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Anarchist overprints by Makhno

Robert Tkhorzhevsky

1990

Among the more than five thousand types of money and bonds that were issued on the territory of Ukraine, during the years of the civil war and military intervention, banknotes with overprints made by anarchists are known of. There are different opinions about the authenticity of these overprints till this time among our bonists.

Back in the early 1920s, there was a discussion about the issue of paper banknotes among anarchists. In the 1922 edition of the journal *Caucasian Collector*, the question was directly posed: “Did N. Makhno’s bonds exist?” In his memoirs, published in the collection *Revolution and Civil War*, K. Gerasimenko, for example, argued that “Makhno, through Volin, put into practice everything that he found necessary, up to and including the printing of banknotes.” They were not found, although rumors persisted about their release.

In the 60s, interest in Makhno’s banknotes increased again. This was due to the fact that in a fairly complete catalog of domestic

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banknotes by N. Kardakov, anarchist overprints were described in the section of Soviet issues as rare and in circulation.

The Alma-Ata collector I. N. Koltyshev even cites overprints by the anarchist N. Makhno. Five-ruble banknotes issued by the bank of Rostov-on-Don in 1918 are stamped with red printing ink in four lines:

1 Rev. Ins. Army Ukr.
50 rub.
Huliaipole
1919 N. Makhno

There are overprints in which the word “insurgents” is omitted. Overprints are known on banknotes in denominations of one ruble of Tsarist Russia, where, in addition to this text, the head of a man in a Kubanka (presumably Makhno) is depicted. Overprints affixed to paper banknotes in denominations of one and five rubles increased the value of the money by 10 times.

In addition to the above — mercantile ones, there are also curious anarchist overprints. For example, this: “Hey, chum, stop worrying! The smart money is on Makhno!” By the way, I. Koltyshev cites a similar overprint in his study: “as made without the knowledge of Makhno by individuals from the command staff and only for the sake of curiosity.”

However, the Bonists are interested in the question — are the anarchist overprints from Southern Ukraine authentic or fake?

As you know, there are no surviving archival documents that would shed light on this issue. In the declaration adopted by the Makhnovists in October 1919, there is some information about the attitude towards money. One of the former theoreticians of anarchism, I. Teper, wrote: “On the question of how funds will and should be collected for the implementation of the general tasks of construction (meaning the “free society of anarchists.” — R.T.), the declaration answers: “Free and voluntary self-taxation of the

working people”, i.e. “money remains old, new declaration does not recommend printing”.

Until recently, it was believed that Makhno did not print his money “as it was unnecessary”, because their source — the confiscation of valuables — “was inexhaustible.” But if the anarchists did not print them, they could overprint old banknotes for mercantile reasons. They were aware of the overprints on the bonds of the Freedom Loan, on other banknotes and surrogates that were in circulation at that time in Ukraine.

In late September — early November 1919, the Makhnovists, having captured a huge region of Southern Ukraine, allowed the circulation of all banknotes: Soviet, Denikin (Don), Petliur, Kerenok, Tsarist and other local ones.

An eyewitness from Katerynoslav M. Gutman writes: “Makhno did not cancel any money and took indemnity from both Soviet and Don. However, the Revolutionary Military Soviet apparently preferred to keep the Don money, because only Soviet money was distributed to the population.”

The issues of Rostov-on-Don were popularly called the “Don”, banknotes that had the right to circulate throughout the Don region. Just like in Soviet Russia all issues of the Central Rada, the Hetmanate and the Directory were called “Ukrainian” or issues of various Caucasian governments were called “Caucasian”, etc.

The fact that the Makhnovists kept them at home suggests that it was this money that they decided to stamp. Moreover, as you know, they are the note that was most often overprinted by anarchists.

In Katerynoslav there were large stocks of confiscated “Don”, the value of which fell daily due to inflation. This apparently forced the anarchists to resort to an already proven method — to stamp them, raising the cost by 10 times, and obliging the population to accept it at this rate. Already known to us, I. Teper wrote that “financial specialist Joseph Emigrant [...] carried out foreign exchange transactions with such success that the rapid fall of the Soviet cur-

rency did not at all affect the state of the cash desk.” This once again convinces us that he had to resort at critical moments to the stamping of the “Don” in order to improve Makhno’s financial situation.

The text of the overprint given by I. Koltyshev is quite plausible. In various newspapers, leaflets, documents, the Makhnovists called themselves “Revolutionary Insurgents” or the “Revolutionary Insurgent Army of Ukraine.”

Why is the village of Huliaipole named in the overprints, and not another city captured by the Makhnovists? The answer is simple. Makhno toyed with the idea of creating “autonomy”, and within it a “free order” with the capital in the village of Huliaipole.

Based on the above, we can conclude: the anarchists did not print money, since the banknotes themselves were not found. K. Gerasimenko’s statement that “Makhno, through Volin, put into practice everything [...] up to and including the printing of banknotes” should be understood as stamping overprints on old banknotes. Consequently, overprints of a mercantile nature took place, they are originals, and not Bonist fakes. Of course, it cannot be denied that there are fakes among them.

As for the curious overprints, it is difficult to determine who fabricated them. It is possible that they were made during the civil war. At the end of 1919, some units of the Red Army, emerging from the White Guard encirclement, joined the anarchist army. It is quite possible that, having familiarized themselves with the “orders” in Makhnovia, some of the commanders of these units, in protest, affixed quatrains unflattering to Makhno on banknotes, signs borrowed from Ukrainian folklore.