

The Lost Dreams of Ukraine

Tony Sheather

2022

December 2022: I wrote this article some months ago. Since that time the Ukrainian forces have rolled back the Russian invasion in the south and the east of the country but Putin's madness continues. Now the Winter is settling in and the Russian barrage of missile and drone attacks have traumatised cities including Kiev and the nation's electricity system has been devastated. Millions of people are suffering as electricity, heating and running water have been damaged. Civilian lives are taken every day and massacres continue. The Mayor of Kiev, Vitali Klitschko, symbolically a former world boxing champion, has warned of an "apocalypse" and the likelihood that the city could be evacuated for the surrounding villages. The war continues to mutilate the youth of both Ukraine and Russia.

One hundred years after the devastation wreaked at the end of World War One, eight decades after the invasion of the Nazis, the horror of war and invasion has again visited Ukraine. Once anarchist ideals disappeared in the bloody Civil War following the 1917 Russian revolution, now the modern-day Tsar slaughters the innocents as he seeks the new imperial empire.

As the flower of Western manhood disappeared in the bloody trenches of France and Belgium, in Eastern Europe the victorious Bolsheviks waged war with the White armies, intent on restoring tsarist autocracy.

Today, June 27th., the Amstor shopping mall in the industrial city of Kremenchuk is shattered as Ukrainian civilians die in defence of a representative democracy, new innocents trapped by a former KGB officer who rules Russia like his former masters, oligarchic autocracy replacing the bureaucratic totalitarianism of the USSR.

This is a conflict between nation- states. While the Russian elite is the aggressor in Putin's megalomaniac desire to create the Empire of old, Ukraine is a conservative representative democracy supported by Western representative democratic capitalism. Zelensky is no Putin nor is he a libertarian wanting to usher in a brave new world. His affinity with the world elites has admittedly intensified after the Russian invasion.

The history of Ukraine has been a bloody and often tormented one. The invasion of Crimea in 2014 has been until now the most recent in a series of conflicts reflecting both divisions within this country of almost fifty million people and war with invaders, enemies outside.

Foreshadowing the tragedy unfolding now, Ukraine declared its independence from Greater Russia as the Bolsheviks gained power in late 1917. Nestor Makhno became the spirit of the new crusade to liberate the poorest people of society from the multiple threats of imperialistic, nationalist, reactionary and bureaucratic forces.

The mainstream history books steadfastly ignore the “*The Third Revolution*” (Bookchin’s four-volume description of popular movements beyond the bourgeois and autocratic) that occurred throughout the centuries. The Makhno movement in Ukraine between 1918 and 1921 has been lost yet the horrors of today resonate in many ways with those conflicts a century ago.

The courage and tragedy of the Makhnovist Movement was described by the anarchist Peter Arshinov, a participant in this forgotten revolution, in 1921, first published in Germany in 1923. However, Arshinov’s “*History of the Makhnovist Movement*” was not published in English until 1974.

In the turmoil of the war, this desperate attempt to introduce social revolution confronted opponents on all sides, the Austro-Hungarian sponsored Hetman, the national bourgeois government and military described as Petliurism, tsarist forces led by Deniken then Wrangel and the saddest of all, Trotsky’s Red Army. “(T)he movement lost from 200 to 300,000 of the best sons of the people...with a heroism rare in human history...hold(ing) high the black flag of oppressed humanity.” (Arshinov, 235). The fellow anarchist writer Voline states that the movement lost “at least nine tenths of its best militants” (Voline, 695).

It is rare that an event is remembered with the name of its most famous protagonist. Generals may be seen as critical to a victory but this is the distortion of a history dedicated to hierarchy, one conspicuous also in the “achievements” of monarchs. For one man, Nestor Makhno, to be assigned the nomenclature of a movement of people embracing their own destiny is tribute to his charisma and military prowess while an awkward reflection of personal difference and aspiration.

Yet as Arshinov observes even if Makhno had not come to prominence someone else would have emerged. The Russian anarchist and author Voline who translated this book into German and was later to write his own reflections on “*The Unknown Revolutions*” of Kronstadt and Ukraine, describes ‘the fortuitous’ character of the term ‘Makhnovshchina’, “the movement would have existed without Makhno” (Preface, 26).

Makhno was undoubtedly a courageous soldier and his magnetism drew many of Ukraine’s poorest to the dreams of liberation and equality. Born in Gulyai-Polye in Southern Ukraine, raised by his mother after his father’s death when he was a baby, he worked as a shepherd from seven years of age. While at school, he worked as a farmhand then after leaving school at 12, in a foundry.

Throwing himself into anarchist politics and activism after the 1905 revolution, he experienced imprisonment as a youth, immersing himself in language, literature, history and mathematics. The extent of these accomplishments is extolled by Arshinov within these confines yet criticised as limited within the wide sweep of social revolution.

On return to his home he organised the workers into the first soviet. His plans were to liberate southern Ukraine from Austrian and German tyranny as well as the grasp of collaborators and the local landlords or bourgeoisie. He formed partisan groups of horsemen that moved rapidly and surprised the enemy with sudden and devastating attacks.

Peter Arshinov eulogises Makhno’s military skills. The youth who embraced anarchism in prison and who rejected Kropotkin’s call to support the Allies in the imperialistic European war (World War One), the young man who created workers’ unions and associations of peasants

in 1917, now became in 1919 “a completely new and transformed individual... as leader of the revolutionary insurrection” (218).

While “undoubtedly gifted with great military talent” Arshinov detected flaws in the revolutionary (218–223). He observes a certain carelessness in Makhno’s personality that he ascribed to his lack of knowledge of political theory and history, even an intoxication with victory. He believed that this contributed to the Makhnovist’s failure to prepare a Ukrainian-wide defence in 1919 after the initial defeat of the monarchists (162, 223).

Nonetheless, he passionately repudiates the Bolshevik description of the Makhnovists as “pitiless assassins.” His assertion that the partisans were “victims of combats” initiated by the Communists is evident, the comment “war is war; there are always victims on both sides” is obvious if a tragic commentary on an era when millions were dying for delusion on both Western and Eastern Fronts.

His claim that the revolutionaries behaved with “tact, self-restraint and revolutionary honour” in fraternising with Red Army soldiers after battle, “not one of the soldiers ...taken prisoner... was made to suffer” is observed to be in stark contrast to the enemy’s treatment of the revolutionaries “(who) were invariably shot on the spot”. Makhno’s decision to summarily execute the messenger, Ivan Mikhailov, from the reactionary Wrangel, sits uneasily with this integrity (166,174).

Arshinov’s account was restricted by the circumstances of constant warfare and harassment and we are told by Voline in the preface that he lost his manuscripts and precious documents four times. Yet there is still a vibrancy that rings with conviction.

Voline asks the question “Can the reader have confidence in the author...(i)s the author sufficiently impartial...? He ponders the motivation of critics of the Makhnovshchina, from “political considerations” to motivation by a “sensationalist theme”, “money” and “a journalistic mania” (16).

Voline introduces his personal involvement in the Makhnovist movement for six months as evidence of the veracity of his own reflections. He presents Arshinov’s more intimate knowledge of the movement over two years as critical to a more thorough depiction of a revolutionary force almost totally composed of workers and peasants involved in constant warfare during which 90 percent of the most able soldiers were killed (Arshinov, Voline preface, 17).

He acknowledges that this was neither a time nor place for theorists, observing that Arshinov’s background as a metalworker and an activist involved in the entirety of the movement gave greater immediacy and credibility than his own. As a former Bolshevik disillusioned with the Bolsheviks after the failure of the 1905 uprising, as a man imprisoned by Tsarism for the shooting in 1907 of Vasilenko, the anti-worker railroad head at Aleksandrovska, then again after escape and exile with a youthful Makhno between 1911 and 1917, this self-educated anarchist was a passionate voice.

Peter Arshinov lived and breathed the movement from early 1919 to 1921 as the director of educational and cultural matters, editing the newspaper “The Road to Freedom”. Impartial in the even-handed mediocrity of “objectivity”, no. Passionately biased as a participant in the life and death battles of the time, absolutely. While the existing anarchist movements played no part in the rise of the Ukrainian revolution, Arshinov observes, “(t)he very essence of the Makhnovshchina glowed with the light of anarchism and unintentionally drew anarchism to itself.”(239)

Arshinov too acknowledges the impact of the loss of crucial documents and details in his preface. Nonetheless, he highlights the urgency of describing the critical aspects and principles

of this unique revolutionary experience before the defeat of this radical social experiment erases its character, courage and aspirations.

Voline extolls Arshinov's depiction of the Bolsheviks as a ruling caste, divorced from the realities of the workers and peasants, thrust by political ambition to create their dictatorship, to claim the state and all its functions in the name but not the will or spirit of the proletariat. Arshinov discerns the psychological nature of Lenin as "the most perfect and most powerful personification" of the Bolshevik caste, its dedication to the "violent elimination of all other wills, the absolute destruction of all individuality." (76) The commands of Trotsky in 1919 condemning participation in the Makhnovist Congress as "high treason" and the Makhnovists as "kulaks" (rich peasants) mirror the arrogance and dictatorial nature of the new regime (Arshinov 127, Voline 592).

Arshinov describes the victories and defeats that he witnessed around him in graphic and tragic detail. The ultimate failure of the revolution was perhaps inevitable given the outnumbering of the supporters of radical transformation by the hostile armies around them. Brief, uneasy alliances with the Bolsheviks were undertaken in 1919 and 1920 but each time destined for tragedy and betrayal as the statist forces attacked three times. Makhno was vilified on all sides as a bandit, a traitor. Voline inveighs against these perceptions both here in the preface and in his later tome "*The Unknown Revolution*". (Arshinov 20, Voline 592).

It is extraordinary that any possibility existed to put into practice the creation of free soviets based on self-management principles yet this was begun in the heart of the revolution in Gulyai-Polye in 1920. The weaker influence of the Communist Party in the Ukraine as well as the enduring memory and spirit of Vol'nitsa celebrating the Zaporozh'e Cossacks from earlier centuries are cited by the author as inspiring a greater passion for independence than in Greater Russia (Arshinov, 50).

The creation of a Revolutionary Congress with delegates from 72 districts was to coordinate the activities of an organic movement. A five-person Revolutionary Council was appointed by the first Congress to address crucial issues of coordination. The ironic nature of surviving documents may reflect the sense of humour, here undoubtedly black, of Makhno himself. More likely it was the broad expression of assurance that emerged from independent assertions where hierarchy was defied.

Education was instituted with ideas similar to those of the Spanish anarchist Francisco Ferrer, the teachers those villagers who had read widely. While efforts to assist the non-literate majority of the peasants were a priority, these Ukrainian social radicals studied the history of the French Revolution as recorded by the influential anarcho-communist Peter Kropotkin, the theory and practice of anarchism and socialism, political economy, the Russian Revolution itself (180–184). The role of the theatre was embraced. It was an astonishing act of heroism to seek such life and enlightenment in the very ferment of civil war, with imminent betrayal and likely death.

Army hierarchy is surely one of the contradictions of libertarian organisations yet it is sometimes assumed as a necessary exception as argued by the late longterm anarcho-communist Murray Bookchin. He asserted that the necessity of "(w)ar anarchism"... required troops to accept a stern measure of military discipline." (Volume 3, 317) In response to criticism from urban anarchists of the time he wonders "how they expected Makhno's force to fight successfully in strictly a libertarian manner".

However, within these constraints, the Makhnovist movement's principles of voluntary enlistment, election of officers by soldiers, self-discipline guidelines drawn up by insurgent com-

missions and approved by general assemblies of the different military units are astonishingly democratic for a traditionally rigid and authoritarian institution. These principles reflected the direct election of delegates for the Congress from general assemblies at villages, factories and workshops (Voline, 595).

The contrast a hundred years later with traditional military hierarchy as well as peacetime Ukrainian conscription for young men is marked. Martial law was declared with the Russian invasion making military service compulsory for men between 18 and 60. All nation states mirror the limitations of their inflexible vision.

Voline's real name was Vsevolod Mikhailovich Eichenbaum, affirming anarcho-syndicalist Rudolf Rocker's assertion in the foreword to *"The Unknown Revolution"*: "It is much easier to think and speak of him as Voline"! (9) Voline came from a privileged background, both his parents were doctors and he and his brother enjoyed childhood instruction in languages from governesses. Nonetheless, having joined the Social Revolutionaries in 1905 he soon became victim to similar exile, imprisonment and threat of death as Makhno and Arshinov. Fluent in French and German as well as his native Russian he was an erudite anarchist from 1911 to his death in 1945.

He kept his promise in the preface to Arshinov's book to write about the Makhnovshchina "in my own way, in my own time"(19) with *"Ukraine 2018-21"* comprising Part 11 of Book 111 entitled *"Struggles for the Real Social Revolution"*, the final section of his lengthy work published two years after his death in 1947.

He introduces his final narrative describing his "quandary" that the "scope, duration and above all the moral and revolutionary importance" of the Ukrainian Revolution warranted a discussion five times the hundred pages devoted in the previous account of the Kronstadt Revolt (Book 111, Part 1) but with limited resources he could not do this. He makes clear that his account is heavily reliant on Arshinov's chronicle. (In this translation, Arshinov becomes Archinov. I will use the original spelling).

Voline, with the benefit of time and distance, in France is able to offer a more discerning even balanced insight into the advantage and disadvantages of the Makhnovist movement, particularly the latter.

He lauds the complete independence of the movement, the "free, federative coordination of "a vast, freely organised ...social movement" with its "healthy and advanced ideological influence" the "incomparable... valour of the revolutionary peasant army, Makhno's "organisational, strategic and military genius" (570). He stresses the role of the Revolutionary Military Council created at the Second Congress as an executive body not an authoritarian one reflecting the needs and concerns of the free region occupied by the spirit and practice of free communism (577). Here the two primary observers are as one.

He identifies disadvantages together with Arshinov including the near-impossibility of creating peaceful and constructive works in a time of continual warfare, the constant shortage of arms, the absence of a vital workers' movement to sustain the fighters. He queries the naivite ("a certain casualness") displayed by the revolutionaries in trusting the Bolsheviks (571).

In believing that the Makhnovshchina lacked "libertarian intellectual forces" within their ranks he again concurs with Arshinov. However, the latter's condemnation of the Russian anarchists for passivity and detachment, even arrogance in connection with the Ukrainian rebels is queried by Voline in the preface to the earlier book, stating that the anarchists' position varied from sceptical to neutral or favourable. He believes that Arshinov's "statement and explanations are inadequate...and should be elaborated and developed" (27)

Voline goes further than Arshinov and even more so Bookchin in detecting “the evil mentality... always and inevitably affecting...an army, of whatever kind it may be” (571). He reiterates his conviction in the essay’s final chapter which Voline believes is “the most important and suggestive of my book” (710). Here he maintains that even a free and popular army composed of volunteers embracing a noble cause “is by its very nature a danger” particularly as it becomes permanent and loses connection with the healthy world of labor (703).

He also probes more deeply the flaws and defects within Makhno himself, perceiving “serious weaknesses of character and education” beyond “libertarian ardour” and the military realm that “diminished the scope and moral significance” of the movement” (571). He acknowledges “a semblance of veracity” within the damning and slanderous assaults of the Bolsheviks. After affirming Arshinov’s reflections on the man’s lack of theoretical knowledge, necessary to broaden and deepen the movement, he asserts that “we must complete what Arshinov has barely hinted in mentioning Makhno’s ‘heedlessness’” (705).

He condemns the revolutionary leader’s abuse of alcohol and particularly when drunk “odious activities (even)... orgies in which women were forced to participate.” (705) He observes “the despotism, the absurd pranks, the dictatorial antics of a warrior chief” that at times “strangely substituted” his customary “calm reflection, perspicacity, personal dignity and self-control.”

Both Voline and Arshinov comment upon the clique of warrior chiefs who surrounded Makhno, their elite contempt for and detachment from the ordinary peasants. Voline describes the “serous resistance” that developed opposing such “‘deviations’” while Arshinov, cited by the former, extolled the “revolutionary mass” as possessing the “truth and health” of the movement, not the chief, commander or elite” (705).

It seems odd that Voline then describes these destructive even criminal behaviours as “nothing more than a series of digressions” that the “evil could only be a localised wound” unable to infect the entire organism of “a vast and conscious popular movement.” (706–7)

Certainly the virulent attacks of the Red Army exaggerated the failings of this threat to their domination of Ukraine. It seems clear that less principled groups did adopt the name and insignia of the Makhnovshchina and the Bolsheviks were happy to smear the libertarian movement’s reputation.

In the tragic light of Nazi influence in Ukraine during World War Two, even contemporary society, it is a revelation to witness the documents and references affirming acceptance, indeed inclusion, of Jewish people within the Makhovist ideals and practice despite accusations of anti-Semitism by opposing forces.

Arshinov devotes one of the twelve chapters of his book to the question of nationalism specifically the attitudes of the revolutionary movement to Jewish people. He cites documents proclaiming the brotherhood of the free movement that contradict the fiction of anti-Semitism created by their many enemies. Quoting one such pamphlet at some length illustrates the passion of these beliefs but also the general tenor of Makhnovist documents on all topics included in his narrative.

“On the clear and splendid foundation of the revolution appeared indelible dark blots caused by the parched blood of poor Jewish martyrs...who continue to be innocent victims of the criminal reaction, of the class struggle...”

‘Peasants, workers and insurgents! You know that the workers of all nationalities-Russians, Jews, Poles, Germans, Armenians-are equally imprisoned in the abyss of poverty!’

'You know that thousands of Jewish girls, daughters of the people, are sold and dishonoured, are sold and dishonoured by capital, the same as women of other nationalities.

You know how many honest and valiant revolutionary Jewish fighters have given their lives for freedom in Russia during our whole revolutionary period..." (Workers, Peasant and Insurgents for the Oppressed, against the Oppressors... Always, signed Batko Makhno and others, Arshinov, 213–4).

The summary execution of a soldier who knew Makhno, who had fought against Denikin, "a person who was in general decent" for a violently anti-Semitic sign, shows the tragedy of excess, however nobly motivated (Arshinov, 211–12).

Voline describes the active role of Jews within the movement, within the army as well as the movement's Education and Propaganda Commission. He indicated that the army included a "battery composed entirely of Jewish artillerymen and a Jewish infantry unit." (698)

Perhaps the most telling observation is the verbatim testimony of Jewish research scholar, Mr. Tcherikover, shared with Voline.

Neither a revolutionary nor anarchist, while condemning the reprehensible acts common to all armies including the Makhnovshchina given the evil impulses generated in the atmosphere of war, Tcherikover stressed that the complaints by civilians, notably those of Jewish background, against the revolutionary Ukrainians were negligible in comparison to other armies. This included the Red Army. His own meticulous research could find no truth in the various programs allegedly committed by Makhno and his supporters (Voline, 697–700).

This sense of fraternity and opposition to discrimination contrasts favourably with the influence of extreme nationalists even Neo-Nazis in the modern Ukrainian state. The seeds of fascism were laid during German occupation during World War Two, fostered by the authoritarian decades within the USSR, brought into the twenty-first century by the relative poverty of a still developing nation, twisted by the egregious influence of the oligarchs.

Zelensky is Jewish but Ukraine's history has been stained with the blood of victims of his background. The genocide committed within the Babyn Yar ravine during World War Two saw up to 100,000 people murdered by the Nazis with Ukrainian and Polish collaborators (The Holocaust in Ukraine, Holocaust Museum, United States Memorial). The massacre of 34,000 Jews on the 29th and 30th of September 1941 at Babyn Yar known as the "Holocaust by Bullets" was the prelude to the estimated slaughter of one and a half million people of Jewish descent (Ibid). Revered freedom fighter Roman Shukhevych as well as Yaroslav Stetsko were collaborators deeply involved in this slaughter (US Jewish publication "*Forward*").

Chilling reminders of the contemporary influence of extreme right-wing groups and ideology are evident in the erection of statues to supposed heroes such as Shukhevych and Stetsko as well as the election of members of the racist Svoboda, previously known as the Social National Party of Ukraine, to Ukraine's parliament. Within the courageous ranks of the volunteer battalions presently fighting against Putin's invasion there are avowedly anti-Semitic and white supremacist groups such as the Azov Battalion who fought Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine in 2014 (Allan Ripp, 2022).

The pervasive influence of oligarchs in the Russian state since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 has been well documented by authors such as Catherine Belton's "*Putin's People: How the KGB took back Russia and took on the West*" in 2020 and David Hoffman's earlier "*The Oligarchs: Wealth and Power in the new Russia*" (2011). Ukrainian economic and political life has also been

deformed through elitist manipulation by antisocial personalities. Zelensky's ironic response to a question about his integrity, implying that the oligarchs control everyone, all are tainted, is a haunting reflection of the billionaire oligarchs in Russia. The man elected to erase corruption acknowledges the enormous difficulty of the task.

While the passing of anti-oligarchic legislation by Zelensky in 2021 was a step in a positive direction and their seeming present withdrawal from the public sphere is acknowledged by correspondents such as Isobel Koshiw and political insiders such as Mykyta Poturyaev, the real truth lies in the future. For Ukraine the country's existence is the overwhelming emergency, its future shape unknown (The Guardian, *How the war has robbed Ukraine's oligarchs of political influence*, July 23). It can be said that power, ever -pragmatic, never voluntarily relinquishes its hold.

Arshinov's passionate loyalty to the Ukrainian cause and equal denunciation of the Bolsheviks is contradicted by a sadly ironical sequel. Disillusioned by the lack of action and organisation of the anarchists he rejoined the Bolshevik cause in 1931, returning to Russia where he was killed in the Stalinist purges of 1937... as a supporter of anarchism.

The cynical "tribute" offered by noted anarchist Max Nettlau that he was never an anarchist, more an "anarchist terrorist" even opportunist, is rejected as harsh by British anarchist Nicholas Walter. Walter cites his courage and devotion of 20 years to the libertarian cause, his vital account of the Makhnovshchina as a survivor (British preface to Arshinov, 11-12).

Bookchin sympathises with Arshinov's "bitterness" following denunciations from "almost the entire anarchist establishment-from Errico Malatesta to Alexander Berkman" in the face of Arshinov's conviction that any successful movement needed a coordinated centre and a coherent programme. Is this the increasingly disillusioned Bookchin speaking close to death when he in turn denigrates such anarchist luminaries for speaking from "the basically individualistic core of their ideology"? (*The Third Revolution*, Vol.3, 318)

Perhaps, but Bookchin's essay "*Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism, an Unbridgeable Chasm*" in 1995 is strikingly similar to Arshinov's chapter "The Makhnovshchina and Anarchism" (pp.233-244) when both were still anarchists.

Arshinov observes "the unclear anarchist theory of individual freedom" drawing vivid contrast between the two perceptions:

"Active people with determined wills and well-developed revolutionary instincts understand the anarchist idea of individual freedom as an idea of anarchist relations towards all other individuals, as an idea of the continual struggle for the anarchist freedom of the masses.

But those who do not know the passion of the revolution, who are most concerned with the manifestations of their 'I', understand this idea in their own fashion.

Whenever the question of practical anarchist organisation or the question of organisation with a serious intent is posed, they hang on to the anarchist theory of individual liberty and, using this as a basis, oppose all organisation and escape from all responsibility" (238).

These reflections may remind the reader of Voline's comments in the preface of Arshinov's book regarding the relationship between Russian anarchists and the Makhnovshchina. Voline responds in his own tome to Arshinov's perception of them as "indecisive and passive" by in-

dicating that Makhno's visit came after "the brutal repression of the Anarchists" two months earlier in April, 1918 (556).

His earlier description of the Anarchists' letter to the Bolsheviks condemning the attacks on the sailors of Kronstadt as "conciliatory, vague and even ambiguous" as "naive and (in) vain" may encourage perceptions similar to Arshinov's views. However, Voline's observation that "the last vestiges of the Anarchist movement disappeared in 1921" surely reveals the impotence of a vanquished group as much as ideological purity or intellectual indulgence (524). Prominent anarcho-communists Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, both signatories to the letter, were exiled from Russia.

Arshinov indicates the participation of Ukrainian anarchists within Gulyai-Polye in the Makhovist movement, notably active in the cultural and educational areas. Voline, who had left Petrograd to support libertarian activists in Ukraine, was one of the militants to come from "Nabat" the Confederation of Anarchist organisations of the Ukraine, described by the author as "the most active and effective of all the anarchist organisations in Russia" (241).

Lessons on violence, military hierarchy, terrorism, zealotry may be found throughout the history of nation states, even within libertarian ideals. The use of terrorism particularly assassination by anarchists such as Arshinov in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was a desperate act condemned by many anarchists as counter-productive and a distortion of the true nature of this philosophy, however just the ideal.

The insightful "*You Can't Blow up a Social Relationship, The Anarchist case against Terrorism*" written by a Brisbane social anarchist group still articulates the essence of a philosophy where consistency between means and ends is inherent (Libertarian Socialist Group, 1978). It also mirrored the movement urged many years earlier by celebrated anarcho-communists such as Kropotkin and Malatesta away from individual acts of terror.

Needless to say, terrorism is undoubtedly at its most horrific when manifested by the state as shown now in Putin's war. The exploitation of the normal soldier whatever the state or ideology he purportedly represents is apparent in the brave testimony of Russian paratrooper Pavel Filatyev in his memoirs ZOV.

He makes graphic the desperation and confusion of the men in Putin's army, the incompetence of the generals and their strategies, the poor nature of their supplies and weapons. Putin's decision in late August to add 137,000 more men as cannon fodder, replacements for the dead (estimates vary from 15,000 to 42,000), drawn from rural youth not the political or cultural cities and towns, illustrate the failure of his ambitions as well as his indifference to the suffering of even his own people.

There is a sensitivity in Voline's reflections and observations that is lacking in the writing of Arshinov. This may be the distance of place and time afforded Voline with Arshinov writing in the throes of battle, the former in Nazi-occupied France but with some opportunity to seek family nurture and fraternal support. It may also be that Voline "was a genial and intelligent man with mild manners, courteous and thoughtful" in the description of Rocker whereas Arshinov was a proletarian activist, a man who had assassinated an enemy of the people and spent many more years in prison. Their social backgrounds and orientation, the metalworker and the intellectual, fostered different temperaments.

Voline's quiet intervention in the summary trial of a priest accused of betraying forty Makhnovist supporters to the Denikinist reactionaries, "Enough comrade", I said quietly, "After all he was

not a torturer” did not save the man. It did show a compassion, not possible for those outraged, yet necessary for living a philosophy where fraternity and empathy replace law and constitution.

His depiction of this event is vivid and evocative as is that of a regional congress held in Alexandrovsk in 1919. The passionate exchanges and essential democracy of the delegates rings out a century later in eras of dreary and detached parliamentary debate (pp.633–48). He recalls personalities, conversations and speeches in stirring detail.

Perhaps it is a literal footnote in this powerful liberatory exposition of over seven hundred pages that most transcends the conflict of ideologies described. It evokes the humanity needed to find a society where the horrors described no longer exist.

“At nightfall I myself went slowly on horseback and a little to the rear of my comrades over this Cavalry of the Denikist regiments. I shall never forget the fantastic spectacle of those hundreds of human bodies, savagely cut down in their prime, lying under the starry sky, isolated or piled in heaps along the road, and in infinitely and strange and varied positions, undressed to their underwear or even naked, covered with dust and blood, but themselves bloodless and greenish in the starlight. Many of them lacked arms, others were horribly mutilated, some had no heads, some were split into two almost separate halves by terrible sabre blows. From time to time, I got down from my horse, bent anxiously over those mute and immobile bodies, which were already stiff, as if I hoped to penetrate an impossible mystery.” This is what all of us would now be if they had won,” I thought.” Is it Fate? Luck? Justice?” The next day the local peasants buried all this debris in a vast common grave beside the road.” (Voline, 618–9).

I think of the equally young and indoctrinated Russian men dying today in Ukraine. Those who did not have the maturity, insight or emotional resources of the 34 year-old paratrooper, Pavel Filatyev.

The importance of education both intellectual and social is critical in forming one’s own independent character within all forms of libertarian or revolutionary situations. The Makhnovist military organisation may be perceived by Bookchin as “the most libertarian you can get...” Nonetheless, while libertarian in aspiration, representative and hierarchical elements persisted purveying the dangerous seduction, “we select our leaders, we assume, accept leadership”, an historical shadow inherent in even the most democratic of militia or social movements.

We live today in a different world where nuclear, biological, chemical weapons diminish the role of this most hierarchical of arrangements. Retired Australian general and military strategist Mike Ryan’s observation that certain plans in the Ukrainian Russia war (21/7/2022) ...were “soldier- expensive” is surely the ultimate in human alienation, evidence that “modern” does not necessarily denote human progress. Bourgeois capitalism in the form of the US and Western European powers sees the armaments manufacturers in an ecstasy, an estimated 10 billion dollars’ worth of weapons sent to Ukraine from the United States alone. General Ryan’s proclamation “A just war: West has moral obligation to help defeat Russia” (July 19) is grist for the mill of elites and mandarins everywhere.

In a world bereft of philosophical reflection and radical praxis, the chilling yet naïve liberalism of Fukuyama’s 1992 “*The End of History and The Last Man*” gained wide popularity. Its influence persists. Bookchin’s belief that freedom, self-consciousness and cooperation must transcend the comfortable lap and resting place of capitalism, the seduction of liberal compromise and conser-

vative reassurance inherent in bourgeois democracy, has been a passionate voice crying in the new wilderness (Bookchin, *The Philosophy of Social Ecology*, 1996, 158).

The doubtful virtues and limitations of these traditional philosophies are discerned yet epitomised by the Australian thinker Stan Grant. Grant is a highly respected and erudite Australian and influential international journalist who writes and broadcasts for the national public broadcaster the ABC. His professional success and integrity as a First Nations man and his position as Professor of Global Studies at Brisbane's Griffith University are nonetheless at odds with his role as a Senior Fellow of the conservative Australian Institute for Strategic Defence think tank and lobby group. Indeed the social status afforded even the most critical academic or mainstream political voice is itself a subversion of radical insight.

His essay "*As war rages in Ukraine...where is liberalism -and what does it stand for?*" (July 24) is one that probes the heart of Western philosophy and political thought. Grant asks this very question "Is Liberalism a question without an answer?" As a (representative) democrat and liberal he wrestles with the chequered history of this philosophy, fearing a contemporary world where the battle is not between democracy and autocracy but the growing autocracy within (representative) democracy.

Humour leavens the discussion with "Robert Frost's telling quip "A liberal is someone too broadminded to take his own side in an argument". He cites existentialist Camus as the essence of redeemed liberalism striving for courageous rebellion yet moderation. Incisive minds but what lessons in revolutionary transformation do those who read them learn?

Does Fukuyama's most recent work "*Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment*" (2018), while redeeming passion and recognition from the rationality of yesteryear, equally represent – and condemn – liberal thought as the universal answer to human concerns? For the turmoil of minority or broader social protest threatens Fukuyama's tidy liberal order. In more compassionate and inclusive vein, is this Grant's anxiety?

It is a tragic if inspiring irony that the ideals and practices of a peasant army one hundred years ago in the trauma of war, flawed as these may sometimes have been, depict a more accurate and powerful portrait of a society dedicated to true justice, equality and freedom than all the manicured or well-meaning theses and professorial manifestations in the decades since that time. More than the myopic and trite manifestos wedded to inequality and the destruction of personal dreams offered by ambitious political hacks and their military lackeys today.

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Tony Sheather
The Lost Dreams of Ukraine
2022

theanarchistlibrary.org