Far-left agrarianist peasant-centric discourse

Makhnovist movement

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Left and far-left forces dominated the Ukrainian political space. After the February Revolution of 1917, N. Makhno expanded his activities in the south of Ukraine, which turned into a powerful peasant movement. At first, N. Makhno and his movement did not have their own political program. He was strongly influenced by anarchist ideas, but during the revolution an independent ideological search developed in N. Makhno his own system of views, a kind of symbiosis of anarchism, socialism and peasant pragmatism. N. Makhno understood that the correct slogans and practices for solving the agrarian issue would allow his political force to gain the support of the general peasantry. And although he considered himself an anarchist, he took the position of the Socialist-Revolutionary socialization of the land, because the land must belong to those who cultivate it. Unlike the Socialist-Revolutionaries, who proclaimed that the agrarian reform should be decided on a legitimate basis by the Constituent Assembly, Makhno argued that the peasants themselves should resolve the issue of land and proclaim it universal property without waiting for the decision of the "revolutionary government".[1] The propaganda of this idea was received with enthusiasm by the peasantry. At congresses and assemblies, resolutions were passed on the transfer of land to the working population without redemption and the inalienable right of the working peasantry to declare landed, monastic and state lands public property. N. Makhno destroyed land documents and called for the free distribution of land to the peasants, which won their ardent support.

N. Makhno advocated the creation of communes, which he considered the highest form of social justice. Those who did not want to go to the commune could remain individual masters, but without the use of hired labour. Instead, the Bolsheviks, who at times were allies of Makhno, insisted on a communist version of solution of the agrarian issue. In an attempt to divide the peasantry, they divided it into the poor (supporters of the proletariat) and the kulaks (supporters of the bourgeoisie). The Makhnovists denied such a division and, on the contrary, focused on a "cohesive" labour union.

The general principles of agrarian policy were decided at congresses of Soviets of Peasants, Workers, and Insurgents. The resolution on the agrarian question, adopted on February 15, 1919,

[1] Махно Н. Русская революция на Украине (от марта 1917 г. по апрель 1918 год). Париж. Б-ка Махновцев: Федерация анархо-комунист. групп Северной Америки и Канады. 1929. Кн. 1. 1929. С. 53–57.

proposed to solve the agrarian problem on an all-Ukrainian scale on the following grounds: "All land in favour of socialism and the struggle against the bourgeoisie must pass into the hands of the working peasantry. Based on the principle that "no man's land" can be used only by those who cultivate it, the land should be used by the working peasantry of Ukraine free of charge according to the equal labour norm, i.e. it should provide the consumer norm on the basis of own labour".[2]

Seeing the negative attitude of the peasantry to the Bolshevik policy in the countryside, the Makhnovists in 1919 called for the repeal of the Decree on the nationalization of land. They declared that all land confiscated from private owners should not come into the possession of the state, but into the possession and disposal of working peasants, who on the ground had to decide for themselves how to dispose of the land.[3] As can be seen, Makhno's agrarian policy was largely based on the Socialist-Revolutionary theory of socialization. An important difference with the Socialist-Revolutionary approach was that the Makhnovists introduced into it a certain anarchic element, considered it legitimate for the peasants to actually redistribute the land, n e waiting for certain orders or legal grounds from the state. This position brought N. Makhno great popularity and support among the peasants.

Regarding the political system that N. Makhno intended to create. In our opinion, it is necessary to pay special attention to his appeals and declarations, which often had a "powerless and anarcho-communist" character and actually implemented projects of government building, which claim the formation of certain elements of state structures. N. Makhno called on the population to start building a new life on anarchic, powerless principles. At the same time, realizing that the Soviets were popular among the peasants, he relied on their formation. Councils and land committees were formed on the ground and began to function as bodies of revolutionary power.

At the end of 1918, the Makhnovists won the "Free District" in southern Ukraine, which was independent of any government. In this territory N. Makhno made an attempt to create his own political entity, an "anarchist republic".[4]

The political ideal of the Makhnovists was a society in which coercive state power was replaced by a system of public power, which was to stop the construction of a new bureaucratic system. Power, based on local self-government and growing from it down to the mountain through congresses of Soviets, is the main principle of Makhnov's concept of a "free Soviet system". These councils were to become a kind of "socio-economic organizations" regulating production and social relations.[5] It is significant that the construction of local self-government bodies, like that of the SRs, was based on the "labour principle", i.e., only the working class had the right to elect and be elected to government bodies. The Military Revolutionary Council was a permanent body of power. There were also general congresses of peasants, workers and insurgents of the "Free District".

N. Makhno adhered to left-wing political pluralism. The principle of the political strategy of the Makhnovist movement, beginning in 1919, was the platform of the "united revolutionary

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[2] Нестор Махно. Крестьянское движение на Украине. 1918–1921. Документы иматериалы. [ред.-упоряд. В. Данилов, Т. Шанин]. Москва. (РОССПЭН). 2006. С. 90.

[3] Жбанова К. Земельна політика Нестора Махна (1917–1921 рр.). *Сіверянський літопис*. 2013. № 4–6. С. 99.

[4] Чоп В.М., Лиман І.І. Нащадки запорожців: Махновський рух у Північному Приазов'ї (1918–1921 рр.). Мелітополь. Видавничий будинок Мелітопольської міської друкарні. 2019. С. 5.

[5] Савченко В.А. Нестор Махно. Харків. Фоліо, 2019. С. 55.

front", the union of "Soviet" parties. In addition to the anarchists (whose ideas were declared) there were organizations of the Left Socialist Revolutionaries, Mensheviks and Bolsheviks. In general, N. Makhno adequately assessed the real influence of political parties on the peasant masses. His detachments consisted mainly of non-partisan peasants, who primarily sought land and complete independence from power and freedom of action. Unfamiliar with the theory of ideological anarchism, the peasant insurgents defended their own vision of a just system, which in some ways coincided with the declarations of anarcho-communism.

In the autumn of 1919, Makhno became disillusioned with the allies-Bolsheviks, who declared a monopoly on the revolution for their party and embodied the anti-peasant policy of the "dictatorship of the proletariat". He put forward the idea of a "third social revolution" (after the first, the February (bourgeois) and the second, the October (communist) revolution. Its tasks were: the struggle against both the communist and the White Guard authorities and the development of self-government on the basis of non-partisan "free Soviets",[6] The Makhnovists also declared the need to protect the countryside from exploitation and enslavement by the city. Makhno himself argued that cities were an anachronism in the lives of free people and were therefore doomed. He believed that the power that spread from the city was as hostile to the peasants as the power of the state that exploited their labour.[7]

N. Makhno and the peasant insurgents considered persons of the "bourgeois class" as well as "Soviet commissars, members of punitive detachments, and emergency commissions" to be enemies of the working people.[8] Modern researchers V. Verstyuk and V. Volkovynsky reduce the essence of the ideology of the Makhnovist movement to the peasantry's search for a "third way" in the revolution.[9] The order that emerged in the territory controlled by N. Makhno was a real alternative to both the Bolshevik (Communism) and White Guard (Capitalism) authorities – and aimed at protecting the interests of working peasants.

The peasants of southern Ukraine massively supported the slogans of N. Makhno and the anarchists because most other political forces advocated organized and sanctioned by state bodies transformations in the agrarian and socio-political spheres. Instead, the Makhnovists advocated their immediate implementation by the peasants themselves, which gained widespread support among the masses. The peasant insurgents defended their own interests in a just society, which in some ways coincided with certain principles of the doctrine of anarchism. The "free district" seemed to anarchist ideologues of the movement and peasant insurgents not only the ideal of the social order, but also, in a way, the practice of order in the territories occupied by the insurgents. The researcher of Makhnovism V. Chop notes that its ideology synthesized the ideas of theoretical anarchism, folk worldview and Zaporizhzhia traditions.[10]

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[6] Нестор Иванович Махно: Воспоминания, материалы и документы. сост. В.Ф. Верстюк. Київ : Дзвін. 1991. С. 156–163

[7] Грицак Я.Й. Нариси історії України: формування модерної української нації XIX–XX ст. [навч.посібник]. Київ. Генеза. 1996. С. 149.

[8] Нестор Иванович Махно: Воспоминания, материалы и документы. сост. В.Ф. Верстюк. Київ : Дзвін. 1991. С. 154–155.

[9] Чоп В.М. Махновський рух в Україні 1917–1921 рр.: проблеми ідеології, суспільного та військового устрою : автореф. дис. … кандидата історичних наук. Запоріжжя, 2002. С. 5.

[10] Чоп В.М. Союз і змова: обставини підписання і розриву військово-політичної угоди РПАУ /махновців/ та УНР (вересень 1919 р.). Наукові праці історичного факультету Запорізького державного університету. Запоріжжя : Просвіта. 2005. Вип. XIX. С. 206.

The phenomenon of Makhnovism was best reflected in the following discourses: "socialization of the land", "comrades peasants, working population", "social revolution", "kingdom of freedom and equality", "anarchic commune", "labour and capital", "for exploited against exploiters", "Decide your own destiny", "life without parties and without state political power", "freely elected workers 'and peasants' councils", "away from the White Guards", "for free councils without communists", "away from the commune", "the real Soviet system".

Thus, the social base of Makhnovism was the Ukrainian peasantry. It was in the Makhnovist movement that the peasantry proved to be the subject of real politics. His socio-economic program reflected the peculiarities of the peasant mentality associated with free life and management of their own land, based on the traditions of the Ukrainian Cossacks. Therefore, the main requirements were: free peasant land use and elected councils as self-governing bodies without state intervention, i.e. the implementation of the slogan "land and freedom" in the form of a free labour community.

The Makhnovists declared a decisive clash between the idea of a free, powerless organization (they believed that this idea was already accepted by large masses of Ukraine) and the idea of political power (monarchical, communist or bourgeois-republican). In the end, this struggle ended in victory for the Bolsheviks, who embodied the idea of a strong state. At the same time, a kind of peasant republic, the so-called "Free District", was not the embodiment of anarchist ideals of statelessness, and the socio-political practice of the Makhnovist movement gave rise to a quasi-state formation with its own system of government and political program. The ideas of anarchism about a stateless, powerless, free society did not correspond to the realities of life.

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