxist Victor Serge noted the “*strenuous calumnies put out by the Communist Party*” against Makhno “*which went so far as to accuse him of signing pacts with the Whites at the very moment when he was engaged in a life-and-death struggle against them.*” (**Memoirs of a Revolutionary**). Some things never change.

As for being pogromists, this claim is just as false. The Makhnovists contained numerous Jewish anarchists as well as volunteer fighters from the local Jewish colonies (indeed, there was an exclusively Jewish artillery battery and infantry detachment). After the war, Jewish anarchists like Alexander Berkman, Emma Goldman, Sholem Schwartzbard, Voline, Senya Fleshin, and Mollie Steimer did not criticise Makhno as an anti-Semite and defended him against such claims. Significantly, Schwartzbard assassinated the Ukrainian Nationalist

leader Petliura in 1926 because he considered him responsible for pogroms during the civil war. He shot Petliura the day after he, Makhno and Berkman had seen him at a Russian restaurant in Paris.

Turning to Voline, an active participant in the Makhnovists (when not under arrest by the Bolsheviks), we find him quoting the eminent Jewish historian M. Tcherikover about the question of the Makhnovists and anti-Semitism. An expert on these matters, Tcherikover stated “it is undeniable that, of all these armies, including the Red Army, the Makhnovists behaved best with regard the civil population in general and the Jewish population in particular.” Moreover, “do not speak of pogroms alleged to have been organised by Makhno himself. That is a slander or an error. Nothing of the sort occurred. As for the Makhnovist Army ... [n]ot once have I been able to prove the existence of a Makhnovist unit at the place a pogrom against the Jews took place. Consequently, the pogroms in question could not have been the work of the Makhnovists.” (Voline, **The Unknown Revolution**)

The lie that the Makhnovists were pogromists is common in Marxist circles. Why? Let me quote another Jewish anarchist active in the movement (and, like so many others, shot by the Bolsheviks). Talking to Berkman, Yossif the Emigrant stated that “*Nestor is merciless toward those guilty of Jew-baiting. Most of you have read his numerous proclamations against pogroms, and you know how severely he punishes such things.*” He stressed that any stories of atrocities and pogroms committed by the Makhnovists were “*lies wilfully spread by the Bolsheviks*” who “*hate Nestor worse than they do Wrangel.*” For Yossif, “*Makhno represents the real spirit of October.*” (**The Bolshevik Myth**) Makhno represented the dream of the Russian revolution (soviet democracy, socialism, workers’ control) while the Bolsheviks represented its nightmare (party dictatorship, state capitalism, controlled workers). No wonder Marxists, then and now, hate and slander him.