

Nestor Makhno in the Russian civil war

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To my children
Iain, Saffron, and Jonquil

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Preface

Until the appearance of Michael Palij's book in 1976, the role of Nestor Makhno in the events of the Russian civil war was almost unknown. His ideas and activities are still anathema in the Soviet Union, the work on him in his own country in the 1920s known only to a few specialists; his ideology has but a small following in Western Europe and the United States; his main area of operations, the Ukraine, is virtually unknown in the West among the general public; and the history of his times has been largely written in terms of the winners rather than the losers, even where the latter helped decide the outcome.

This book has three main aims: to place Makhno, and the movement he led, historically where they belong - in the context of a civil war and a conflict of ideas, neither of which is finished. With this in mind, the book has been divided schematically, so that the many questions only indirectly connected with military events can be adequately discussed and easily referred to. In this, the work is complementary to that of Palij, which seeks primarily to place Makhno and the Makhno movement in their Ukrainian context. It is very much the author's hope that his work will be of interest outwith academic and left-wing political circles.

It will be clear from the book that the author has some sympathy with Makhno and his ideals, but he trusts that this has not led to gross distortion or untruth.

23 February 1979 M.M.

(1) EVENTS DIRECTLY CONCERNING NESTOR MAKHNO

Date	Event
14/27.10.1889	Birth of Nestor Makhno.
1896-1902	Nestor at school.
1906	He joins local anarchist-communist group.
August 1908	Arrest of Makhno and others.
1910	Their trial by court martial, Katerynoslav.
2/15.3.1917	Makhno and Arshinov released in Moscow.
24.3/6.4.1917	Makhno back in Hulyai Pole.
29.3/11.4.1917	Foundations of Hulyai Pole Peasant Union laid.
Early June 1917	Makhno leads successful strike, Hulyai Pole.
11/24-16/29.6.1917	1st Provincial Peasant Congress, Katerynoslav.
August 1917	Hulyai Pole group letter to Kropotkin.
28.8/10.9.1917	Regiment disarmed at Orikhiv.
11/24-16/29.6.1917	1st Provincial Peasant Congress, Katerynoslav.
27.12.1917/9.1.1918	Sixteen Cossack trains try to break through at Olexandrivske.
1/14.1.1918	Makhno helps to restore Soviet power, Olexandrivske.
15.4.1918	Hulyai Pole betrayed to Central Powers.
End April 1918	Taganrog conference of Hulyai Pole anarchists.
4.5.1918	Makhno leaves Rostov for Tsaritsyn.
2 or 3.6.1918	Makhno leaves Saratov for Moscow.
29.6.1918	Makhno leaves Moscow for the Ukraine.
4.7.1918	Makhno makes first contacts with peasants, from Rozhdestvenka.
July 1918	Schus takes refuge in forest after defeat.
28.9.1918	First brief occupation of Hulyai Pole.
5.10.1918	Battle of Dibrivki.
12-16.11.1918	Founding Conference of Nabat, Kursk.
27.11.1918	Permanent occupation of Hulyai Pole.
26.12.1918	Bolshevik and insurgent forces under Makhno attack Katerynoslav.
29.12.1918	Nationalists retake Katerynoslav.
3.1.1919	Front unit delegate congress, Polohy.
23.1.1919	1st regional congress, Velyka Mykhailivka.
26.1.1919	Chubenko-Dybenko agreement, Nyzhnyodniprovske.
12.2.1919	2nd regional congress, Hulyai Pole.
5.4.1919	Makhno advance to Kuteinykove: Shkuro counter-attack.
2-7.4.1919	Nabat congress, Yelyzavethrad.
10.4.1919	3rd regional congress, Hulyai Pole.
29.4.1919	Antonov-Ovseyenko at Hulyai Pole.
April 1919	Arshinov arrives at Hulyai Pole.
April 1919	Rosa Luxemburg commune starts again.
7.5.1919	Kamenev at Hulyai Pole.
12.5.1919	Gorkaya incident.

(2) MORE GENERAL EVENTS CONCERNING THE UKRAINE

Date	Event
July 1921	Release of anarchist hunger-strikers, Moscow.

Introduction

In the complicated history of the Russian Revolutions from 1917 to 1921, much of what has been written has concentrated on the events in the twin capitals, Petrograd and Moscow. There is also a considerable literature on the general course of the civil war throughout the territories of the former Russian Empire, but, in contrast to the detailed works on important movements in the capitals, little has been written on significant events outside them. There are two main reasons for this: firstly, attention has tended to be lavished on the politics and policies of the triumphant Bolsheviks. Secondly, the constituent parts of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union have never been well known abroad-the everyday description, still, of the Soviet Union as Russia shows that this habit persists.

These two factors have helped to obscure from western view the history and geography of the Ukraine, although it has a population larger than most European countries. During the period 1917-21, the Ukraine was central to few but Ukrainians, whether in their own country or in exile, yet it played a vital part in the history of the revolutions, even more in that of the civil war which followed.

The geographical position of the south-east Ukraine goes a long way to explain its strategic importance. Vital railway lines cross the area from west to east, and the main line from central Russia to the Caucasus passes through the east of the region. Much of the civil war was fought along the railways. Herein lies the importance and the legend of the armoured trains, individually named, steaming up and down, striking terror into the hearts of all for miles around, although in practice this awe lasted only while the train was nearby, for, when it departed, the enemy would re-emerge from the neighbouring villages.

The Ukraine had been very sparsely populated until Catherine the Great annexed it from the Turks in 1787. The name given to the new acquisition, later to be the provinces of Katerynoslav, Tavria, and Kherson, was New Russia. The area had the ill luck, along with the Caucasus, to be the last of the Russian Empire to be enserfed, in 1796. Catherine started, and Paul continued, a policy of colonisation by foreigners, especially Germans, as well as by Russians. Under Catherine seventy-five thousand foreigners came in, being given four million acres and advanced nearly six million roubles, of which one third was a gift. Most settled in New Russia or the provinces of Samara and Saratov.

Because of the shortage of labour, the authorities turned a blind eye to unofficial Russian colonists. The soil, it turned out, was very fertile, and the nobles lucky enough to get grants there found it ideal for grain crops, especially wheat. Thus the area has long been one of the granaries of the Russian state. The incredible figure of 99.9 per cent of serfs were on barschina, under which they were obliged to work the land, as of old, and not allowed to commute this service for money (obrok). By contrast, in the central industrial districts only 41 per cent of serfs were on compulsory field work. The reason was simple: the soil was poorer, labour more plentiful, and, in these circumstances, the owners could make more profit out of their serfs by demanding cash rather than labour.

The first half of the nineteenth century therefore saw a boom in commercial production by landlords in New Russia and also in Little Russia to its north, but not in the older established, more populous and less fertile provinces of the right or western bank of the river Dnieper. The chief crops were spring wheat and summer barley, sent for export through Odessa, a trade which greatly contributed to the growth of that city to be the third largest in the Empire at the time of the 1897 census. Whereas Katerynoslav province devoted five-sixths of its land to export crops, that of Kiyiv used just over half to grow rye, the staple food of the peasants. This was both cause and effect of the greater number of small peasant holdings in Kiyiv province.

The gap in prosperity was widening towards the end of the century, chiefly because of the introduction of machinery, brought in by forward-looking landlords as much to increase acreage as to improve efficiency. This development was especially marked in Tavria and Kherson, Berdyansk being the site of Grieves and Co., the largest manufacturer of threshing machines in the Empire and one of the largest in Europe.

The coming of the industrial revolution in the last quarter of the century only heightened the economic importance of the area. At the end of the 1860s an enterprising Welshman named Hughes had found coal to the east of the agricultural area and founded Yuzovka, now Donetsk. Other mines were opened up in rapid succession, giving birth to the industrial area of the Donbas, still of the first importance in the Soviet Union. Further, with the opening of a railway line linking the iron centre of Kryvy Rih, immediately to the west of the Dnieper bend, with the Donbas, the production of pig iron surged ahead. By 1913 Kryvy Rih was producing three quarters of the Empire's ore, while the centres in and around the Donbas — Luhansk, Kharkiv, Katerynoslav — were producing two thirds of the pig iron.

Not surprisingly, the towns of New Russia grew fast. Katerynoslav (now Dnipropetrovske), founded by Catherine the Great and named after her, had not prospered initially. By 1861 its population was still under 20,000, yet between 1863 and 1914 it had the second fastest growth rate in the Empire. At the time of the 1897 census the figure was 112,000, by 1914 this had shot up to 211,000. Amongst its factories were the Gantke metallurgical works and the Bryansk locomotive and heavy engineering works. After Kharkiv, it was the second industrial city of the Ukraine.

The concentration of agriculture, communications and industry in a relatively small area explain why the contenders in the civil war were both desperate to take control of south-east Ukraine, and so sensitive to any thing or person who might disturb or upset that control.

The settlement of Hulyai Pole in the province of Katerynoslav (now in that of Zaporizhya) was founded about 1720 by migrants from the west Ukraine, reinforced by Cossacks and their families after Catherine put an end to the Zaporozhian Sich. It could best be described as a market town, a centre for agriculture rather than industry, but too large, with a population between twenty and thirty thousand at the turn of the century, to be called a village. It stretched, a long, thin place, for several miles along both banks of the river Haichur, about 55 miles from the district centre, Olexandriyske, to the west, slightly more from Katerynoslav to the north-west. It was the centre for a volost (roughly, a parish) with two churches, a synagogue, three schools, a hospital, two agricultural machine factories, two flour mills, and many artisan workshops. Its fairs brought merchants from as far as the provinces of Kharkiv and Kursk. It became more accessible to the outside world with the opening of a branch off the main Katerynoslav-Donbas railway line, from Synelnykove junction to the Azov Sea port of Berdyansk, more so with the start of a southern Donbas line from Olexandriyske to Volnovakha junction. The two crossed at Polohy, not far south

of Hulyai Pole. Since the station was built five miles from the town, we can infer that it was to carry goods rather than people.

ZAPORCZHIAN SICH

The Zaporczhian Sich holds more than passing interest in this story. It was a series of all-male communities founded on the Khortytsya Islands on the Dnieper near Olexandrivske immediately to the south of a wild stretch of river stretching almost to Katerynoslav, containing no less than nine rapids. The Sich was a byword for absolute self-government, living off plunder, mainly at the expense of the Turkish communities of the Azov Sea, the Crimea, and the northern Black Sea coast. Since Makhno's followers held similar attitudes to central government, it has been suggested that these owed something to Sich traditions. One nationalist writer, no friend of Makhno or his ideology, stated that

Its [Hulyai Pole's] inhabitants are mostly descendants of the old Cossack times, who have down to the present preserved the true Zaporczhian traditions.¹

To press further an interesting but speculative comparison would be frustrating rather than rewarding. However, there was a protest by 600 peasants against *enserfdom* in 1817, and considerable activity during the first revolution in 1905. Meetings were held, attended by local intelligentsia, workers and peasants; agitators from Olexandrivske, Katerynoslav and the Donbas were active. A punishment detachment of Don Cossacks was sent in and set about restoring order. Even at this time, there was little nationalist activity.

MAKHNO'S EARLY LIFE

Nestor Ivanovich Mikhnenko, later Makhno, was born on 27 October 1889 at the village of Shagarova on the outskirts of Hulyai Pole

His father, an ex-serf of the landlord Shabelsky who had land at Shagarova, continued in service with him after 1861, transferring at some point to become coachman for Kerner, a rich Hulyai Pole merchant who owned one of the agricultural machine shops, one of the flour mills, a big store, and 1350 acres of land, which he rented out to German colonists. On two future occasions Makhno would try to settle accounts with Kerner.

His father died when Makhno was less than a year old, and Nestor had no memories of him. The mother was left with four young sons, Omelyan the eldest, then Sava or Hryhory, with Nestor the youngest. The hut was a poor one, with no hens or pigs, and it must have been a struggle to bring up the family. From the age of seven to thirteen Nestor attended the 2nd Hulyai Pole primary school in winter. In the summer, he drove oxen or bullock carts for local landlords, a common occupation for peasant youth from poor homes. For this he earned twenty-five kopecks a day. He enjoyed school, but also liked to go ice-skating on a local pond. Once he fell in, went off to his uncle, who handed him over to his mother who beat him soundly.

On leaving school he took up full time work as a herdsboy on an estate of one of the German colonists. His mother had been forced to take up charring work, and at the age of seventeen Nestor transferred to Hulyai Pole, where he got a job as an apprentice painter in Budko's workshop, repainting old brichki (peasant carts) and agricultural machines. He retained his skill in

¹ Vynar - Zviazky, p. 18.

this profession, taking it up in Paris in exile when opportunity occurred. He stayed at least two years before moving on to a local iron foundry, first as an unskilled worker, later as a founder. This foundry was presumably an agricultural machine shop, for Kerner owned it.

It was while he was working in Kerner's factory that he became involved in revolutionary politics in the stormy years following 1905. He was a member of an amateur theatrical circle which included Zuichenko, who belonged to the local anarchist-communist group. Through Zuichenko he was first drawn towards, then into, the group which had been founded in 1907 by Volodya Antoni, son of a Czech settler in Hulyai Pole. Antoni had finished school in 1901, disappeared, then, at the age of eighteen or nineteen, returned to teach in the 1st Hulyai Pole primary school. He got into conversation with some of his former schoolmates, and told them of his political and social views. It is not known where he picked up his anarchism, but, since he was the contact with the strong Katerynoslav group, if he did not find his ideas there he may well have worked with it before returning to Hulyai Pole.

One of the first to join the group was a local peasant, Olexander Semeniuta. Like the rest of the group with the possible exception of Antoni he had had no schooling beyond primary. When he was called up soon afterwards he absconded, coming to visit his wife and two brothers only at night. He handled the question of arms, whilst Antoni was in charge of the other side of the group's activities, illegal literature.

At the same time Makhno entered the group, it was engaged in literature distribution and small scale robbery to finance it. At the start he was not of the core of the group. Makhno took part in both activities. At the first attempt 500 roubles were taken from the local nationalist poet Kernerenko, a distant relative of Kerner. The proceeds produced the first local leaflet on a second-hand hectograph. Previous ones had come from Katerynoslav, and the police suspected outsiders behind this one also.

Then things started to go wrong. A drunk who started talking was killed by Prokip Semeniuta. A second expropriation was successfully carried out on a post office cart carrying money to the station, but its popular police guard was killed, and the anarchists felt obliged to leave an anonymous 100 roubles at the widow's house. An informer requested by the local police and sent in from Olexandrivske was shot. The hunt for the terrorists then started in earnest. Half of them went underground, continuing their previous activities. Makhno himself was arrested and escaped, but soon afterwards unwisely returned to Hulyai Pole. The local police chief, Karachentsev, recruited two trustworthy peasants as spies. They found out that Olexander Semeniuta had returned from Katerynoslav, and that a group meeting would take place at the house of Ivan Levadny, a member. This was in August 1908. The hut was surrounded by ten policemen under one Lepechenko, with instructions to capture all alive. In the shoot-out which followed Lepechenko was killed, one policeman wounded, and Prokip Semeniuta hit in the leg. As the anarchists made for the steppe, Olexander carried his brother, but at Prokip's insistence put him down. When the sun came up he shot himself to avoid falling into the hands of the police. For the rest the police searched in vain: they made their way to Polohy station, thence by train to Katerynoslav.

This progress was not good enough for Karachentsev's superiors, and he was sent off to Katerynoslav, where he made four arrests.

On his return to Hulyai Pole he made more, including Makhno. They were all taken off to Olexandrivske prison. A second escape attempt by Makhno lasted only two days, but when Levadny tried it, the end was disaster: he died of cold in a snowstorm.

They were kept in prison for some time before being taken to trial in Katerynoslav by court martial of the Odessa military district in March 1910. The charges—expropriations, illegal association and holding illegal meetings - were liable to the death penalty. Sixteen hardly innocent and semi-literate peasants had little chance against the might of the Tsarist state, and they were duly found guilty. Most sources say that they were all sentenced to death, although they do not state how many were carried out. Halyna Kuzmenko, later Makhno's wife, has said that he spent 52 days under sentence of death. All are agreed that he was reprieved on the grounds that he had been under twenty years of age when the offences had been committed. It is probable that his mother put in a plea for clemency.

The group was decimated, but not destroyed. Following the death of Prokip, Olexander Semeniuta was out for revenge. Karachentsev was lured to a performance at the local theatre, where Olexander had a seat two rows behind him. At the end of the performance, Olexander hid in a tree, shot Karachentsev three times in the neck, then got away. A big price was placed on his head, but he stayed free for a year. He was cornered when, supposed to stay with one of Nestor's brothers, he went instead to his mother's house. Like his brother, he shot himself so as not to be captured alive. Although Antoni left for the USA soon after this, never to return, the remaining anarchists continued at least propaganda activity over the next three years up to the start of the war, possibly during the war also. The skeleton of the group was still there in 1917. On the very first day of the February revolution a procession went round the graves, including the Semeniutas, with anarchist black flags.

By contrast, Makhno spent the years 1910-17 in the Butyrki prison in Moscow, serving his commuted sentence of hard labour for life. The prison was used for many long term offenders, and this would explain why Nestor was not sent to Siberia. His health suffered badly, and he picked up the TB which was later to kill him.

He seems to have caused the prison authorities quite a lot of trouble, and as a result spent much time in the punishment cell, an ideal breeding ground for TB. His nickname of 'Modest' which he later used when publishing some poetry in an Astrakhan paper in 1918, would suggest that he did some talking and boasting to his fellow prisoners. He is supposed to have circulated a petition against the first world war at its inception. Even in the prison there was a minor wave of patriotism, and his action did not endear him to the prison authorities. He shared a cell with two well known Social Revolutionaries, Gots and Minor.

While in Butyrki he formed one of the most important friendships of his life, with Peter Marin-Arshinov, a metalworker from a Katerynoslav suburb. Arshinov had some years of revolutionary activity behind him before he reached Butyrki. A Bolshevik before he became an anarchist, he had educated himself to some extent, and passed on to Makhno much of the formal education the latter received. Makhno himself mentions history, geography, and mathematics. He also reinforced Nestor's political and social beliefs. The friendship was to last beyond the revolution and into exile.

The February revolution burst suddenly on the prisoners, isolated largely from the world outside. Overnight they were heroes and not criminals. For Makhno and Arshinov, the ways would shortly part. Nestor would never forget the horror of prisons which was his lasting memory of Butyrki.

Glossary

Anarchist-communist, anarcho-syndicalist. These are discussed in chapter 7.

Barschina. Compulsory peasant labour on the land under serfdom.

Batko. Ukrainian for 'little father'. In the civil war, it indicated respect and military control.

Batrak. Landless peasant. See chapter 4.

Bednyak. Poor peasant. See chapter 4.

Black Guard. Anarchist militia (cf. Red Guard) 1917-18, especially in Moscow.

Bluecoats. Common nickname for nationalist soldiers, from deliberately period uniform.

Borbisty/Borotbisty. See chapter 10, sections 1 and 5.

CGT. Confederation Generale de Travail. French communist, originally anarcho-syndicalist, trade union.

CNT. Confederacion Nacional del Trabajo. Spanish anarcho-syndicalist trade union.

Central Industrial Districts. Moscow and surrounding provinces.

Central Powers. In First World War, Germany and her allies.

Cheka. Soviet secret police, founded December 1917.

Comintern. Acronym for Communist International (of Parties).

Commissar (Military). Political appointee in trio with commander and chief of staff in Soviet units - to ensure loyalty of spetsy.

Committee for the Salvation of the Revolution. Sprang up throughout the country to mobilise against the Kornilov coup, 1917.

Communards. Workers on communal farms. See chapter 4.

Cossacks. Originally refugees in the Ukraine from the Tsars. From late eighteenth century, main cavalry of army, with appropriate land privileges.

Directory. Ukrainian government of five, 1918-19.

District. Russian/Ukrainian administrative division (uezd/povit) between guberniya (province) - Soviet oblast, and volost.

Dnieper. Right and left banks are respectively west and east of it.

Don Cossacks. Most important of the Cossack groups.

Drozdovtsy. Elite White Army unit, founded by Col. Drozdov in 1918.

February Revolution. Overthrew the Tsar, 1917.

Food Requisitioning detachments (food army). City workers sent into the countryside to extract grain from the unwilling peasants. In 1920, formalised into army units.

Free Battalions. Makhnovist volunteers against the Rada and Central Powers.

Greens. See chapter 10, section 6.

Insurrectionary Army. Makhnovist Army.

Intelligentsia. Declasse intellectuals with a conscience.

KNS (Ukrainian initials). Committees of Poor Peasants; see chapter 5.

Katzapy. Derogatory Ukrainian term for Muscovites.

Kulak. Russian word for fist. Used to mean rich peasant, with appropriate overtones of grasping and meanness.

Kursanty. Officer cadets.

Kursk railway station. In Moscow.

Left Communist. From inside or outside the Bolshevik party, advocating similar policies but critical of the party.

Left SRs. Split from the SRs in 1917. Coalition with Bolsheviks until March 1918, then hounded like the rest.

Libertarian Communists. Similar to anarchist-communists.

Makhnovschyna. Makhno movement.

Makhnohrad. Nickname for Hulyai Pole.

Maximalists. SR splinter group, ideologically nearest to the anarchists.

Mensheviks. (Russian mensheless). Social-democratic wing of Russian Marxist party, split 1903: at time of split, in a temporary minority.

Moscow order. Of Denikin, 1919, envisaging entry to Moscow that year.

Nabat (Russian - alarm). Main anarchist federation in the Ukraine.

Obrok. Compulsory money levy in poorer regions, in place of barschina.

Odessa Terrorists. One of a number of independent anarchistically inclined groups, more or less fighting the Rada and Central Powers, spring 1918.

Okhranka. Tsarist secret police. Otaman (Russian/English ataman). Ukrainian ruler. Appropriated by some local chiefs during the civil war.

Petty bourgeois. Traditional Marxist term of abuse for the lower middle class. Pogrom. Organized attack on Jewish property, sometimes lives.

Politbiuro. Chief policy-making body of Communist Party.

Priazov. Area to north of Azov Sea.

Provisional Governments. Four - between February Revolution and Bolshevik coup in October 1917.

RVS. (Russian initials). See chapter 3.

Rada (Ukrainian for Soviet). Mainly used as name for Ukrainian government, 1917-18.

Red Guard. Mainly factory-based Bolshevik militia, 1917-18.

Revkom. Acronym for revolutionary committee.

Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army of the Ukraine (Makhnovists). Makhnovist Army.

SRs. Social Revolutionaries: main peasant party.

SRIU. Soviet Revolutionary Insurgents of the Ukraine. See chapter 3.

Serednyak. Middle peasant. See chapter 4.

Sichovy Striltsy. Crack Ukrainian troops from Eastern Galicia.

Socialisation. Organisation of industry from below on liberation lines.

Sotnya (sto - 100). Cossack unit of about 100.

Soviet. Russian for council (or counsel).

Tachanki. Sprung carts. See chapter 2, section 1 .

Tsentrvetkom. Russian acronym for central revkom.

Ukrainian Communist Party. Name for Borotbisty in part of 1919. See chapter 6, section 5.

Ukrainian Social-Democrats. Formed 1917.

Ukrainian SRs. Formed 1917. Universal. Ukrainian government manifesto.

Varta. Hetman police.

Volost. Smallest administrative unit in Russian Empire.

War Communism. Strict Moscow regime during the civil war.

Whites. General name for mainly non-socialist opponents of the Bolsheviks.

Zhidy. In Russian, abusive name for Jews. Not necessarily abusive in Ukrainian.

Part 1 Military History 1917-1921

1 Relative Peace, 1917-18

Makhno left the prison early in the morning of 2 March. From what he himself tells us, he resumed his political activities on his release, working for about three weeks in the anarchist group of the Lefortovo district of Moscow. However, he was always mindful of his need and desire to get back home, and on 23 March he left Moscow, arriving back in Hulyai Pole on the evening of the 24th. There, in addition to the survivors of the anarchist-communist group, many peasants turned out to meet him, curious to see the return of the only political deportee.

Makhno's first priority was to get the group on its feet again, and through it organise the local peasants. After that, he would break the local power of the Provisional Government. This was organised in a 'Public Committee' headed by Prusinski, a lieutenant in the 8th Serbian regiment, stationed in the area. Within a week, he had founded a Peasants' Union, with himself as chairman. This political and organisational position was to be the foundation of all his later influence and successes.

At first, he had difficulty in persuading his comrades of the soundness of his tactics. While he was convinced that the anarchist movement must undertake the organisation of the workers, and, especially, the peasants, some members of the group, including Kalynychenko, wanted to continue as in the past, distributing leaflets and other forms of propaganda. Anarchists would not take office in existing peasant organisations, but would expect these to arise as a result of the propaganda.

It did not take Makhno, with his prestige of having suffered for the cause, long to win over the others. When re-elections were held in the first half of April, both the Public Committee and its most important sub-section, the Land Department, came under peasant control, exercised by members or sympathisers of the anarcho-communist group in the Peasant Union.

A noteworthy success was achieved at the May Day procession of 18 April/1 May. There had been considerable doubt as to the attitude of the Serbian regiment: in the event, the regimental machine-gunners joined in. Such an happening was not unique in the Russia of 1917, but it indicated that Hulyai Pole was moving leftwards at a faster pace than elsewhere. As late as July, the Olexandrivske Soviet of Workers', Soldiers', and Peasants' Deputies supported the actions of the Provisional Government in Petrograd. In contrast, a Hulyai Pole meeting on about 6/19 July saluted the soldiers, workers, and those who had risen in the July days.

At about this time Nestor met his first wife, Nastyenko, but had little time for personal affairs, for his fame was spreading into the surrounding countryside. Peasants from nearby Kamyshevat came to see how things were being done in Hulyai Pole. Apart from this, he played a large part in a strike of wood and metal workers at a factory owned by his old enemy, Kerner. Pay increases of 80 and 100 per cent were demanded to compensate for the rise in the cost of living; when Kerner gave way, the other industrialists, who had held out united against the demands of their workers, capitulated also.

In June, at the same time as this successful strike, the peasants refused to pay the second instalment of rent due to the local landlords, and the role of the militia, the only remaining force loyal to the central authorities, was reduced to that of messenger boys.

In August Makhno called all the local landlords together, and all documents concerning ownership were taken from them. A district meeting of peasants agreed that all land was to be divided equally, the division to include the former owners. This was in flat contradiction to, and in open defiance of, the Provisional Government, which was insisting that all vital state decisions, including the ownership and distribution of land, be left to the Constituent Assembly. Nor was it to the liking of the Provisional Government commissar in Olexandrivske, B. K. Mikhno, a liberal landlord with a record of opposition in Tsarist times. As Mikhno had neither the administrative nor the military means to do anything, he could not stop Makhno's activities.

At peasant congresses in Olexandrivske in May and July, Makhno was able to meet delegates from nearby areas and have his first taste of party politics, mainly from the Social Revolutionaries, for the number of Bolsheviks in the Ukrainian countryside was extremely small. Very few others shared his views, and he found the long political discussions and debates a waste of time. He felt that Hulyai Pole had advanced beyond what the congresses were merely talking about, without the constant wrangling and jockeying for position. He was forgetting that few towns or villages had the fortuitous conjunction of a clearly established dominant political grouping with roots going back a number of years, with the return of a political deportee at a time of change.

He found the town anarchists as unorganised as the Hulyai Pole group had been. This did not prevent him returning to Olexandrivske on occasions during the rest of the year whenever there arose a crisis which he considered important enough to intervene in.

In August he attended the first provincial congress of Soviets and Peasant Unions in Katerynoslav. His impression was similar to what he had found at Olexandrivske, even though he was a member of the congress Land Commission. By decision of this congress, the local Peasants' Unions became Soviets, a sign of a leftward shift among the peasantry, a growing awareness of, and cooperation with, the workers in the towns.

Coming shortly after this congress, the Kornilov affair was an ideal chance for Makhno to take a further local initiative. Within hours of the news of the march on Petrograd, a local Committee for the Salvation of the Revolution was set up. The real aim was to move against the potential local enemy - the landlords, bourgeoisie, and kulaks. Patrols were sent out into the surrounding countryside: all opposition was either cowed or powerless.

An example of how this worked in practice occurred when Marusya Nikiforova, one of the anarchist characters of Olexandrivske, turned up in Hulyai Pole to urge that the Preobrazhenski regiment at Orikhiv, between Hulyai Pole and Olexandrivske be disarmed. This was agreed, and two hundred people went off to Orikhiv by train, taking with them a mere ten rifles and a few revolvers. The regimental stores were cordoned off, the staff in the town surrounded, the men handed over their rifles without a fight and went off home. This was on 28 August/10 September.

On about 25 September/8 October a volost congress in Hulyai Pole took the next logical step in the land question by confiscating all landlord land, which was to come into public ownership. Many of the landlords fled. Shortly before the Bolshevik coup, there was a press working in Hulyai Pole, turning out appeals against Kerenski. The change of government caused scarcely a ripple in the town. If the Bolshevik slogan of 'Bread, Peace, and Land' was known there, it would have been welcome enough.

In the towns things were very different, the situation in both Katerynoslav and Olexandrivske being confused. Both the old and new regimes were extremely weak. In Katerynoslav the Bolsheviks faced a town дума elected in June in which they held less than a quarter of the seats, and which continued its agitation well into the New Year; Ukrainised troops, many with sympathies for the nationalist Rada government in Kiyiv; a group of sailors passing through the city on their way to fight Kaledin, otaman of the Don Cossacks; and a Soviet which had a pro-Bolshevik majority but was under the influence of the anarcho-syndicalist Grinbaum, commander of the local Red Guard.

Makhno attended a provincial congress of Soviets in the city early in December. During the early stages there was trouble with some of the Ukrainised troops and also some St. George Cavaliers (holders of the equivalent of the Victoria Cross), who were refusing to listen to revolutionary speakers. Makhno managed to quieten them down after other speakers had failed to do so. On his return home, he gave a report on the congress, but says that he was very glad to get out of the tense uncertain city into the relative calm of the countryside.

In Olexandrivske the main cause of trouble was the breakdown in relations between the Rada and the new Soviet Russian government. As late as 25 November/8 December the Mensheviks and SRs still had a majority in the Soviet, the Bolsheviks having 95 seats out of 232. A further cause of friction was the presence of Cossack regiments, mostly still in good military order, who wanted to continue their journey home from the south-western front to the Don. The Rada, anxious only to get rid of the Cossacks as a possible threat to their own weak position, raised no objection to their passage across the Dnieper at Kichkas near Olexandrivske.

The Bolsheviks, however, were worried by the gathering of their enemies on the Don, for which the returning Cossacks could be a valuable reinforcement. When the Petrograd government declared war on the Rada early in December, it was all the more necessary to prevent their enemies cooperating with each other, even indirectly. This placed a heavy burden on the local Bolsheviks, who had no military outside help.

Round the turn of the year Rada forces seized power from the revolutionary committee of Bolsheviks and left SRs which had been in power for about four weeks. In response to a call for help from the revolutionary committee and with more Cossack troop trains outside the town, a partial mobilisation took place in Hulyai Pole following a Soviet meeting. Being fifty miles nearer the Don, Makhno saw the danger of standing by and doing nothing.

On 29 December/11 January, the first armed forces of Hulyai Pole in the Civil War, 800 of them, set off for Olexandrivske with Makhno in command. Three days later the Red Guard in the city under Bohdanov rose, and Soviet power was restored. The Cossack echelons refused to be disarmed and halfheartedly tried to push through: finding opposition, they agreed to hand over their weapons.

With the Cossack crisis over, Makhno, who had been coopted onto the united revolutionary staff, spent some time working on a tribunal set up by Bohdanov. Here he paid off an old score against the informer responsible for Olexander Semeniuta's death. Among the others to come before him was Mikhno. In view of his anti-Tsarist record, he ordered his release.

After some meetings in which the political parties tried without much success to interest the Cossacks, Makhno decided that the crisis was over, and, despite pleas from Marusya and others, went back home.

In January 1918 it seemed that the Bolsheviks were in control of most of central and southern Ukraine. In Katerynoslav a local metalworker, Averin, had seized power with the help of the

Red Guard. In Olexandrivske the revolutionary committee was again in power. However, apart from the Red Guard, the military forces at their disposal consisted of a few remnants of the old army who still had some stomach for fighting. The new conscripted Red Army was not yet in being. It is true that a commander had been appointed by Petrograd, Antonov-Ovseyenko, one of the original triumvirate in charge of military affairs on the morrow of the seizure of power. His successes against the Rada and Kaledin reflected the weakness of the opposition, not the strength of his own forces.

As for Makhno, he was able once again to concentrate on peasant needs. He 'persuaded' the local bank to hand over 250,000 roubles for the revolutionary cause. He also managed, despite the difficult transport conditions, to arrange a direct exchange of food for textiles with a Moscow factory.

Despite his popularity he did not feel totally secure. He thought it prudent to organise a revolutionary committee that included left SRs and Ukrainian SRs. While the former were locally fairly close to the anarchists, the same was not true of the Ukrainian SRs, whose growing influence was the result of national events.

Following a rapid political advance in 1917, the Ukrainian parties, and in particular the Ukrainian SRs and Ukrainian Social Democrats, were faced in January and February 1918 with the choice of being squeezed between the Central Powers from the west and the Bolsheviks from the east, and accepting the proffered bait of a separate peace with the former. There were conditions, of which the most onerous was to supply large quantities of grain to the starving countries of central Europe. The desperation of the political situation overcame the democratic scruples of the Rada.

Soon news came through to the unoccupied parts of the Ukraine that Rada soldiers were advancing alongside the Germans, Austrians, and Hungarians. Antonov had all sorts of plans to cope with the invasion, and even some groups of soldiers he called armies, but the position was hopeless. The enemy were no longer the demoralised remnants of the First World War, but trained soldiers hardened on the Eastern Front, and still accustomed to obeying orders. The Central Powers conquered the entire Ukraine in less than three months.

Hulyai Pole fared little better than the rest. In March, Makhno had organised local detachments based on the villages, but these were unsatisfactory, for, with the enemy occupying Katerynoslav on 3 April and Kharkiv on the 7th, he had grouped them into two units which were sent to the front, one towards Katerynoslav, the other towards Olexandrivske. What happened to the latter is not clear, if it set off at all; trenches were dug round Hulyai Pole. In the Chaplyne sector, whither, by agreement with the Red Army rear command, the Katerynoslav free battalion had been sent, the unit had either mutinied or been tricked into leaving the front. Vasyl Sharovsky, later to have prominent positions in the Makhnovist army, rushed back with the news.

He arrived back to find that Nestor had been called away to the headquarters of the reserve front Red commander, Yegorov, to coordinate activities. This proved impossible, as Yegorov's train was moving east at a faster rate than the train in which Makhno was travelling. In Hulyai Pole the shaky morale collapsed, and the staff fled. The town was taken over by nationalist elements who were able to win over the Jewish company on guard duty. Shortly afterwards Austrian forces, who had been assigned most of the south-eastern Ukraine as an area of occupation, entered, and reprisals began.

Makhno tried to make his way back to Hulyai Pole, but the enemy had already spread beyond the town. Exhausted and depressed, he allowed himself to be put on a train for Taganrog. There

his spirits revived somewhat on meeting up with other refugees from his home area. It was decided to hold a conference in the city on future policy and activity. Among those present were one of Nestor's brothers, Sava, and Fedir Schus, a former sailor and a member of one of the free battalions, native of Velyka Mykhailivka, a village to the north of Hulyai Pole. He was one of Nestor's few intimate friends and played a very large part in the Makhnovschyna (Makhno movement). He was finally killed by the Bolsheviks in 1921.

The participants were hardly typical peasants, for in non-occupied territory they had a more optimistic perspective than those back home already suffering from repression. They agreed to separate, and meet up in groups of two or three in the Hulyai Pole area at the end of June or the beginning of July. It was felt that preparatory work for insurrection could usefully be done in the period leading up to the harvest. They considered also that it was their revolutionary duty to avenge the defeat they had suffered at the hands of the Austrians, more humiliatingly from the Rada, and, most galling of all, the treachery within their own ranks.

Some decided that work could be started immediately, and made their way back across the front line. Among these was Sava, who was caught, and held in Olexandriivske jail until October. Others, including Nestor, saw no point in staying in the Ukraine in view of the occupation, and continued east to see what they found. A further attraction for Makhno was the chance of getting to Moscow, where he could find his old Butyrki friend, Arshinov.

In Rostov as in Taganrog, the general mood was one of despair and imminent disaster. An anarchist who met him there, where she was ferrying wounded from the front, but who left him later because she didn't like his authoritarian attitude to the insurgents, speaks favourably of him. On 4 May, the day before the Germans entered the city, the civil authorities left for Tsaritsyn, and many of the political refugees left with them. Makhno joined an artillery base-train under a non-party commander, Pashechnikov. They set off south-east, via Tikhoretskaya, as the Germans had already cut the direct rail link. At an unscheduled stop not far from Tsaritsyn, Makhno found himself speaking to an audience of woodworkers, who, he says, responded positively to the ideas he put forward.

On arrival he started to look for the communards he had on occasion helped back home. They included Nastyenka. He found them living in railway sidings in the carriages in which they had travelled from Rostov. He managed to find them better lodgings at a farm four miles outside the town. He himself decided to move on quickly, partly to see what he could do of the rest of the country before the agreed return to Hulyai Pole, but partly also because the local Bolsheviks, better organised each day following the arrival of Voroshilov with the beginnings of the 10th Army, were increasingly taking strong-arm measures against the various non-party military detachments who had fought the Germans, and were now on the loose.

Accordingly, Makhno headed north up the river Volga. There was a tearful parting with Nastyenka, who was about to have his child. They never saw each other again. Later, she heard that he had been killed, and remarried. The child died young.

On arrival at Saratov, Makhno found the situation no less tense. Earlier in the spring, there had been a rising by the Maximalists, a left-wing breakaway from the SRs, and, although this had been put down, the Bolshevik hold was still precarious. This was proved in mid May, when a military detachment called the 'Odessa Terrorists' arrived in town. When the local Cheka tried to disarm them, bombs were thrown. Nestor thought it advisable to clear out as quickly as possible, and took the first boat, even though it was going in the opposite direction to the one he wanted.

Thus it was that he arrived in Astrakhan, to the south of Tsaritsyn. His stay was uneventful: he worked in the propaganda department of the local Soviet, making encouraging speeches to soldiers about to leave for the front. He made his way north once more at the end of May, by river to Saratov, thence by rail to Moscow.

He arrived to find the anarchists cowed. After the Cheka raid on the Black Guard headquarters in April, anarchist activities had been circumscribed, and were closely watched by the police. To Makhno, coming from places where freedom of speech was either taken for granted or only now starting to be questioned, this low level of work came as a shock. Compared to the battlefield of the revolution, the 'Union for the Ideological Propagation of Anarchism' seemed pointless. In this opinion he was less than fair to his comrades, many of whom were doing their best under difficult circumstances. He regarded Moscow as the capital of the 'paper revolution', whose red tape and meaninglessness had affected even the anarchists.

It was by pure chance that he blundered into the Kremlin. His friends were living in very cramped conditions, and he did not want to impose on them further. He therefore went to the Kremlin to obtain a permit for free board and lodging. It was thus that he met first Sverdlov, then Lenin. Sverdlov got him talking, discovered he was recently from the Ukraine, whence very little hard news came to Moscow, and decided that what he had to say was of sufficient interest to arrange a meeting with Lenin.

Lenin questioned him in some detail about what he called 'South Russia', Makhno reproving him for not using 'Ukraine'. Lenin asserted that anarchists could not organise. Makhno retorted that it had been the anarchists and left SRs who had organised the propaganda and military struggles against the invaders. When questioned on Bolshevik moves against the Moscow anarchists in April, Lenin replied that 'It was necessary for us to remove the anarchists from the . . . town house . . . because they were hiding . . . well-known bandits'.¹ Similar arguments were later used against Makhno when it suited the Bolshevik leadership.

Despite the ideological gulf, Makhno records in his memoirs that he felt himself coming under the influence of this man. He was glad when the interview was over, and he accepted an offer of help in his illegal return to the Ukraine. The middle of June was past, and he was impatient to return home for the agreed rendezvous.

Lenin passed him on to Zatonsky, one of the leading Ukrainian Bolsheviks, then in forced exile in Moscow. After some procrastination, Zatonsky fixed him up with a false passport to get him across the frontier now established between Soviet Russia and the Ukraine. The same day, June 29, that he received this passport, Nestor was down at the Kursk railway station. Apart from occasional excursions near the border, he would not again leave the Ukraine until driven out for good in August 1921.

¹ Makhno, *Pod Udarami*, p. 134.

2 The Rise of the Batko, July 1918-February 1919

He arrived at Kursk on 1 July. The journey through no man's land had to be made on foot. On the way, he met up with others from the Hulyai Pole area, who told him of the activities of Hetman Skoropadsky, successor by coup to the Rada, and the occupying forces. One brother, Omelyan, a war invalid, had been shot, and he also learnt of Sava's arrest. He got on to the crowded Belgorod-Kharkiv train, along with several others clinging to the roof of a carriage. He had to change at Kharkiv and again at Synelnykove, where he was recognised by a friend. The nearer he got to home, the more fearful he was of being arrested. Finally he abandoned the train and walked to Rozhdestvenka, a few miles from Hulyai Pole.

Opposition to the Hetman's German-backed regime was mounting. There were reports throughout July of arrests of left-wingers, peasant unrest, and even, in Huenichesk and Melitopol, the introduction of bread rationing. In Mariupol an armed uprising lasted two days. In the middle of the month a rail strike started, which snowballed into a protest against the Hetman by hundreds of thousands of railway workers.

Retribution could be terrible. Fines were commonly levied on towns or villages which were the scene of anti-Austrian or anti-German actions. Sometimes, as at the village of Volodymyrivka, things went much further: forty males were summarily shot. In Hulyai Pole the passivity following these reprisals was charged, among the revolutionaries, with feeling against the Jewish guard company which had betrayed the town back in April.

On his return Makhno argued successfully that the inexperienced soldiers of the company had been won over by treacherous officers suborned by the nationalists, including Lev Schneider, a former member of the anarchist group, who had led the coup.

From Rozhdestvenka Makhno sent letters to friends in Hulyai Pole, hoping to make a quick visit there. He became frustrated and impatient when he received discouraging replies saying that the place was crawling with spies and troops. Despite this, he paid several secret visits, holding meetings.

Apart from discussion, Nestor also wanted to initiate action. The first step would be the formation of small groups of peasants prepared to attack landlord estates, as the best way to lay the foundations for a general insurrection against the authorities. He found a number ready, some over-eager: while he was on a visit to Hulyai Pole, some of them in nearby Voskresenka went into action against a German punishment detachment.

This heightened the vigilance of the Hetmanites, who at once suspected Makhno of being behind the attack. He had to flee to avoid arrest to a relative at Ternivka sixty miles away. The peasants there suspected he was an informer, and even laid a plot to kill him. Once he had proved who he was, they showed themselves eager for action. When he felt they were ready, he moved on, the hue and cry having meantime died down. He paid a short visit to Rozhdestvenka to re-establish rudimentary coordination, and then gave the signal. However, the groups were still too

weak, and he had once again to leave the area. He visited some former Rada troops who had hidden out on some islands in the Dnieper. They had a few weapons hidden, and they gave him some.

He then made his way back to Hulyai Pole, where he put the organisation on a more permanent footing. A meeting was held in Semeniuta's house, those present including Makhno, the Karetnyk brothers, and Marchenko. Discussion centred on acquiring weapons. The main source was to be surprise attacks on the authorities, with additions from hunting weapons and hidden war-service rifles. Soon after this, a successful raid was made on a bank at Zhrebets, near Orikhiv, 44,000 roubles being seized.

The number of actions against the occupiers was growing, but so was the latter's response. Strenuous efforts were made to capture Makhno - at one point, an Austrian officer was even decorated for having killed him! As the tide of insurrection mounted, the government found it increasingly difficult to cope, and the attacks on them became more daring.

On the night of 26 September, Makhno and his men entered Hulyai Pole, to find some Austrians and Varta - Hetman police - ready to leave the village in search of them. The enemy was ambushed and fled, abandoning their horses and rifles. After asking a friend to prepare the local people for the following day, the Makhnovists withdrew to Pokrovske, twenty miles to the north. Makhno arranged the next morning that church bells would sound as soon as his men opened fire on the Austrians: this would be a signal for the peasants to attack from the rear. The plan was successful, and a revolutionary committee was elected on the spot. A telegram was sent out to celebrate the event, the first time that a place of any size had been captured from the enemy in the southeast Ukraine.

The post office, railway station and telephone exchange were taken over, and leaflets were run off to explain what was happening. A large meeting was held, at which the Austrian prisoners were urged to convey the good news back to their own country. Nestor received an ovation and was chaired from the meeting.

Many thought the revolution had started, but Makhno was under no such illusions. He decided to abandon the town before the Austrians came back. He did not stay more than twenty-four hours. Soon he was back again, this time for three days, forty new insurgents joined the ranks. When news of Austrian reinforcements moving up the railway from Polohy came through, he retreated twenty miles to the north-east, to the village of Velyka Mykhailivka on the edge of the Dibrivki forest, the largest in the province. The insurgents slept well until, in the middle of the night, there were shouts of an attack. Not finding Makhno in Hulyai Pole, the enemy had continued up the line and picked up his trail. The Makhnovists panicked and fled into the forest.

There, they had the good fortune to meet up with fifty to sixty men headed by Schus. They had spent most of the time since July hiding in the forest after a defeat by the Austrians. Schus had a number of wounded, and he was not optimistic. Makhno's men can hardly have been feeling much better. To the east and south, where the forest was bounded by the river Volchya, were Austrians, along with a German detachment who mounted a gun on the highest hill. Two miles to the north of the village, through which the river flowed, was an Austrian infantry brigade. One mile to the west were two hundred cavalry of the provincial Varta. In addition, news came through to the insurgents that enemy reinforcements were expected.

Makhno decided, as far as we know by himself, on a plan which was foolhardy, but put forward as practicable in a desperate plight. A surprise attack would be launched on the troops who were quartered in the village. If they could be put to flight, it should be possible to break out of the circle. His own men accepted the plan, but he had difficulty persuading Schus. The latter was finally won over by appeals to his revolutionary honour and the fact that there was no alternative but surrender.

It was known that the Austrians in the village would be resting during the day, and it was decided to attack them then. Makhno selected only those whom he knew would go through to the end. They numbered about thirty. The larger part under Makhno crept towards the Austrians in the church square, while the rest under Schus took up position ready for enfilade fire. From less than one hundred yards Lewis machine-guns opened up on the enemy. The result was a massacre, as the enemy fled for their lives. As soon as the peasants realised the way the battle was going, they rushed out with their pitchforks and pursued the enemy, who were fleeing to the nearest source of aid at Pokrovske. Makhno had great difficulty in restraining them from dealing with the prisoners on the spot.

The victory was local, but amazing and overwhelming. It was after this battle of Dibrivki, 5 October 1918, that Makhno was given the nickname of 'Batko', which stuck to him thereafter. In Ukrainian it means father. During the civil war, it signified the leadership and control of a specific area and its population in both civil and military fields. The central point of the use of the word, rather than 'leader' or 'dictator' is that the leadership is usually based on respect, as in Makhno's case, and always on intimate knowledge of the home territory.

Dibrivki, in making him a local hero, impelled him to a wider fame. Before, he had been the equal of Schus: now he was the batko, the unquestioned commander. He was also the focus of the local federation of anarchist groups which came into existence round about this time. Militarily, the victory meant little more than the occupations of Hulyai Pole: psychologically, it was a disaster for the Central Powers and the Hetman, for the anti-Hetmanite feelings which the peasants had been nursing over the summer now exploded with full force.

Other small detachments joined him after the victory, among them Kurylenko's in the Berdyansk area, and Petrenko-Platonov's around Hryshyne. Their accession considerably widened the area of insurgent operations. Along with later additions, these forces covered most of the provinces of Katerynoslav and mainland Tavria: but in October 1918 these were more or less isolated detachments with irregular communications, and it would be another two months before we can talk of either a front or a staff.

At Velyka Mykhailivka revenge was not long in coming. Troops surrounded the village two days after the battle. Makhno had once again to retreat into the forest. After a heavy artillery barrage, the Austrians destroyed the village by fire. Besides Austrians, those involved included Varta and special detachments of local people -rich peasants, landlords' sons and the like, who had most to lose if Makhno's activities were allowed to continue. Over six hundred houses were destroyed. As they entered the village of Havrylivka nine miles away, the Makhnovists could see the silhouette of the flames. In revenge, the houses of rich peasants there and in nearby Ivanivka were fired. Subsequent insurgent attacks reflected the bitterness of the insurgents: especially was this so of Makhno, conscious of his inability to prevent the destruction at Velyka Mykhailivka, and of Schus being, like many of his followers, a native of the village.

Makhno's wish to keep control over events and in particular over the partisans soon reasserted itself. As a revolutionary he also wished to discourage private looting, and the following instruction was issued:

In order to ensure the speedy arming of the revolutionary peasantry ... it has been decided (that) any of our detachments which occupies an estate, landlord farm or German colony should ... summon all owners ... , levy on them a monetary contribution, and declare a collection of weapons and bullets. This should all be done under the definite leadership of the detachment commanders, who are to be subject to the strictest revolutionary responsibility in the matter.¹

In the printing of this proclamation appears the first mention of portable printing equipment, one of the lesser known features of the Makhnovtsy on the move, which reappears from time to time.

Developments on the political front were also favourable. The first signs of disaffection among German soldiers were reported: earlier cases had been limited to Austrians and Hungarians. The German army was the bulwark of the regime, and the Hetman could not long outlast his protectors. Bolshevik interest in the Ukraine revived with an agreement between Manuilsky, delegate of the Ukrainian Communist Party, and Vynnychenko, representing the Nationalists. Under this, the Bolsheviks were to abstain from interfering in the internal affairs of the Ukraine.

Sensing this new mood, but not yet strong enough to take over Hulyai Pole permanently, Makhno went round the south-east Ukraine spreading the insurrection. By the end of October or beginning of November he was at Tsarekostyantynivka, a railway junction to the south-east of Hulyai Pole, connecting Olexandrivske and the Crimea with the southern Donbas via Volnovakha. A troop train carrying cavalry and heavy infantry from the Don to the Ukraine under a Skoropadsky-Krasnov (the otaman) agreement was intercepted, four officers killed, and the soldiers freed. From Tsarekostyantynivka, a visit to Haichur north of Hulyai Pole lured that garrison out in pursuit, whereupon the town itself was once again briefly occupied; thence, after more wanderings, back to Dibrivki again.

Driven out by the Austrians, the Makhnovists turned south to Temyrivka. Here they were badly defeated, surprised and surrounded near the village by some Hungarians, half the insurgents being killed in the battle. The other half retired into the steppe to lick their wounds. Both Nestor and Karetnyk were wounded, and Makhno was blamed for the defeat. They went off to find fresh support in the Orikhiv area. Certainly by the end of November, a former miner who had lost his legs in a railway accident, Simeon Pravda, had gathered together a band of partisans, which terrorised the German settlements in the neighbourhood, and, until the beginning of January, had but the loosest of connections with the main Makhnovist forces. Makhno, probably with Pravda's support, attacked Zhrebets on the night of 20 November: a nationalist unit holding the village came over without a fight. Thus encouraged, the insurgents turned in their tracks and made for Hulyai Pole, which they entered, this time for good, on 27 November.

There an Insurrectionary Staff was set up, consisting of Nestor's old and trusty friends Karetnyk, Liuty, Schus, and Marchenko. Within the following month, if not at the start, they were joined by Chubenko. Some, perhaps all, of these commanders were not full time, but continued to serve also in the field. Until he left for Katerynoslav in December, Makhno was both commander and chief of staff. Others who may have joined at this time were Khersonsky, a left communist but non-Bolshevik Katerynoslav worker, Myrhorodsky, a left SR peasant, and the an-

¹ Makhno, *Ukrainskaya*, p. 124.

archist Gorev. The interesting points about these three are their political allegiances, and their being outwith Makhno's close personal circle.

In the town life started to return to normal. A Soviet of Workers', Peasants', and Insurgents' Deputies was set up. Trade unions and the anarchist club were reopened. An important task was to secure the release of the anarchists held in Olexandrivske jail since their capture in the spring. Their return, including that of Sava Makhno, would considerably strengthen the number of experienced comrades at Makhno's disposal. The Hetmanite authorities temporised on demands for their release, and they did not get out until the amnesty declared by the new nationalist Directory government following the flight of the Hetman from Kiyiv on 14 December.

Shortly after the final occupation of Hulyai Pole, the German forces withdrew to such centres as their numbers would enable them to defend in the face of the all-Ukrainian peasant revolt. Initial grouping of their forces in the Makhnovist area was on the junctions of Polohy and Chaplyne. If left alone, they would not attack, and after the news of the armistice and the fall of the Kaiser, all they wanted was to go home.

The power vacuum thus created resulted in a series of large expanses where no writ of authority was known or recognised. This admirably suited the stage of development of the Makhnovist movement, for it meant that groups of insurgents could move unopposed into the villages. Most of the area bounded by Olexandrivske and Katerynoslav on the west, Synelnykove, Pavlohrad and Chaplyne on the north, Hryshyne, Yuzovka and Volnovakha on the east, and the Azov Sea on the south, was empty of formal authority. Such landlords as remained fled to the towns, the Varta likewise.

Expansion also brought problems. Nestor had already posed the problem of organisation in a long speech to representatives of the staff, partisans, and initiative groups (the underground groups set up in each village as a prelude to insurrection):

The time has come to move on from small detachments to large ones, up to and including free battalions . . . capable of fulfilling the tasks of the revolution in the struggle with the counter-revolution on a basis of fronts ... Otherwise, our revolt will be diverted into the path of unnecessary vengeance on the enemy, which will weaken its role physically and morally, and lead it straight to disaster.²

Concrete measures to this effect were taken early in December. On 10 December Chaplyne and Polohy were occupied: by then Tsarekostyantynivka had been taken. This meant that fronts could be established at Polohy against some local White forces including German colonists, and at Tsarekostyantynivka against units connected with Krasnov on the Don.

At this time the Bolsheviks were not in evidence on an all-Ukrainian scale. A Military Revolutionary Staff consisting of Antonov, Stalin (who dropped out after a few days), Pyatakov, and Zatonsky, was not set up in Moscow until 17 November. The following day Antonov left the capital with Viller as chief of staff and Skachko, later to be Makhno's army superior, as head of operations.

If Makhno filled the vacuum in the south-east Ukraine, in the rest of the country the nationalists stepped in. Although they had been defeated by the Bolsheviks in January and February, and overthrown and suppressed by the occupying forces in April, they were able, in the absence of

² Makhno, *Ukrainskaya*, pp. 138-9.

a more radical alternative, to expand their influence and control very quickly in the autumn. A further impetus was given them by the release of Petliura from prison in the middle of November. Within a month, a Directory of five, including Petliura, had seized power in Kyiv.

Nationalist feeling also showed on the east bank of the Dnieper. Bolbochan, who styled himself 'otaman of the left bank', occupied Kharkiv on 18 November, although he soon ran into trouble with the pro-Bolshevik Soviet. On 21 November he occupied Katerynoslav. Meanwhile, at Belgorod, north of Kharkiv, Antonov was not given the right to proclaim a new Soviet Ukrainian government until 28 November. The reasons for Moscow's delay were, firstly, wariness of getting their fingers burnt as they had been in the spring, and secondly, indecisiveness over the Directory, and in particular the Vynnychenko-Manuisky agreement.

The triumph of the Directory put Makhno in a political and military quandary. However bitterly he might feel about the invasion in the spring, and however much he might personally distrust the Directory, the tide was running very strongly for them at the end of November and for most of December. The success of Bolbochan made them a force to be reckoned with in his own area, where he himself was barely established.

When, therefore, Horobets, the nationalist commander in Katerynoslav, offered a joint campaign against the Whites of the Don, the idea was not rejected out of hand. A delegation went off to Katerynoslav on 15 December, and a draft treaty of cooperation was worked out: the Makhnovists would get arms, uniforms, and food, while the Petliurists would have unhindered right of mobilisation in the insurgent area. A wagon of bullets and half a wagon of rifles were sent, and some explosives also. On the other side, the mobilisation was at least partly effective, for the Makhnovists engaged in propaganda directed at the conscripts on their way by train to Katerynoslav.

Some time within the following few days, however, this vacillating policy turned to open hostility. Contact had been made with the local Bolsheviks in Nyzhnyodniprovske, just up river from Katerynoslav, by the delegation on its way back from Horobets. To prove their revolutionary faith the Makhnovists agreed to send Marchenko to liaise with the local Bolshevik Revolutionary Committee.

The reason for this change in attitude was not the disenchantment of the peasantry with the Directory, for that did not set in until the end of the year. Rather, although the insurgent forces were getting stronger all the time, they were not strong enough to take on the Nationalists as well as the Whites in the south. An ally was needed against the Nationalists.

The forces of Antonov were still too far away, but there were Red insurgents operating in the area round Hryshyne and Pavlohrad, and in the Donbas. The forces of Kolos, the leading partisan, were having considerable success, picking up men as they passed through the countryside in the same way that Makhno had done. One of his lieutenants, Maximenko, had occupied Haichur station. It is not clear when Kolos decided to go for Katerynoslav, but the two key factors were his growing strength, and the knowledge that he could expect support from the workers of the city and its suburbs.

The political situation was not as favourable to the Nationalists as might appear. At a provincial congress of Soviets the Bolsheviks and left SRs obtained a large majority. It was due to meet in Kharkiv on 22 December, but Bolbochan banned it. Elections to the Katerynoslav Soviet on 6 December gave a similar result, and there were skirmishes with local Bolsheviks at the Gantke works, a large local factory, as well as at Nyzhnyodniprovske and the suburbs of Kodak and Amur.

Apart from the special case of the Sichovy Striltsy from Eastern Galicia, who never played any part in the affairs of the left-bank Ukraine, the Directory's forces were mainly peasant levies. In the west, the number of these at one time reached 100,000; in the east, Bolbochan had 1900 men in Kharkiv, while Makhno estimated that Horobets had between 3000 and 4000. Apart from inferior numbers, the Kharkiv position was anyway the more exposed: the nationalists under Hryhoriyiv had control of the area to the west of Katerynoslav, and, unlike Kharkiv, the city was not in imminent danger of attack by Antonov.

By the end of the first week in December, Horobets was in firm control of the city, although his hold on Kodak and Amur was not so secure. He had, however, dealt with the Austrians, and sent packing a corps of volunteer Hetmanites. Beyond the city, Kolos posed a greater threat. Apart from sitting astride the main communications with Kharkiv, he might also attack the city.

Kolos was not strong enough to do this on his own, and the obvious ally was Makhno to the south. On about 20 December a battalion under Makhno and a further detachment under Karetnyk left Hulyai Pole for Synelnykove. These amounted to between 300

and 500. From Synelnykove the force moved on to Nyzhnyodniprovske, where it arrived on 25 December. There Marchenko gave Nestor the latest news as regards the strengths of the Nationalists and Bolsheviks, the latter being underrated. Marchenko thought the combined forces could hold the city long enough to seize weapons, but not retain it against enemy reinforcements.

That evening Makhno attended a meeting of the Party Revolutionary Committee, and was appointed commander-in-chief of the combined forces. A rough plan of attack was drawn up for the following day.

The attack started before dawn, at 5 a.m. on 26 December. An empty train without a driver was sent across the Dnieper bridge, followed by an armoured train containing Bolshevik and insurgent troops. This ruse took the enemy unawares. The armoured train approached the station, soldiers poured out and seized it. These troops remained there as reinforcements pressed forwards into the town. Despite the fact that one of the Nationalist artillery commanders came over soon afterwards under a previous arrangement, the fighting was bitter. However, most of the town was captured by the evening of the 28th.

The fight for the town gave rise to later accusations of plundering by the Makhnovists. Makhno states that 'We took over the entire Ozerny bazaar as a food base.' All prisoners were freed, and within twenty-four hours Nestor personally had had to shoot three looters. Further, a large amount of military supplies, including rifles, were loaded onto trains. Here, as elsewhere, the boundary between plunder and spoils of war is not easy to draw.

There has also been some dispute over the importance of Makhno's role. There were certainly insurgent forces involved, and the idea of the empty train must have been his. However, he did spend all the time in Nyzhnyodniprovske, arguing politics with the Bolsheviks. This argument became relevant on the 28th, for, with the town largely cleared, the question of political power in the city was posed.

The relationship between Makhno and the Revolutionary Committee is unclear. Makhno says that on the 28th he went to the Bolsheviks and asked that the composition of the Committee be changed to five Bolsheviks, five SRs, and five insurgents, to reflect the forces now engaged. It is probable that this was done, with the left SRs and Makhnovists forming a bloc. In this enlarged committee Makhno became Commissar for War, if only for a day.

Meantime the Nationalists had not been idle. On 29 December reinforcements under Otaman Samokyshyn approached from the west, and entered the city that day. There was a disorderly

retreat to the bridge. Four hundred made it safely across, but six hundred were drowned, and the flight continued right back to Nyzhnyodniprovske, which also had to be evacuated soon afterwards. From there the partisans fell back on Synelnykove, the Bolsheviks towards Novomoskovske. From Synelnykove Makhno made haste back to Hulyai Pole, to gather his thoughts and consider how to stop Samokyshyn advancing further east.

For the Petliurists the year thus ended with a considerable victory. They lost Kharkiv as expected on 3 January, but they retained hold of central and western Ukraine. The Directory was confident of holding any advance on Kiyiv. War was only declared on 16 January, in the face of unsatisfactory correspondence with Moscow, and the continued advance of Antonov.

For Makhno as for Antonov, the victory of Samokyshyn was only a temporary setback, and for neither of them did it stop their other activities. The immediate effect on Makhno was serious, however: there was a void in the front along the railway line from Hulyai Pole to Chaplyne and on to Synelnykove.

Early in January a post-mortem was held between Makhno and Schus, both returned from Katerynoslav, and Bilash, an insurgent from Novospasivka to the south, lately arrived in Hulyai Pole. It was agreed on Makhno's suggestion to try to fill the void to the north by sending Chubenko, if Samokyshyn had advanced no further than Nyzhnyodniprovske, as far as Pavlohrad, and there possibly link up with the Red Army, rumoured to have launched an offensive and occupied Belgorod. If he did meet up with the Red forces, he was empowered to make a military alliance.

Two other important decisions emerged from this meeting. Holovko, a middle peasant from Velkya Mykhailivka, was to organise an united congress of workers, peasants and insurgents. Secondly, Bilash was to summon a congress of front unit delegates. Bilash had first to find the various detachments and their commanders. This meant a journey round the units to the south. He started at Polohy, thence to Basan, Maly Tokmak, Orikhiv, and Zhrebets. It is no coincidence that all these places are on or very near the railway.

While a concern to get the various batki such as Pravda at Zhrebets under some sort of military and political control was a large factor in his advocacy of the congress, Bilash also realised that better military organisation was needed to face an increasingly efficient enemy. On 3 January the congress met at the station building at Polohy, with over forty delegates. An executive committee of five was elected, and also an operational staff to take charge of the southern front and its rear. Bilash was elected chief of staff, and among the five members were Marchenko and Kurylenko. In the rear, the local Soviets were to be supported in every way, no military violence towards them to be permitted.

On 4 January Bilash issued his first order. Regimental staff locations were to be at Tsarekostyantynivka, Polohy, Basan, Orikhiv, and Zhrebets. Of the 6200 men, 2500 were to be at Tsarekostyantynivka. He appointed Pravda, whom he considered the most dangerous of the batki, as deputy head of the staff department for raising new units and for hospitals. It is unlikely, however, that he took up this promising post, for he was involved in a number of incidents at Krasnopil near Zhrebets, culminating in the shooting of his own brother, Mitka, in a drunken brawl.

By the same order all units were instructed to be ready for an offensive on 8 January. The White forces under the overall command of Mai-Maevski outnumbered the partisans 3 : 2, but the latter were optimistic, as many of the Whites were recently mobilised peasants. However, only half the Makhnovists were properly armed. It is not clear whether this offensive took place, for Bilash does not mention it again. His next date is 20 January, when he indicates that numbers

had grown to 15,000 plus 1000 cavalry and forty machine-guns on a 150 mile front, this length having increased by half.

At the same time the Whites were reinforced by the landing at the ports of Huenichesk, Berdyansk and Mariupil of fresh forces from the Caucasus totalling 12,000 men. A successful offensive followed: after heavy fighting Orikhiv, Polohy, Hulyai Pole, Haichur, and Hryshyne were captured. Not far north of Haichur the insurgent retreat halted.

In these unpromising conditions Holovko's congress opened on 23 January at Velyka Mykhailivka. Apart from being Holovko's village, the place lay to the north of current military operations.

Delegates were elected on the basis of one per volost and one per 100 insurgents. On the agenda were the strengthening of the front, adoption of a common nomenclature for popular organisations (soviets and the like), and application to the Directory for the return home of soldiers mobilised by it. There was concern at the amount of bloodletting between Makhnovists, Nationalists, and Bolsheviks, and a resolution was passed urging an end to it. A delegation was chosen to proceed to the various staffs. Instructions were issued on 26 January, over the names of Holovko, his two assistants, and the two secretaries, which combined the desire to stop the bloodshed with the wish to secure the return of the draftees.

The delegation, which had been further instructed to summon and report back to a second congress after their return, went soon afterwards to see Bilash at Pokrovske nearby. He told the astonished Holovko that Chubenko had already been sent by the staff to find and make an agreement with the Red Army. This decision had not been communicated to the civilians, and there had been not even a rumour of it at the Holovko congress.

Chubenko had not in fact left for Synelnykove until 25 January. He met up with the local Red commander, Dybenko, at Nyzhnyodniprovske the following day, the same day that the latter occupied Katerynoslav, with very little opposition. The main heads of agreement were as follows: all partisan units and detachments were to form part of a Red Army brigade, to be known as the third Trans-Dnieper Batko Makhno brigade; the brigade would be allocated military equipment, food, and finance by the Red Army; the internal organisation of the Makhnovist forces, including the electivity of commanders, would remain intact; while Makhno would command the brigade, political commissars would be sent in by the Red Army at staff and regimental levels; there would be authorised Makhnovist regiments, to which all local detachments would belong; and the brigade was to be operationally and administratively subordinate to Dybenko as commander of the Transdnieper division and Antonov as front commander. Dybenko promised to send an armoured train, 10,000 rifles, twenty machine-guns, money and other supplies.

Chubenko reported back to a meeting of unit commanders and chief and operational staffs on the night of 28 January. It was decided to send a delegation to Kharkiv, including Bilash, to sign the agreement formally and speed up the promised supplies. The following evening it arrived and met Antonov's deputy. The latter said that Dybenko had reported sending the Novomoskovske regiment and the armoured train 'Spartak' to the Makhnovists. He also sent warm greetings to the insurgents. The written agreement was probably signed early in February. At the same time as Makhno became commander, Kalashnykiv and Kurylenko became commanders of the 7th and 9th regiments of the brigade.

At the time of Chubenko's return a new White offensive was repulsed and the insurgents counter-attacked, retaking Hulyai Pole. They were now part of the forces of the Kharkiv direction, shortly to become the 2nd Ukrainian Army under Skachko, Dybenko's superior.

Following the capture of Olexandrivske on 30 January, a telegram was received by the town Revolutionary Committee on 1 February from Hryhoriyiv, 'Otaman of Kherson and Tavria', who had heard rumours of the fall of the Directory and wanted to make contact with the new authority in the city. His wire was passed on to Kharkiv, which demanded unconditional subordination to the Soviet Ukrainian government and Red Army command. After some hesitation, he accepted these terms. Most other wavering otamany in the central Ukraine then also deserted the Directory. On 10 February, Hryhoriyiv met Antonov in Katerynoslav.

The military situation had thus improved by the time that Holovko and the other delegates returned to summon the second congress. It met at Hulyai Pole on 12 February. To coordinate civilian affairs between congresses, a Revolutionary Military Soviet (RVS) was set up. Unlike the similarly-named Bolshevik military body of three members including the appropriate commander, the Makhnovist body did not deal in military affairs. These were left to Makhno and the staff, although the RVS had nominal oversight over them as representing the authority of the civilian over the military.

The first flush of enthusiasm, fighting for their own homes, had worn off; many of the front line soldiers had not been relieved for a considerable time. At Makhno's initiative, the congress decided on a 'voluntary, egalitarian, ten-year mobilisation' throughout the partisan area. The nature of the mobilisation is a matter of some difficulty for anarchist historians of the movement. How, as a writer in a Petrograd anarchist paper asked later in the year, can a mobilisation be voluntary? Either it is compulsory, and thus a mobilisation, or it is voluntary, and its members are free to come and go. It may rather be, as the Bolshevik historian Kubanin suggests, that Makhno was shrewd enough to realise that conscripts would stand a better chance of survival if taken prisoner by the Whites. In practice, the distinction turned out to be superfluous:

there were no arms for the volunteers who turned up in answer to the appeal.

In a resolution on the general political situation, there were the usual fulminations against the world and Russian bourgeoisie, such as appeared in the resolution of the first congress. But there was in addition a passage which sharply attacked the Bolsheviks. The reasons for this sharp change from the recent welcome were firstly, the behaviour of the Bolsheviks since their arrival. By the beginning of 1919, the Soviet Russian government had been firmly in power for over a year, and its Ukrainian offshoot tried to apply the same strong-arm methods to a country that was much more politically active and unsettled. Secondly, the peasants were extremely suspicious of Bolshevik land policy, which was to take the large estates away from the landlords, and make them into collective farms. The peasants wanted the land for themselves, and saw no reason why the private landlord should be replaced by the state landlord. Thirdly, from an anarchist point of view, a Bolshevik government might say some of the right things, but it went about them in a way little different from the Tsars. Slogans used at the congress such as 'Down with commissar-power and appointment from above' and 'Down with the Chekas, the Okhrankas of our times'³ clearly show this line of thinking.

³ Kubanin, p. 53.

3 The Year 1919

With the disappearance of the Nationalists as a military force from the eastern Ukraine, and the entry of the Red Army into the north-east, the attention of the partisans was reconcentrated on the south-east. Following the occupation of Hulyai Pole on 29 January, fighting was reported at Polohy on 4 February, its capture announced in *Izvestiya* on the 5th. By the 8th, the attack had reached forty miles south of Olexandrivske. On 13 February there were clashes round Verkhni Tokmak and also Volnovakha. The forces, including the insurgents, were now described as Dybenko's in the central press. A notable event was the coming over of a Volunteer Army platoon, complete with banners.

Hryhoriyiv also had been active. The enemy he faced were the Western Allies of the Great War, mainly the French, with the help of some Greeks. They had occupied some of the southern ports at the end of 1918, to stop them falling into Bolshevik hands. The area of occupation stretched from Odessa to Kherson, and also included the main Black Sea naval base at Sevastopol. This enemy was externally imposing rather than internally sound. Hryhoriyiv moved against them early in March, occupying Kherson on the 10th and Mykolaiv on the 12th.

The Bolsheviks were so desperately short of troops that they had to allow the otamany an autonomy which amounted to independence in everything except strategy. In these circumstances, the political commissars, on whom much reliance had been placed to keep the partisans in line, were almost powerless. Makhno kept them on a very tight rein: they were allowed to exist, albeit in a not very friendly atmosphere, but they were not allowed to influence policy. The chief commissar attached to Hryhoriyiv found it advisable to cooperate closely with him rather than with distant Kharkiv or Kiyiv: he signed the orders and hoped for the best.

With Hryhoriyiv's success in the west, Antonov switched his thoughts temporarily to the east. There, the strategy - a better description might be an ad hoc coordination involving two fronts and various armies - was to push the Whites out of the Donbas towards the Kuban by attacking from the north round Luhansk and the east towards Volnovakha and Taganrog. Up to the middle of March, the eastern half of this strategy worked successfully. Berdyansk was freed on 15 March, Volnovakha on the 17th. On the 13th, however, Antonov had learnt that Dybenko had separated from Makhno, considering that the liberation of the Crimea was the top priority. He had not consulted Antonov beforehand, and turned a deaf ear to Antonov's orders to back up Makhno's advance.

On 14 March Dybenko took Melitopil, the last important town on the mainland railway to Sivash and the Crimea. On 27 March he captured the Chongar bridge and peninsula. The same day, insurgents occupied Mariupil, for which they were handsomely praised in Dybenko's report, which even, ironically in view of later changed relationships, proposed a medal for one of the Makhnovist commanders. Dybenko himself earned Antonov's great displeasure, and an accusation that he was acting as wilfully and independently as any partisan.

At about this time, over Antonov's unavailing protests, the Makhno brigade was operationally transferred from the Ukrainian to the Southern Front. The commander-in-chief, Vatsetis, wanted

to consider the defence of the Donbas as a whole. He pointed out, correctly, that Makhno was holding the southern end of the Southern Front, and that, while the Ukrainian Front supplied the arms, food, and ammunition, this was an accident of historical development. Apart from Dybenko, the rest of the Ukrainian front was away to the west, and even he had no front line contiguous with the Southern Front as Makhno did.

While Vatsetis's logic was impeccable, his organisation left something to be desired, for the chain of command was left exactly as before. This meant that orders for Makhno had now to come from the Southern Front commander, Gittis, via Skachko as commander of the 2nd Ukrainian Army and Dybenko in the Crimea as divisional commander. On top of this, Antonov was told that he was still politically responsible for Makhno. This placed Antonov in an impossible position: he was frequently called upon to justify Makhno's activities, but had no direct control over him. He bombarded Vatsetis with telegrams over this as over many other matters, large and small.

The effect of this bickering on Makhno and Hryhoriyiv can easily be imagined. It gave them ample room to preserve their autonomy by playing off the Red commanders against each other. They were further aided by two developments. Towards the end of April, Antonov decided he had better find out about things for himself, and paid visits to both leaders. This made the differences within the Red command obvious. Secondly, the Moscow leadership became increasingly concerned during April at the White build-up in the Donbas. This added to the existing worry over the falling off of food deliveries from the south to the northern cities. To Lenin these were matters of vital importance.

From early April 1919, Hryhoriyiv played no part in offensive operations. He retired to his home base at Olexandria, whence he resisted all attempts to get him to move. Even when Antonov went there, all he would promise was to move against the Romanians at some future time.

Makhno, on the other hand, continued to fight. On 27 March the Whites attacked towards Luhansk, one of the biggest towns in the Donbas. The attack was beaten back by the Soviet 8th Army. Makhno moved forward to relieve the pressure, retaking Mariupil following a Shkuro incursion at the beginning of April. The Whites, however, under Mai-Maevski, had much better internal communications, pushed back the 8th Army again, then turned on Makhno, ensuring that both offensives had done little except tire out and deplete the Red and partisan forces.

Carried forward past Mariupil, Makhno's advance had threatened the main Luhansk-Taganrog railway. After a short check, it reached to within four miles of Kuteynkove on this line. Mai-Maevski then directed Shkuro, one of his best cavalry commanders, to launch a partisan attack on the weak junction of the Makhno brigade with the 9th division of the neighbouring Red 13th Army. According to Antonov, the 9th division panicked, and Shkuro irrupted into Makhno's rear on 12 April. Skachko then ordered Dybenko to send some troops to Makhno's aid. Again Dybenko refused. He was far more interested in consolidating his position in the Crimea. A Crimean army was formed early in May, and Dybenko's 3rd Ukrainian division became part of it on 22 May. A second counterattack had to be launched by the 8th Army, entailing further losses, but managing to slow down and finally halt Shkuro.

The low point of the retreat was the re-abandonment of Mariupil on 19 April. By the 22nd, things were picking up. On the 26th, Volnovakha station was retaken, and soon the Donbas front settled down until the Whites reactivated it round Luhansk, which they forced the 8th Army to abandon on 4 May.

While the armies marched across the southern steppes, life continued in Hulyai Pole, free of enemy occupation since January. The RVS called a third regional peasant and insurgent congress

on 10 April, to review progress and look forward. This was the largest and most representative congress held by the Makhnovists. The number of delegates is not known, but they came from 72 volosts in which lived two million people. An attempt was made by Dybenko to ban it, which may explain his refusal soon afterwards to send Makhno any military help. The telegram attempting the ban was sent at the furthest point of the advance on Kuteynykove. More puzzling this, as the attitude of the Bolshevik leadership was, if not favourable, certainly still neutral. Lenin telegraphed to Rakovski, head of the Soviet Ukrainian government, on 18 April:

Re Dybenko's plans, I'd beware of adventure - it could end in disaster, and he'll be cut off (a reference to the Crimean campaign - MM); more sensible for his forces to replace Makhno and strike at Taganrog and Rostov. Think it over very carefully indeed, but of course make the decision yourselves.¹

The anarchist influence in Hulyai Pole worried the Bolsheviks. At the end of April, Shevchenko, in charge of an armoured train doing propaganda work on the Southern Front, reported:

On taking up work ... I discovered that political work among the serving forces is at its height; but among those being mobilized it is rather bad, and in the Makhnovist detachments it is non-existent. Political activists are refusing to work in them, and this refusal is leading to a growth in banditry, pogrom agitation, beating up of Jews, &c.²

That there was some truth in these allegations is clear from Bilash's description of the partisan forces at the turn of the year, especially his first meeting with Pravda. On the other hand, Shevchenko's picture does not square with insurgent military operations during the first half of 1919. Besides, the whole question was academic: there were no replacement forces for Makhno - except Dybenko's!

The reports also had an effect on Antonov. Unhappy about the lack of military progress, he became angrier when he saw the Kharkiv *Izvestiya* for 25 April, which contained an article entitled, 'Down with the Makhnovschyna'. He felt the task of containing the partisan commanders was already difficult enough. In order to patch things up, he decided to make the visits to Makhno and Hryhoriyiv already mentioned.

After a brief welcome at Hulyai Pole, Makhno took his guest off to the front, where they made speeches to the troops, Antonov stressing the need for discipline, while Makhno had the usual complaints about lack of guns and clothes. The Makhnovists had been given 3000 Italian rifles, but they became useless as soon as their small quantity of bullets was used up. There were also complaints about the behaviour of the rear authorities, especially the Cheka.

In private conversation Antonov was much impressed by Makhno's resolve to keep on fighting the bourgeoisie, so impressed that on the same evening, 29 April, he sent a telegram to Rakovski and Bubnov in Kiyiv saying that the Makhnovist forces were a big asset, and that the hounding of them must stop at once. He sent another telegram to the editor of the paper, with copies to Rakovski and Makhno:

¹ Korolivsky, Vol. 1, pt. 1, p. 737.

² Korolivsky, Vol. 1, pt. 2, p. 374.

The article is the most perverted fiction and does not in the least correspond to the existing situation. The insurgents fighting the Whites are on a level with the Red Army men, but are in a far worse condition for supplies.³

In a postscript, Antonov added that the press campaign had certainly helped to turn Makhno anti-Soviet.

The commander-in-chief told Skachko not to remove any troops from the partisan sector, and gave him a large list of supplies to be sent, including bullets for the Italian rifles, 2 surgeons, 27 field kitchens, and sheets for 1000 wounded. He must have known that Skachko could not fulfil this order - an example of the Bolsheviks in the Ukraine expecting miracles around, and especially, below them.

The situation, chiefly for the Bolsheviks, was further complicated and confounded by the arrival of L. B. Kamenev, special emissary of the Russian Republic, in Kharkiv from Moscow on 19 April.

His job was to try to sort out the bureaucratic muddle that had overtaken food procurement in the Ukraine, delaying or preventing the movement of supplies to the northern cities. It was not simply, he argued, a case of getting agreements with Hryhoriyiv and Makhno. First, agreement between Antonov, Podvoisky, the War Commissar, and Shlikhter, the Food Commissar, was needed.

Kamenev also decided to go out and see things for himself. He went first to Dybenko in Simferopol. The latter also complained of the poor work of the food organisations! He did, however, tell Kamenev he would obey orders in future, a reference to his earlier defiance of Skachko's order to come to Makhno's aid. After a brief stop at Melitopol, Kamenev arrived in Olexandriivske on 3 May. There he met Dybenko's supply chief, Novikov. When asked why he had no control over his subordinates, the latter merely shrugged his shoulders and said: 'Makhno will be Makhno, and you won't get him to obey orders'.⁴ Novikov did, though, bestir himself so far as to arrange a meeting between Kamenev and Makhno.

Accordingly Kamenev found himself at Hulyai Pole station early on 7 May, only eight days after Antonov. He took the precaution of asking the commandant to come and look for him if he had not returned by 6 p.m. Over lunch, there were renewed complaints about the Cheka. Kamenev brought up the subject of the Hulyai Pole mobilisation, and was told that the toiling people did not need to ask permission in such matters. The meeting was inconclusive, but publicly the two men parted on the friendliest of terms. Like Antonov, he complimented Makhno, but was honest enough to admit that there were differences:

I should also openly mention what I noticed on my tour to be evil and harmful. First, strong anti-Semitic feeling - an unmitigated evil, which must be fought to the finish ... Secondly, all insurgents, the brigade, the population of the area should realise that ... your sector of the front is only one thousandth of the front on which the workers and peasants of Russia and Ukraine are repulsing the common enemy ... Things such as the removal of valuable property from Mariupol - belts and metal - without agreement from the centre, without even the knowledge of the Army command, should cease at once.⁴

³ Antonov-Ovseyenko, Vol. 4, pp. 113-14.

⁴ V.S., p. 132.

These differences were minor compared to the disaster which erupted in the central Ukraine, the revolt of Hryhoriyiv. On 7 May came a strong warning of trouble when he arrested Savitski, a recently arrived commissar. The storm broke when Kamenev, after his visit to Makhno, continued in Antonov's footsteps, intending to proceed to Olexandria via Katerynoslav. He never got through, for early in the morning of 9-10 May news reached Katerynoslav of the revolt, and of Hryhoriyiv's proclamation of an Universal, or declaration to the Ukrainian people, a virulent attack on the Bolsheviks containing one explicit anti-Semitic reference, but not mentioning Makhno.

Kamenev at once set up a Katerynoslav Council of Defence including Averin and Skachko. He warned the latter that retreat would be regarded as criminal, but that did not stop him abandoning the city in a panic when Hryhoriyiv approached. The same day Antonov, then in Kiyiv, ordered his replacement by Voroshilov in respect of the forces of the 2nd Ukrainian Army to be directed against Hryhoriyiv.

The height of the revolt was Hryhoriyiv's appearance in the suburbs of Katerynoslav - Averin stopped him taking it - and the mutiny of some Red Army men north of Yelyzavethrad. He was so confident that he split up his 15,000 men in four directions: Odessa, Kiyiv, Kremenchuk, and Katerynoslav. Fragmentation led quickly to reverses, although not before he had started a pogrom in Yelyzavethrad which claimed three thousand victims.

The same day, 10 May, that Kamenev wired Lenin about the revolt, he also telegraphed Makhno:

The traitor Hryhoriyiv has betrayed the front by failing to carry out his battle orders, and has reversed his guns. The decisive moment has come: either you march with the workers and peasants of all Russia, or you will in fact open the front to the enemy. There can be no delay . . . publish a proclamation against Hryhoriyiv. The absence of a reply will be taken as a declaration of war.⁵

This telegram did not reach Hulyai Pole for 48 hours, for the Bolsheviks had intercepted telegrams from Hryhoriyiv to Makhno urging the latter to join the revolt. The Olexandrivske authorities immediately cut telephone and telegraph communications with Hulyai Pole. There were also rumours, which proved to be false, that Makhno had removed troops from the front and sent them against Olexandrivske.

As soon as the telegram got through to the field staff in Mariupil via Hulyai Pole, an enlarged staff and RVS meeting took place. A telegram was sent to the soldiers urging them to hold the front. The reply to Kamenev was frostier, but the message was similar. A few days later a proclamation was issued against Hryhoriyiv. It uses the Universal to attack him for wanting to impose a new authority on the people, for encouraging toiling people to attack each other, and for inciting pogroms. The Bolsheviks were blamed as largely responsible for the revolt. In addition to the Makhnovist staff council, the leading Soviet representatives in Olexandrivske town and district also signed the proclamation, a move which can hardly have been of comfort to Moscow.

Within a fortnight, Red forces had reduced Hryhoriyiv to a level where he could be contained without trouble. Far more serious were the tactical and strategic errors which would result in the most serious defeat inflicted by the Whites and were to lead Denikin to within 250 miles of the capital. In order to secure the containment and then reduction of Hryhoriyiv, all available reserves of all three Ukrainian armies were thrown against him. This left none over for Makhno's hard-pressed forces. In addition, Dybenko withdrew the Crimean Shock regiment from Makhno

⁵ V.S., pp. 139-40.

for use against the revolt, and diverted reinforcements from the Crimea (at last) intended for Makhno, consisting of a cavalry regiment and an armoured train.

This tactical error might not have been so serious, perhaps it was inevitable because of the pressing need to deal with Hryhoriyiv, had it not been for the strategic error. This was to persist in the planning of yet another offensive to liberate the Donbas. According to one Bolshevik source, the Whites at the beginning of May had a local superiority of nearly two to one.

The reason why the offensive nonetheless went forward was the unremitting pressure from Moscow to take Taganrog and Rostov. Lenin telegraphed to Kamenev on 7 May, before the news of the revolt:

We shall undoubtedly perish unless we clear the Donbas completely in a short time. For the time being, till Rostov is occupied, we must be diplomatic with Makhno's forces. Antonov has been sent there in person, and he has been made specifically responsible for Makhno's units. Telegraph a detailed response, (underlining in original).⁶

The partisans advanced once more to Kuteinykove on 15 May; the staff reported that:

The non-fulfilment of an urgent order for bullets has compelled us to abandon many positions and call a halt to the offensive. Units . . . moving forward are seriously vulnerable in the event of strong counter-attacks.⁷

Shkuro's cavalry was transferred once again to meet the threatened breakthrough of Makhno and the neighbouring 13th Army.

With Hryhoriyiv contained but not beaten, and a vital offensive in progress, another quarrel broke out within the Ukrainian command. From Makhno had come a repeat of an earlier request that his forces, now about 20,000, be made into a division. This would certainly enhance his prestige. Antonov was planning to bring Makhno under closer supervision by creating a divisional amalgam of Red Army men and Makhnovists. Makhno would remain a brigade commander, but the number of forces under his direct orders would be reduced. It was hoped that the Red Army soldiers would leaven the insurgents.

Antonov was therefore very angry to learn that the RVS of the 2nd Ukrainian Army - Skachko - had approved the proposal to turn the brigade into a division, on about 23 May. Skachko had his reasons ready: transforming the insurgent forces into a division would be a good opportunity to introduce larger numbers of political activists into those units: reversion to brigade status would exacerbate the position. The proposal was confirmed: it transpired that Skachko had obtained the prior approval of Mezhlauk, a member of the RVS of the Southern Front and an aide of Voroshilov. Nonetheless, the RVS issued a statement fulminating against Makhno, on 28 May, and ordered Chikvannaya, Antonov's nominee, to Hulyai Pole to take over the insurgent division.

The advance of the Red forces continued until 19 May, when Shkuro counter-attacked. The Makhnovists retreated 23 miles, a big withdrawal in one day. Documentary evidence from Gekker, commander of the 13th Army, suggests that the breakthrough took place at the junction of the two forces, compelling the Makhnovists to retreat to the west and the 9th division to the north-west.

⁶ Arshinov, *Istoriya*, p. 107.

⁷ Korolivsky, Vol. 2, p. 16.

On 21 May the partisans abandoned Volnovakha. The following day the Whites launched a further offensive against the northern Donbas, and attacked towards Millerovo. On the 29th, they opened a second gap, at the junction of the 13th and 8th Armies. In the Makhnovist sector the retreat went on. Mariupil was evacuated on 25 May. To the north-west Red forces withdrew further, although the Whites were checked thirteen miles west of Volnovakha. On 30 May, Makhno telegraphed his resignation to the Commissar for War, leaving the Red Army. Such was the confused situation that the following day he had a meeting with Hiroshi, now commander of Skachko's forces in all but name.

There then followed a Makhnovist action which was bound to cause more friction. On 31 May, the Hulyai Pole RVS decided, in view of the gravity of the military position, to summon a new, fourth, congress for 15 June. This time it was Trotski, the latest high-powered emissary, who went for the Makhnovists. In his train paper 'On The Road' on 2 June, he printed the most vicious piece of anti-Makhnovist propaganda yet to appear. The only reason the partisans were allied with the Bolsheviks, he said, was to obtain money and military supplies. The Makhnovists had refused to hand over coal and corn they had seized through their control of the Mariupil branch line. They talked about non-party Soviets, when in fact they were making anarchist propaganda. This 'anarchist-kulak debauchery' must be eliminated.

Throughout June he published similar articles, of which the best known was Order 1824 of 4 June, banning the congress. This order was also signed by Vatsetis, and came from the RVS of the Republic. One source suggests Makhno was planning to use the congress to set up an independent Priazov-Donets republic centred on Hulyai Pole, another that Order 1824 was not communicated to the insurgent staff, who only heard about it a few days later.

By early June the Makhnovist sector was in very grave danger. At Hulyai Pole a peasant regiment was scraped together in 24 hours in an attempt to save the town, with the most varied weaponry, as neither front nor rear had any to spare. Ten miles away at Svyatodukhivka, it encountered Shkuro's Kuban Cossacks. Hopelessly outclassed but fighting bravely, they were mown down on 5 June and their commander, Veretyelnyk, killed. The following day the Cossacks entered and gave the place a good working over. Makhno himself in a desperate rearguard action was able to hold the station, five miles away. The following day he recaptured the town, but only briefly.

The Red commanders were duly impressed, for the same day, 7 June, they travelled down from Chaplyne to Haichur station. Voroshilov, now formally Skachko's successor of what had been renamed the 14th Army, and Mezhlauk came in person. Once again there was cooperation, now from the highly desirable mobility of an armoured train-but for 48 hours only, neither side seeing a chance of more lasting joint action.

It is likely that Voroshilov had a Trotski order for Makhno's arrest in his pocket, also covering Nestor's leading supporters and the disbandment of the insurgent division. Certainly, an order had been issued for his arrest on 6 June, even before the link-up with Voroshilov. He was well advised to clear off while he could. He put in his resignation again, dating it from Haichur, although he had left there by the time it was issued.

He handed over his command to a Bolshevik in Olexandrivske who was out of touch with the main Red forces. His staff were not so lucky. Five of them were arrested on the same day. On 17 June at Kharkiv they were shot under Order 1824 for having distributed literature concerning the abortive fourth congress. They had been on the armoured train, and were easy enough to arrest once Nestor himself had disappeared.

Only a small cavalry detachment went with him to Olexandrivske. He gave orders that the rest were to remain under Red command to fight Denikin, fulfilling an earlier promise not to create an interior front against the Bolsheviks - yet. Foreseeing further use for his men, he made a secret agreement with his regimental commanders to await a message from him to leave the Red Army and join up again with the partisans. He then passed through Olexandrivske into the Chorno-Znamenski forest as a temporary refuge. Word soon spread that he was there, and large numbers of refugees from the Hulyai Pole area made their way thither to escape the vengeance of the Whites.

Along with other Red forces, the partisans continued to offer some resistance. Hulyai Pole was re-occupied after heavy fighting, but on 11 June Berdyansk was abandoned, creating the possibility of a further White flanking movement from the south which could become a pincer. Polohy was temporarily retaken on 12 June, but at the same time Hulyai Pole and Haichur stations had to be given up, and on the 14th the remnants of the Berdyansk line were abandoned. A final attempt to retain a hold on the left bank failed after a brief re-occupation of the Polohy-Hulyai Pole area on 20 June.

By 21 June Denikin had finally split the forces of the Red Southern Front into three. One part was retreating along the Azov shore: White units moving on Olexandrivske and Katerynoslav cut them off from what was left of the 13th and 8th Armies, retreating to the north of Pavlohrad towards Kharkiv. These in turn were separated from the Tsaritsyn front by Vrangeli's Millerovo offensive. These successes led to increased expectations and the issue of the famous Moscow order on 3 July.

After his stay in the forest, Nestor was forced to retreat west towards Dolynska and Yelyzavethrad. He was now moving into Hryhoriyiv's territory, and, even though the latter was neither very active nor in control of a large area, he was a force to be reckoned with in view of the weakened military state of the Bolsheviks.

Some units of the 3rd Ukrainian Army, to which Hryhoriyiv had been attached, and still based on Odessa, would soon also face the threat of being cut off. They could still get some supplies from Kiyiv, but, as well as the Whites, Makhno, and Hryhoriyiv, they faced an irate peasantry organised in the smaller insurgent groups. In August, there was a revolt within five miles of Mykolaiv, where, with the evacuation northwards of a railway battalion and a Cheka battalion, there were no local troops left to defend the town.

Makhno's next move was to attack Yelyzavethrad, where his counter-intelligence told him there was a single Red battalion. The first part of the town was taken quite easily, but the Red soldiers were joined by townspeople who apparently thought that the attackers were followers of Hryhoriyiv. The matter was not pressed, and the Makhnovists retired to the village of Kompaniyivka near Verbluzhka. The attitude towards Hryhoriyiv had now to be decided: whether to fight or make an alliance, if the latter, against whom.

The cards were by no means all in Makhno's hand. It was true that he enjoyed greater prestige, but he was away from his home area, in the centre of Hryhoriyiv's remaining influence. Nestor would therefore have to think carefully before he made any hostile move, despite his public denunciation of the Universal. Whether by chance or design, Hryhoriyiv and some of his staff arrived soon after in Kompaniyivka: he asked if Makhno had brought any Jews with him. On being told that he had, the otaman suggested they be beaten up; they were not. Vehemence against the Reds and Nationalists covered an ambivalent attitude to the Whites, against whom he refused to commit himself positively.

Negotiations lasted about four days, with protracted arguments among the Makhnovists on whether to go into an alliance or not. Both sides conferred separately several times. Makhno had much difficulty in winning over his leading supporters, who all, including himself, regarded Hryhoriyiv as an unprincipled adventurer. Some were convinced by the suggestion that a temporary arrangement could be used to get at the rank and file, many of whom were thought to be good revolutionary people. Hryhoriyiv himself could be disposed of later. The final agreement was that Hryhoriyiv should be military commander of the united forces, but subordinate to Makhno as chairman of the RVS. Hryhory Makhno was to be chief of staff.

There were many immediate points of contention. The Jewish Makhnovists were disgusted at Authority's continued anti-Semitism. Some of the Makhnovists complained of unjust punishments: one had been shot for stealing some onions from a priest's garden. Peasants' possessions were being stolen. The final break came when Hryhoriyiv tried to win over Makhno to an alliance with the Whites, on the grounds that against the Reds the devil himself could be an ally.

On arrival in Sentove village near Olexandria on 26 July, there was once again evidence that some armed band had been ransacking peasant cooperatives and Jewish shops. The locals said the damage had been done on the 25th. The Makhnovists at once concluded that this was Hryhoriyiv's work, and, when the offer of a White alliance was made, decided to use a meeting planned for Sentove on the afternoon of the 27th for the denouement.

The meeting had originally been called to discuss the current tasks of the insurgents in the Ukraine, and was attended by nearly 20,000 partisans and local peasants. Hryhoriyiv was the first speaker, saying that the most urgent task was to chase out the Bolsheviks, that they should ally themselves with any anti-Red forces available - the clear inference being Denikin. This was seized on by the second speaker, Chubenko, who also voiced other complaints. The argument became heated, Hryhoriyiv went for his revolver, but Chubenko, who had been expecting just such a move, was too quick and shot him. Makhno himself finished him off.

Immediately afterwards Makhnovist units posted nearby surrounded the village, disarmed the leading Hryhoriyivists, and shot one of them. Makhno, Chubenko, and others went back on to the platform to justify the killing. Under one resolution Hryhoriyiv's men were to join the Makhnovists, another explained:

The assassination of Otaman Hryhoriyiv on 27 July in the village of Sentove ... by the ideological leader of the insurgents, Batko Makhno, should be regarded as an historical and necessary fact, for his policy, acts and aims were counter-revolutionary and mainly directed to helping Denikin and other counter-revolutionaries, as is proved by his Jewish pogroms and his arming of thugs.⁸

In case this was not enough, a short telegram was sent out for general distribution, announcing the killing, with a copy to the Kremlin. There was now no insurgent rival left in the central Ukraine.

At the end of July, with Hryhoriyiv disposed of, Makhno judged the time right to recall the troops he had left under Red command. By the end of June, all units of the Crimean Army had abandoned the Crimea, to avoid being cut off. They united with the remains of the 14th (formerly 2nd Ukrainian) Army in the Nykopol area, soon afterwards becoming its Crimean division, then, on 1 August, the 58th sharpshooter division of that army.

⁸ Antonov-Ovseyenko, Vol. 4, p. 302.

The remaining units of the 14th Army were the Makhnovists, and it was they who now rejoined Nestor. They met up at Dobro-velychkivka village near Pomischna station in the middle of August. With the discarding of many demoralised Hryhoriyivists, the combined strength amounted to 15,000. There were four regiments of infantry and cavalry, a separate artillery division, a machine-gun regiment, and a bodyguard of 150-200 for Makhno. They were concentrated in the Pomischna junction-Yelyzavethrad-Voznesenske area.

About 31 July, the 58th division was operationally transferred to the 12th Army, a combination of the former 1st and 3rd Ukrainian Armies. This made sense, as the division was cut off from the rest of the 14th. It was under instruction to hold the Black Sea littoral at any cost. On 14 August, Semyonov, commander of the 12th, set up a separate southern group. He named Fedko, commander of the 58th, formerly Dybenko's deputy in the Crimea, as its chief. The group also contained the 45th division in the Vinnytsa area and the 47th round Odessa.

The Red forces in Mykolaiv were in a perilous position. Local insurgents had already damaged the main line of retreat, the railway to Odessa, and the line to Kiyiv was cut by the Whites soon after. The road to Odessa was the only way left open. Two telegrams captured by the Nationalists give a graphic description of the town and the extent of Makhnovist influence. Both were sent by Fedko to the RVS of the 12th Army, to Rakovski in Kiyiv, and divisional commander Yakir in Odessa:

The disintegration of the units in contact with the insurgents has reached its height. Units in Kochergin's sector which is flooded with Makhno agents, have, along with most of the command staff, gone over to Makhno. The Makhnovists have seized the staff in this sector, Kochergin has been badly wounded, and the political commissar killed. The mood of the units now in Mykolaiv is Makhnovist. An armoured train team has sent a delegation to Makhno, has surrounded the main station and the divisional staff and has formed an armed meeting, at which they demanded the arrest of the staff and joining up with Makhno. It was possible to conclude the meeting satisfactorily. An order has been given for the armoured train to be blown up. When the remaining units come into contact with the insurgent masses, we can expect their adherence to the latter.⁹

After the armoured trains were blown up, a large number of their crews went off to join Makhno - with their weapons. A minority has been clearing the road to Odessa. With the units in this mood, we will hardly be able to hold Mykolaiv. Enemy occupation of the town threatens to overwhelm the entire group of the 58th division active in the area.¹⁰

Another telegram later the same day announced that Kochergin had been killed, and Semyonov reported to the commander-in-chief:

The 3rd brigade of the 58th division, based in the Dolynska area, has disintegrated, and part of it gone over to the Makhnovists. The 2nd brigade had retreated to Bratske, 25 miles north of Voznesenske. The enemy has occupied Kherson. Part of the Mykolaiv garrison has gone over to the Makhnovists, but part of it is defending the town and clearing the road to Odessa, fighting the bands. If Mykolaiv falls, Odessa and the 58th division will be in serious trouble.¹¹

The full story of the Makhnovist coup has only recently come to light. It was led by Kalashnykiv, former commander of the 7th regiment of the TransDnieper brigade, one of the more anarchist of

⁹ Heifets, p. 71; *Izvestiya*, 5 August 1919. ¹⁰ Kapuslyansky, p. 105.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Korolivsky, Vol. 2, p. 300.

the insurgents, who had with him Uralov, one of the outside anarchists who had joined Makhno earlier in the year. Kalashnykiv, still a regimental commander, supposed to be covering the rest of the division, appeared with the regiment at the staff location of Novy Buh, and arrested the entire staff and all commissars. Attempts by the few troops unaffected by Makhnovist propaganda were easily dealt with. Shortly afterwards he moved off with his men towards Dobrovelychkivka to join Makhno. At least two other regiments, the Novospasivka and Kurylenko's, were affected, with Makhnovist influence in a number of others.

Zatonsky, a member of the 12th RVS (southern group) and Anulov, his second in command, brought up some Red kursanty (officer cadets) and a few others they had scraped together, and had occupied the vital Pomischna railway junction on 13 August. Nearby were the remnants of the Mykolaiv garrison who had not sided with Makhno. Some political activists with Zatonsky tried very hard to persuade them to help the kursanty hold the junction, to ensure retreat from Odessa. The Mykolaiv men were very nervous: they could hear White guns only a few miles away. Even the kursanty, normally among the most steadfast, refused to fight Makhno: there were partisan agents even among them. Anulov himself was easily captured, along with the armoured train in which the kursanty staff travelled.

Anulov reports the Makhnovists as saying that 'The communists are abandoning our own free Ukraine; we should defend the Ukraine against Denikin, against the Whites, against the communists, against all who are pressing on Ukraine'.¹² There was a widespread feeling that the Reds were deserting the Ukraine in order to defend the Russian heartland of Bolshevism. The soldiers, being themselves Ukrainians, were susceptible to the nationalist undertones in this argument. Further, they could see everywhere evidence of bitter peasant dissatisfaction with the remote central government. Makhno, on the other hand, was nearby, known as a skilful general who seemed ready to continue the struggle inside the Ukraine.

The defections were a serious blow to Yakir, now in command of the 12th Army southern group. Following the fall of Mykolaiv and the combined land and sea White attack which captured Odessa on 23 August, his main preoccupation was to escape through the narrow gap between the forces of Petliura and Denikin, daily getting smaller and infested by insurgent and bandit groupings, of which the Makhnovists were the largest. His forces consisted of his own 45th division, along with the 47th, and the remnants of the 58th, about a third of its original strength. The total roughly equalled the numbers under Makhno.

Soon after the White general Shilling occupied Mykolaiv on 31 August, Makhno, now reinforced, felt strong enough to go over to the offensive against the Whites. On 2 September he occupied Pomischna, two days later was driven out of it, nearly recaptured it, but finally had to retreat to Novoukrainka, which the Whites occupied on 7 September. Retreat to Uman now started in earnest. Fighting was continuous as superior White forces pushed Makhno further and further westwards. The insurgents had now to move by road, as the Whites had control of the railways. Makhnovist forces at this time were made up of the old cavalry regiment 900 strong, three Red Army brigades under Dyachenko, Gubanov, and Maslov (the latter certainly a former 58th commander), and two artillery divisions. The regiments included an International Battalion under Eiman, on which there is unfortunately no other information available.

First contacts were made with the Nationalists in the Uman area in mid-September: they were occupying the town of Uman. The Makhnovists were thus caught in a sack, with Whites to the

¹² Anulov, p. 121.

south and south-east, towards Holta and Odessa, while to the west, Zhmerynka, and the north, Uman, were Petliura's forces. The latter were not in the best of spirits after disasters earlier in the year, despite some recent revival. They certainly did not want to add another enemy to the Bolsheviks, and, possibly, the Whites. Also, their right-wing ended in mid-air, and it was hoped that Makhno might actively or passively fill this void. The partisans had no base, and had been on the move for nearly three months. They had a large number of wounded who could not be cared for properly. They were far from home, and to add a third enemy to the Whites and Bolsheviks would have been military suicide.

It was therefore in the temporary interests of both sides to avoid hostilities, and a truce was agreed. After a delegation to the Makhnovist camp, Makhno himself went to Uman for negotiations. An accord was signed, under which all the Makhnovist wounded would be taken care of in the Uman hospitals, and strict military neutrality would be observed. The insurgents would occupy the area round the villages of Perehonivka and Tekucha, near Uman.

Despite the truce, the attitude of the insurgents towards Petliura had not changed at all. The Makhnovist RVS issued a leaflet attacking him as a 'defender of the propertied classes, and therefore deserving death at the hands of the toilers'.¹³

By 24 September, intelligence reports coming in to the Makhnovists suggested that White units had appeared to the west of Uman. Makhno at once concluded that the only way this could have happened was through the Nationalists allowing the Whites to cross their territory and thus surround the partisans. This view has been disputed by Nationalists, on the grounds that fighting had started two days before against the Whites.

By 25 September, the insurgents were definitely surrounded: there was no hope of further retreat westwards. Makhno decided to turn back east to face the Whites. The risk of an all-out battle was preferable to being slowly squeezed and starved to death. On the evening of the 25th an indecisive engagement took place at the village of Krutenkoi, near Perehonivka. The Whites retired, trying to entice their enemy to attack prepared defensive positions, but the latter did not go forward, hoping to deceive the Whites into believing that their action had been purely of a rearguard nature, thus disguising the change of direction.

However, the Whites were quite ready for the battle which started at 3 a.m. on 26 September. Perehonivka village was the insurgent headquarters, but Makhno himself had disappeared the previous evening. The better-armed and numerically superior Whites soon began to get the upper hand. Their reinforcements entered the battle. Slowly, the Makhnovists were pushed back on the village. By 9 a.m., fighting was taking place on the village outskirts. The staff picked up their weapons, ready to make a last stand. Arshinov takes up the story:

Then the machine-gun fire and the shouts of the enemy began to recede, and the defenders realised that the battle was going on some distance away. The cause of this was Makhno, who . . . tired out and covered in dust, burst onto the enemy flank out of a steep ravine. The tiredness and despondency of the insurgents disappeared at once ... They surged forward with renewed energy, following their beloved leader, who seemed doomed to death.¹⁴

¹³ Arshinov, *Istoriya*, p. 138.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 140-1.

In spite of its steadfast resistance, the 1st Simferopol regiment was beaten back, in good order for the first ten minutes, scattering in formation in an attempt to delay the advancing enemy, but then turned to flight. The Whites tried to make for the river Syniukha, about ten miles away. They were outpaced by the insurgent cavalry, who caught up with them just as they reached the bank, and a terrible slaughter followed. In addition, Makhno had crossed the river ahead of them, and a reserve regiment and some of the staff were taken prisoner. The 1st Simferopol and 2nd Labzinski regiments were destroyed.

Outwith the immediate area of the western Ukraine, the full implications of this victory were not immediately apparent. On the northern front the White advance was at its greatest extent, and the first news Moscow readers heard of events in the south was when Pravda reported three weeks later that Makhno had occupied Olexandrivske.

Within 24 hours Makhno's forces were advancing in three separate directions, in the south towards Kryvy Rih, Dolynska and Nykopil, in the centre towards Olexandrivske and Hulyai Pole, and in the north towards the open country between Olexandrivske and Katerynoslav. The main thrust was in the centre. Within forty-eight hours they were masters of Kryvy Rih, about 165 miles from Perehonivka as the crow flies. Olexandrivske, about 70 miles further east, was rushed the following day. On from Kryvy Rih to Nykopil, where three reserve regiments in process of formation were smashed. From Nykopil the southern advance turned temporarily north, probably because of a check to the central advance, for Olexandrivske was finally occupied from the Nykopil direction on 5 October.

On 6 October Makhno gave orders for a drive south to the Azov ports. On the evening of the 10th, the inhabitants of Berdyansk heard cannon-fire from the fishing suburb of Lisky, and the nearby cemetery: the Lisky fishermen, in cooperation with the Makhnovists, had captured some guns in Lisky, and turned them on the town. The insurgents, about 2000 men, drove out the Whites the following day. There was a huge haul of military equipment, including 600 trucks of British ammunition and an aeroplane. White communications with the outside world through the town, and soon after through Mariupil also, were cut off. This was a very serious blow, for much of the military supplies for Denikin from abroad came in through these ports.

There were two British naval ships in the Sea of Azov, cooperating with the White land forces. These were at Mariupil between 15 and 18 October, then left on assurances that the situation was well in hand. On the 19th, the Makhnovists advanced against the town, which the Whites, lacking reinforcements, then abandoned. On the 23rd, the insurgents moved in.

Shortly after the occupation of Olexandrivske, the insurgents were back in Hulyai Pole - 7 October. Over the next fortnight they controlled the area Perekop-Berdyansk-Mariupil (direction Crimea), under Volodin, one of the Red commanders who had come over in August; Kakhivka-Apostolove (direction Kherson); Synelnykove (direction Katerynoslav); and the area bounded by Olexandrivske, Synelnykove and the Azov ports (direction Volnovakha). The first serious opposition was met near Volnovakha, where, following a five day battle, the Makhnovists occupied the town. The first general put in charge of anti-Makhnovist operations, Revishin, did manage to prevent the capture of the main artillery dump nearby, but, with the railway cut, no shells got through to the Moscow front. With Makhno only 50 miles away, one of Denikin's friends suggested the evacuation of Taganrog. Another describes Makhno as the 'Pancho Villa of the Russian Revolution'¹⁵ and relates how 10,000 insurgents appeared out of nowhere before the walls. In the

¹⁵ Lobanov-Rostovski, p. 358.

town, there was panic among the 200 headquarters officers, who had at their disposal a company of war wounded and a few tanks. Three days later, to the immense relief of all-Denikin himself was in the city— Makhno retreated, having grossly overestimated the strength of the defences.

Denikin was forced to withdraw some of his best troops from the front at a time when he could least afford to do so. Part of Shkuro's corps, including a brigade of Terek cavalry, was thus transferred. In the Volnovakha area were concentrated the Terek and Chechen divisions, a brigade of Don Cossacks, three other regiments, three battalions, and other small units, all under the command of Revishin.

The capture of Mariupol proved to be the high tide mark of Makhno's southern advance. On 24 October the town was abandoned at the cost of 600 killed. Events along the Azov coast turned in Revishin's favour. A general partisan retreat led to the evacuation of Berdyansk, then Hulyai Pole, and finally, on 3/4 November, Olexandrivske. By this time most of the left bank of the Dnieper had been cleared of insurgents, but at the cost of pushing them elsewhere, the main forces retreating northwards towards Katerynoslav.

Apart from Revishin's units, White troops in the rear of the Moscow front were almost non-existent in the provinces of the south-east Ukraine. Schetin, governor of Katerynoslav province, who had earlier publicly scoffed at the rumours of Makhno's return, sent against him 100 horse militia and two or three guns! The town was intermittently cut off from the outside world, food became short, and the workers, sensing the weakness of the regime, were restless. A British boat was sent to Mykolaiv from 9 to 15 November, as it was thought that Makhno would pass that way during his retreat. Slaschov was in the town on 18 November, and he dealt with the disorder in the place and the surrounding countryside, where two peasant 'republics' had been set up: only for it to resurface as soon as he left for Katerynoslav to deal with Makhno. The movement of coal was interrupted, and adequate reserves could not be laid in for the winter.

It is perhaps surprising that Nestor did not move on Katerynoslav sooner, but he was fully occupied elsewhere, spending much of his time directing operations from an armoured train on the Berdyansk line. Further, Katerynoslav was outside the original thrust to Olexandrivske, the Azov ports, and Volnovakha. When this thrust was pushed back by Revishin at the beginning of November, two lines of retreat were possible: back across the river—which the British had feared—or northwards. The latter was strategically more important, and included the Hulyai Pole region, so the insurgents moved north.

The first Makhnovist attack was launched on 26 October. The initial onslaught was beaten off by the Whites, who, by evening and with the aid of a river steamer and the hurried appearance in the front line of high school pupils and students, were able to force their withdrawal. Two days later the partisans attacked again, apparently unexpected, from the Nykopil direction, this time successfully.

The Communist local paper 'Star' reappeared on 4 November, but only two numbers were printed, as on the 6th the Makhnovists evacuated the city. They retreated into the nearby villages, hoping to unite with the units which had recently left Olexandrivske. The Whites were threatening from the north and west, while to the east their flank was put in severe danger by otaman Dyakivsky. The latter had sought and received arms from Makhno, but, on being called to help against the Whites, refused to do so.

About twenty miles from the city the linkup took place. It was decided to advance on Katerynoslav again. They floundered along in the heavy rain and mud, a sitting target for one accurate machine-gunner. They fell on the Whites in the outskirts almost by chance. The latter,

surprised in the murky evening, overestimated their opponents and fled, leaving the city on 9 November. The entry of the Makhnovists was facilitated by a workers' uprising in the suburbs of Chechelivka and Kodak.

Makhno's power was now almost as great as in early October. Although he had lost Olexandrivske, he held Kichkas not far away, and also Verkhnyedniprovsk, Nykopil, Berislav, and Aposhtolove. Volodin had moved forward from Kakhivka to Melitopil, and partisans sympathetic to Makhno were active round Kryvy Rih and Dolgintseve to the west of the Dnieper bend. Other insurgents, including Kolos in the Novomoskovske area, had been able greatly to increase their activities as a result of White concentration against Makhno.

The situation of the Whites was worse rather than better. They had regained one important town only to lose one larger and more strategically vital. They were, however, still strong enough to prevent Makhno making any effective use of the city. Although driven out of most of it, they had entrenched themselves on the Amur side, the right bank of the river. They made full use of the fact that the right bank was on higher ground, frequently shelling the lower, to the great discomfiture of the inhabitants.

The most important event in Katerynoslav had military origins and considerable political results. One of the 58th officers who had come over at Pomischna in August was a communist, Polonsky. At the time of the occupation of Olexandrivske he was commander of the 3rd Crimean or 'Iron' regiment, which had the reputation of being one of the best units in the insurgent army. Polonsky had remained a communist, for, during the Makhnovist congress in Olexandrivske, he came up especially from Berdyansk for a semi-legal meeting of the district party committee on 27 October. He was already de facto head of the Bolshevik underground in the Makhnovist army. It is unclear how important were the contacts between Novitski, newly elected communist on the Makhnovist RVS, and Polonsky, nor do we know whether the counter-intelligence was already keeping an eye on him. He was warned by his comrades not to come to the meeting, because this would attract attention.

Work was temporarily halted by the evacuation of Olexandrivske a few days later, but was resumed by party members in Katerynoslav, with the same aim, to work for a seizure of power when the internal disintegration of the insurgent forces and the approach of the Red Army made the situation favourable for such a move. Links forged in Olexandrivske were restored, although not without difficulty: almost all the former Red units were stationed or fighting outside the city, and it has been reasonably suggested that this was because Makhno did not trust them.

The forces in the city included a cavalry regiment under Schus largely made up of tried Hulyai Pole comrades; Khoma Kozhyn, commander of the main machine-gun regiment, was another old friend of the Batko's. In neither of these was there a single communist cell. The town commandant was Lashkevich, commander of the 13th Crimean regiment, and he showed his attitude soon after arriving. When the local party members went to see him, he threatened them with arrest and refused to allow 'Any attempt by us (Bolsheviks) to organise authority'.¹⁶ Two other regiments are mentioned as definitely Makhnovist, one intermediate, while two, the 33rd and Polonsky's 3rd, were definitely pro-communist. Polonsky himself was posted to Nykopil, which made coordination no easier.

Polonsky's activities in Nykopil, and his comings and goings to Katerynoslav, even though some of them were on army business, must have been noticed. A conference of command staff

¹⁶ Miroshchevski, p. 198.

was held in Katerynoslav on 4 December. In addition to Polonsky, other Nykopol communists came up for a meeting of the provincial party committee, where he was unwise enough to give a report on his activities. After the end of the conference, at midnight, Polonsky invited Makhno and other close friends back for supper. An hour later, Karetnyk, Chubenko, and Vasylyvsky tied up Polonsky and some of the Nykopol and Katerynoslav Bolsheviks. If they were sentenced to death, this was a mere formality before being handed over to and disposed of by the kontr-razvedka (counter-intelligence). They were taken down to the river and shot.

The following day a deputation from the provincial party committee, unsure of what had happened to Polonsky and his comrades, went to demand their release. When they asked for a public trial, they were told that they would be shot by decision of the army command. The consequences for the Makhnovists were serious. Just before the evacuation of the city an argument broke out between the largely civilian RVS, headed by Volin, and the army command. At an RVS meeting, Makhno declared that Polonsky had been part of a plot to poison him and restore Soviet authority, while at an earlier meeting he had apparently stated that Polonsky had been caught dealing with the Whites. This contradiction did not improve the credibility of either explanation, and it was plain to the Bolsheviks that their friends had been shot to prevent their subversion spreading further.

The RVS, perhaps piqued at not being informed, and considering that the military had grossly overstepped the bounds of their competence, refused to accept Makhno's versions. A commission of three, Volin, Bilash, and Uralov, was set up to investigate. Volin, in the dark as much as the rest, seems to have been genuinely embarrassed. He could not approve of the undemocratic and authoritarian manner in which the executions had been carried out behind the backs of the RVS, a body elected only a month before in Olexandrivske, and supposed to be the chief authority over the army. He soon, however, came over to Makhno's side, while Bilash and Uralov had sided with Nestor from the start, and Volin may have been anxious to show unity. An agreement between Makhno and the RVS was patched up. It reiterated that the RVS would concentrate on administrative, economic, and financial matters, the army with military affairs, but no delineation on borderline cases such as Polonsky's was drawn. The RVS was given three million Soviet roubles for its work while Makhno kept the Kerenski and Tsarist money.

During this internal crisis in the Makhnovschyna the fortunes of the war on the Moscow front had turned decisively against Denikin. Even at the high point of his advance on 13 October, the capture of Oryol, he was still outnumbered. On 24 October Budyonny won his crucial victory against the hitherto invincible cavalry of Shkuro and Mamontov. A further victory at Kastornaya on the Kursk-Voronezh railway on 17 November enabled Budyonny to cut direct communications between the Moscow and eastern fronts, and started a White retreat which went on uninterrupted for almost two months, to Bataisk, on the far side of the Don from Rostov.

Makhno did make another attempt to retake Katerynoslav, but it was unsuccessful. The city had been abandoned in face of Slaschov's simultaneous attacks from east and west, the aim being to encircle Makhno and cut off his retreat to the south. Nestor anticipated this by retiring towards Nykopol, where the bickerings within the command staff, and between them and the RVS, resurfaced.

At this time the insurgents still numbered about 25,000, the same as at Olexandrivske in October. There were also about 10,000 ill or wounded, three times as many as at Uman, but there was no one ready to take them over, nor anywhere to evacuate them to. Many peasants who took in the ill themselves caught typhus and died of it.

When Nykopil was abandoned early in January 1920, 1000 typhus victims were left behind. Makhno himself had a very serious attack, and Volin was affected on his journey to Kryvy Rih in December. The Makhnovists failed completely to cope with the epidemic, but it is difficult to see how they could have done better. When the Red Lettish division arrived in the town, they found partisan numbers very much reduced.

4 Stalemate, January-October 1920

During December, the rapid Red advance continued. On the White side, Shilling was put in overall command of Slaschov's forces in the centre as well as his own in the west, on 5 December. On 30 December, Slaschov left Katerynoslav for the last time. With his forces retreating rapidly to cover the Crimea, a meeting between Uborevich's 14th Army and the insurgents was imminent.

The first Red units entered Katerynoslav on 1 January, on a line stretching east to Synelnykove. On 3 January they were 15 miles south of Chaplyne, in Mariupil on the 4th, Olexandrivske on the 5th, Hulyai Pole on the 6th, Berdyansk on the 7th. To the east, Rostov fell to them on the 8th. The only resistance was encountered at Rostov. White forces were split into three: Shilling in the west at Odessa, Slaschov covering the Crimea, and the main forces at Bataisk.

Of Uborevich's forces, the 45th division was to go west to Kryvy Rih, thence to Mykolaiv and Kherson, annihilate Makhnovist bands there, and disarm the population; the 46th was to move on Melitopil, the Primakov cavalry group on Berdyansk and Mariupil; the 41st was to go into reserve in the Orikhiv-Polohy-Hulyai Pole area. This order was issued on 4 January, five days before Makhno was outlawed, and shows that the Bolshevik command had a clear view of Makhno's future, even if the latter did not.

The Makhnovists tried to neutralise the Red advance by putting out propaganda leaflets, hoping that, if fraternisation took place, some of the Soviet troops would change sides. Combined with Uborevich's order, the stage was set for an open confrontation.

The initial meeting at Olexandrivske was reasonably friendly. On the afternoon of 5 January, Red forces entered the town, immediately followed by Karetnyk and Makhno himself from Kichkas. Talks were held between a representative of Makhno and the commander of the 1st brigade of the 45th division. The insurgents were ready to occupy a sector against the Whites, but also wanted separate political talks, which had been forbidden by the 45th commander. Relations between the rank and file were openly friendly: a joint assembly was held, at which it was agreed that both had the same enemy - capitalism and the counter-revolution.

The end of this cordial relationship had already been prepared. Policy on political questions would not have been within the remit of a divisional commander. The break was signalled on the 8th, when Uborevich issued through the 45th an order for Makhno to transfer to the Polish front in operational subordination to the 12th Army. That this order was merely a pretext to shift the blame for the opening of hostilities is clear from an exchange between Yakir, still the 45th commander, and Uborevich.

Volin sums up why, as both Yakir and Uborevich foresaw, the Makhnovists refused to carry out the order:

The Insurrectionary Army was subordinate neither to the 14th corps nor to any other Red Army unit. Furthermore, half the men, as well as nearly all the commanders and

staff, and Makhno himself, were sick. Finally, the fighting qualities and revolutionary usefulness of the Revolutionary Army were certainly much greater on their own ground in the Ukraine than on the Polish front.¹

Despite this, it seems that shortly after Uborevich's order, talks were held between the 14th Army RVS and a Makhnovist delegation, about the Polish transfer. The talks can have been little more than a time-wasting exercise on both sides. On 9 January Yegorov, commander of the Southern Front, outlawed Makhno for refusing to carry out the order.

In an effort to avoid immediate hostilities, Makhno broke camp and made for Hulyai Pole, but not before the insurgent RVS had issued an appeal to Red soldiers to 'resist the provocations of their chiefs'.² Fighting started soon afterwards, and lasted more or less continuously for the next nine months. A feature of the early 1920 period was the large number of reports in *Pravda* and *Izvestiya* telling of big victories, how the Makhno bands had been smashed; then, a few days or weeks later, he reappears in a similar sort of item. When the Red Army finally occupied Nykopol on 15 January, large amounts of materiel were captured.

After these reports, it is less easy to follow Makhno's fortunes. The main anarchist sources give generalities, which suggest bitter fighting, but no details. On 27 January a 13th Army report on the fighting with the remnants of Slaschov's forces at the approaches to the Crimea included a report that Makhnovist bands had been liquidated in the Hulyai Pole area. At about the same time a staff report of the newly-formed South-West Front for the first half of January stated that

During this period the Makhnovist Army has continued to disintegrate, and is much reduced in numbers as a result of the ever-increasing number of deserters, those who have come over to our side, and the typhus epidemic.³

On 9 February, the South-West Front reported victory over Makhno. The insurgent staff in the Hulyai Pole area had been dispersed by the 42nd cavalry regiment, the spoils including the staff's anarchist black banner. Throughout February Makhno was attacking Soviet government buildings in the south of Katerynoslav province, the Donetsk area, and the new Olexandriyske province.

Towards the end of February units of the Estonian and 42nd divisions were ordered to concentrate in the Orikhiv-Hulyai Pole-Haichur and Polohy areas respectively. Communications were to be set up between the commander of the army reserve and Pauka's 13th Army, of which these divisions were part. They were to root out the Makhnovschyna for seven miles around. In March, an Estonian brigade, perhaps the same one that had been taken prisoner by the Makhnovists at the beginning of February, and one or more brigades of the 42nd, went into action. Overwhelming forces occupied Hulyai Pole, and captured most of the insurgent artillery. However, within a few days the Estonian division had been sent to the Crimean Front and the 42nd into reserve, for reasons not given - perhaps Makhno was thought to be finished.

Some further information comes from a diary alleged to have been kept by Makhno's wife. Extracts appear from it in two reliable Soviet sources. Makhno points out that they ascribe it to different women, Fedora Gaenko and Halyna Kuzmenko, but admits that he and his companion

¹ Volin, *The Unknown*, p. 181.

² Arshinov, *Istoriya*, p. 158.

³ Korolivsky, Vol. 2, p. 707.

kept a diary over a 17 month period. He says he gave it to Arshinov to write his history of the Makhnovist movement. Halyna was in fact Nestor's wife, and she wrote an article on him after his death, to refute some of the wilder assertions against him. In the absence of corroboration, it is unwise to place much reliance on specific episodes recorded in it, for example: '7th March. Varvarivka. Batko very drunk. Arrived Hulyai Pole, where drunken outrages took place.'⁴ It is very difficult to think of the confidante of a guerilla leader talking about 'drunken outrages.' Other happenings, such as the shooting of two Bolshevik agents on 23 February, are rather more typical.

With the abandonment of Yekaterinodar, capital of the Kuban, on 15 March and the chaotic evacuation of the nearby port of Novorossiisk on the 26th, the military threat of Denikin was very greatly reduced, although the failure to push on into the Crimea was to prolong the civil war by nine months. Slaschov and Vranghel, the latter by agreement with Denikin taking over as White commander soon after the evacuation of Novorossiisk, were not as threatening as the Poles, who launched an attack towards Kiyiv at the end of April.

Many of the Red forces which had fought in the Kuban were now hastily ordered to march to the threatened Western Front. The 15th Inzenskaya regiment was one ordered to proceed there early in May from Bataisk via Rostov. It heard that Makhno was active in the villages, demanding in one case that all commissars and militiamen be handed over, but had returned to Novospasivka on failing to find any. On 21 May the regiment passed through Kinski Rozdory, described as Makhno's residence. Whenever the Makhnovists saw this imposing force, it is said, they fled.

For the authorities in Katerynoslav province, not threatened by the Polish advance, the anti-Makhno struggle was still a top priority. A meeting of district organisers on 25 May decided that the anti-bandit effort was of higher importance than the setting-up of Poor Peasant Committees (KNS - Ukrainian initials), which had been set up six days earlier, or food requisitioning (prodrazverstka), or work among peasant women and youth.

There were other ways of dealing with Makhno. There had been attempts on his life as early as the retreat from Katerynoslav at the end of 1918, the Nationalists probably responsible. That Makhno could use such methods is shown by the way in which Hryhoriyiv had been disposed of, a reported plot to get rid of Petliura in September 1919, and the planning that went into the efficient removal of Polonsky. When one recalls the vicious nature of the personal attacks on Makhno from May 1919 onwards, it is not surprising that other Bolsheviks, similarly frustrated by failure to capture him, resorted to such methods.

The Makhnovist press was active at this time: of the small number of leaflets that survive in the original or facsimile, six out of thirteen are dated May or June 1920. This is plainly an historical accident, accounted for by the paucity of Civil War material from the eastern Ukraine which has found its way to the west. Four were addressed to Red Army men, one urging them to cease doing Denikin's work of attacking and oppressing the poor and recognise the commissar-tyrants in their midst, and refuse to fight the Makhnovists. Another sought to nail Bolshevik propaganda that the insurgents killed all Red prisoners.

Early in June, Makhno was still fighting the 13th Army.

⁴ Yakovlev, p. 29.

In the rear the Makhnovists have fled to the Zaitseve-Domakha area. A military train from Pavlohrad to Olexandrivske was stopped, and the bandits seized three wagonloads of equipment and four machine-guns.⁵

Soon afterwards, on 8 June, Reconnaissance reports that up to 4000 Makhnovists have scattered in the direction of the front north of the Pysmenna-Ulyanivka railway sector, and have attacked towards the south . . . The band has suffered heavy losses . . .⁶

On 12 June the remnants were in Kinski Rozdory, and on the 13th Novouspenivka, which was to be the starting point of a raid into the White rear.

The raid did not take place, because they came across a Red force a few miles from Novouspenivka. The latter were unaware of Makhno's proximity, and were carrying round their treasury, containing a large amount of money. The partisans attacked, seized the money, and started to retreat under machine-gun cover. But the Red units, driven into ravines nearby, counter-attacked so successfully two hours later that Makhno himself was almost taken prisoner, and was left with 30 to 50 survivors. He later put out a statement that the Red Army had attacked him at the very moment he was about to break into Vrangl's rear.

Meantime, to the north, the Bolsheviks had occupied Hulyai Pole. There was a reported meeting of 2000 people on 6 June, unusual in that the resolution passed was anti-Makhno and pro-Soviet. This would indicate the presence of the Red Army to cow the local population.

Following the defeat at Novouspenivka, Nestor moved back towards Hulyai Pole. The 13th Army tried to surround him: a detachment from Haichur was ordered to advance from the southwest and drive him back on the 42nd division, while troops at Chaplyne were to prevent him breaking out to the north. On 14 June Makhno defeated part of the Chaplyne group near Velyka Mykhailivka; half a battery and 30 Red Army men were lost, and the commander and political commissar were arrested by the Chaplyne commander because 'a Makhnovist attitude reigned in the detachment.'⁷ There was a full-scale battle the following day at Velyka Mykhailivka, about 1500 men on each side. At the end of the day it was the Red soldiers who retreated, and 'the result of the battle has put the rear of the 13th Army in a highly critical condition'.⁸

There were further clashes during the rest of June. The situation was serious enough for units to be withdrawn from the Vrangl front to guard the communications lines running through Polohy and Volnovakha. On 21 June and again the following day, Makhno attacked Hulyai Pole, capturing much booty and defeating 300 infantry. On 26 June he surrounded and took prisoner the entire 522nd regiment.

Vrangl meantime had not been idle. After the evacuation from Novorossiisk he had reorganised what forces there were in the Crimea. They had been utterly demoralised by the retreat, but Vrangl, who had had a relatively good record as commander of the Tsaritsyn front, was able to rest them behind the thin screen of Slaschov's units, which were soon replaced by fresh men. Paleologue, the last French ambassador to the Imperial Court and now assistant Foreign Minister, promised French supplies would continue.

Even so, Vrangl was still very exposed: the Crimea had only been saved by the exhaustion of the Red Army after three months of rapid advance, and by the subsequent threatening attitude of, and later hostilities with, the Poles. By the beginning of June, Vrangl felt strong enough to

⁵ Kubanin, p. 146.

⁶ Kubanin, pp. 146-7.

⁷ Kubanin, p. 147.

⁸ Kubanin, p. 148.

launch an offensive. His desire to get hold of the corn in northern Tavria, and the possibility of fresh troop levies outweighed his disappointment at the turn of the tide in the Polish-Soviet war, and disowning by Britain.

Slaschov began from the line Perekop-Huenichesk. In addition to forward movement by land, troops were sent from Feodosiya into the Sea of Azov and took by surprise the Bolsheviks in Melitopol, chief town in northern Tavria. The town was occupied on 14 June after two days of fighting. The 13th Army retreated in disorder, units losing touch with each other and the staff. The attack slowed down after 17 June, as the Whites paused for rest and consolidation. A counter-offensive by the cavalry of Zhloba, second only to Budyonny by reputation, had failed badly by the end of June, and the problem of feeding the Crimea had been solved.

Confused and narrowly shifting fighting continued, mainly to the north and north-east of Melitopol, from the middle of June to the middle of September, much of it immediately to the south of Orikhiv town. On the Tokmak-Olexandrivske railway, it was strategically important for both sides. If Vranghel could capture it, he could attack westwards towards Olexandrivske, to Synelnykove and Katerynoslav in the centre, and outflank the 2nd Cavalry Army to the east. Its continued possession by the Bolsheviks threatened Melitopol and the Crimea.

Vranghel was still desperately short of men. The Poles might help, but contacts were tenuous. The only significant anti-Bolshevik forces within reach were Nationalists and insurgents. He decided to make contact with both. To aid in this, his agrarian programme made large steps away from Denikin's, in the direction of satisfying some of the aspiration of the peasants. On 13 May, even before the offensive, he had issued a secret order:

If we go over to the attack, we can, in order to achieve the cherished aim of the annihilation of communism, enter into contact with the partisan units of Makhno, the Ukrainian forces, and other anti-Communist groups ... All commanders are instructed to act on these lines.⁹

There was apparently in the secret police archives a photograph of a White officer holding a mandate for talks with Makhno. Towards the end of a staff meeting on 9 July at Vremivka, this emissary, who had been handed the letter by Slaschov's aide de camp, read out an offer of help and encouragement signed by Shatilov, Vranghel's chief of staff. The response was immediate: it was decided to execute the delegate at once, unanimously, and propose to the Makhnovist soviet that it publish simultaneously in the insurgent press Vranghel's message and a fitting reply. This was done that same month in the first issue of 'The Road to Freedom' to appear since December 1919, in Katerynoslav.

This was not the end of the story. It was widely believed on the White side that Makhno was ready to cooperate with Vranghel. The Crimean papers were full of rumours about this during the early summer. If the answer of Makhno was far removed from this, the same cannot be said of some of his former lieutenants such as Volodin, or Yatsenko, who issued an appeal as 'Commander of the Partisan Detachment "Batko Makhno"' ¹⁰ issued on the White Army press.

The Bolsheviks also made good use of these units for propaganda purposes, to show Makhno's unreliability. Towards the end of June, it was announced that there was documentary proof of

⁹ Korolivsky, Vol. 3, p. 115.

¹⁰ Vozzvanie.

communication between Vrangeli and Makhno. That the Bolsheviks knew this was a complete lie will be seen later.

During the fighting round Orikhiv the Makhnovists went on a raid through the provinces of Katerynoslav, Kharkiv, and Poltava. On 13 July they attacked and plundered Hryshyne station, killing fourteen Soviet activists and workers. While in the province of Poltava at Zinkiv between 1 and 7 August, they were approached by a delegation of insurgents centred on a wood near the village of Liutenka, with a view to cooperation. The locals numbered five to six hundred, and one of the commanders, Butavetsky, as well as many of the men, called themselves anarchists. They must have been glad that they decided to join up with Makhno, for shortly after leaving the area, pursuing Red forces smashed those who had stayed behind.

On 16-17 August the Makhnovists were at Myrhorod not far away, for thirty-six hours, plundering the district food committee building, destroying Soviet offices, and killing twenty one Soviet workers and Red Army soldiers. At Kobelyaki they stayed several days, attacking and derauling the armoured train 'Red Cossack'. Early on 24 August, with 3000 infantry and 700 cavalry they were at Hubynyky, thirteen miles north of Novomoskovske. On the night of 25/26 August, the 115th regiment broke through superior Makhnovist forces and compelled them to retreat. The insurgents made for Izium and the nearby woods, and finally for Starobilsk. One of the reasons for taking this direction rather than heading home, was the fact that fighting between Reds and Whites was still going on round Orikhiv nearby.

Following the failure of the summer seaborne expedition to try to rouse the Kuban, re-embarked on 7 September, Vrangeli pinned his hopes on a renewed offensive in northern Tavria. His idea was to link up with the Poles, who were once again approaching the frontiers of the Ukraine. In order to secure his right flank, he had to attack north and east before crossing the Dnieper in the optimistic direction of Poland. In view of the small size of his forces, 30,000-35,000 men, this was a counsel of despair, but he preferred this to waiting for the Bolsheviks to destroy him when they were ready.

The initial target, the Polohy-Tsarekostyantynivka railway, was soon taken. On 20 September Olexandrivske was occupied, on the 22nd the Red Army abandoned Synelnykove station. The high point of success, on 3 October, was to reach within five miles of Katerynoslav, the town itself being abandoned by the Bolsheviks. The following day, the Whites retreated, and Red forces re-entered the city.

This renewed advance posed an acute problem for both Makhnovists and Bolsheviks. At the beginning of September, Makhno's depredations had been a matter of serious concern to the Katerynoslav civilian authorities, quite apart from the military forces which were after him: but there was as yet no thought of joint action against Vrangeli. As late as 24 September, the commander-in-chief, S. S. Kamenev, was talking of the need for 'the final liquidation of the Makhno band'.¹¹

Very shortly afterwards this attitude changed, certainly no later than the 29th. It was true, as the 13th Army RVS pointed out, that Makhno could be dealt with after Vrangeli; the latter, however, was as yet far from beaten. If some sort of temporary agreement could be patched up, the Red Army would be free to concentrate on the Whites without having to worry about their rear. A further advantage would be the release of Makhnovist insurgents, tried troops extremely hostile to the Whites, for the fight against Vrangeli.

¹¹ Korolivsky, Vol. 3, p. 522.

As early as the end of May or the beginning of June, the Kharkiv anarchists, including the Nabat secretariat, had approached the Ukrainian government unofficially, to find out the latter's views on an armistice with Makhno. Although the response was negative, soon afterwards an Olexandrivske SR offered himself at a Makhnovist RVS meeting as an intermediary, saying that, although he was not a delegate from them, the Bolsheviks knew about his visit. The insurgent answer was that they would fight the Whites independently. Offers of a ceasefire were sent by the Makhnovists to Kharkiv and Moscow during July and August, but there was no reply. Both sides' attitudes were ambivalent, and the desultory fighting and pursuit continued.

At the beginning of August Nestor had a confidential talk with Yashin and Teper, about to leave him to attend a planned all-Ukrainian anarchist conference in Kharkiv. He asked them to do all they could to secure an agreement with the Soviet regime, in return for which he wanted a specific sector on the Vranghel front. The insurgents were not as united as this might indicate. Some, including Bilash, Kurylenko, and Khokholtva, urged this line, while Karetnyk and Popov argued that the Reds be dealt with before the Whites. It seems probable that the majority were in favour, with Makhno sometimes vacillating. The first definite Soviet approach would clinch matters.

Such an approach is recorded on 29 September, at a meeting of the Ukrainian Politburo. Among those present were Rakovski, Yakovlev, and Ivanov. The latter, a member of the central committee, headed the agreed delegation which went to negotiate at Starobilsk, and worked out a preliminary agreement on the spot.

5 The End, October 1920-August 1921

Early in October, Frunze, new commander of the Southern Front, informed his army commanders:

On 30 September 1920, the RVS of the Makhno Insurgent Army made a request to the RVS of the Southern Front for the cessation of military activities against the Makhnovist Army, on the basis of their recognition of Soviet power, subordination to the front command, and the inviolability of the internal organisation of the Makhnovist army. Agreement on these lines was reached, and on 2 October I gave an order that military action against the army and independent detachments of Makhno should cease.¹

The Makhnovist RVS also explained the agreement:

Threatening clouds again hang over our tortured country. From the west has come the hated historical enemy of every Ukrainian, the Polish nobility, from the south there cuts irresistibly into the heart of the Ukraine Baron Vrangeli, the German, oppressor of the people. The high-handed communists and commissars have been taught another lesson. They had to recognise that, without the Ukrainian people and the free insurrection, they were powerless. On its side, the Soviet of the Revolutionary Insurgent Army of the Ukraine (Makhnovists) concluded that to stand aside as passive spectators would mean aiding in the restoration of the Ukraine to the historical enemy-the Polish gentry, or to the Tsarist power headed by a German baron. The Soviet . . . has therefore decided, on a temporary basis until the destruction of the pressing external enemies and Polish hirelings, to enter into an alliance . . . with the Soviet Army . . .²

On 6 October, Ivanov met Karetnyk, Popov, and Bilash at Svatove station near Starobilsk. The provisional agreement was signed. The following day, an armistic was arranged. It was decided that the final draft of the agreement, which would be political as well as military, would be worked out at Kharkiv. For this purpose, a delegation of Kurylenko, Budanov, Popov and others was sent there. The final agreement was signed between 10 and 15 October, but the delegates stayed on to resolve the disputed fourth point of the political part.

Section 1. Political Agreement.

1. All Makhnovists and anarchists are to be freed immediately.

¹ Korolivsky, Vol. 3, p. 580.

² Lebed, pp. 38-9.

2. There is to be the fullest freedom of agitation and propaganda both of speech and press for Makhnovist and anarchist ideas and attitudes, excepting appeals for the violent overthrow of the Soviet government, and on condition of respecting the military censorship.

3. There is to be free participation in election to the Soviets . . .

Section 2. Military Agreement.

1. The Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army of the Ukraine (Makhnovists) is to become part of the armed forces of the republic, as a partisan army operationally subordinate to the high command of the Red Army. It will keep its established internal structure, and will not adopt the bases or principles of regular Red units.

2. The Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army of the Ukraine (Makhnovists), when advancing through Soviet territory or on crossing a front, is not to accept into its ranks any Red Army detachment, or deserters therefrom . . .

3. The Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army of the Ukraine (Makhnovists) shall inform the toiling masses which follow it of this agreement, and shall request the cessation of military actions against the Soviet authorities. To expedite the successful realisation of common aims, the Soviet government is to publish this agreement at once.

4. The families of combatants belonging to the Makhnovist . . . Army now residing on Soviet territory shall enjoy the same privileges as the families of Red soldiers ...

Fourth Clause of the Political Agreement.

In view of the fact that one of the main activities of the Makhnovist movement is the struggle for the self-administration of the toilers in their localities, the Makhnovist Army puts forward a fourth clause of the political agreement, as follows:

'The local worker and peasant population, shall be free, in the area of operations of the Makhnovist Army, to organise free institutions of economic and political self-administration, as also their autonomous and federative links - by agreement -with the State organs of the Soviet Republic'.³

The distrust of the two sides stands out both in the agreement and in their commentaries upon it. It shows most clearly in the proposed fourth clause. Both knew this was crucial, for it concerned the political and economic mastery of the south-east Ukraine. If Makhno had his way, the Bolsheviks would be dependent on his favour for the vital railways from Russia proper to the Crimea and part of the Donbas, and thence to the Kuban, quite apart from the area's own agricultural value. More, the area would be a magnet for all dissidents and refugees from Bolshevik-held territory. Only if Vrangeli had proved to be much stronger, thereby necessitating a continued alliance, would there have been any chance of the clause being signed, or of Trotsky's tentative suggestion for an autonomous area round Hulyai Pole being taken up.

The Bolsheviks did, however, keep to the signed agreement, even if they published the two sections separately, the military first. On 1 October Volin was released. On 4 November, an amnesty was declared, and the anarchist paper *Nabat* reappeared. An anarchist congress was planned for Kharkiv at the end of November or beginning of December. Over clause four the Bolsheviks procrastinated right up to the renewed outbreak of hostilities on 26 November.

³ Arshinov, *Istoriya*, pp. 171-3; Volin, *The Unknown*, pp. 188-9; Teper, pp. 117-19.

The final campaign against Vranghel lasted less than two months, from early October to the occupation of Sevastopol on 15 November. Even before formal agreement, Frunze on 4 October gave Makhno his first operational assignment. With about 10,000 men he came under the Olexandrivske group, shortly to become part of the 4th Army. The task was to seize the Hulyai Pole area and pursue the retreating enemy. The keenness of the Makhnovists to undertake this task is explained by the prospect of re-occupying their home area.

Some of the best White forces, including the Drozdovtsy, were covering their northern front round Synelnykove, along with Olexandrivske and Hulyai Pole in the rear. The Whites retreated on 11 October, and launched one of their last counter-attacks here three days later. Between 15 and 17 October there was fighting in the Hulyai Pole-Polohy area. On the transfer of the Makhnovists to Hulyai Pole, a field staff was set up under Karetnyk, forming the nucleus of the forces to take part in the Crimean campaign.

Kutepov, White commander in northern Tavria, was now threatened by the possible irruption into his rear not only of the Olexandrivske group and the 13th Army, now including Makhno, in front of him, but from two other directions: the Kakhivka bridgehead to the west, and forces to the east round Tsarekostyantynivka, where between 15 and 18 October a division of the 2nd Cavalry Army had broken into the rear, causing considerable damage. Makhno's forces were concentrating near Orikhiv.

Following this success, the plans for Makhno were changed from containment to offensive. The initial frontal attack began on 22 October, and resulted in victory for the Makhnovists and the 23rd infantry division. Almost all the 4000 men of the Drozdovski division were taken prisoner, and Olexandrivske was occupied the following day. Makhno's task was now to break into Vranghel's rear, bypass Kutepov's remaining forces to the east, and wreck the railways in the Melitopol region. If possible, he was to continue south and seize the Crimean passes not later than 29 October.

Makhno skirted Bolshoi Tokmak, and on the morning of the 29th stormed the trenches at the German colony of Heidelberg. However, the 13th Army and Makhno were not quick enough to cut off Kutepov's retreat, and the great raid into the rear turned into a minor excursion, as a result of the strength of the White resistance and the skilfulness of their withdrawal. They were aided by a tactical error by the 1st Cavalry coming in from the west. This advance was split and thus weakened, enabling Kutepov to brush aside the units threatening his rear. Most of his forces managed safely over the Chongar bridge at Sivash, thence into the Crimea: but it was a very close run affair.

On 30 October Melitopol was occupied, and the 6th Army took Perekop. On 2 November the 1st Cavalry Army penetrated onto the Chongar peninsula, but because of strong opposition was unable to seize either the railway bridge or the Sivash dam nearby to the east. With this advance, the dispositions for both Makhno and the 7th cavalry division were changed. They were to group at two colonies on a tongue of land jutting south about half way between Chongar and Perekop. Probably they were to be held in reserve pending a decision on the forces to be used in the assault on Perekop.

On 3 November Frunze left Kharkiv for Melitopol, in order to be nearer the scene of operations. The key decision to be made was when, and with what units, to make the final attack. The main defences on the Perekop peninsula had been neglected for many years, but Vranghel had perceived the defensive nature of the isthmus, and had greatly strengthened the old fortifications. By November 1920 there were three main lines of defence: one at Perekop at the northern end,

the second, known as the Turetski Val—first built by the Turks—immediately to the south, and one at Yushun, where the isthmus opens out into the Crimea proper. Frunze thought of following the Turks, who had successfully attacked the Khan of the Crimea by moving down the Tongue of Arabat. For this he needed the help of the Azov flotilla, which was frozen up in Taganrog by early, very severe frosts, and took no part in the final campaign.

The remaining alternative was to force the gulf of Sivash not far east of Perekop, opposite the Lithuanian peninsula, which jutted northwards into the gulf from the Crimea. This was the shortest intermediate crossing between Perekop and Chongar. The rear of the isthmus defences could thus be threatened. A variant of this was a longer Sivash crossing to the east of the Lithuanian peninsula and south of the villages where the insurgents were encamped. Neither of these crossings was normally fordable, but Frunze went ahead with plans for their possible use.

The new task of the Makhnovists, aided by the 6th Army, was to penetrate the enemy rear, and not later than 10 November cut the Perekop-Simferopol road at Dyurmen. Planning and execution of this part of the assault was made possible by a strong westerly wind, which blew much of the water out of the western half of the gulf, thus making it fordable. This was most unusual, and, for Vrangeli, unexpected. The wind, however, could change direction at any time. Bliukher, commander of the 51st division, reported to the 6th Army commander, Kork, on 6 November that the 15th division had been due to occupy the Lithuanian peninsula that day. This did not happen, as the forward units — the Insurrectionary Army — had not been able to ford Sivash.

On the evening of the 7th, the water was reported to have returned to the western end of the gulf. However, later that night it receded again, and the 52nd and 15th divisions were finally able to cross.

Despite desperate counter-attacks, Red units held onto the northern end of the Lithuanian peninsula. Karetnyk's forces, intended as reinforcements, were prevented from crossing by a change in the wind. By 3 a.m. on the 9th the 7th cavalry division was across, and Karetnyk, along with Marchenko and Kozhyn, was summoned the six miles from Strohanyvka village to do the same. Frunze says:

At 4 a.m., the Makhnovists arrived. I summoned their commander, Karetnyk, and their chief of staff . . . explained the situation and asked for their immediate transfer to the southern shore: a whole hour was wasted in talking. Evidently the Makhnovists did not fully trust me and were afraid to go forward, maybe expecting a trap. Only towards dawn, about 5 a.m., was it possible to have them transferred to the front line.⁴

The Makhnovists came under heavy fire during the crossing, led by the cavalry under Marchenko, followed by the machine-gun regiment under Kozhyn. There were many casualties, and Kozhyn was among the seriously wounded.

At 5.30 a.m. that same morning the 51st division had at last stormed Turetski Val, a renewed attack having been originally launched to relieve the pressure on the Red units on the Lithuanian peninsula. On 10 November, the 51st broke the 1st Yushun defence line, on the 11th, the remainder. On the Lithuanian peninsula the fighting went on with swaying fortunes, but the

⁴ Frunze, *Izbrannye*, Vol. 2, p. 115.

White retreat there was now in danger of being cut off. On the night of the 11th, therefore, the last tenable positions in the northern Crimea gone, Vranghel ordered a general retreat to the ports for evacuation.

It is not easy to evaluate the contribution of the Makhnovists to Vranghel's defeat. Even their numbers vary from 1500 to 6000 in different estimates. It is certain, though, as a Bolshevik author says, that 'The Makhnovist units fulfilled their military tasks with no less heroism than the Red Army units'.⁵

By 12 November, the Red armies were well down the railway lines. There was a change of direction by the 2nd Cavalry Army, whose advance units were the insurgents, and the latter entered Simferopol on the morning of 13 November. They were assigned quarters, which they reached early on the afternoon of the 14th, at the nearby villages of Bulganak and Djandjurek, where they found a quantity of abandoned materiel. On the 15th, Sevastopol was entered in the wake of the organised departure of the Whites, a big improvement on the chaos at Novorossiisk.

On 15 or 16 November news of the penetration into the Crimea and the imminent capture of Simferopol reached Hulyai Pole in a telegram from Karetnyk. One of Nestor's aides, Hryhory Vasylyvsky, said: 'It's the end of the agreement. I'll bet you anything that the Bolsheviks will be on us within the week'.⁶ He was not far wrong. In his operational order after the capture of Sevastopol, Frunze directed that the insurgents, along with the 9th division, be transferred to the Caucasus Front. Copies of this order were sent to the four army commanders involved, but not to Karetnyk. Two entire armies were to concentrate in or near the Hulyai Pole region, both cavalry. Both factors were very significant in view of what was to follow: the Red Army always had difficulty keeping up with Makhno.

In this order, there is no mention of the 'completely impermissible manifestations'⁷ of Makhnovists against Red Army men mentioned in his later order 00149 from Melitopol on 23 November, which prepared for the open break with the insurgents. It has been suggested that some of the Makhnovist otamany disregarded the October agreement. This exact possibility was foreseen by the Makhnovists, and is the most likely explanation of Frunze's accusations. He further alleged that the Insurrectionary units in the Crimea had refused to move to the Caucasus: Makhnovists and anarchists were preparing an uprising against the Soviets; the insurgents had carried out a mobilisation of peasants, who were to be used to fight the Soviet government; deserters had been accepted into the Makhnovist ranks; they had been increasing their agitation among White prisoners, urging them to join the Insurrectionary Army. As with the earlier order, 00149 was not received at Hulyai Pole, nor was a copy sent to the delegation at Kharkiv.

With 00149, Frunze enclosed order 00155, 24 November: . . . Makhno and his staff, who sent an insignificant handful of their followers against Vranghel to clear their consciences, preferred, strangely, to sit back with the rest of their bands in the rear. Now the reasons for this have been uncovered. . . . They are (now) ready to make a run for it in a last adventure, trying to use the dissatisfaction of the kulak village leaders with the Soviet power. Our duty, comrades, is to uproot this stupid and harmful manifestation. I will wait until 26 November for the above order (00149) (to be fulfilled). In case of non-fulfilment ... the Red regiments of the front, who have now finished with Vranghel, will start speaking a different language to these Makhnovist youths...⁸

⁵ Teper, p. 113.

⁶ Arshinov, *Istoriya*, p. 180.

⁷ Frunze, *Izbrannie*, Vol. 1, p. 427.

⁸ Frunze, *Izbrannie*, Vol. 1, pp. 428-9.

Since Makhno did not receive the order, there was no answer to_ this ultimatum, and on 26 November he was outlawed. Three armies - one more than the 'Caucasus' order, were to be concentrated in the area bounded by the Dnieper, Synelnykove, and Volno-vakha. From west to east these were the 4th, originally intended to guard the Crimea, the 1st and 2nd Cavalry Armies, plus a front detachment at Chaplyne.

Shortly before the attack on 26 November, Lenin took a personal interest in the fate of the anarchists and Makhnovists. He urged Rakovski, still head of the Ukrainian government, to keep a close watch on all anarchists and prepare documents of a criminal nature as soon as possible, on the basis of which charges can be preferred against them. Orders and documents are to be kept secret. Send out the necessary instructions.⁹

The Makhnovists accused the Bolsheviks of taking undercover action against them. Nine counter-espionage agents were caught at Polohy and Hulyai Pole on 23 November, who confessed that they had been sent to find out the whereabouts of the leading Makhnovists, and shadow them. On the day of the attack, captured Red units were found to have undated anti-Makhnovist proclamations, which the prisoners stated had been given them on 15 or 16 November, less than 24 hours after the end of the Crimean campaign, and before Frunze's 'Caucasus' order.

The roundup of anarchists started at 3 a.m. in Kharkiv, Yelyzavethrad, Mykolaiv, and elsewhere. At 11 a.m. simultaneous attacks were launched on the Makhnovists in the Crimea and at Hulyai Pole. Karetnyk himself and his chief of staff were lured towards Hulyai Pole for a meeting, seized en route at Melitopil and shot. On 27 November the rest of the Crimean Makhnovists broke through a cavalry division immediately to their north and reached Yushun on the 29th ahead of their pursuers, slipping past a division of the 6th Army on the Perekop isthmus the same day and on into northern Tavria. On 1 December there occurred a full-scale battle. The commander of the 4th cavalry division of the 1st Cavalry Army, Tymoshenko, future Marshal of the Soviet Union, recorded his victory in the Tymoshivka area to the north of Melitopil. Out of a force of 2000-4000 from Simferopol, only 250 cavalry under Mar-chenko finally escaped.

In accordance with plans, Hulyai Pole itself was surrounded. In the town were 150-200 of Nestor's bodyguard, or 'Black Sotnya', and a few others. Despite overwhelming odds Makhno broke out. On the 27th there was heavy fighting in the Hulyai Pole-Polohy region. On the 28th, Makhno escaped and Red forces occupied the town. The week or so following was spent creating new units from forces outwith the region at the time of the attack on the 26th: these amounted to 1500 infantry and 1000 cavalry. During the period of the agreement Makhno had been forming units under various experienced commanders throughout the south-east Ukraine, and not limiting recruiting to Hulyai Pole.

On 1 December, Rakovski gave a report on the imminent demise of the Makhnovschyna to the Kharkiv Soviet. How premature he was became clear on 6 December, when Makhno re-occupied Hulyai Pole, routed the 42nd division stationed there, taking, according to one report, 6000 prisoners, of whom one-third volunteered to join the insurgent ranks. After a nine-hour battle, however, he had to abandon the town again, and turn south.

Frunze nonetheless felt that the final attack should start by 11 December. The new commander on the western side, Griunshtein, had the Boguchar brigade and some internal security forces in

⁹ Gruppa, p. 24.

addition to the 4th Army. The second Cavalry Army was to move in from the east; a breakout was to be avoided at all costs.

Just in case these military measures were not enough to cow the local population, Frunze gave orders on 6 December on how to do just that: 'In addition to the annihilation of the Makhnovists, the bandit-infested region is to be totally disarmed and all the poorest elements of the population capable of supporting Soviet power are to be organised'.¹⁰

At the same time, by decree of the Ukrainian Council of Ministers, a political section to fight banditry was set up under the Council and Frunze. On 9 December the central committee of the Communist Party of the Ukraine confirmed political directives from the Russian party, under which the main tasks were the liquidation of anarcho-Makhnovist and Petliurist-Nationalist banditry, especially by creating Poor Peasant Committees and other Soviet organs in the villages.

On the military side, progress was unsatisfactory. Desertions were so numerous that special commissions were created to pick up deserters and prisoners freed by the insurgents. Orders were given that all Makhnovist prisoners were to be shot, to discourage the local population and Red soldiers thinking of joining them. There is also evidence of unrest in the Azov fleet, which transferred from Taganrog, where it had been icebound during the Vranghel campaign, to Mariupol, at the end of the year. Makhno was rumoured to be nearby, but the employment of the sailors against him was evidently hazardous: two guns ordered to fire on him were sabotaged.

On 6-7 December, Makhno was in the Komar area east of Pokrovske. Here he was joined by the remnants of the Crimean forces. On the 7th he turned south towards Tsarekostyantynivka. Frunze was still hopeful of annihilating banditry in the area totally by 16 December, driving the insurgents into the Sea of Azov from west, east and north. Makhno made full use of what maneuverability he had within this ring. On the 11th he joined up with Vdovychenko's forces at Novospasivka, and made for Berdyansk, where the defence, in a state of utter disorder, consisted of:

A small unit of dismounted cavalry, which was in an appalling state, a battery of 3" guns which went over to Makhno, a local battalion . . . , a Red sotnya of 300 semi-Makhnovist types of the Military District Committee, some Food Army men, Cheka and party members of the Red Army, about 300 in all against a band 5000 strong ... It was hoped to hold out for 2-3 hours pending reinforcements, which would mean Makhno could be surrounded in a Berdyansk pocket.¹¹

According to this writer, eighty-three communists were killed in the raid, but the Makhnovists were not completely successful: a few defenders managed to hold out in the Land Department building, inflicting heavy losses.

By 2 p.m. on the 12th, Makhno was already leaving Berdyansk, within two hours he was clear, by 8 p.m. he was back in Novospasivka. Shortly after midnight he left for Andriyivka, arriving there at dawn. His forces rested in nearby farms and departed that evening. Fourth Army units moved in on him from the north-west. At 2 a.m. Makhno boldly and unexpectedly took the offensive against them. The Red units were almost certainly much more numerous, for by the evening of the 14th, the insurgents had been driven back into the village and surrounded, but as a result of the criminal negligence of some units, (Makhno) has broken out to the north. His

¹⁰ Frunze, *Izbrannie*, Vol. 1, p. 433.

¹¹ Esaulov, p. 84.

entire cavalry has escaped, and apparently almost all of his infantry in tachanki ... The future direction and intentions of the enemy are as yet unknown.¹²

The battle was called by the Bolsheviks the 'Andriivsky konfuz.' There was 18-20 hours of continuous fighting, but 'konfuz' means a discomfiture or embarrassing position. Such it certainly was, for the commander-in-chief to have to admit that he was totally ignorant of Makhno's movements, after having thought him firmly and tightly caught at last!

He now ordered the 2nd Don division to clear the area south of the Olexandrivske-Volnovakha railway, the scene of Makhno's recent activities, while Eideman's north group, along with a cavalry division and a cavalry brigade, were to prevent an insurgent breakout to the north-west. From these forces three special detachments not less than 2000 strong were to be selected, to pursue Makhno independently until he was annihilated. The rest of the 2nd Cavalry Army was to pursue him in the event of his slipping through their lines. Specially chosen air detachments plus the 3rd cavalry corps were also to pursue him wherever he might go. An alteration of tactics is apparent here: although still hopeful, Frunze was not so confident of surrounding Makhno. Arrangements therefore had to be made to pursue him relentlessly.

By midnight on 14 December, Makhno was at Kinski Rozdory. By 2 a.m. on the 16th, at Fedorivka, he was surrounded again, and a 14 hour battle began against Eideman's forces and the 2nd Cavalry Army. However, he broke out once more, to the north-east. On the 19th there was another encirclement battle at the Greek village of Kostyantyn against large forces of cavalry and artillery, including the Boguchar brigade. He escaped again, but despite enrolment of Red deserters, he still had only 3000 men; losses were keeping pace with recruits. In any one engagement he might face 10,000-15,000 enemy soldiers. If the Insurgent Army was to survive, it would have to leave its home area. The decision to do so was taken at a meeting of the Soviet of Revolutionary Insurgents soon after the battle of Kostyantyn. Nestor was given carte blanche on the line of retreat.

Having gone westwards to Fedorivka and back east to Kostyantyn, Makhno continued east towards Yuzovka in the Donbas, but, learning that there were large enemy forces in an area with which he was not familiar, round the end of the month he once more turned west. To make pursuit more difficult, the roads were abandoned. On he went across the Dnieper and on into Yelyzavethrad district. On 30 December units of the cavalry corps of the 14th Army were ordered by the 1st Cavalry Army commander to take up the pursuit of Makhno, whose total forces were much the same - 2300 infantry, 600 cavalry, 38 machine-guns, and 3 guns.

On 1 January 1921 the number of bandits in the Ukraine listed by the Red Army had dropped from 35,000 to 40,000 at the time of Vrangeli's defeat, to 6500 plus 82 machine-guns. By the end of 1921, this total had dropped to 850.

On 31 December units of the 8th division of the 1st Cavalry Army met up with Makhno, who, as he retreated, was pursued by the 1st and 2nd brigades of the division. Following another attack on 2 January, despite a two-fold superiority in machine-guns, the insurgents were forced to turn towards the Dnieper again. On 4-5 January the 17th division reinforced the pursuit, now commanded by Primakov. It continued for most of the rest of January, changing direction several times before finally switching back to the river, going as far east as Galicia before passing through the Kiyiv area on the way west. In the second half of the month a shock group under Nesterovich took up the chase, and, on the recrossing of the Dnieper, another shock group under Kotovsky,

¹² Frunze, *Izbrannye*, Vol. 1, pp. 439-40.

commander of the 17th. Makhno entered the province of Poltava after fighting twenty four battles in as many days.

During February the insurgents went into Kharkiv province, thence into that of Kursk, where they occupied Korocha, a town in the south-east of the province, and ran off a lot of propaganda. Makhno then started for his home area via Vapnyarka and the Don country, fighting infantry and the 2nd Cavalry Army daily.

The political leaders of the Ukraine were still worried about him. Many of the fulminations were against banditry generally, Makhno himself, because of his reduced numbers and activities, being mentioned rather less. A plenum of the Communist Party of the Ukraine on 7-9 January discussed it; several times the Ukrainian Politbiuro took up the issue. A large amount of anti-bandit literature was published. Eideman, earlier commander of the north group and Frunze's deputy in 1921, wrote a number of brochures on how to overcome the problem, both militarily and politically.

At the beginning of March, under pressure which increased as he drew nearer Hulyai Pole, Makhno split his forces. The intention was to meet up with other insurgents in the home region, but between 7 and 10 March the Makhno group ran into stiff opposition in the Melitopol area. Makhno was wounded, but got himself onto horseback to take charge, and made his escape along the narrow tongue of land which separates Lake Molochne from the Sea of Azov. From there he moved into the Tokmak area, thence towards the Greek village of Komar near Novospasivka. On 12 March the 1500 cavalry and two regiments of infantry under Petrenko-Platonov beat off further attacks, but on the 14th disaster struck during an insurgent counter-attack. Makhno was again wounded, this time seriously, in fighting against the 9th cavalry division. Under pressure from his commanders Nestor agreed on 15 March to split his men into groups of 100 or 200, to be sent to help the independent groups already functioning under Kurylenko and others. A special detachment under Zabudko would be responsible for hiding Makhno until he recovered. A further skirmish with this cavalry forced the heavily outnumbered insurgents to flee 120 miles in thirteen hours, a speed of exhaustion which even they could not keep up for long. After a five-hour halt at Sloboda on the Sea of Azov, they set off again for Novospasivka, but soon ran into fresh cavalry. After a 17-mile chase, a decision was made at the village of Staroduhivka, west of Mariupil. In order to save Makhno, five machine-gunners sacrificed their lives to keep the Bolsheviks at bay, while Zinkovski supervised the escape of the wounded batko.

On 17 March there was an engagement at Pokrovske station to the north of Hulyai Pole. Only a small force, with Makhno still wounded, broke out towards Hryshyne-Izium. Making use of the breathing-space resulting from the difficulty of movement for regular troops during the spring thaw, Makhno was able to reestablish contact with the groups who had hived off after Staroduhivka under Schus, Kozhyn, and others. Numbers had grown before the disasters of mid-March from 500 to 3000, then declined, and were now picking up again. A rendezvous for the groups was fixed for somewhere in Poltava province at the beginning of May. Little is known of events during April, but at the end of the month the insurgents were in the Kobelyaki district of Poltava province.

Sometime in May the rendezvous took place: among those who turned up were Kozhyn and Kurylenko, making a total of 2000 cavalry and several infantry regiments. There was fighting in the southern parts of Poltava and Kharkiv provinces, the main objects of attack being the Soviet food and anti-profiteer apparatus; it should not be forgotten that, although Soviet agricultural policy had changed drastically following the relatively lenient attitude to the peasants adopted in

the New Economic Policy, the effects of this change, and especially the abolition of food requisitioning, had yet to be felt in the villages. Makhno says that considerable forces were sent against him from Kharkiv - quite enough to convince him that his idea of a raid on the city was wildly impracticable.

To indicate the fear that Makhno's name could still arouse, we can point to some trouble in the city of Katerynoslav. On 1 June, some workers had come out on strike and some railway Chekists were beaten to death when they came on the scene. To counter the effect of this 'little Kronstadt', Rakovski, Bukharin, and Frunze were sent down to speak:

. . . Rumours swept the hall that something had happened to Rakovski's train. . . . The prevailing excitement, suspicion and fright grew enormously, and was becoming hysterical when the speakers had not arrived by 10 p.m. - they had been expected at 7. There were no communications with nearby stations at the time - every night the Makhnovists ripped down the wires. . . . Just after 11 [special couriers] rushed in to say they had arrived. Twenty minutes later they entered, to applause. Rakovski explained the delay: as they were approaching Pavlohrad, Budyonny had brought in 300 captive insurgents to the station, and he and Bukharin had had to administer justice to the sons of rebellious kulaks.¹³

There is other evidence that Makhno was still a source of trouble. In a telegram printed in *Izvestiya* on 8 June, the Katerynoslaw congress of KNS told Lenin:

We, poor peasants of Katerynoslav province, are well aware of the serious situation of the republic. . . . The Makhnovists roam over our fields, sabring and killing poor peasants; by our combined pressure, through the creation of cavalry squadrons and tachanki detachments, we will put an end to the Makhnovschyna.¹⁴

According to *Izvestiya* on 22 June, the strongest bands left were Antonov's in Great Russia, and Makhno's in the Ukraine.

The end was hastened by the adoption of new tactics. Instead of pursuing the insurgents whenever they appeared, the Red Army adopted Eideman's ideas. The lines of Makhno's raids, his directions of march and his stopping places were worked out on paper, and as far as possible, troops garrisoned accordingly. Frunze took personal charge during June. During an incident at the village of Reshetylivka in Poltava province on 15 June, he was almost captured by the insurgents, but the latter lost two thirds of their effectives, and were forced out into the Novomoskovske area. Makhno had 300 cavalry, 100 infantry and a number of machine-guns, but this is almost certainly an underestimate.

Despite this reverse, the Makhnovists were still a big worry to Frunze in his order to the armed forces of the Ukraine and Crimea on 23 June. It listed many faults which had enabled a band, a third of its former strength, to continue to evade pursuit. He thanked a few troops, mainly KNS and Internal Security, who had acquitted themselves well. For the rest, he certainly felt that his

¹³ Arbatov, 'Yekaterinoslav', pp. 131, 132, 135-6.

¹⁴ *Izvestiya*, 8 June 1921.

personal conduct of operations for a few days had shown up a very bad state of affairs indeed, especially among the cavalry, widely regarded as the 'stars' of the Red Army. The cavalry in question, Budyonny's cavalry army, had also been responsible for the rough handling of food collection in Katerynoslav province, the consequent revival of insurgent activity, and hence, the appearance of the 'kulaks' before Rakovski and Bukharin.

In April, presumably on Frunze's orders, annihilation detachments had been set up to deal with the bands, including Makhno. The first such had been mauled by the Makhnovists, but a second, under the command of P. Hryhoriyiv, deputy commander of the 2nd cavalry division, and of roughly brigade size, heavily defeated the insurgents in two engagements in Poltava province between June 28 and 30.

Militarily the Makhnovists were now defeated, although not destroyed. Politically they could do little - the peasants were exhausted by the years of war and civil war, and, even where they still had the inclination to help, they were often prevented by Red Army men garrisoned and quartered on them. There were exceptions: in July 1921 peasants near Okhtyrka in the west of Kharkiv province gave Makhno supplies, took over the wounded, and gave information on the dispositions of Red Army units.

Furthermore, there was a drought in the early summer, which lasted for most of the rest of the warm months. It drove the main Makhnovist forces as far as the Kuban, thence north to Tsaritsyn and Saratov, possibly in the hope of linking up with A. S. Antonov in Tambov province; from there south-east to the province of Voronezh, down the Don, and back into the Ukraine. The old skill showed in the crossing on the night of 6-7 July of the Lozova-Kostyantynohrad line. From the Bolshevik point of view the failure had not been in Eideman's quartering policy, but the failure to combine it with pursuit tactics and keep watch on the lines with armoured trains, which would cut down Makhno's time to cross and escape.

Frunze was confident enough to meet the press on 4 August. There were mostly only small bands left, remnants only of Petliurists and Makhnovists. The 'Insurrectionary Army of Makhno' had been almost wiped out, Zabudko and Kurylenko killed, Schus and Kozhyn severely wounded, all carts and machine-gun tachanki captured. Makhno himself had fled into the Donetsk district.

At the beginning of August Nestor finally gave up the struggle as hopeless. Rather than surrender, he decided to flee abroad - the unknown was better than certain death. He also needed medical attention, which in the circumstances he could never get in his own country. Following the re-entry into the Ukraine, he set off for the Dnieper on 13 August, crossing the river on the 16th. He records:

On our way to the right bank of the Dnieper we met many of our detachments, to whom we explained why we were going abroad. They all said the same thing: 'Go on your way, take good care of the batko, and then return to help us. . . .' On 19 August, eight miles from Bobrynets, we ran into the 7th cavalry division. . . . To turn back would have been fatal, as a cavalry regiment to our right had spotted us and was attempting to cut off our retreat. I therefore begged Zinkovski to put me up on a horse. In a moment we had drawn our sabres, with a loud hurrah rushed the village, and captured the division's machine-gun unit. We took 13 Maxims and 3 Lewises, and then continued our journey. . . . We lost 17 of our best comrades. . . . On 22 August . . . I was hit by a bullet which entered the back of my head on the left and

came out through the right cheek. ... On 26 August we fought another battle ... in which we lost our dearest fighters and comrades, Petrenko-Platonov and Ivanyuk. I made a change of route, and on 28 August crossed the Dniester. Here I am abroad . .

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Makhno crossed the river between Monastyrivka on the Russian side and Vadul-lui-Vode in Romania. Estimates of his numbers vary from 50 to 250. The latter figure would be likely for the start of the journey. Given the casualties, 100 to 150 actually crossing would be reasonable.

There are a few echoes of the movement telling of its final folding. On 29 September a Berdyansk report said that:

. . . Recently, 10 bandits surrendered voluntarily. The ideological decay of the Makhnovschyna is especially noticeable in the mood of the peasants, who are helping in every way to disarm the bandits in hiding.¹⁶

The Cheka was especially active. The haul of rifles, machine-guns, and other equipment was especially high in Hulyai Pole and district. A report for the new Zaporizhya province round about October/ November 1921 gives 20 machine-guns, 2833 rifles, 335 revolvers, 405 sabres, 86,798 bullets, and much besides - and more was coming in. After this there is hardly an echo, although it is possible that a search through the papers of Katerynoslav, Tavria and Olexandrivske might give a few clues.

Thus ended the military career of the most remarkable guerillas of modern times. Some of the spirit lives on in folklore and novel. A visit to the Hulyai Pole area could expand this through contact with survivors. Despite the losses of all the wars, there must be a few who still remember. In Hulyai Pole today part of the Makhnovist headquarters building is used as a museum to display his atrocities: any reference to 'Makhnohrad' is strongly disapproved of officially.

One source mentions that folk verses and songs were recited at fetes, weddings, and the like. If a child would not go to sleep, the mother would say: 'If you don't go to sleep, Batko Makhno will be coming here this minute; he'll give it to you!'¹⁷ There was a film going round the Ukraine in 1939-40, depicting him as the bloody chief of a band of thieves. He appears in some civil war novels, such as Honchar's 'Sobor', where he has an encounter with the famous Ukrainian antiquarian Yavornytsky. Paustovski came across him in the course of a train journey. Alexei Tolstoy and Leonov wrote novels round him. One day we might know how his own country regards him. He was a legend in his own time, sixty years ago.

¹⁵ Arshinov, *htoriya*, p. 200.

¹⁶ *Izvestiya*, 29 September 1921.

¹⁷ Arbatov, 'Batko', p. 112.

Part 2 Makhnovschyna Organisation

6 Makhno's Military Organisation and Capabilities

STRATEGY AND TACTICS

As an ideological anarchist of long standing, Makhno had a deep distrust of all authority and political parties, summed up in the slogan 'Beat the Whites until they're Red, beat the Reds until they're black'.¹ One might be tempted to think of him simply as the largest of the 'Green' forces, the otamany who roamed the countryside round their homes, but the Greens had neither the cohesiveness, the consistency, nor the scale of the Makhno movement. Only A. S. Antonov, as regards the first two factors, and Hryhoriyiv as regards the last, come near him, and neither lasted for such a length of time. Strategically, therefore, Makhno had a difficult choice as to whom, if anyone, he should ally with: the temptation was to fight independently, the often reluctant decision to join meantime with the lesser evil. This dilemma faced non-Bolsheviks on the left who wanted at all costs to avoid the restoration of the old regime.

The Nationalists were only a pressing problem in this respect at the end of 1918 and beginning of 1919, and in September 1919 round Uman. They were a temporary phenomenon, the Bolsheviks a recurring factor. This perspective, an order of priorities, helps clarify the confused and shifting alliances, and accusations of betrayal, which characterise the Civil War in the Ukraine. Under 'White' can be included the Central Powers, the Hetman, Denikin, and Vranghel. The Nationalists are thought of in much the same terms as the Bolsheviks thought of them, as unreliable allies who tended towards the right, especially in power, but whose rank and file sometimes contained good revolutionaries who had been misled by the attractions of nationalist ideology. Thus we find Makhno cooperating with the Reds against Denikin and Vranghel, potentially with the Nationalists against the Whites on the Don, and acting on his own against the Central Powers, as neither the Bolsheviks nor the Nationalists had any forces on the left bank Ukraine for most of 1918. Alliance with the Reds against the Whites in the spring of 1919 survived the attraction of independent action at the time of Hryhoriyiv's revolt, the interests of the revolution in the face of the Whites held to be paramount despite deteriorating relations with the Soviet regime.

For the second half of 1919 Makhno was acting as an independent factor in the vacuum following the Denikin offensive and Red withdrawal from the Ukraine. Yet, in the autumn, although the Bolsheviks were far away and the Whites barely able to contain him, he was unable to use his military preponderance to establish effective military or political mastery of the left bank region. This criticism of Arshinov, by no means a hostile witness, is supported by an article in the insurgent paper 'The Road to Freedom' on 21 November, at the height of his power and influence:

¹ Alexashenko, Protiv, p. 174.

What steps remain for the insurgent army to take in the event of the approach of the Bolshevik Army? ... It will indeed be a huge crime before the revolution if the toilers, risen ... against the yoke of Denikin, now allow on their backs new oppressors, even if they wear arch-revolutionary tags. The revolutionary insurgent army (Makhnovists) must now take the necessary measures to prepare for a possible clash with the approaching Bolshevik authorities. The insurgents must publicly declare that ... they consider the Red soldiers to be their brothers, with whom they can build their own lives without the help of authorities or political parties. That also on meeting Red Army men ... they will jointly make an end of Denikin. ... Also, under no circumstances will they allow Trotsky or other dictators to provoke the insurgent army into a clash with the Red Army. But that, if such a clash is unavoidable, if nonetheless the Red soldiers remain a blind weapon in the hands of the political party of the Bolsheviks, ... then the insurgents will answer the summons, and go the whole way .²

There is a strong impression here, as in Makhno's known preoccupation with military affairs, of a reaction to the present or immediate future, little conception of how the political consequences of military events could be influenced, perhaps determined. It is true that some attempt was made in this direction at the Olexandrivske congress - the peasants were to go back to their localities to build the revolutionary society at the grass roots - but at no time in Katerynoslav. The army of over 25,000 that autumn drifts away, some killed, many more dead of typhus, most just go back home. The huge amounts of arms and ammunition were either squandered or buried.

Part of the problem lay in the loose structure of the Makhnovist command over a wide area, a tactical advantage but a strategical disadvantage. In the autumn of 1919, three corps were acting semi-independently of each other: the south, Olexandrivske, and Katerynoslav. While this gave a flexibility shown in moving the headquarters to each district - Olexandrivske, Katerynoslav, then Nykopol - it also had the drawback of no secure rear which could be organised against future enemy attack. Political solidity and political offensive could have followed their military counterparts. Whether Makhno could have done this, given the nature of the forces at his disposal, mostly peasants, and some but vaguely acknowledging his authority, is another question: what is clear is that the question was briefly posed, and no solution found. The Hulyai Pole region would have been the obvious choice, but the intoxication of victory precluded this also. Vague talk of the spread of the third revolution was no substitute for forward military and political planning.

If Makhno failed to grasp strategic opportunity, it is beyond doubt that he was a master of tactics. Indeed, to become a legend within a few months, as witness the innumerable stories, he must have been. Apart from his personal bravery, which resulted in many wounds and helped him to an early death, he displayed great skill in the techniques of guerilla warfare: the ability to work without a fixed base, the ability to retreat as well as advance, and stratagems of various kinds. He also showed military talent on a larger scale, handling in the autumn far bigger numbers than normally available to a guerilla leader. He further introduced a novel tactic-the military use of the tachanka.

Makhno could be described as the inventor of the motorised division before the car came into general use. The origins of 'tachanka' are not clear, but the most likely derivation is as a shortened

² Teper, p. 67.

form of 'Tavrychanka', from Tavria, the old Tsarist province which covered the Crimea and the northern littoral of the Azov Sea. It was different from the usual peasant cart or wagon, used by all sides in the civil war for their supply trains. By contrast, tachanka wheels were sprung. It was very common among the generally more prosperous German colonists in mainland Tavria. It could seat four and was drawn by a pair of horses. It had three advantages: lightness and ease of manoeuvre, speed, and durability. Apart from the rifle and the machine-gun, the peasant armies of the civil war did not take over the techniques of the regular army, and both the rifle, frequently becoming the sawn-off shotgun, and the machine-gun, mounted on a tachanka, were adapted to peasant needs.

He used the tachanka in two ways. First, to transport as many men as possible. This gave him mobile infantry, which could keep up with cavalry at a rapid trot, covering sixty or more miles a day, far beyond the speed of the marching infantryman, and arriving much fresher. All forces apart from heavy artillery could thus be moved at very short notice, without the need to rely on railways. This mobility, as long as the supply of horses lasted, enabled Nestor to get out of many tight corners.

Secondly, a machine-gun was sometimes mounted at the rear. Instead of three or four men and the driver, there was room for the gun, the gunner, an infantryman, and the driver. There is no record of when Makhno first used the idea, but it may have followed the loss of a gun in retreat. Makhno suggested that it be rescued and put on a tachanka, instead of the usual method of slinging it across a horse. He himself mentions their use in this way as early as September 1918.

A White officer tells us that when he encountered the 1st Batko Makhno machine-gun regiment in the autumn of 1919, it consisted of 120 guns, all mounted on tachanki. Given a total of 1000 guns in the army at this time, this would indicate eight such regiments. These uses of the tachanka, especially for mounting machine-guns, was taken up by Budyonny, although the debt to its originator was acknowledged neither at the time nor since. Still in Hulyai Pole today, the invention of the 'machine-gun tachanka' is officially ascribed to Budyonny.

NUMBERS, NOMENCLATURE, AND WEAPONS

Estimates of the numbers under Makhno's command at various times vary widely. This is not surprising, considering both the difficulty of reliably estimating regular forces, and the inevitable partisan wish to over- or underestimate. The first armed forces were those at Olexandrivske in January 1918, and the free battalions against the invasion in April. These were all volunteers. On his return in July, he started afresh with 53 rifles; Schus's detachment at Dibrivki numbered 60. New recruits at that time increased the total to about 350, with another 1000 or so for whom there were no rifles.

By the time of the attack on Katerynoslav, the force had reached four figures, of whom 400 infantry and 100 cavalry took part there. The main concentration was in the south, but figures vary wildly. Bilash gives figures of 15,000 infantry and 1000 cavalry for the middle of January. If roughly three-quarters of the infantry were without arms, this would mean about 5000 front-line men. By the beginning of May, this had grown to about 12,000-which would correspond with the argument over the upgrading from brigade to division at the end of May.

Following the coming over of the Crimean units and some of Hryhoriyiv's, we have a figure of 20,000, of whom a small nucleus, at most 1000, were Hulyai Pole personnel, about 5000 Red Army men, the rest new recruits and Hryhoriyiv's men, plus wounded and camp followers: perhaps 10,000 combatants in all.

At the height of the movement in the autumn of 1919, estimates vary from 25,000 to 80,000 - both Bolshevik figures. Like Chamberlin, we can do no worse than suggest that the true figure lies somewhere between. Perhaps 40,000 would be reasonable; 15,000 infantry, some in Katerynoslav in November; 10,000 cavalry, of whom half, including Schus's command from Hulyai Pole, in the city; 5000 in support services, machine-gunners, artillery, armoured trains, supply, staff, &c; and 10,000 on the sick list, mostly typhus.

With a low point in January 1920 (the evacuation of Nykopol) the numbers oscillated between about 1000 and 4000, 20 to 25 per cent being cavalry. This rose in the autumn, about 4000 taking part in the Crimean campaign, two thirds infantry, one sixth cavalry and one sixth gunners and machine-gunners. The forces in Hulyai Pole at the end of November were the 250 of Makhno's personal bodyguard. After the breakout, this figure rose quickly to 3000, one third cavalry. This figure stayed constant into early 1921, heavy losses being balanced by new recruits, prisoners, and deserters. After the January 'chase', this had declined to about 1700, of whom 700 cavalry. In March, with the split into smaller groups, the strength of the main (Makhno) group and the combined separate groups declined, although picking up on passing through the home region. By mid-June 1921, the main force was down to 800, but lost half of its effectives in defeats at the end of the month: hence the 250 who started on the last journey to Romania in August. The proportion of cavalry increased steadily over the last year or so, a logical result of the need for increased speed because of continuous and increasing Red harassment. The Bolsheviks have alleged that this shows the strong kulak element in the Makhnovschyna; we shall return to this point in discussing the relationship of Makhno with the peasantry.

It is no easier to establish the nomenclature of the Makhnovist army. On all sides in the civil war the size of the military units varies wildly, and it was quite usual for units to retain their names even when they had lost most of their effectives. Before the autumn of 1919 there is little information apart from the creation in the spring of the 7th, 8th, and 9th regiments of the 3rd brigade of Dybenko's TransDnieper division. In the Uman area in September 1919 were the 900 strong Hulyai Pole cavalry under Schus, 3 Red Army regiments, 2 artillery divisions, a Mykolaiv composite regiment, 3 Trans-Dnieper regiments, another composite regiment, the 1st Olexandrivske regiment, the 514th Soviet regiment, 4 Novospasivka regiments-a reflection of the strong support the Makhnovists always received from this village to the south of Hulyai Pole.

During the autumn there were at least 3 corps, the 1st and 2nd Donets, and the 3rd Don cavalry corps under Havrylenko, later chief of staff in the Crimea. The regimental and divisional picture is confusing, indeed, divisions are not mentioned, indicating that, given the increased total number, large-size regiments combined directly to form a corps, perhaps six regiments in each. As in September, quite a number are named after localities, Katerynoslav being popular. The best known of the eight machine-gun regiments, each with about 300 infantry, were those named after Batko Makhno and Khoma Kozhyn, later commander of the machine-gun regiment in the Crimea.

The picture for 1920 and 1921 is very sketchy, mostly isolated pieces of information that do not add up to much. It is the 1919 picture of regimental organisation, regiments grouped together into corps when required, which is significant. The number of separate units is explained by the

fluid nature of the movement, and direct staff command necessitated by this - we can recall that for part of the autumn Makhno was controlling the insurgents from an armoured train on the Berdyansk line, central to the fighting in middle and late October. The Makhnovists therefore did not need the formal centralised hierarchy of the Red Army, but adapted current military practice to their own insurgent-guerilla needs.

As with the other civil war armies, the rifle was the main weapon of the Makhnovist infantry, but with a difference. As well as using the many types of standard rifle, when available, or, as in the spring of 1919, supplied by the Red Army, shotguns were widely in use, both the hunting gun and the ordinary rifle shortened, the bullets of the latter creating a sprayed or dum-dum effect, very nasty indeed. The use of shotguns is not surprising given the predominance of peasants, even less so considering the large amount of scrubland, and also some woodland in the southern steppes, with a much lower population density and thus more open spaces than on the right bank of the Dnieper.

If the affair of the Italian rifles is any guide, Makhno was better off without Red Army supplies. Antonov admits that they were supplied so that if need be the flow of bullets could be stopped. In the tangled rivalries of the Red Army command in the Ukraine in this period it is difficult to say where this policy originated, but it is plain that Antonov bore the political and Skachko the military responsibility. This measure to control Makhno in both respects helped lead to the White breakthrough in the middle of May 1919.

Sources of weapons were as varied as dress. Apart from the spring of 1919, there were two main sources, weapons left over from the war, brought back by deserters and returnees, hidden in case of future need, and seizures from the enemy. Quite often the main object of an attack would be to obtain rifles and ammunition; the exception was the height of the movement in the autumn of 1919, when huge quantities of weapons from revolvers to aeroplanes were captured from the Whites, and rapidly squandered.

With the formation of the new partisan units in the late summer and early autumn of 1918 comes the first mention of machine-guns, the skilful use of which was to be the hallmark of Makhno's forces. A machine-gun was seized in the very first attack. Types used were the common ones of the Great War, Maxim and Lewis, but nowhere is calibre specified. In the autumn of 1919 there were certainly some heavy guns among the 1000 machine-guns. It was this colossal instant firepower which ensured Makhno's predominance in the central eastern Ukraine.

During the Crimean campaign the Makhnovists had machine-guns in the ratio 1: 24, compared with the Red Army figure of 1: 67. This is an example of the greater role of the machine-gun in the Makhnovist Army. The last weapons, 13 Maxims and 3 Lewises, were lost on the way to Romania.

Evidence as to whether Makhno possessed artillery before the end of 1918 is inconclusive, but early in 1919 Dybenko promised him supplies including an armoured train and a three-gun battery. Antonov, in April, gives an unverified but likely figure of eight guns, five of them light (3 inch): this presumably included the Jewish half-battery mentioned by Arshinov. In the autumn there were between 47 and 50 of them, 3 rapid firing, 2 forming a heavy 6 inch battery, the rest light. There is mention of artillery throughout 1920, including mortars. The final mention is early in January 1921, the last pieces being lost in the continuous battles of the January retreat.

The need for mobility explains the predominance of light artillery. However, its persistent use while lacking a permanent home base for repairs shows a sophistication above the general level of peasant insurgency, even such a well-organised one as that of A. S. Antonov. Makhno's army was much more than a collection of rustics armed with scythes and pitchforks, although these

also could be pressed into service if necessary, as at the time of the Cossack attack on Hulyai Pole in June 1919.

Similar considerations, only more so, apply to the use of trains, especially armoured trains, for in using these Makhno was abandoning the village byways in favour of one of the latest techniques of contemporary warfare. True, that he could easily take to the roads if necessary, as on the retreat to Uman, and in the final phase: however, he preferred more modern methods if he had the troops available. The train sent by Dybenko, 'Spartak', was used, and there was his mobile headquarters on the Berdyansk line in October 1919. Three other armoured trains are mentioned, also four armoured cars. At Nykopol the Red Army found two and three of these respectively. The mention of six ordinary engines and 80 carriages there serves as a reminder that the Makhnovists used the railways extensively for troop movements; the trouble was, as the workers of Olexandriyske knew to their cost, that the military in the civil war did not pay for using the line and commandeering rolling stock.

As might be expected, the use and mention of armoured vehicles is limited to 1919, when in the spring they were receiving supplies from the Red Army, and in the autumn, when they controlled a large part of the left bank. The use of armoured vehicles, especially the trains, showed control of (in Makhno's case) a wide area containing the railway line, and not simply the villages on either side of it.

Most surprising of all are two mentions of an aeroplane, one in the spring of 1919, when it was used to foil an attempted coup against him by the Bolsheviks, the other at the capture of Nykopol. The evidence cannot unfortunately be stretched to indicate that there were any Makhnovist pilots, when Reds and Whites alike had few enough; but it is worth pointing out that the use of artillery and armoured trains hardly betokens a dark mass of ignorant peasants on the march. Given that there were no specialists (ex-officers as employed by the Red Army) it rather shows a hard core of experienced men with some technical skill: a different picture from the one of debauched *declassé kulaks* so beloved of Soviet authors. Makhno came a long way from the possession of 'Nagan, Mauser, and other up to date revolvers',³ of which the Tsarist authorities had accused him in 1910.

ARMY ORGANISATION

Unlike the Red Army, none of the well-known Makhnovist commanders came from the ranks of Tsarist officers. Outside the close circle of Makhno's Hulyai Pole friends, the only example that can be given is that of Lashkevich, commandant of Katerynoslav, and he had been an ensign. However, many of the Hulyai Pole insurgents had had experience in the war. When trouble loomed in December 1917, it was these people who taught the youth some basic military knowledge.

Open entry had been the rule for the free battalions of April 1918. Makhno wished to avoid a repetition of this disaster, but it was difficult to enforce selection in a partisan army, and, for Makhno, ideologically questionable. The problem therefore remained - even for those mobilised into the Makhnovist army. First, dubious elements such as criminals entered the army for what they could get out of it, especially plunder in the towns. Secondly, sabotage and treachery could

³ Novopolin, p. 77.

still occur, as in the case of Polonsky and his comrades in Katerynoslav. Some selection was certainly enforced on the Hryhoriyiv men following the latter's killing in July 1919.

The involvement of the Red Army men varied. There was a time in the late spring of 1919 when the Red Army in the south-east Ukraine consisted of little except insurgents; the Red element was further reduced by Dybenko's Crimean campaign. Antonov had intended reinforcements to remedy this situation, but they had to be diverted against Hryhoriyiv.

The overwhelming local makeup of the Makhnovists changed following the linkup with Hryhoriyiv's men, and these even more so with the adhesion of Red Army men soon after, and formed a significant part of the Makhnovist forces in the autumn. During 1920 the pattern reverted back to local support, and, when the final alliance came in the autumn of 1920, the Makhnovists were a small part of one army group, in its turn part of a Red Army with about 1,000,000 active soldiers available for front duty. In 1921, support and recruitment generally diminished.

The first mention of a 'Staff of the Insurrection'⁴ is made by Makhno in September 1918, an ad hoc affair of himself, Marchenko, and Karetnyk. When Hulyai Pole was finally occupied in November, better organisation was both possible and necessary. In default of a suitable civilian body, it would perforce meantime also have to take political decisions. Makhno was commander and chief of staff, and although he now had Schus, Liuty, and Chubenko further to assist, he was still overworked; doing staff business at night, being at the front by day.

Early in 1919, Bilash on his arrival still found things chaotic, and started to sort out the situation, especially Pravda and company. It was the staff who originated the mission of Chubenko, then chief of staff, to Dybenko. The Bolsheviks did not like what they found - no economic, supply and similar departments; apart from operations, this work was done by regimental and company committees. The staff and commanders held office on an elective basis.

From April onwards the Bolsheviks became determined to take over rather than merely improve this state of affairs. Antonov commented favourably on the work of the new chief of staff, Ozerov on his visit at the end of April, but the rest of the staff were not of the same stamp, especially Veretyelnyk, probably Ozerov's predecessor. At least three others, Mikhalev-Pavlenko, Gorev, and Seregin, were anarchists, and Pavlenko was one of the staff shot in June for distributing literature about the abortive fourth congress.

On the move in the summer of 1919, the staff of necessity reverted to taking political decisions, as in the discussions over Hryhoriyiv, where Makhno had great difficulty in persuading them to agree even to a temporary alliance, being in a minority in the first vote. It was also a staff decision to finish with Hryhoriyiv, and the staff, including Chubenko and Karetnyk, played a big part in the final denouement.

We have a better idea of the particular commanders in the insurgent army in the autumn of 1919 than at any other time. Schus, the cavalry commander; Kozhyn, machine-gun regiment commander; Lashkevich, commandant at Katerynoslav; Klein, commandant at Olexandrivske; Polonsky, ill-fated commander of the 3rd Crimean (Iron) regiment; Kalashnykiv, commander of the 1st Donets corps. Of the staff we have less information. It moved its location from Olexandrivske to Katerynoslav to Nykopol. On it certainly were Chubenko, Karetnyk, Vasylyvsky, and Bilash. The first three were all involved in the Polonsky issue, and Bilash supported Makhno over the affair. The emphasis is still on a close group of friends from in and near Hulyai Pole whom Makhno knew he could trust.

⁴ Makhno, *Ukrainskaya*, p. 67.

Despite assurances that the town commandants did not interfere in the civil life of their cities, they did have a lot of power. Klein at Olexandrivske complained that all he did was sit at a desk and sign bits of paper, while Lashkevich at Katerynoslav threatened to shoot the local Bolsheviks if they tried to take over civilian power in the city. Skaldytsky in Nykopol ordered that anyone who did not allow free exchange of the various currencies would be dealt with as a counter-revolutionary.

During the first half of 1920, a number of leaflets were issued by the staff. A number of senior commanders were also members of the Soviet of Revolutionary Insurgents, successor to the RVS. At the time of the Crimean campaign the staff was split in two. The wounded Makhno, along with Vasylyvsky, remained in Hulyai Pole, while Karetnyk, Marchenko, and Kozhyn went to the Crimea. Following the renewed hostilities a staff continued to exist, although we hear little. This was true even in the smaller groups, but the fight was for survival, and casualties among the senior commanders were very heavy.

There is no doubt about the individual skill and bravery of the Makhnovist commanders. A Bolshevik author says:

These (Makhnovist) treacherous military tactics and the particular composition of the army needed a completely trusted, cunning, experienced, and courageous commander, and such were the Makhnovists.⁵

Such was not the ideal regular commander, but their personal qualities combined with ease of contact with the rank and file made them excellent leaders of any size of irregular unit, and Makhno himself excelled in these respects. It was the latter quality which enabled him to keep the loyalty of the peasants, the former to use that loyalty to good effect. Volin points out that Kurylenko may have been superior to Makhno in military ability and moral standards, but he did not enjoy that exceptional rapport with the peasants.

Judgements on the military value of the insurgents vary wildly. It cannot be directly compared with a regular army such as the Red Army, but it had staying power. Unlike the latter, its basic core was cavalry, often from the Hulyai Pole area, while the infantry were frequently deserters from other armies. This explains why the Communists found it so difficult to establish cells in the Makhnovist cavalry. In the desperate days of 1921, Makhno was glad of anybody; even so, most of his men were still from the provinces of Katerynoslav, Poltava, and Don. The widespread Bolshevik - and White - propaganda of the Makhnovists as desperadoes and bandits are totally inadequate to explain the survival of a more or less regular army for over three years.

Another misleading Bolshevik view is that all the best insurgents were really pro-Soviet, longing for the day when they could pass over to the genuine popular cause. Even if this were likely given their land policy, it is not borne out by any large-scale desertions from the Makhnovists. It has been suggested that the insurgents forced Makhno to surrender his command in June 1919; this is patently not so, when within a few weeks units he had left in the Red Army to fight Denikin rejoined him when asked to do so. In February 1920 the Makhnovists are reportedly dissatisfied with their leaders, in June they are mostly bandits, by October a purge of the bandit and kulak elements is needed before the fight against Vrangeli; despite the fact that there were only desperate bandits left in it, the Makhnovschyna was still easily the strongest anti-Bolshevik band left in the Ukraine as late as June 1921.

⁵ Kubanin, p. 175.

Above all, Makhnovist military organisation was elastic: units split up or amalgamated as necessary. Laying aside for the moment ideological criticisms of authoritarianism from the anarchists and sweeping general condemnations from the Bolsheviks, we have a reasonably accurate picture of an army that did not have the organisational strength of a regular army, but yet had excellent internal communications with tried and courageous commanders; an army that ran down in the exhaustion of the civil war, but did not lose its cohesiveness to banditry, rather trying still to put a positive case, as in the Korocha leaflets in March 1921, and still had 250 men for the final journey to the Romanian frontier.

SUPPLY SYSTEM

We have a chaotic picture of the Makhnovist medical services, not surprising if the difficulties of a front line army are recalled - lack of supplies for field hospitals and dressing stations, transport, personnel, sometimes the most basic equipment. These delays are much worse in a civil war, much worse still in an insurgent army; for example, the sick and wounded cannot be evacuated to any safe rear area. The problem was most serious in the autumn of 1919, when the huge numbers of sick (mostly typhus) and wounded swamped what services could be scraped together, and when the peasant remedy of handing over the sick to the family or the village proved impossible in the towns and disastrous in the countryside, spreading the disease even more. On the retreat from Olexandrivske to Katerynoslav at the beginning of November there were 3000 barefoot wounded and sick, in overalls, muffled in sheets and rags.

On the retreat to Uman, casualties in train were 3000, in Katerynoslav there were 10,000. Both at Uman and at the time of the agreement with the Bolsheviks against Vranghel arrangements were made for the sick to be handed over to more geographically stable authorities. A nasty side-effect of the civil war was the butchering of prisoners, extending even to the sick in hospital or isolation barracks. This happened when the Nationalists abandoned Uman, and again when Slaschov temporarily recaptured Katerynoslav in December 1919.

The picture was not all gloom, but it must be emphasised that insurgent measures were on a small scale. A delegate at the end of the Olexandrivske congress in November 1919 wanted a commission created to set up the basics - straw and a few attendants. This was agreed, and the commission managed to get the straw and a few personnel. At Katerynoslav, Lashkevich organised a bath for his own regiment, and the staff arranged some first aid lectures at the army hospital, only to discover, perhaps inevitably, that the sisters of mercy (nurses) had V.D. The lack of medicines was extreme, and when a surgeon's kit and medical instruments were lost, the staff ordered everybody to look for it.

When in firm occupation of Hulyai Pole, the beginning of 1918 and November 1918-June 1919, the town could be used as a hospital base, although the supply of medicines was worse than in the villages. In April 1918 a local doctor had set up medical detachments, but nothing more is heard of this. Bilash on his arrival found this sector as chaotic as the operational, the wounded having to dress each other. Shortly after this, and probably connected with his arrival, things improved. A series of decrees was published in the anarchist paper 'Nabat' in early March, threatening punishment to all who did not keep their places clean, and asking a Doctor Sarnikov to prepare a list of requirements: all feldshers (semi-qualified doctors) and sisters or brothers of mercy were to report for duty. The particular concern was typhus. Sisters of mercy were certainly working

in a Hulyai Pole hospital later in the spring, and Antonov was impressed by the efficiency of ten military hospitals in houses formerly belonging to the rich and housing 1000 sick. They were full, but clean and tidy, a truly remarkable transformation in a few weeks.

This lack of medical personnel is hardly unexpected considering the proletarian nature of the movement and the lack of professional people. During the occupation of Katerynoslav doctors were mobilised, and the sisters of mercy provided what help they could. Transport of the wounded was also a problem, only carts being available, and even a sprung tachanka could jolt the wounded; the weather could compound the misery. At the time of the evacuation of Olexandrivske, even the requisitioning of all available carts was not enough. Even more painful was transport on the back of guns or in ammunition wagons, but better than what the enemy would do to them. All in all, the casualty rate was very high, and recovery from even small wounds or minor illness was uncertain.

What turned a problem into a catastrophe was the typhus epidemic which raged in the Ukraine during the later stages of the civil war, particularly the winter of 1919/20. It spread most rapidly of all in the insurgent army. Being carried by lice, it found a congenial home among soldiers. Other illnesses are mentioned, the widespread Spanish 'flu which carried off the White general Alexiev in September 1918, and an epidemic of cholera in Katerynoslav in the spring of 1921; venereal diseases generally were rampant. But it was typhus which claimed huge numbers of victims all over Russia at the time. For the first ten months of 1920, 84 per cent of infectious diseases in Odessa district were typhus cases. Over 3,000,000 casualties were reported in 43 provinces excluding the Ukraine from July 1919 to June 1920, with over 260,000 in February alone. The six provinces worst affected were those bordering on the Ukraine.

The epidemic had already started in Katerynoslav when the Makhnovists first entered the city in October 1919: the losses caused by the disease were great enough to be a factor in the abandonment of the city early in December. Volin caught it while on a political mission in the Kryvy Rih area the same month, as a result being taken prisoner by the Red Army. In Nykopol, the staff spent most of their time trying to organise typhus hospitals. Nestor himself had a bad attack, and most of the commanders and staff caught it; hence the physical impossibility of transferring to the Western Front, even had they wished to do so.

Nykopol was a health problem for a long time after the Makhnovists left, and the epidemic returned to Katerynoslav in the winter of 1920/21. Similarly cholera returned with warmer weather, followed by the drought and famine. The overall picture is depressing. Some attempt could be made at Hulyai Pole as a base, but little on the move, and all efforts were swamped by typhus. It is almost surprising that the fight could continue at all.

In two important respects the Makhnovists fared much better for food supplies than military procurements. Whereas arms and ammunition need considerable materials and careful manufacture, such are not necessary for food. Whilst the workers in the towns were indifferent or even hostile, the peasants were very willing to cooperate. Apart from coming from a rich corn-growing area himself, Makhno obtained for them most of what town goods were available, especially sugar, shoes, and textiles. The negative side of this was that if the peasants grew weary or had nothing left, the Makhnovschyna would be doomed. We have already indicated that the overall staff situation at the beginning of 1919 was chaotic. In the field of supply little progress was made: it was on the agenda for the fourth congress in June 1919. From incidental references we know that there was a supply department in the autumn, and that its probable head was Sava Makhno. It was the second item on the agenda at the Olexandrivske congress, so plainly no satisfactory

solution had been found up to that date. The congress decided that local commissions were to carry out confiscations from the bourgeoisie, and were to be linked to a chief commission attached to the supply department of the Makhnovist Army. In the circumstances these intentions remained a dead letter.

Makhno tells how the feeding of the men worked out in practice in the early days of the insurrection:

I asked the assembled population to say openly where the kulaks lived ... so as to get hold of two or three sheep to make soup for the insurgents. The peasants would bring some bread to go with the soup, and thus the insurgents would be fed.⁶

Bolshevik authors point out that this does not hold true in later years when peasant reserves diminished, but it is certainly true that most of the food needed was found locally by the troops. One author says:

Food supply was primitive, on the traditional insurgent pattern: the bratishki - the Makhnovists' name for each other-would scatter to the peasant huts on entering a village, and eat what God sent; there was thus no shortage, although plundering and thoughtless damage to peasant stock did occur; I saw them shoot peasant cattle for fun more than once, amid the howls of women and children.⁷

Clothes and footwear were as great problems as arms and ammunition. It was common practice for all sides in the civil war to remove boots from a dead man. On his visit to Hulyai Pole Antonov remarked on the variety of the clothing: uniforms were in particularly short supply, but the Red Army seems to have sent little. In the autumn, trousers as well as boots had to be requisitioned, and the commissions set up at Olexandrivske were to collect clothing as well as food.

Long supply trains followed the insurgent army, livestock often being herded, but these could never hope to supply the whole force. They are part of a rather better picture than is the case with military supplies, and while the Makhnovists were certainly worse off than the Red Army for weapons, they were, as long as the peasants had it to give, better off for food. It is worth recalling that the final year of the Makhnovschyna was the drought and famine year of 1921.

There is another side to the question of army supplies: plunder. As early as the Kornilov revolt in 1917 Makhno had shown his opposition to it, and in the early days of the insurrection in 1918 he shot one of Schus's best friends for levying an illegal contribution and appropriating the proceeds. There was bitter controversy over the occupation of Mariupol in the spring of 1919: metal, machine belts and other supplies were alleged to have been taken and forwarded to Hulyai Pole. Although an internal Red Army enquiry found little substance to the charges, there was probably some truth in them.

Three different White sympathisers who were in Katerynoslav at the time of both Makhnovist occupations of the city relate that his instructions were that each insurgent could take one item of anything he needed, the surplus to be handed over to the staff for central collection and

⁶ Makhno, *Ukrainskaya*, p. 74.

⁷ Miroshchanski, p. 199.

distribution. Disobedience could result in being shot. The views of the population, as far as they can be ascertained, were that Makhno was preferable to the Whites because often surrounded by enemies, and without a rear or supply base, the Makhnovist Army had to supply itself. The population understood this, and preferred Makhno's 'anarchy' to Denikin's 'strong government'. The peasants who joined up [with Makhno] thought of the towns as a source of enrichment, especially the bourgeoisie and nobles therein: a repayment for the services of the peasants to the revolution.⁸

The townspeople were very impressed when Nestor personally shot a looter in the city bazaar, a contrast to the White commanders such as Slaschov who tended to issue edicts from on high but let the Cossacks get on with it. Vrangal was an honourable exception.

Bolshevik polemic emphasising the bandit element in the Makhnovists, without comparison with the Whites or themselves, is thus rather wide of the mark. One fruitful source of error and distortion by the Bolsheviks, and sometimes by the local people, was to accept as Makhnovists all who proclaimed themselves such. At times such as the autumn of 1919 local independent insurgents wished to associate themselves with Makhno, but were less scrupulous in their methods. We should add that generally the Red Army had a rather better record than either Whites or Makhnovists, but it is also true that, in staying longer and organising more efficiently, they took more from the population than either of their adversaries. And who decides the dividing line between spoils of war, held to be justified, and plunder, unjustified?

One aspect of Makhnovist appropriation deserves special note, for it helped to reinforce his good relations with the peasants. This was his distribution of captured or stolen goods to the peasants, usually after a part had been kept for insurgent needs, and sometimes after some had been hidden for future use.

Drunkenness was a big problem during the civil war: it was one of the easiest ways of forgetting reality at a time when life was often unpleasant and sometimes short. There is the same tradition of home brewed spirit in rural Russia and Ukraine as in other countries. Volin shows how badly alcohol affected Makhno's behaviour towards his friends, his comrades, and women. This is partly explained, but not excused, by his being part of this 'tradition'.

When Bilash arrived in Hulyai Pole in December 1918, one of his first sights was some drunk machine-gunners riding in a tachanka along the main street. The Bolsheviks were appalled. In June 1919 Pravda reported, surely exaggeratedly, that 'Makhno ordered thousands of buckets of spirits and got his partisans drunk'.⁹ At the Olexandrivske congress the case of Klein, city commandant and one of the Makhnovist commanders who had remained in the Red Army to fight Denikin, was brought up. He had issued proclamations against drunkenness, and then got himself publicly and riotously drunk. Summoned to the congress, he apologised, and his request to be sent to the front line, away from the boredom of desk routine, was granted. Whilst this is a happy example of the military clearly obeying orders from their civilian masters, we have to admit that the bad example came from the top - Makhno was known to go on blinders of two or three days.

The puritan side of anarchism, clearly seen in the Spanish movement, often reasserted itself in attempts to curb this excess. Makhno told the visiting Antonov that he himself didn't like drink, and prosecuted drunkenness. There is more truth in the latter than the former claim. More prac-

⁸ Kubanin, p. 187.

⁹ Pravda, 25 June 1919.

tical was the resolution of a regiment in the autumn of 1919 that the sale of alcohol to insurgents and commanders be stopped, as also card playing: the orders of a commander were to be obeyed, provided he was sober at the time of giving them! It is sadly ironical that in exile, because of his wounds, one glass of wine was enough to make Nestor tipsy. He did not drink heavily again until the last two or three years of his life, when he knew that tuberculosis was killing him anyway. He was no longer the batko, accustomed to keeping up the drinking standards of his fellow Ukrainian peasants.

DISCIPLINE

One of the sharpest lines of Trotsky's attack on the Makhnovschyna was the lack of discipline and democracy in the army, and the effect this had on the battleworthiness of both insurgent and Red soldiers. Volin adds some reproaches on this score, but also gives the theory of election to command posts:

Eligibility for command posts meant that all army unit commanders, including the staff, as well as all those who held other important positions in the army, were either elected or accepted without reservation - if they happened to have been appointed in an emergency by the commander himself-by the insurgents of the unit in question, or by the whole army.¹⁰

This reflects not only anarchist ideals, but the practice of soldiers' and sailors' committees in 1917, accepted for tactical reasons at the time by the Bolsheviks. Trotsky attacked this:

The electoral basis (of the command staff) exists in name only, as an external show. The command staff and its closest associates are chosen by Makhno himself. It is true that commanders from platoon to regimental level are put up for the approval of the units concerned, but this is a mere formality. In case of disagreement, the final say rests with the senior command, who can appoint whom they see fit. One should add to this that the men have to accept the commanders Makhno gives them.¹¹ It is difficult to see how deterioration in the operation of democracy could be avoided, given the worsening of the military situation, especially after November 1920, and, in consequence, the rarer opportunities for exercising the rights of election and control.

The role of Makhno's bodyguard, known sometimes as the 'Black Sotnya', is far from clear, but it was not just a fighting body. It consisted of up to 200 men, and has been described as a sort of oprichnina (the secret police of Ivan the Terrible). It probably undertook special missions, such as the unsuccessful attempt to recover the gold hidden at Turkenivka, June 1920. It has also been alleged that it was used to get rid of any of Nestor's opponents within or outwith the movement. It was certainly needed to help guard his life, as witness Bolshevik attempts to kill him, and well fulfilled this function. It is unclear whether it had any links with the kontrrazvedka, the

¹⁰ Volin, *The Unknown*, p. 115.

¹¹ Trotsky, *Kak Vooruzhalas*, Vol. 2, pt. 2, p. 216.

Makhnovist counter-intelligence. One would expect the Bolsheviks to have made some capital out of a body such as this, objecting to the fact that it was secretive, and probably not subject to rank and file control. Certainly, one cannot be very easy about the relations between the bodyguard and the rest of the movement.

For the rank and file, conditions were rather more lax than in the Red Army. One commander, Petrenko, complained that, if an attack was ordered for 3.30 a.m., the units might turn up at 11! The loyalty between ordinary insurgents could make it difficult for a commander to find out what was going on. Exhortation played a large part in discipline, self-discipline being emphasised. Where this failed, shooting was common, and was carried out without fear or favour: a brigade chief of staff was shot at Olexandrivske in October 1919 for misappropriating the proceeds of a levy on the bourgeoisie, and Lashkevich, the commandant at Katerynoslav, was shot by decision of a mass meeting of insurgents, for embezzling funds intended for partisans in dire straits. Plundering, Jew-baiting, and murder were but three offences for which any Makhnovist could be shot. Such decisions leave little room for democracy, but do show a measure of rather severe discipline. We should not forget the bond of common origin between rank and file and leadership, up to and including the commander himself; these bonds extended to common language and common aspirations. They greatly lessened the need for the iron discipline necessary to weld together the disparate elements of the Red Army, complete with the politically suspect 'spetsy', mostly ex-Tsarist officers, who had to be kept in check by the commissar system. The Makhnovist army had no spetsy. It was a proletarian army at all levels, unlike the Red Army, where it can hardly be said that the proletarian element predominated at a senior level.

Like the other forces in the civil war, the Makhnovists had their kontrrazvedka, or counter-intelligence. This combined a number of functions: military reconnaissance, arrest and holding of prisoners, judge, counter-insurgency. It did not fulfil all these roles all the time, but it did so at the height of its power in the autumn of 1919, also the high point of the Makhnovschyna.

The reconnaissance side grew out of Makhno's ties with the peasants: in the early days the peasants did this work themselves, and, as with A. S. Antonov, women and children were commonly used. This sufficed for local intelligence, but the sheer scale of operations in the autumn of 1919 demanded greater organisation and coordination: there were four separate kontrrazvedki active in the various directions of the insurgent army.

However, it is in Katerynoslav that its other activities gained for it the notoriety it has retained ever since - although it should be noted that, along with the bodyguard, it successfully preserved Makhno's life. In one case, a trade union delegation that went to complain about the arrest of a woman cultural activist was told that the worker's place was in the factory, and that they would interfere in the work of the kontrrazvedka at their peril. Its role in the Polonsky affair is not clear; certainly, the prisoners were in its hands before being shot and dumped in the river, but we do not know whether they were formally condemned by it. It was the kontrrazvedka which broke the Polonsky plot, according to some reports, with the help of an agent provocateur.

At Olexandrivske its activities had caused enough concern to the congress delegates to lead them to ask for an enquiry: 'It has been reported to us that there exists in the army a counter-espionage service which engages in arbitrary and uncontrolled actions, of which some are very serious, rather like the Bolshevik Cheka. Searches, arrests, even torture and executions are re-

ported'.¹² A commission was set up, but was lost in the general evacuation of the city shortly afterwards.

In Katerynoslav, the offices were in the former Hotel Continental on Zalizna Street. At its head was 'Levka the Bandit', Lev Zadov-Zinkovski. He certainly had a record, but it is not clear whether this was criminal, as the Bolsheviks say, or political, as Arshinov says. He was one of Makhno's closest associations on into 1921.

Although not nominal head of the kontrrazvedka, he was its de facto chief, but was under Makhno's control like everyone else. Prisoners were either let go, or ended up in the river - in any case, fairly quickly.

At Nykopol, the kontrrazvedka chief arrested no less a person than the town commandant, Skaldytsky, only to be told by Makhno that anyone who did not trust Skaldytsky was a traitor. Although the commandant was released, this incident shows the power it could wield.

The question of Makhno's personal knowledge of, and involvement in its activities is as controversial as the activities themselves. Nowhere in his writings does he suggest he did not know what was going on. In Olexandrivske in January 1918 he had been a member of a commission sifting out counter-revolutionaries among arrestees and prisoners. It has been alleged that he personally tortured prisoners. He was closely involved in the Polonsky affair, being at the supper given by Polonsky after the staff meeting.

It enjoyed a revival of notoriety in 1920 under the former left SR Popov. The anarchist delegation of Baron and Sukhovolski joined with Bilash to complain to the Soviet of Revolutionary Insurgents about it, and as a result it was restricted to a purely military role. To take over its counter-intelligence work a new body, the 'Commission for Anti-Makhnovist Activities' was set up, consisting of Halyna, Vasylivsky, and Zinchenko, with right of participation granted to the two anarchists. This was most unusual, in view of the delineation after the Polonsky affair. More, Makhno tended to keep ideological and military personnel and business clearly separate from each other.

It is worth making a final point: all the specific allegations against the kontrrazvedka concern towns - Berdyansk, Katerynoslav, Olexandrivske, Nykopol. None of them concern the countryside, where there was rarely the opposition to justify the nastier side of its actions. Comparison with the Cheka and Denikin's secret police have been made frequently. Some of the killings of the Makhnovists were as brutal as those of their enemies, but it cannot be said they went about them with the same methodical cruelty. What was planned by the Red or White secret police seems to have been for the most part a defensive reaction on the part of the insurgents. Even this was limited, for they did not screw down the peasants, nor did they keep the jails full to overflowing - they were not usually in one place long enough.

MOBILISATION

The question of mobilisation both involves an important point of anarchist theory and reflects Makhno's popularity at a time when recruits, following the debacle of the Great War, were hardly numerous or willing. The first crisis occurred in January 1919, when after the retreat from Katerynoslav, many of the volunteers who had taken up arms against the Hetman simply went home. Previously, all Makhnovists had been volunteers: now, faced with filling regular lines

¹² Volin, *The Unknown*, p. 173.

against the Whites, he decided on mobilisation, perhaps because this would mean less danger for any prisoners who fell into the hands of the Whites. This was agreed at the regional congress in February 1919. Arshinov's suggestion that this was in fact 'a general appeal for army volunteers'¹³ has a touch of sophistry, inasmuch as neither the anarchists nor the Makhnovists would accept such an explanation. An anarchist writer who was in the Ukraine faced the objection squarely: either it was voluntary enlistment, or it was compulsory mobilisation. At all events, an anarchist insurgent army must be based 'from top to bottom on the principle of the contractual agreement of each primary unit'.¹⁴ The Makhnovists in contrast stated:

Some groups have understood voluntary mobilisation as mobilisation only for those who wish to enter the Insurrectionary Army, and that anyone who for any reason wishes to stay at home is not liable. . . . This is not correct. . . . The voluntary mobilisation has been called because the peasants, workers, and insurgents themselves decided to mobilise themselves without awaiting the arrival of instructions from the central authorities.¹⁵

In the event, there were far more volunteers than arms. More detailed instructions came from the third congress, in turn amplified by the RVS. Those born between 1889 and 1898 were liable, were to assemble at specific points, organise themselves, and elect commanders. The idea was anathema to the Bolsheviks, but, as they did not control the area, they could not stop the mobilisation.

The Makhnovists mostly mobilised when they were settled in their home area, for the obvious reason that they could be certain of success. Surviving leaflets of 1920 are in the nature of appeals to join up, not instructions. The attempt to carry out the mobilisation ordered by the Olexandrivske congress failed for the same reason as its other measures, the evacuation of the city a few days later. Trotsky had a go at the Makhnovists on this score also:

Makhno does not have general mobilisations, and indeed these would be impossible, as he lacks the necessary apparatus: but the partisan who enters the detachment is not at all free to leave. Anyone leaving voluntarily is considered a traitor and threatened with bloody vengeance, especially if he goes into a Red unit. Thus the 'volunteers' are caught in an iron vice, unable to leave. One should add that there are non-combatants, such as the choir of Estonian musicians, medical personnel, &c, who have been taken prisoner and compelled to carry out their duties.¹⁶

The apparatus in the spring of 1919 was not satisfactory, in the sense that there were not enough arms for those who came forward. The opposite is true of most armies which mobilise, including Reds and Whites in the civil war: there are enough weapons, it is the 'volunteers' who are not over plentiful. And Trotsky omits to mention the fate that awaited Red deserters - unless the number became too great, whereupon it was thought diplomatic to entice them back by means of an amnesty. And what army does not mobilise non-combatants? Such may not be justified in anarchist theory, but who is Trotsky to criticise on that score?

¹³ Arshinov, *Istoriya*, p. 88.

¹⁴ Rudenko, pp. 14-15.

¹⁵ 'The Road to Freedom', 17 May 1919.

¹⁶ *Izvestiya*, 16 October 1920; Trotsky, *Kak Vooruzhalas*, Vol. 2, pt. 2, p. 216.

7 Civilian Organisation

The leading Makhnovists had definite ideas about the ideal form of social organisation:

The basic form was to be the free toilers' soviet of peasant and worker organisations. 'Free' here means complete independence of all central authority and participation in the general economic framework on a basis of equality. 'Toilers' means that these Soviets were to be based on the principle of labour, containing only toilers, serving only their will and interests, political organisations being excluded.¹

The Bolsheviks never used the word 'free' in this context, and there is a fundamental difference in the Bolshevik and anarchist-Makhnovist attitudes to basic socio-economic organisation: or rather, for the insurgents the Soviets were the vital base of their ideal society, for the Bolsheviks they became increasingly cyphers covering party rule. The exclusion of political organisations - this should not be confused with their banning, which was not the case - follows logically from this argument.

The Soviets were to be the local organs of worker and peasant self-administration: they were to federate on a local, then regional, then national level. As power was to remain supreme locally, this federation would be horizontal rather than vertical. This ideal could only be attempted in periods of relative peace and territorial stability, as in the spring of 1919. A regional soviet was formally created by the congresses of that time: the peasants heard about the idea as anarchist propagandists spread it into the villages, but their main preoccupations were the danger from Denikin and the need to grow food, leaving little time or energy for free Soviets. They respected and admired Makhno, and were quite willing to go along with his ideas, which, being based on local units such as the village, made sense to them. Progress could thus be reasonably expected, but, except round Hulyai Pole, was not achieved up to June 1919.

In that area changes also took place in farm organisation, and to that we shall return.

There was a brief revival of free Soviets in the short peace of October-November 1920. The idea figured prominently in the discussion on the proposed clause 4 of the political section of the agreement. A Bolshevik author points out that 'The fourth point was fundamental to both sides, it meant the system of free Soviets, which was in total opposition to the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat'.²

At the same time, the 'Fundamental Theses of the Free Toilers' Soviet' were published. A considerable and detailed discussion took place in Hulyai Pole village assemblies during November 1920, of which there were about half a dozen. The local soviet was refounded round the middle of the month, a bare ten days before resumption of hostilities. The theory lived on, for a Bolshevik party worker and author who wrote a polemic against Makhno in 1921 saw Kronstadt as

¹ Arshinov, *Istoriya*, p. 80.

² Kubanin, pp. 158-9.

an example of the penetration of petty-bourgeois ideas such as free Soviets and the need for a third revolution. There is similarity between the idea of free Soviets and points 1 and 2 of the Petropavlovsk resolution of 28 February 1921-immediate new elections to the unrepresentative existing Soviets to be preceded by free electoral propaganda, and freedom of speech for workers, peasants, and left organisations, including the anarchists, plus a secret ballot. So, the author writes: 'It is characteristic that the anarchist-Makhnovists in the Ukraine reprinted the appeal of the Kronstadters, and in general did not hide their sympathy for them'.³

If the free Soviets did not get off the ground except in Hulyai Pole, the congresses held by the Makhnovists were much more successful. They were held as follows: on 23 January 1919 at Velyka Mykhailivka, on 12 February and 10 April at Hulyai Pole, and from 27 October to 2 November in Olexandrivske. A fourth had been summoned for 15 June, but had not been able to meet because of the military collapse. A projected fifth congress scheduled for Olexandrivske in November 1920 was a casualty of renewed fighting with the Bolsheviks. The formation and decisions of the three congresses in the spring of 1919 have already been briefly discussed. It remains to consider the Olexandrivske gathering, and fit all four into the Makhnovist scheme.

Next to an all-Ukrainian congress of workers and peasants, which the Makhnovist paper in Katerynoslav was urging, a more limited congress such as those mentioned was the most democratic and representative way of deciding the questions of the day. Where the local people would directly elect their delegates to the local free soviet to deal with local matters, equally would they elect delegates to the larger bodies. The possible conflict between the federation of Soviets and such congresses did not arise. The need for quick decisions on a wider basis than the local free soviet was paramount in the spring and even more in the autumn of 1919.

For the fourth congress, the scale of representation was to have been: one peasant or worker delegate per 3000 people, insurgents and Red Army men one delegate per unit, regiment, division, &c: plus staff and political party delegates. This was biased in favour of the military, most of whose units were less than 3000. The imbalance reappeared at the Olexandrivske congress.

There was no electoral campaign for delegates, the Makhnovists holding that this would open the way for the political parties to make a mess of things and confuse the electorate. It was summoned by the RVS, and most of the delegates were peasants rather than workers, despite the locale of the congress. Of 270 delegates, 18 were workers, and of these six walked out after Makhno had called them 'lapdogs of the bourgeoisie'.⁴

Following the walkout, the congress took a number of important decisions. Volin, chairman of the RVS, was elected chairman of the congress. There was a debate on free Soviets, which Makhno considered important enough to leave the front for. It was resolved 'In all ways to support our own free socio-economic organisations with unity between them, striving for the quickest approach to setting them up locally everywhere'.⁵ It was during this debate that the six Mensheviks walked out.

Aside from this, the commissions set up to investigate medical arrangements and the kontr-razvedka, and the case of Klein, all of which have been referred to, the main item on the agenda was once again the army. Another voluntary mobilisation was decreed, voluntary peasant contributions were to feed the army. Forced levies were to be made on the bourgeoisie - also a Bolshevik

³ Lebed, p. 51.

⁴ Konevets, p. 82.

⁵ Kubanin, p. 94.

practice-and further materiel was expected to be captured from the Whites. Yet another commission would see to this, as also one to summon further congresses, at which the discussion about self-administration in theory and practice would continue. Measures were to be taken to help the wounded and the poorest part of the population.

It is the raising of the thorny questions such as the kontrrazvedka which set off the Olexandrivske congress, and probably those in the spring, from similar Bolshevik events. In the latter there was little criticism from outside the party, and none of it on such sensitive issues as the Cheka. In this field there is a clear correlation between anarchist theory and Makhnovist practice.

The intermediate body designed to coordinate the local Soviets in time of peace and be the civilian or combined civilian and military power in time of war, yet be subordinate to representative congresses such as those mentioned above, was the Revolutionary Military Soviet. The name was the same as that commanding major Bolshevik military units, but there the similarity ends. The first RVS was set up by resolution of the 2nd congress at Hulyai Pole in February 1919, one delegate from each of 32 volosts in the provinces of Katerynoslav and Tavria.

Given, the circumstances of its birth, it was inevitable that it should concentrate on the military side and support for this. It was made directly responsible to congresses on the pattern of the second congress. When these could be held frequently, as in the spring of 1919, this control could be exercised, but in times of stress (most of the time after that) it was the RVS or similar body which exercised the final authority, in default of its theoretical check and balance.

How far the RVS in the spring of 1919 was a government has been much debated. Volin skirts the issue when he says that

It [the RVS] was thus, in a certain sense, the supreme executive of the movement. But it was not at all an authoritarian organ. Only strictly executive functions were assigned to it. It confined itself to carrying out the instructions and decisions of the congress. At any moment it could be dissolved by the congress.⁶

The RVS may have given orders, but these were merely the executant (perhaps a less understandable word than executive) consequences as indicated. At the one meeting to which the RVS reported as scheduled, the third congress at the start of April 1919, there is no record of dissent over its actions since February. Even so, for over three months effective power in the area was in the hands of the RVS, and its competence included some of the tasks of government such as the carrying out of the mobilisation order and the issuing of policy statements, for instance the attack on Dybenko for attempting to ban the third congress. The Bolsheviks certainly saw it as a rival: Kamenev on his visit declared its existence unacceptable, but did not obtain its dissolution.

One of the tasks of the Olexandrivske congress was to re-elect the RVS, which had been functioning with appointees since August with Volin as chairman. This body was rather aptly nicknamed 'Monk Nestor's twelve apostles'.⁷ A new RVS of 22 was elected, Volin again chairman. Among its members were three Communists, including Novitski, a well known local party member who was elected treasurer, and at least four Makhnovists, Laschenko, Uralov, Bilash, and Karetnyk. Although we know no other names, a Bolshevik author suggests that 'the controlling

⁶ Volin, *The Unknown*, pp. 108-9.

⁷ Peters, p. 104.

elements' were 'all peasants - anarchists or anarchist sympathisers'.⁸ In view of the attitude of the RVS to the Polonsky affair, there was truth in this, although one senses an insurgent rather than civilian peasant predominance. The unwritten boundary between civilian RVS and army staff had been broken by an incident involving both.

With the army on the move for most of 1920, the RVS disappeared after the fall of Nykopol in January, and a new military coordinating body, the Soviet of Revolutionary Insurgents of the Ukraine, took its place. It consisted of 'Seven members, elected and ratified by the insurgents, and to it were subordinated the three main army departments-military-operational, control-organisational, and cultural-educational'.⁹ Its members were mainly soldiers. Its first secretary, Popov, was a *bete noire* to the Bolsheviks, a left SR who had been a leading figure in the attempted anti-Soviet coup in Moscow in July 1918. It was also called the RVS, and its remit on the military side was similar. It lasted until December 1920, after which, in the struggle for survival, it is heard of no more.

Of the four attempts at coordination, February-June 1919, August-October 1919, October 1919-January 1920, and June-December 1920, the first and last were the most successful. The first had a firm civilian base and area of control, the last was confined to insurgents, of which it largely consisted. The second, on the retreat to Uman, had little to do except propaganda work - the crucial decisions on the alliance with, and then disposal of Hryhoryiv were taken before its creation. The third had the biggest task, for it had to deal with both the largest area and the most fluid military and political situation. Despite the difficulties over Polonsky, it undertook a large number of social and economic measures, such as the collection and distribution of money. It edited 'The Road to Freedom', and published the single most important Makhnovist document, the 'Project-Declaration of the(Revolutionary Insurgent Army of Ukraine (Makhnovists).'

One civilian problem which the Makhnovists did not know how to handle at all, for reasons to be shown, was that of money, especially on a large scale and in the towns. Peasants could produce much of the food they needed for themselves, even if the farm gates and machinery deteriorated through lack of spare parts, and there were shortages of basic commodities like salt, paraffin, and matches. They could largely do without money if they had to. A worker, however, must have money before he can buy food. In the chaotic transport conditions of late 1919, regular barter was no answer. In the anarchist society, money would be abolished, but that was not yet. The Makhnovists, elated by their military successes, felt the third revolution was just round the corner, and so their attitude to the workers' sufferings was rather cavalier.

The problem of inflation became worse as the civil war progressed, and more and more paper money was issued by the various contenders for power in nominal settlement of their debts. It is not certain whether Makhno printed any: one account suggests that he did so, stating on the back that no-one would be prosecuted for forging it! This would certainly be in character: it was the usual practice - rather tiresome for the ordinary inhabitants - for each regime to declare illegal all currencies except its own, but Makhno was an exception. A proclamation at Nykopol said that 'Cash and credit notes - Romanov, Kerenski, Soviet, Ukrainian, Duma, Don - coupons of all sorts, are exchangeable. Those guilty of not fulfilling this order will be treated as counter-revolutionaries'.¹⁰

⁸ Kubanin, p. 168.

⁹ Arshinov, *Istoriya*, p. 166.

¹⁰ Kubanin, p. 99.

This was put into practice, as the contributions levied on the bourgeoisies of Olexandrivske, Katerynoslav, Berdyansk and Nykopil were paid in all types of money. Bolsheviks point out that Makhno helped himself also to whatever was in the banks, especially in Katerynoslav. Volin summed up the Makhnovist and anarchist attitudes, and their blissful ignorance of their effect on the workers, particularly the vicious cruelty of high-rate inflation, when he averred: 'Should the people not really decide the financial question, since they possess such huge amounts of notes?'¹¹

Despite this, there was preference in what the Makhnovists gave out, if not what they took in. Currency values fluctuated wildly with the military fortunes of the issuing authority: thus, towards the end of the occupation of Katerynoslav, the rating of Soviet money improved in expectation of the return of the Red Army. However, for most of the occupation RVS policy was to hand out Soviet money when Don-Denikin money was appreciating.

There are no estimates for money given out by the insurgents in Olexandrivske; figures for Katerynoslav vary between 3 and 10 million roubles. Even given the prevailing rate of inflation, the former figure would feed 4000 families for a month. Something like a department of Social Security was set up, although their contemporary counterparts might balk at the comparison. The recipients - mainly poor local people, released prisoners, families of Red Army men - were let in one at a time, their passports scrutinised, extent of the need asked, the grant decided: this, and the name of the applicant were written down, and the money handed over from a pile on the floor, no receipt being asked for. Women, widows of workers and others in pressing need could receive up to 1000 roubles: a typical amount might be 500 roubles, which would certainly keep the wolf from the door for up to three weeks.

A large amount of food, including flour, salt, and sausage was also disbursed: the handout continued right up to the last day of the occupation. On the other side of the coin, a confiscation order was made against all the Katerynoslav pawnshops, presumably on the grounds that their owners were fleecing the holders of pledges. The order was reversed after a general outcry led by the Bolshevik paper 'Star'. The Makhnovists had simply forgotten that the poor holders would be worst affected of all by the order. Nor did the Makhnovists attempt to control prices. White bread, 18-20 roubles under Denikin, rose to 25 under Makhno, down to 12-16 under the Soviet regime - but these are Soviet figures.

If the Makhnovists helped to create confusion by their attitude to finance, they also alleviated it by generous grants to those in need, with a minimum of red tape, something few other administrations then or since can boast of. Whether such a policy was viable in the longer term is a completely different question.

¹¹ Kubanin, p. 100.

Part 3 Ideology

8 Peasants and Workers

The expectations of the peasants in 1917 could be summed up in one word - land. Those who had some wanted more, those who had none hoped to acquire some. By 1917 about 40 per cent could no longer make a living out of the land, another 40 could make ends meet, except in a bad year, 20 were relatively well off, a few at the top very well off. These figures correspond to the Bolshevik categories of landless labourer/poor, middle, and rich peasant (batrak/ bednyak, serednyak and kulak). In 1917, the Hulyai Pole peasants, at Makhno's prompting, had been among the first to take the initiative in seizing landlord land. The militant mood of the majority (remembering that Nestor himself was of poor peasant stock) meant that most of the land was distributed direct to the poor peasants, or used to set up communes. Every peasant, including the kulak and landlord, was entitled to as much land as he and his family could cultivate without the use of hired labour.

This redistribution reinforced Makhno's popularity. With the coming of the German invasion and then the civil war, he had need of this support - soldiers for the insurgent army, food to feed it, clothes to clothe it, horses and carts to move men and supplies and ensure a quick getaway when necessary.

Bolshevik land policy in 1919 and 1920 was a disaster: to this we shall return. However, as in other fields, they claimed ideological victory. Makhno, it was said, like A. S. Antonov, represented the interests of the kulaks, while they, the Bolsheviks, represented those of the poor, and, intermittently, the middle peasants. Trotsky remarked at the height of the anti-insurgent campaign in June 1919 that 'Scratch a Makhnovist and you'll find a Hryhoriyivist, but more often you won't need to scratch, the naked kulak or petty speculator baying at the Communists stands out a mile'.¹

Makhnovist support came from a wide spectrum of peasant opinion, but neither the mass support of 1918 and 1919, nor the continued military and provisioning sustenance of 1920 and 1921 could have come from as narrow a base as Trotsky suggests, and he is but the earliest Soviet propagandist to put this view. Certainly, the accusation of a certain ideological vagueness has validity, for the Makhnovists never clearly said where they stood in relation to Bolshevik land policy as a whole. This did not mean that the insurgents were devoid of ideas on the matter. Their ideology was very different from that of the Bolsheviks, and is sometimes called the 'united village' theory. The Makhnovists felt that, given time, the kulaks would be won over to the equalitarian redistribution of the land brought on by the revolution in general, and speedier than most in the Hulyai Pole region. The key factor, already mentioned, was that no peasant should have more land than he and his family could farm without the use of hired labour. This would still give the rich, even landlords, a fair stake in the post-revolutionary society, while at the same time giving the poor and landless an equal share of the land. The post-revolutionary economy would thus be both viable and fair.

¹ Trotsky, *Kak Vooruzhalas*, Vol. 2, pt. 1, p. 191.

To the Bolsheviks this was anathema. Any policy differing from theirs was counter-revolutionary, contrary to the interests of the workers and poorest peasants-the workers are always put first. The conflict between those who had lost land and those who had gained should be sharpened, not amicably resolved. In either case the poor peasants would be the gainers. Even if Makhnovist ideas had not appealed to the vast majority of the peasants, they would hardly have turned to the prejudiced and mistaken views of the Bolsheviks, let alone those of the Whites.

The Makhnovists themselves were quite clear on this:

The family of toilers should not be divided into parties and mutually hostile groupings, but rather should there be the closest links between workers and peasants, between all toilers . . . The task of restoration and the need for the quick recovery of our destroyed and retarded economy indicates that the ways and means of the new method of land organisation should be left to the completely free and natural decision and movement of the entire peasantry.²

And specifically on the kulaks:

We are sure that, mainly in these conditions, the kulak elements of the village will be pushed to one side by the very course of events. The toiling peasantry will itself turn effortlessly on the kulaks, firstly by adopting the kulak's surplus land for general use, then naturally drawing the kulak elements into the social organisation.³

If these quotations dispose of the 'objectively kulak' and similar accusations on the part of the Bolsheviks in theory, it remains to give some practical proof. Apart from the fact that the Makhnovist movement could hardly have lasted for four years supported by, at most, 20 per cent of the population, there are a number of other specific pointers. Firstly, up to June 1919, the whole emphasis of Makhnovist land policy is on an equal share for the poorer peasants, not just in terms of land, but of live and dead stock also - this will be referred to below, and is amply borne out by the contemporary Bolshevik press. Secondly, it is accepted that Makhno's support from all sources in the autumn of 1919 was overwhelming. Thirdly, if the Makhnovschyna was as moribund as Trotsky's writings in the autumn of 1920 suggest, it would hardly have been worthwhile making a military alliance with Makhno - and this after intermittent Red Army pressure over the previous nine months. Fourthly, even given the vast superiority in terms of men and munitions of the Red Army after the defeat of Vrangeli, Makhno held onto a diminishing degree of peasant support, despite their sustained losses throughout the civil war. The truth of the matter is that Bolshevik attitudes to Makhno, and the undoubted support he had from all sections of the peasantry, varied according to the political and military needs of the Russian and Ukrainian governments, or, put more briefly, were based on expediency. The fault lies in the attempt to sublimate expediency into ideology, an attempt that has, in default of defenders of the revolutionary potentialities of the peasantry and rescuers from oblivion of the defeated, been only too often successful.

The support of the peasants for Makhno and his movement is thus clear enough. It remains to emphasise that there were good reasons for this continuing support. Two have already been

² Kubanin, p. 112.

³ Kubanin, p. 113.

mentioned: Makhno's habit of distributing some of his plunder among the peasants, and the idea of free, local, autonomous but federated Soviets. Apart from the personality of Nestor himself, there are two further reasons of which something should be said.

The first was the direct exchange of goods between town and country when permitted by the military situation. Early in 1918, in return for a shipment of corn to Moscow, textiles were despatched direct from a Moscow factory, without the intervention but with the assent of the central government. Early in 1919, 1500 tons of grain were sent to Petrograd and Moscow. The commander of the train carrying the wheat (and a small amount of coal) was authorised to do a direct exchange for textiles. Bread was desperately needed in the north, and textiles were in very short supply in the countryside, so the exchange benefited both sides. The initiative in both cases came from the Hulyai Pole peasants.

The second activity, which, like the first, would benefit the poor peasants rather than the rich, was the establishment of communes. A start was made in the autumn of 1917, and was resumed in February-March 1918 as the time for spring ploughing and sowing approached:

A number of peasants and workers who had organised themselves into communes the previous autumn left the villages, and went off with their families to the estates. . . . There they established themselves, and lost no time in getting ready, partly for spring work in the communes, partly in military detachments. . . . They were based on the equality and solidarity of the members. . . . There were four agricultural communes within five miles of Hulyai Pole, and many more in the area: I stress these four, as I organised them personally. . . . To one of them I devoted two days of physical work a week. . . . There were peasant anarchists in all the communes, but most of the members were not anarchists. . . . Each commune consisted of ten peasant and worker families, 100, 200, or 300 souls in all. These communes took over the toiler's norm of land, that is, as much as they could individually work.⁴

In April 1918, Makhno took Belenkevich, the Red reserve commander, to see Commune No. 1 on the estate of the former landlord Klassen, on the way to Pokrovske. According to Makhno, Belenkevich was impressed. This was the one Makhno had been working on, and with whose members he met up in Tsaritsyn a few weeks later on his way to Moscow. The German landlords, like Klassen, or colonists, like Neufeld, saw things rather differently. It has been said that the communes were more a case of peasants settling on an estate until its supplies and stock were exhausted. This may well have been the initial motive for settling on the estate, but, with the flight of the landlord, the decision would be made to take over all or part of it on a cooperative basis. No poor or middle peasant would have had the capital, even if the political climate had permitted it, to take over on his own.

It was early 1919 before the situation was stable enough to allow of the reintroduction of the communes. In April, the commune on Klassen's estate was restarted. Early in the year two of its farms, which had been empty for some months, had been reoccupied by nine families. It was named after the recently murdered German revolutionary, Rosa Luxemburg. It was a success, for by 1 May it had a total of 285 working and non-working members, and 340 acres of spring sowing had been completed.

In February, the second congress at Hulyai Pole had shown the way:

⁴ Makhno, *Russkaya*, pp. 173, 174, 175.

Henceforth, until the decision on the land is taken in a fundamental manner (at an all-Ukrainian congress of peasants), the congress expresses the wish that local land committees should draw up at once a record of all landlord, appanage, and other lands, and assign them to peasants with little or no land, securing for them, as for all citizens in general, seed and materials.⁵

Three, other communes followed the 'Rosa Luxemburg' on Klassen's estate. There were not many, and at best a significant minority of the poorer peasants organised and worked them, but they are certain evidence of the influence of Makhno prevailing over the utterly different Bolshevik idea of a commune: they were organised from the bottom up, not the top down. The irruption of the fighting into the area in June 1919 brought the life of the communes to an abrupt halt, and peace never returned for long enough for the experiment to be restarted. Very few peasant movements in history have been able to show in practice the sort of society and type of landholding they would like to see. The Makhnovist movement is proof that peasant revolutionaries can put forward positive, practical ideas.

Makhno's own personality was also of vital importance. A poor peasant himself, he well, and perhaps instinctively, understood the feelings of his fellows: 'The peasants look on him as their very own, and the insurgents say of him, "Batko is one of us. He'll take a glass of vodka with us, he'll have a good chat, he'll fight by our side"'.⁶

With the exception of Volin, all his closest associates were peasants or workers. Volin had been a doctor, Schus was a peasant turned sailor, Kalashnykiv was a local from the Hulyai Pole region, Bilash had been an engine driver, Kozhyn was another local peasant, Vdovychenko was a peasant from Novospasivka. They make an interesting contrast to the Bolsheviks; Lenin, whose father had reached the lower ranks of the Tsarist nobility; Trotski, the son of a well-to-do Jewish peasant (a kulak perhaps) for example. Indeed, Trotski undermines the usual 'anarchist-kulak debauchery' line when he says that 'The liquidation of Makhno does not mean the end of the Makhnovschyna, which has its roots in the ignorant popular masses'.⁷

There have been few mobilisations where 90 per cent of the draftees have had to be turned away for lack of arms. The Bolsheviks have totally misconstrued the nature of the Makhno movement. It was not a movement of kulaks, but of the broad mass of the peasants, especially the poor and middle peasants. Acceptance of this in the case of Makhno, or A. S. Antonov in Tambov, implies that peasants can be revolutionary in their own right: they do not have to be led by the workers, or whipped into line by the self-appointed vanguard of the workers.

Makhno had had some early experience as a painter in Hulyai Pole, and also been involved in industrial politics in the town in 1917, but these did not equip him to cope with the problems of cities like Katerynoslav or Olexandrivske. He was a local lad made good in Hulyai Pole, but the scale of industrial operations was so different from the cities as not to be comparable. We have only to think of the Olexandrivske railway workshops, or the heavy engineering plants in Katerynoslav, and contrast them with the one or two small factories and large number of artisans in Hulyai Pole, to appreciate this.

While there is some justice in Arshinov's defence to Bolshevik accusations of lack of Makhnovist influence in the towns as resulting from never being in a town of any size long enough —

⁵ Kubanin, p. 56.

⁶ Arshinov, *Istoriya*, p. 218.

⁷ Trotski, *Kak Vooruzhalas*, Vol. 2, pt. 1, p. 207.

Olexandrivske four weeks, Katerynoslav two periods of one and five weeks respectively - it was the attitude of Makhno and the insurgents which was largely responsible for the small following they found among the workers. Makhno's own views showed in his description of Moscow during his travels in 1918, although on the occasions he spoke in Olexandrivske and Katerynoslav in 1917 he was well received. He was however speaking as an individual, not, as in the autumn of 1919, as the commander and spokesman of an all-conquering army. The attitude of the Bolsheviks, who still had much influence among the workers, had hardened against him. Relations between them, while not generally openly hostile, could hardly be described as warm.

At first, things did not go too badly in Olexandrivske. The Makhnovists organised two workers' conferences, at which the workers were urged to restart production under their own control, and establish direct relations with the peasants. The workers were not very keen, and wanted wages - the Whites had been behindhand in this - rather than ideas and goodwill. An initiating commission was set up including shoemakers and railway workers, but, when the latter asked for payment of arrears, Makhno told them:

In order to ensure the widest possible restoration of normal railway services in the area we have liberated, and acting on the principle of the organisation of their own free existence by the peasant and worker organisations and their unions, I propose that the comrade workers and employees energetically organise and restore things themselves, setting sufficient tariffs and wages for their work, apart from military traffic.⁸

It is the last four words which are the most significant, for most traffic in a civil war is military, and at that time most of the traffic round Olexandrivske was of the Makhnovists. It was therefore unrealistic and unfair to expect the railwaymen to take this advice: at least the Reds and Whites would have held out expectation of payment, even if the promise was not in the end fulfilled. A few trains did, however, start running shortly afterwards, and a few factories and unions showed signs of life.

What good work had been done in these preliminary consultations was swept away by the quarrel which broke out at the Olexandrivske congress. The Mensheviks had had some legal positions in the unions under White rule, but Bolshevik influence was now increasing. The Mensheviks did not have the same eager appetite for political power as the Bolsheviks, but they did share with them a distrust of the non-Marxist left. Makhno was a definite improvement on the Whites, but hardly welcome for his own sake.

At insurgent insistence, the unions did agree to send delegates to the congress, but for information only. There was some jockeying for position, which exasperated Makhno: he called the Mensheviks 'Lapdogs of the bourgeoisie'.⁹ The congress, mostly peasants, fully agreed with him, but six of the workers' delegates walked out on the spot: twelve, including the Communists, remained. Both sides immediately buttressed their positions. A conference of eighteen mostly metallurgical plant committees stated that they and the unions would disclaim all connection with the congress, making it an exclusively peasant body. Makhno's reply illustrates the gulf between the two sides:

⁸ Kubanin, p. 104.

⁹ Konevets, p. 82.

It is possible that the workers of Olexandrivske and its suburbs should, in the persons of their Menshevik and right SR delegates at a free and businesslike congress, put forward a Denikin-type opposition? And if such people are calling an extraordinary congress and passing a resolution of protest against their being called by their true names, this does not surprise me in the least. Scoundrels like the infamous thieves and cowards who fled from justice at the congress are incapable of anything apart from this underhand treachery.¹⁰

Short of open fighting, it is hard to see how relations between Makhno and the Olexandrivske workers could have been worse. The dispute came to a fortunate and abrupt end with the retreat towards Katerynoslav, and was not a good augury for cooperation there.

There were some minor successes in Katerynoslav. The workers at a tobacco factory won a collective agreement they had hitherto been refused, and the bakers, among whom there had long been a strong anarcho-syndicalist influence, set themselves to preparing the socialisation of their industry, plans being drawn up both to feed the army and the civilian population. We have already seen that large sums were handed out to those in need: but, for the most part, the record was poor. A typical misunderstanding occurred when the Makhnovists sent some captured White guns to the big Bryansk engineering works for repair to the locks. The work was done, so the workers asked for payment. Not surprisingly, they felt insulted at the offer of a small payment in kind. Angered in turn by this seeming ingratitude, Makhno ordered the guns to be taken without any payment at all. When he followed this up with an article in the insurgent paper in which he attacked the Bryansk workers as 'Scum, self-seekers and blackmailers, trying to increase their prosperity at the expense of the blood and heroism of their front-line fighters',¹¹ the level of polemic and misunderstanding had reached a point not far above that of Olexandrivske. It is not difficult to see how an initial mutual caution could, and did, turn into suspicion and hostility. The pace of events was too fast, conditions too adverse, for the two sides to understand each other. It is to Makhno's credit that he tried to get through to the workers: to many peasants, the towns sapped the lifeblood of the countryside through taxes and conscription. Makhno, on the other hand, genuinely believed in an equal partnership of peasants and workers, but, short of time and understanding, made little impression on the latter.

¹⁰ Kubanin, p. 106.

¹¹ Kolesnikov, p. 324.

9 Makhno and the Bolsheviks

Apart from the brief contacts at Olexandrivske at the turn of 1917/18, and the attempt to defend Hulyai Pole in April 1918, there were no direct contacts with the Bolsheviks until the agreement signed by Chubenko early in 1919. After this, the story is mostly one of bad relations, punctuated by periods of alliance or neutrality.

For the first half of 1919 the Bolsheviks had no alternative but to cooperate with Makhno - and Hryhoriyiv - against Denikin. By May 1919 two thirds of the second Ukrainian army was made up of their forces. At this time there were few accusations of banditry, rather of Makhno's attitude to Soviet institutions, including the Red Army, and of lack of discipline in the partisan forces. Trotsky stated that 'The blame ... is entirely that of the muddled and dissolute anarchist commanders',¹ but did not elaborate. Neighbouring units of the 9th division were being affected, shoulder marks being torn off, the election of commanders demanded; political commissars in the Makhnovist units were being prevented from carrying out their duties. In sum, 'Makhnohrad'-Hulyai Pole-was acting like an independent republic.

Following the bitterness of the break in June 1919, the Bolshevik press gave scant coverage to Makhnovist successes in the autumn. The Bolshevik paper 'Star' conducted a bitter polemic with the Nabat anarchists and their paper in Katerynoslav, but had to tread warily as regards Makhno and the insurgents, because of Makhno's personal popularity, the hope of winning over many insurgents to the Red Army, and fear of the counter-intelligence of Zinkovski.

There was a quiet period in the first half of 1920, but by the autumn the position of the Red Army was much stronger. While Makhno's help was certainly needed against Vrangeli, the insurgent forces did not play the key role they had done against Denikin. Further, Frunze started to lay plans for the destruction of Makhno almost before the ink was dry on the agreement for cooperation against the Whites. After their defeat, the Red Army had no external enemy left, and its commanders were free to use it against internal dissidents such as Makhno, the Kronstadt sailors, and A. S. Antonov. The combination of the new tactic of quartering large numbers of troops on sympathetic villages with the old tactic of pursuing him relentlessly, plus the introduction of the New Economic Policy, spelt the doom of the Makhnovschyna.

The Makhnovists had many complaints against the Bolsheviks. The essence is contained in the reply to Dybenko's telegram banning the third regional congress. What right, it was asked, did the Bolsheviks have to interfere in the political and social life of the southeast Ukraine? The toilers had a perfect right to govern themselves as they saw fit, and if the Bolsheviks didn't like it, they could lump it. Any state including the Soviet one was distasteful to the peasants and abhorrent to the anarchists, but some aspects of the Soviet state were particularly disliked. The Cheka never dared to show its face in Hulyai Pole in 1919, but peasants nearer the towns, as elsewhere in the Ukraine, had good cause to hate it, and the food requisitioning teams also. Rebellion against

¹ Trotsky, *Kak Vooruzhalas*, Vol. 2, pt. 1, p. 191.

the new rulers was widespread by early May, barely three months after their re-entry into the country. What Makhno and his collaborators did was to articulate this bitterness and resentment.

The Bolshevik leaders soon realised the importance of Makhno himself to the peasant insurgent movement in the Ukraine in general and the south-east Ukraine in particular. Several attempts were made to assassinate him. One author has suggested that both anarchists and criminals were promised their freedom if they could kill him.

When Volin, in prison after the final break, reproached his interrogator with Soviet treatment of the partisans, the latter stated that Volin had shown how naive the anarchists were, if they expected the Bolsheviks to keep to the October 1920 agreement any longer than was militarily justified. The crowning accolade came from Trotsky, who said he would rather see the Ukraine occupied by Denikin than Makhno. Trotsky knew that Denikin appealed little to the peasants and workers of Ukraine: Makhno was so dangerous precisely because he had such an appeal, at least to the peasants, the vast majority.

It will be apparent that the aim of the Soviet governments from the spring of 1919 onwards was to destroy the Makhnovists as an independent force, preferably killing Makhno himself in the process. Lenin is on record in May-June 1919, and November 1920, the two most promising times for such a Red Army initiative, as taking a personal interest in this. Trotsky also emphasised the military side of the anti-Makhno campaign. Given the disastrous nature of Bolshevik land policy, to be considered later in this chapter, this was not only unsurprising, it was inevitable.

The impression should not be left that the instructions of the two leaders were carried out by their subordinates in the Ukraine without a murmur. Most of the disputes centred round Antonov, the Red commander-in-chief. He quarrelled with the commander of the Red Army, Vatsetis, with Podvoisky, Ukrainian Commissar for Defence, Shlikhter, the Commissar for Food, Skachko, commander of the 2nd Ukrainian Army, and with Skachko's subordinate Dybenko. He could not afford to squabble with Hryhoriyiv and Makhno. Each of the Red commanders felt his own competence being called into question if his superior queried the conduct or performance of the insurgents. The arrival of first Kamenev and then Trotsky to try to sort things out only added to the muddle and resentment, and from the end of May military defeat added apportionment of blame for the disaster to all the other differences.

Twelve months later, the balance of military force had changed very much to Makhno's disadvantage. Not only were there more soldiers to spare against the partisans, there were no longer the disagreements in the higher command. Indeed, the separate Ukrainian armed forces had been done away with in June 1919 following Denikin's successes. With the advantage of hindsight, this shift in the balance of forces can be seen as the beginning of the end. The only means of reversing this would have been widespread desertions from the Red Army in 1920 and 1921, made much less likely by the introduction of NEP.

There were times, especially early in 1918, and during the autumn and winter of 1918/19, when Communists and Makhnovists were on good terms. The practical help of the corn sent north early in 1919 was much appreciated. A few days later, in mid-February, Pravda gave a favourable account of the origins of the Makhnoschyna. This also reflected the amicable nature of the agreement between Chubenko and Dybenko's forces shortly before this. However, the agreement indicates a basic misunderstanding: whether and how well Makhno fought were political as well as military questions. The Bolsheviks expected subordination from Makhno in both, while the latter expected the authorities to adhere strictly to non-intervention in non-military matters.

The fact that Makhno had a socio-political philosophy to back up his arguments only made the Bolsheviks more determined to break his hold over the south-east Ukraine, as soon as they realised that Nestor would not surrender that hold voluntarily. No government can long tolerate an independent or autonomous area within its borders, and of none is this more true than a highly centralised authoritarian state such as that headed by Lenin. There was no room even for mild concessions to federalism, especially where areas of vital strategic importance were concerned.

This central concern of the Bolshevik leadership explains the shifts in the attitude of the ruling elite to Makhno. He was to be used when convenient, discarded when not, suppressed as soon as practicable. This is not to say that ideological justifications for both the overall Red policy and shifts within it were lacking, but many of them have come after the event. The longer after, the more assured they are.

Red forces employed against Makhno in the later stages were often from outside the Ukraine altogether, it being feared that Ukrainian troops were unreliable against him, or might even join him, as- happened in the Novy Buh revolt in August 1919. Initial meetings between the rank and file were always friendly, as at the meeting at Olexandrivske in January 1920. One of the points in the October 1920 agreement was that the Makhnovists would not allow Red deserters to join their ranks. It has been suggested that one of the Makhnovist motives in signing was precisely to win over Red Army men to build up the insurgent forces, and this had certainly been an intention in inviting Red units to send representatives to the fourth congress planned for June 1919.

One assiduous Bolshevik assertion has been that the Makhnovists shot all captured Red soldiers. The existence of roundup detachments at the end of 1920, whose task was to re-collect prisoners freed by the Makhnovists, would disprove this, especially as they were operating in the last and bitterest phase of the struggle. In fact, the general rule - of course, there would be exceptions - was to shoot commissars, Chekists, members of food requisitioning teams or internal security forces, and other agents of repression, and not the mobilised rank and file. Arshinov asserts that it was common Red Army practice to shoot all Makhnovist prisoners. This is not commented on by Bolshevik sources. Among more recent authors, generalised accusations of Makhnovist atrocities are common. In the last stages most of all, the insurgents had their own homes to defend, while the Red soldiers had been conscripted from elsewhere to do work that they neither liked nor understood. It was thus the Makhnovists who stood to gain by liberating prisoners, the Bolsheviks by shooting them. It is no coincidence that the Makhnovist attitude matched up with a libertarian philosophy, while Soviet policy reflected their authoritarian ideology, and, increasingly, practice.

One of the less well-known areas of the history of the civil war is the activity of Red insurgent detachments. The area particularly concerning us is the north of Katerynoslav province, adjacent to the centre of Makhno's activities in the Hulyai Pole district. As elsewhere, the fate of these partisans was completely different from Makhno's: unlike the latter, they would usually join up with the Red Army as soon as that force arrived in their district.

The first signs of such activity are in November 1918, some three months after Makhno's start. Apart from a small detachment originally based on one of the Yuzovka mines which was disarmed by the Makhnovists in January 1919, the main force was commanded by one Kolos. It started out with under 100 men in a Katerynoslav suburb, then moved out to gather safety and support. The main aim was to disrupt and later control the main railway between Katerynoslav and the Donbas via Synelnykove. At that station this line was crossed by the Katerynoslav-Kharkiv line via Pavlohrad and Lozova, and this also became part of Kolos's sphere of operations. Probably

in November, Kolos and a lieutenant met Makhno in Hulyai Pole for talks, whereby a rough demarcation line was worked out based on existing areas of influence. From these two forces the attackers on Katerynoslav at the end of December were drawn. This was a hastily organised affair, largely designed to relieve Nationalist pressure to secure the railway lines to Kharkiv, and thus their communications with Bolbochan.

Following the debacle, Kolos took command of the insurgents at Synelnykove, retreated with them north to Pavlohrad, finally meeting up still further north with Dybenko, whose advance had been slower than expected, at Lozova. However, Kolos's forces certainly made that advance easier and quicker than it would otherwise have been, and helped prevent Nationalist consolidation of the central left bank.

Kolos reappears after Denikin's summer offensive. He himself, as commander overall of Bolshevik insurgents on the left bank, was out of the area. The most active force was under one of his 1918 lieutenants, Lantukh, in the district of Novomoskovske; but they were not as successful as earlier in the year, and there were strong Nationalist, Borotbist and Makhnovist elements among the insurgents, present at a meeting of 'initiative-revolutionary groups' held at the beginning of October.

This mood had not changed much as late as December, despite rumours of the Red advance. A factor here was the continued Makhnovist presence in Katerynoslav, and Lantukh himself was affected by these elements. Kolos considered the supposedly Soviet detachments so unreliable that:

(Firstly) an order was given that detachments which were in fact in a state of military-operational readiness should obey the orders of their superiors . . . without question, but the brigades and regiments did not do this without special orders. [Secondly, the task was] to prevent the Petliurists and Makhnovists from making use of the insurgent movement. To this end, an order was published that, in order to divert insurgent forces away from Makhno, all partisan detachments in the districts of Novomoskovske, Pavlohrad, and Verkhnyedniprovske and Olexandriyske were to go north, destroying the White armies and getting away from Makhno.²

At Synelnykove station soon after this, the 45th division of the 14th Army, busy disarming an insurgent detachment, found a courier ready to go off to Makhno. Another insurgent regiment refused to join the division.

With the brief exception of Vrangeli's advance in September 1920, the area never passed out-with Bolshevik control again. However, the two periods of Soviet insurgent activity are indicative of the tenuous Red control of the countryside. The movements of Kolos, and to a lesser extent Makhno are deceptive in the winter of 1918/19, inasmuch as they were filling a power vacuum rather than fully controlling a geographical region. The White hold in the autumn of 1919 was not strong, but was enough to keep Lantukh in check.

Partisans had a strictly limited role to play as far as the leadership was concerned. They should be used in occupied areas only until such could be liberated. Their independent activity thereafter was not to be tolerated, and all manifestations of the partisan spirit were to be firmly dealt with. That leadership thought of and dealt with the Makhnovist insurgents in like manner. During

² Korolivsky, Vol. 2, pp. 616-17.

1918 and 1919 they had to put up with varying degrees of unruliness from both Makhno and Hryhoriyiv and also from their own partisan forces. On top of this, their 'regular' units such as Dybenko's in the spring of 1919, were not always good at obeying orders. On their return the following year, there were no separate Ukrainian forces, a deliberate move away from employing local partisans on their own ground. With the partisan spirit hopefully suppressed in their own men, it was all the more important that contact with the Makhnovists did not rekindle it.

We have not so far discussed one vital aspect of Makhno's appeal to the peasantry. This was the land policy of the ruling party, the alterations necessitated by failures in it, the need to supply bread to the hungry cities of the north, and the theories which impelled the Soviet government to pursue policies often economically and politically disastrous.

If few members of the Bolshevik leadership were of working-class origin, those of peasant stock were even fewer, the most prominent being Stalin, son of an ex-serf. His training as a seminarist was not typical of his class, and he came from Georgia, far less crowded than Ukraine. Also, both Bolsheviks and Mensheviks had always been town-based parties: following Marx, they regarded the town workers as the vanguard of the proletariat. The party would lead the workers, the workers would lead the peasants. Apart from the dubious veracity of this theory, it encouraged the idea that the workers were inferior to the party, the peasants to the workers. This was well expressed in Lenin's idea that, by themselves, the workers, never mind the peasants, could achieve no more than a trade union level of consciousness. Their political emancipation was to be accomplished by progressive middle-class elements who knew what was best for the working class, elements who laid practical claim to infallibility. This contradicted the idea - also of Marx - that the emancipation of the working class must be the work of that class itself: this view was also held by libertarians and anarchists, and very strongly put forward by Makhno and the ideologues of the Makhnovschyna. At least their leader did come from the masses.³

This notion of an adult leading a politically unsophisticated-and gullible child, by force if need be, to the promised land was bad enough for the workers, even worse for the peasants, the 80 per cent at the bottom of the social, political, and economic pile. It led easily to the notion that the peasants were inferior in intelligence, in adaptability to new ideas, and could, fortunately, if necessary be more readily browbeaten into submission. The history of peasant revolt from the 17th century onwards can easily be twisted to support this view. For party members the result was an inability to understand, or want to understand, the aspirations of the peasants in the former Russian Empire, extending from Lenin and Trotsky down to the rank and file Chekist and the worker sent out into the countryside as a member of a food requisitioning detachment.

This fundamental hostility towards the countryside was initially obscured by the decree on land of 26 October 1917, which simply legally sanctioned the takeover of the land already carried out by the peasants. In no way did it reflect the actual policies of either the Bolsheviks or their coalition partners, the left SRs. In the Ukraine, it was over a year after this before the Bolsheviks could exercise any effective control, and her peasants therefore did not feel the whip of the first Soviet attempt to feed the cities at their expense, the decree of 9 May 1918, under which units of workers were to go out to collect grain by force and bring the poor peasants over to their side by striking against the kulaks. A supplementary decree of 11 June set up Committees of Poor Peasants, which had the dual role of being soviet agents in the village and splitting the peasants into the categories desired by the government. Already, under the original decree, large

³ Binshtuk, p. 15.

specialist farms were to be taken over by the state, not handed over to the peasants. This was a more accurate foretaste of Bolshevik land policy. Despite bitter opposition in Great Russia, the first thing the party did on re-entry into the Ukraine early in 1919 was to attempt similar measures on a country which they held by the thin threads of great expectations.

The results of this blinkered anti-peasant policy were so disastrous for the regime that even recent Soviet articles on the subject have admitted as much, emphasising differences between policy in 1919 and 1920, and that the mistakes of 1919 were learnt in the changes of a year later. One talks of 'mechanical attempts to employ Russian methods',⁴ while another points out that in stressing the transfer from individual to collective working, the 3rd congress of the Ukrainian Communist Party early in March 1919 totally misread the concrete conditions prevailing at the time. Even before this, on 16 January, the Ukrainian Council of People's Commissars had nationalised the sugar industry, following Russian decrees of May and July 1918. As a result, four million acres of peasant land and two and three quarter million of state land were retained or seized by the state, and thus not available, as had been expected, for distribution to the poor peasants.

If this state of mind had been confined to sugarbeet, all would not have been lost, especially in the south-east, where it was not grown: but worse was to follow. Decrees of 5 and 11 February applied the principle of retaining large landlord holdings as state farms to farming land in general. All stock was to be taken over by the Ministry of Agriculture, and to point out that between one third and one half of this land was reserved for poor peasants was largely irrelevant, since the peasantry had expected, and in some cases already controlled, all of it. To them, the government was taking away their land, and not seizing it from the landlords, then keeping some and handing the rest over to its rightful owners. The contrast with the 1917 law gave rise to the story that the Bolsheviks who had given them the land were to be fully supported, while the Communists who were trying to take it away, and their produce too, should be opposed root and branch. In the Ukraine, means of opposition were more plentiful than in Great Russia, which had been under continuous Bolshevik rule for over a year. During April and May, peasant revolts became widespread throughout the Ukraine.

The campaign to collectivize the peasants failed utterly, and so did force when persuasion failed, although in the provinces of Poltava, Kiyiv, Kharkiv and Chernihiv there was some success in the introduction of Poor Peasant Committees (KNS). Faced with the same reluctance - to give something for nothing-as had occurred in Russia the previous year, Shlikhter, the Ukrainian Food Commissar, tried exactly the same sort of remedy, the sending of 3000 Moscow and Petrograd workers into the villages to requisition grain. The tide of revolt which followed the appropriate decree on 12 April rose swiftly, especially in Kiyiv, Chernihiv, and Poltava provinces - three of these, be it noted, where the introduction of KNS had met with some success. In April alone, there were 93 separate risings. Although in the areas under the control of Makhno or Hryhoriyiv there were few, government land policy caused very grave dissatisfaction among their followers, and was one of the most important reasons for the success of both when they broke with the Soviet regime. It is equally clear that the earlier absence of revolt was the result of the restraining influence of the two leaders, and does not reflect any credit on Ukrainian or Russian government land policy.

⁴ Rubach, *Radyanske*, pp. 293, 296, 298, 300.

The widespread dissatisfaction evident in the revolts does seem to have caused second thoughts, and even some minor modifications, but these were too little and too late. There was hardly any essential farm machinery or household goods to offer the peasants on a barter basis. Few peasants, even the poor, received any land because of the February 1919 decrees and the red tape consequent on both centralisation and lack of party and soviet workers in the villages. By the middle of May, the Bolsheviks had lost control of the Ukrainian villages, and had thoroughly alienated the only two prominent peasant leaders who had at first supported them. The KNS, associated with this disastrous policy, were discredited, and their reintroduction would need the aid of troops.

After the debacle in the summer of 1919, the Ukrainian Communists in exile in Moscow had plenty of time to mull over their brief period of power. In its resolution on the Ukraine at the end of November 1919, the central committee gave top priority to the middle peasant-so often and so conveniently lumped in together with the kulak and dealt with accordingly - the transfer of landlord land to the poor peasants with only minimal exceptions for state farms, and punishment for those who used force to compel peasants to enter the collectives, or commune, as the peasants called it. Even so, Rakovski, head of the Ukrainian government, still favoured a large number of state farms. Lenin, ever perceptive of the possible when irreconcilable with the desirable, spoke against him at the 8th conference of the Russian party a few days later. These points were the basis of the new Ukrainian land law of 5 February 1920, exactly a year after the first disastrous decree. Lenin was consulted on its wording. Although there was some opposition still within the party, the only group who voted against it in the Ukrainian revkom was the Borotbisty.

There is some evidence that the new policy had some success in areas controlled by the Bolsheviks, the right bank and northern part of the left bank, but in the Makhno region progress in 1920 was minimal. A report of the Instruction-Information section of the Mariupil revkom in April 1920 describes the situation in nine volosts, including data on some villages, and some of the comments are illuminating:

Bohoslovska volost: favourable to Soviet power because of the activity of a local teacher. Ivanivka volost (especially Ivanivka village): attitude unfavourable, hostile to Soviet power . . . Urzuf: reasonable. Yalta: kulak trouble. Petrovske: anarcho-rebellious, district instructor had to hide outwith the village . . . Kostyantynopil: hostile - kulaks; many Makhnovists have refused to allow food requisitioning; district instructor fled from the village under threat of Makhnovist reprisals. [92]

Despite the presence of the Red Army in the area for more than two months, and a new land policy, four out of the nine volosts are described as being so strongly hostile to Soviet organisational activity that no such work could be done in them. The remaining five were described as favourable to the Bolsheviks. A breakdown of villages within the volosts gives a similar picture. Not only were the Bolsheviks unsuccessful in enforcing their policy, they encountered positive resistance which could not be laid entirely at the door of the kulaks. The political department of the 13th Army stated that immediate local elections in the Makhnovist-dominated districts of Melitopil, Berdyansk, Mariupil and Olexandrivske would give a 90 per cent majority to the Makhnovists and kulaks.

A new law on the KNS was passed by the 4th Ukrainian Congress of Soviets in May 1920. Their main task would be to carry out the February law, help the food requisition teams ever

more in evidence in Bolshevik areas, now most of the country, and propagandise in favour of voluntary entry into the collectives. The success of the new KNS varied, but, as we might expect, very few were in the new province of Olexandrivske, or that of Katerynoslav. Out of nearly 9600 KNS in November 1920, 54 were in Olexandrivske, 300 in Katerynoslav, the remaining 9000+ in the other provinces (there were eleven altogether at the time). After three years of war, this is a considerable achievement on the part of the insurgents, and lack of progress by the Bolsheviks.

KNS self-defence detachments were started shortly after the introduction of NEP in the spring of 1921, and with it the end of forcible requisitioning and its replacement by a food tax. Even this met with initial suspicion, and no wonder. Those very kulaks who had been the especial object of the wrath of War Communism were now to feed the cities. Acceptance might have taken longer but for three factors: the drought and famine of 1921 whose effects lasted into the next year, the overwhelming superiority of the Red Army against its internal enemies such as Makhno and A. S. Antonov, and the realisation that this time the regime was here to stay. On the Bolshevik side, recognition that concessions had to be made to ensure the survival of the Soviet regime worked miracles in the transition from paper to practice. They have since reaped the reward of a return to theory in 1929-33: but at least the contortions of 1919-21 (a policy per year) have been replaced by a relatively constant rate of exploitation of the peasantry since 1933.

10 Other Enemies and Rivals

HRYHORIYIV

One of the least known personalities of the civil war in the Ukraine is Hryhoriyiv, a crucial figure, especially in 1919. During 1917 and 1918 he had shown himself well able to judge the moment to change sides. He had been a deserter at the end of 1917, in 1918 a Skoro-padsky supporter, joined the Nationalists at the end of the year. Finally, at the end of January 1919, he came over to the Bolsheviks. The centre of his support was his native village of Olexandria between the Dnieper and Yelyzavethrad, and extended some distance round it. His military operations in March 1919 against the Allied, mainly French, troops holding the Black Sea littoral west of the Crimea also showed a flair for public relations.

His politics were as vague as the changes in his views might suggest. 'His character was very mixed: some sympathy for the oppressed peasantry, authoritarianism, nationalism, the predatory instinct of a robber chief, anti-Semitism'.¹ At the time he came over to the Bolsheviks, he was in sympathy with the Borotbisty, the left wing of the three factions into which the Ukrainian SRs had split following the debacle of support for the invasion by the Central Powers early in 1918. The embryonic Borotbist government, or Tsentrrevkom, was at Znamyanka, in Hryhoriyiv territory. However, Bolshevik land policy, a wish to keep some freedom of manoeuvre, and the Borotbist rapprochement with the Bolsheviks (they entered the Ukrainian government in May 1919), all led him increasingly to the central SR faction, the Borbisty, and the Independents, a faction of the Ukrainian Social Democrats. In March his new chief of staff was Tyutyunnyk, a former follower of the Directory who had links with the Borbisty. The latter in turn were hoping to use Hryhoriyiv as a springboard for armed revolt against the Soviet regime.

As early as 24 March it was noted that Hryhoriyiv's attitude to the political commissars, drafted in on a similar basis to those sent to Makhno, was ironical and negative. On 26 March an anti-Semitic mood was reported in the 2nd Kherson regiment: further reports spoke of anti-Soviet statements and the killing of Jews. He did not turn up to an agreed meeting with Antonov at Odessa on 18 April to discuss the situation. The commander-in-chief swallowed his pride and went to Olexandria, but this changed nothing either.

Apart from this sullen inactivity, Antonov was very worried by the news that on 10 April the Katerynoslav party committee had reported to the RVS of the Ukrainian Front the arrest that day of a Makhnovist delegation to Hryhoriyiv. He received confirmation of this from his military inspectorate. The concerted anti-Bolshevik activity which could flow from this beginning was a nightmare for Antonov and the Ukrainian government, for they had few troops to prevent a junction of Makhno and Hryhoriyiv, their influence reaching almost to Katerynoslav from either side of the river Dnieper. Antonov questioned Makhno on this during his visit to Hulyai Pole, and was assured the visit had been for information only. This might well have been true, for there was

¹ Arshinov, *Istoriya*, p. 108.

in Yelyzavethrad a large anarchist youth group, to whom it would have been logical for Makhno to turn in seeking new information and background about Hryhoriyiv and his movement.

The story of Hryhoriyiv's revolt early in May has already been discussed. The Makhnovists did not immediately accept Bolshevik arguments against Hryhoriyiv: on 14 May, four days after the revolt broke, another Makhnovist delegation turned up in Kharkiv, where it asked for permission to cross the Red Army-Hryhoriyiv front line in order to propagandise among the latter's troops in favour of joining up with Makhno. With much misgiving they were allowed to travel as far as Pyatykhatky station, where the bodies of dead Jews and the tales of local peasants were enough to convince them of the danger and uselessness of continuing the journey.

By the end of May, the threat of Hryhoriyiv to the stability of the regime had faded, but he had ensured that reinforcements desperately needed by Makhno were diverted away from the White front. He can thus be said to have contributed to the success of the Denikin summer offensive. During May and June he committed some ghastly pogroms, the worst of which, in Yelyzavethrad, claimed 3000 lives. Even when no longer a direct threat to the Red Army, he still controlled the area round Olexandria, from which the Red forces had neither the time nor the manpower to dislodge

him. He comes into the centre of events again when Makhno entered his territory. There followed the brief alliance, and the debacle engineered at Sentove by the Makhnovists, resulting in the death of Hryhoriyiv and the takeover of his forces.

Trotsky was ready with his instant analysis:

Hryhoriyiv harmed the Red Army through his careerism, vanity, and greed. It is highly possible that Makhno did not commit these errors, but he has caused the Red Army terrible harm, acting as he has on the basis of the false anarchist-insurgent programme. The poison of the Makhnovschyna continues to infect the remaining units of the Ukrainian Army. Killing Hryhoriyiv may have quietened Makhno's conscience, but he has not thereby atoned for his crimes against worker-peasant Ukraine. If Makhno and the other partisans really wish to turn away from the Hryhoriyiv path and come to the defence of the revolution, there is only one way for them - to declare once and for all that they do not countenance disorganisation, otaman iule and behaviour, but will place their forces, as disciplined soldiers, at the disposal of the workers' and peasants' power in Ukraine.²

Nowhere is there mention here of 'anarchist-kulak debauchery'.³ It is, in fact, as regards Makhno, a reasonable statement from a centralised Bolshevik viewpoint. Nor can one quarrel with the verdict and typecasting of Hryhoriyiv. It is a pleasant change.

THE WHITES

The Makhnovists were totally opposed to the Whites. The considered judgement of General Denikin in exile was that 'The Makhno movement was ... the most antagonistic to the idea of the

² Trotsky, *Kak Vooruzhalas*, Vol. 2, pt. 1, p. 255.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

White movement'.⁴ This puts into perspective the accusations of the less scrupulous Bolshevik authors, and, even more regrettably, some of their contemporary papers that Makhno was at some time in league with the Whites. For example, shortly after the Makhnovists hung an emissary from Vranghel early in July 1920, but possibly before news of this reached Moscow, Pravda said that a direct link had been forged by the Makhnovists with Vranghel's staff. This was repudiated in the central press by Trotski following the agreement in October.

A possible source of confusion were the detachments formed by Vranghel in the summer of 1920 made up of former insurgents, including some Makhnovists. Their military value was questionable, but Vranghel must have known this: his main purpose was to confuse the opposition. The Crimean papers were full of rumours of an alliance, and the 'orders' of Makhno were even published by them. Some wits in Sevastopol even suggested Makhno might be made the first Count of Hulyai Pole!

In the confrontation at Olexandrivske at the start of 1918, feelings had not been so bitter. Later, accusations of atrocities were frequent. Makhnovists were torn to pieces by shell explosions or roasted alive on slabs of red-hot iron, while Kalashnykiv in Berdyansk was credited with gouging out prisoners' eyes with forks and exploding grenades under prisoners tied to posts.

The bad feeling had been exacerbated by events such as the burning of Dibrivki in October 1918: the Central Powers had brought back the landlords. If they had not made the connection before, this made perfectly clear to the peasants and insurgents what to expect from a White victory: it would be even worse than the intervening period of Soviet power. Even had they not been seen as the harbingers of a new landlord regime, the plundering in the towns and the attempts to mobilise the peasants would have helped seal their doom. They lived in an unreal world where control of the towns and main railroad lines meant secure communications and stable government.

There was another, perhaps unexpected, side to the White attitude to Makhno-a respect for the military skill of an opponent, which partly prompted Shkuro's letter in May 1919:

Being, like you, a simple man, I have followed with enthusiasm your swift rise to eminence, that recommends you as an outstanding example of a Russian. Unfortunately, you have proceeded along a false road, but I have been very pleased to learn that you have changed your mind, and, along with the valorous otaman Hryhoriyiv, put forward the slogan 'Smash the Yids, communists, commissars, and Cheka.' With your acceptance of these slogans, we have nothing to fight about. General Shkuro proposes that you start talks, and guarantees safe conduct for you and your representatives.⁵

The letter was signed by Shkuro's chief of staff, and was reprinted in the Makhnovist paper 'The Road to Freedom', along with suitable comments. Nonetheless, it was used by the Bolsheviks - who only got to know of it through this source - to imply that Makhno and Shkuro were possible allies. Slaschov, in charge of the campaign against Makhno in the autumn of 1919, is reported to have taken off a number of insurgents to the Crimea and made them into White soldiers (perhaps Vranghel got his idea from these), and to have wanted to be a second Makhno. Among Slaschov's

⁴ Denikin, Vol. 5, p. 134.

⁵ 'The Road to Freedom', 4 June 1919; Izvestiya, 18 June 1919.

other fancies were drugs and caged birds, and, like so many, drink: so maybe his admiration of Makhno is not so outlandish as it might seem. However, the Shkuro letter, Slaschov's dreams, and Vrangeli's letter were but brief interludes in the stubborn fighting between two sides who did not often take each other's prisoners.

THE NATIONALISTS

Impartial history will record the damage that Makhno inflicted through his terrible policy of personal rule, making everything dependent on him, with the result that the Ukrainian national authority could not establish a firm footing on Ukrainian territory, and he was thus one of the causes of the Ukraine's recent enslavement.⁶

This is a very widely held view today among Ukrainian exiles. He is held responsible for the loss of the eastern Ukraine to the Bolsheviks, especially in the crucial period at the end of 1918, at the time of the demoralisation and withdrawal of the troops of the Central Powers.

As an anarchist, Makhno had no time for an independent Ukraine, and on many occasions actively propagandised against it. In his memoirs he regularly describes the Nationalists as chauvinists. He bitterly condemned them for supporting the Germans in the spring of 1918, and this coloured his opinion of the Directory at the end of the year. A passage in the Project-Declaration in the autumn of 1919 made the position clear:

In speaking of the independence of Ukraine, we do not mean national independence, a Petliura sort of autonomy, but the social and labouring independence of the workers and peasants. We declare that the toiling people of Ukraine - or anywhere else - have the right to self-determination ... but not in the national sense.⁷

Although Makhno explicitly stated he was no nationalist, he also made clear he was no Great Russian chauvinist either, intent on importing and imposing an alien rule or ideology on the people of Ukraine. For one thing, he was proud of being an Ukrainian. He never used the derogatory Tsarist term 'Little Russia', or spoke of the country as 'South Russia'. He complained to Lenin and Sverdlov in Moscow that the Bolsheviks used this latter term all too frequently. On the other hand, he never mastered literary Ukrainian. His memoirs were written in Russian, with an apology for not being available in Ukrainian. In them, he recalls how embarrassed he was, on re-entering the Hetman's Ukraine in July 1918, not to be able to clarify what was happening in Ukrainian. When the question of the language for school instruction came up >. in October 1919, it was suggested that the language in the locality be used. This would mean Ukrainian in most villages and parts of most towns. The publication of an Ukrainian version of 'The Road to Freedom' shows a desire to get through to the masses and not merely the russified elite and the partially russified towns. Ukrainian culture was welcome, but political nationalism was highly suspect.

There is some evidence that the insurgents became more sympathetic to the nationalist cause during 1920 and 1921, but there is also contrary information. It seems reasonable to conclude that their views changed little. Perhaps the strongest evidence is the meeting in the autumn of 1921

⁶ Onatsky, p. 968.

⁷ Arshinov, *Istoriya*, p. 204.

in Bucharest between Makhno and Nationalist representatives. Yet no cooperation resulted from this. It is at first sight surprising to see how much less influence the Nationalists had on left bank Ukraine as compared with the right. For much of the 19th century Kharkiv had been a centre of cultural activity, but with growing russification, especially in the latter part of the reign of Alexander II and that of Alexander III, the emphasis shifted west, and particularly Eastern Galicia, where Lviv flourished under the less repressive rule of the Austrians. Before the revolution the movement was largely intellectual, although it was spreading in the towns, and, on the right bank, to some of the villages, thanks to propaganda by the intelligentsia, especially teachers, and, later junior officers and NCOs. Many of the 'bandit' leaders in the west during the civil war were ex-officers or ex-teachers, Hryhoriyiv for one. It is true that Petliura came from the east, but there were few others.

In the east, the tradition of peasant revolt dating back to the uncertain times of the Zaporozhian Cossacks persisted, with much trouble in 1905. However, in the early 20th century there was little sign of nationalist activity: in 1917, one weekly was all the combined efforts of the Nationalists could produce in Katerynoslav province. In the Constituent Assembly elections, the Ukrainian parties trailed behind the Bolsheviks in the towns and the SRs in the countryside. The Bolsheviks looked on the right bank (Kiyiv, Volyn, Podol, Chernihiv, Poltava) as Petliurist, the left bank (Katerynoslav, Tavria) as Makhnovist, with Kharkiv and Kherson provinces less affected. Yet the villages of the left bank were overwhelmingly Ukrainian, and, from Makhno's side, it was some achievement to limit Nationalist success there. The towns held large numbers of workers, many Russian, and this is adduced, with some justification, by the Nationalists to explain their failure to hold them for long.

Nationalist activity on the left bank may have been minimal, but there was some. There was some agitation in Katerynoslav town during 1917, and some peasants in the Novomoskovske area complained about nationalist agitators. There was a small but increasingly active group in Hulyai Pole at the turn of 1917 on into 1918. Makhno had come across an Ukrainian SR during a meeting to discuss the July events in Petrograd: the resolution passed contained a sideswipe at the Rada in Kiyiv. At the provincial congress of peasants' unions in Katerynoslav in December 1917, the nationalists were in a small minority, but they had some influence among the troops there. They were also of importance in Olexandriyske at the turn of the year.

Because of the Olexandriyske situation, Makhno moved up armed forces thither from Hulyai Pole. Back in the town, tempers were fraying and speakers putting forward the Ukrainian case were dragged off the platform and beaten up. Nonetheless, Makhno had to hasten back to arrest two of the ringleaders, including a rich Jew and some low-ranking army officers. Rada support increased as Nationalist and German forces approached in March and April 1918. At one meeting, anarchist and nationalist support was almost equally divided. Makhno's prestige was too great for the Nationalists to prevent the creation of the free battalions, but they effectively sabotaged them while Makhno was absent trying to link up with the retreating forces. Makhno regarded this as base treachery, one former member of the anarchist group was involved, and he settled the account on his return later in the year.

Apart from a few local cases to be considered below, all involving local units with rather loose attachment to the central nationalist movement, relations of Makhnovists and Nationalists varied between open hostility and mutually desired cautious neutrality. In November 1918, a Petliurist detachment was disarmed in Olexandriyske district, easy enough in view of Makhnovist superiority. However, the Nationalists in Katerynoslav had to be treated rather more cautiously in

the fluid situation that also affected the Nationalists themselves. Hence Makhno's December decision to send two close associates to investigate. Although they reported back that Horobets, holding power in the name of the Directory, was a counterrevolutionary, Nestor did not feel strong enough to take action on his own against him, and even agreed to the Directory mobilisation going ahead in his area. In alliance with the Bolsheviks, he could revert to open hostility.

There are examples of a different attitude. Makhno met up with some 'Bluecoats', Rada soldiers who had been threatened with disarmament by the Hetman and had fled to the Dnieper islands. Makhno discovered them while on the run in the summer of 1918. He not only persuaded some of them to return with him and take up the fight, but to hand over some of the weapons they had hidden. Further, the delegates at the first congress at Velyka Mykhailivka in January 1919 were very concerned at what they saw as the fratricidal bloodshed between the Nationalists on one side, and the Bolsheviks and Makhnovists on the other: all should combine against the common enemy, the Whites. Evidently, support for fighting the Nationalists was not as strong as a survey of military events would suggest. However, Makhno and the commanders were then determining policy, and the issue speedily lost its relevance on the Nationalist collapse in January 1919, especially on the left bank.

Makhno made full use of the Red decision to abandon the Ukraine in the face of Denikin's advance in the summer of 1919, for strategic reasons. The Red forces retreating westwards, such as the 58th division, were themselves Ukrainians, and for those who had stomach to continue the fight, Makhno was a magnet close at hand; hence

There arose the mistaken opinion that in these circumstances the Denikinists should be fought with the Makhnovists as allies. . . . The Makhnovists agitated . . . with the slogan 'All to whom freedom and independence are dear should stay in the Ukraine and fight the Denikinists.' They blamed the Red Army for a lack of will to defend the Ukraine.⁸

The nationalist element is clear, and a small group of Nationalists round Nestor's wife, Halyna, were influential in this regard. Nowhere, however, is nationalism openly advocated, and the line of argument put forward can more easily be interpreted as libertarian, and, above all, anti-White. By October at the latest, as the passage given earlier in this chapter shows, any ambiguity was removed.

There was temporary agreement near Uman in September 1919, when both had to face Denikin. For either to fight the other would have been suicidal, and a truce was agreed. It was a tactical arrangement, and stopped neither the propaganda war, nor the reported attempt to assassinate Petliura. Makhno escaped as soon as he could. A garbled form of the agreement appeared in the Moscow papers at the end of October: Makhno and Petliura were recorded as having joined forces. The truce did have one important effect, namely, the handing over of the Makhnovist wounded to the Nationalists for caring in the Uman hospitals. This made possible Makhno's incredible ride through Denikin's rear after the victory at Perehonivka.

During the first occupation of Katerynoslav in October-November 1919, Makhno supplied arms and ammunition to the insurgent detachment of Dyakivsky, a Petliurist who considered himself part of the Ukrainian People's Army. When Dyakivsky refused to move to Makhno's

⁸ Naida, Vol. 4, p. 218.

support at the time of the White attack, the latter was forced to abandon the city. There were many Petliurist detachments operating in the Novomoskovske area. Dyakivsky, at Kaminske, was the nearest of these. Not surprisingly, one of the local communists reported that the Makhnovist attitude to the Nationalists was one of suspicion bordering on hostility.

In 1920, there was less fighting, and on a smaller scale; there were both local clashes and local contacts. The latter predominated, both now had a common enemy in the Reds rather than sometimes different attitudes to Denikin. Bilash, one time chief-of-staff, mentions the handing over of surplus weapons to Petliurists in the provinces of Chernihiv, Kiyiv, Poltava, and Kherson. He adds that, as far as he knew, Makhno never had any links with the Nationalists abroad. Since he did not go with Makhno to Romania, this would not cover conversations in Bucharest. Of other specified instances, the best substantiated is the meeting up with the band of Butavetsky and Khristov in the Zinkiv area in August 1920. This band had experienced Nationalist staff officers, and was evidently typical both in respect of the nationalist influence and in the fact that a number of its members, including one of its leaders, left with Makhno when the latter moved on.

Only one similar occurrence is recorded in 1921. The days of both movements were numbered. Even when homesick in exile, Nestor steered clear of the supporters of Petliura, even after he was assassinated in 1926. The ideological gulf remained.

THE COLONISTS

There were a number of nationalities apart from the Ukrainians living in the area of Makhnovschyna. Besides Jews, there were Germans, Greeks and Bulgars. Emigration into the sparsely inhabited southern steppes had been encouraged by Catherine the Great following the acquisition of this 'New Russia' from the Turks. Tempted by the agricultural and financial incentives, a total of about 75,000 colonists entered Russia from abroad, almost all settling in New Russia, or Saratov and Samara provinces. Most of these were Germans.

The Germans soon acquired a justified reputation for hard work, and their prosperity became the envy of their Ukrainian neighbours, enserfed, or after 1861, living with the consequences of emancipation. There were a large number of German villages near Hulyai Pole, and at least one of the local landlords was a German. They were also reputed to be hard taskmasters - the average kulak so beloved of Communist mythology. During the revolution, some certainly helped the Whites, for similar reasons to the Cossacks; to safeguard their gains. Some took part in the burning of Dibrivki village in October 1918, a German colony being fired in revenge. Some of the local fighting in January 1919 took place round these German villages. Peasant feeling against the colonists was not helped by some of the activities of the German occupation forces under the Hetman regime.

On the other hand, there were certainly Germans in the Makhnovist forces, although there are unfortunately no details. There was not the same hostility on the part of peasants or insurgents to either Greeks or Bulgars. Makhno spent some time in the Greek villages east of Hulyai Pole in December 1920. One author suggests that these were rich villages, but does not elaborate. There is no record of relations with the Bulgars, who lived mostly along the Sea of Azov.

THE BOROTBISTY

The name 'Borotbist' originated from the title of the paper of the Ukrainian SRs, 'Borotba', founded, like the party itself, in 1917. At an illegal congress held in the woods outside Kiyiv in May 1918, the party had split into three. The left wing faction captured the paper, so took the name. The party had recently suffered the trauma of the invasion of the Central Powers, but the fundamental disagreement concerned whether the fight for independence should have precedence over the implementation of social and economic reforms. However, the Borotbisty were not a carbon copy of the Russian left SRs: they were sympathetic to the ideas of the Bolsheviks, but suspicious of their centralising tendencies. They wanted an independent Ukrainian socialist republic, including an independent Ukrainian army and an intensification of Ukrainisation in all fields.

In seeking an alliance with the fraternal Russian republic on equal terms, the Borotbists faced the serious difficulty that they were never strong enough to ensure the creation of such a republic on their own, and thus had to search for allies both ideologically similar and militarily powerful. The only two possibilities were Hryhoriyiv and Makhno.

Hence, early in 1919, the Borotbisty were to be found at Znamyanka in Hryhoriyiv territory, and had even organised an embryonic government called the Tsentrrevkom. As Hryhoriyiv moved towards the Borotbisty, drifting into open warfare with the Bolsheviks, and becoming openly anti-Semitic, the Borotbisty in turn moved towards the Bolsheviks, one or two of them entering the Ukrainian Soviet government-Yakovlev becoming deputy chief of the Ukrainian Cheka. This was far too late to influence the hostility of the village towards the Bolsheviks, and, following the Red Army retreat, the Borotbisty, for similar reasons to Makhno (the abandonment by the Red Army of the Ukraine to Denikin) broke with their recent allies. An order for the liquidation of the Borotbisty as an independent political force was drafted in Moscow at this time. Trotsky in particular was anxious to get rid of them as a potential military as well as political threat. On their side, to show their renewed independent stand more emphatically, the Borotbisty merged with the left-wing Ukrainian Social Democrats, later including Vynnychenko. 'SR' was dropped from the new party title, which became in August 1919 the Ukrainian Communist Party (Borotbisty).

The first evidence of Borotbist military activity in the Katerynoslav region is at the end of October 1918, when amongst the, Bolshevik partisans of Kolos, there were Borotbist detachments: his chief of staff was one also. The Bolsheviks incorporated these units into their own as soon as possible. The following summer, these or similar units resurfaced in the same Novomoskovske area, and also in Poltava province. A meeting of revolutionary committees took place at the beginning of October 1919: there was much Borotbist and even Petliurist influence in them. Most likely, the Borotbist element predominated. It would be very easy for the Bolsheviks to smear this as Nationalist or as Makhnovist.

From the Borotbist point of view, Makhno offered the, only chance of building up an independent Ukrainian socialist army in the autumn of 1919. For the Makhnovists, cooperation on equal terms with a group advocating a social revolution in the Ukraine, even if it had some centralising, party tendencies, would help in the fight against the Whites, Nationalists, or Reds. Soon after the Makhnovists occupied Katerynoslav, the Borotbist underground came out into the open. Talks were held between the Makhnovists (Volin, Marochkin, Chubenko) and the Borotbisty (Lisovyk, Hrudnitsky, and Matyash). It was agreed that the destruction of the Whites be hastened, and

the restoration of Bolshevik rule in the Ukraine prevented. Several heads of detachments in the Makhnovist army were Borotbists, including Matyash, one of the signatories of the agreement. A Borotbist paper 'Ukrainian Proletarian' appeared in the city.

At the same time the Borotbisty were also negotiating with the Bolsheviks, in the event of their increasingly likely return to the Ukraine. They had joined an all-Ukrainian Revolutionary Committee, which was based on proposals for the Ukraine put forward by the Russian Communist party. In the middle of December 1919 they entered the provisional Ukrainian government, as Makhno's fortunes receded. The Bolshevik aim was to get rid of the Borotbisty as a separate party and thus ensure that there was no independent Communist organisation in the Ukraine. This was to be achieved 'By means of attracting its best elements into our ranks, and meting out implacable retribution to the Makhnovist and Petliurist elements in the Borotbist ranks'.⁹

An attempt to get approval for admission of the UCP (B) to the Comintern was thrown out by the executive of that organisation, and in March 1920 the party merged with the Russian Communist Party. By that time Borotbist influence in Katerynoslav city and province was minimal, although it was still considerable in Poltava province, where a substantial minority refused to accept the merger. For the majority, an RCP directive of April 1920 still found it necessary to suggest a purge of 'Unprincipled and adventurous fellow-travellers, demagogic elements, semi-Makhnovists and opportunists'.¹⁰

The minority party, the Ukrainian Communist Party, was allowed to exist until 1925: its existence may have had some mitigating effects on Russian cultural policy in the Ukraine, as central authority was then relatively tolerant of cultural nationalism. It would be interesting to speculate as to what might have happened if the Red advance to the south had been held up at the end of 1919.

THE GREENS, INCLUDING A. S. ANTONOV

In considering the political and military situation in which Makhno operated, we should mention the various *otamany* - *batki*, or chiefs - who intermittently exercised influence on the fortunes of the combatants, although politically they were not of much importance outwith the area under their immediate control.

The common name for their forces was 'Greens', a name given originally to deserters who hid out in the forests to escape the vengeance of either side during the early stages of the civil war. It soon came to be applied to any locally based insurgent movement which did not own permanent allegiance to any of the contenders for national power - not just in the Ukraine, but in other parts of the former Tsarist Empire, of which the best known were the Antonov rebellion in Tambov province in 1920-21, the West Siberian insurrection of 1921, and the large-scale movement in the North Caucasus in 1919-20. Of these, the movement of Antonov has the most interesting parallels with the Makhnovschyna, and we shall return to it after considering the Green movements in the Ukraine. Of the differences between Makhno and the Greens, Volin says:

The Makhnovist movement was far from being the only revolutionary movement of the masses in the Ukraine. It was merely the most important and conscious of

⁹ *Izvestiya*, 19 December 1919.

¹⁰ Majstrenko, p. 214.

these movements, the most deeply popular and revolutionary. Other movements of the same type, less widespread, less clearly defined and less well organised were constantly appearing . . . such [as] the movement of the 'Greens' which the foreign press occasionally mentioned and which was often confused with the Makhno movement. . . . The combatants of these various formations often committed regrettable errors and excesses, and very often the Makhnovist movement was held responsible (by the Bolsheviks) for such misconduct.¹¹

Makhno did not advocate pogroms, had a positive ideology, which was opposed to every kind of state, and stood against nationalism. Also, Makhno at least tried to make contact with the workers, which the Greens did not wish to do - towns were for plunder only. This applied even to the best known of them, Hryhoriyiv - one thinks of the Yelyzavethrad pogrom - and Antonov, who never obtained control of any town at all. Finally, after the end of 1918 there was no insurgent rival to Makhno on the left-bank Ukraine: all, including Hryhoriyiv, were active on the right bank. References to Makhno as a Green are therefore misleading. It is easy to emphasise what they had in common - the peasant basis of their support, their common nationality, similar methods of fighting-to the exclusion of the fundamental differences which divided them.

The provinces of Chernihiv, Kiyiv, Volyn, Podol and Kherson were thus the scenes of most Green activity. It is no coincidence that these same provinces provided much of the support for the Nationalists. Given that the right bank was, by 1917, much more nationalist than the left, it would be expected that the nationalist governments would build up their armies from peasant recruits in this area. The fate of the Directory at the turn of 1918-19 is especially instructive in this respect: in analysing its failure to retain the support of the thousands who flocked to their banner at the end of 1918, Reshetar, an historian of the nationalist movement, writes:

The fact that Makhno obtained considerable peasant support indicates that the peasantry's loyalty was not to any blind nationalism but was rather directed to securing land. This was also true of the thousands of peasants who readily enlisted in the Directory's army during the march on the capital.¹²

In the normal course of events, these forces, including draftees, would have become part of a regular army under a regular government. However, the Directory never became a regular government, and its partisan forces never became a regular army. Reshetar continues:

Petliura was the nominal commander-in-chief but he was unable to control the actions of his subordinates. Each otaman acted irresponsibly in his own locale, requisitioning at his pleasure inanimate and animate objects, including women. The forces of some of these commanders were part of the Directory's army, while those of others did not even pay lip service to any higher authority.¹³

This explains why local risings, widespread in the Ukraine against the Germans in the second half of 1918, remained local on the right bank, but on the left led to the Makhnovschyna. It also

¹¹ Volin, *The Unknown*, p. 220.

¹² Reshetar, p. 251.

¹³ Reshetar, p. 252.

explains how these local movements were able to operate as they pleased, aided during 1919 by the transient nature of the governments following the Directory in Kiyiv; Bolsheviks from February to August, Whites from September to December. 1919 was therefore the year of the Greens; thereafter, with the increasing hold of Bolshevik authority, they declined.

Even those Green leaders with the largest followings, Hryhoriyiv, and, outside the Ukraine, Antonov, had little positive to offer. They knew what they were against, but were less concerned with the future. As long as they were left alone to work on their own land without interference of Red commune or White landlord, they would be content. They were not really interested in the issues which divided the hostile parties nationally. Zeleny and his followers fought against the commune, the Chinese, the zhydy, the katzapy. From this came a vague commitment to Ukraine for the Ukrainians.

This did not necessarily mean even lip service to the nationalist leadership, but it did mean that Petliura's government was regarded as the least of three evils.

Two other aspects of the Green movement in the Ukraine should be mentioned: plundering and pogroms. The plundering resulted from the realisation that traditional authority had become either very weak or non-existent. The market towns of the western Ukraine were not all that rich, but they were better off than the villages. Many towns, including Zhytomyr, Cherkasy, Fastiv, Pros-kuriv, had more than one visitation. The plunder was often directed at the numerous Jews in these places. It is no monument to education that many of the leaders of the Green bands committing these atrocities were professionally trained. Volynets, Struk, and Bozhko were former teachers: Tkachenko was a blacksmith turned teacher, Kotsur was another former teacher, Sokolovsky had completed a teachers' training course; Hryhoriyiv was a former officer in the Tsarist army, while Anhel had been one in the Hetman's army. These origins contrast strikingly with the peasant origins of almost all the Makhnovist leaders.

The career of Kotsur was typical. He had been a provincial official of the Rada government, became a partisan leader against the Germans in 1918, robbing German and Austrian troop trains on their way home through his territory round Znamyanka. Put in charge of his home area by the Directory, he went off to fight the Bolsheviks, but deserted before he fired a shot. After the main fighting in the summer had passed his area, he emerged from his forest retreat and took up arms against the Whites. At one point he appeared before the town of Kremenchuk, but did not have the nerve to attack it. When the Red Army returned early in 1920, his men melted away. With his home area no longer tenable, he went off with a few followers to join Petliura near the Polish frontier, and he then disappears from history.

The contacts of Makhno with the Greens were marginal. Following the unification of the bands of central and southern Katerynoslav and mainland Tavria under Makhno at the turn of 1918 and 1919, relations with the Greens were limited to the edges of this region; Hryhoriyiv to the west, Bolshevik partisans to the east in the Donbas and to the north in the northern part of Katerynoslav province.

There were a number of contacts when Makhno found himself outside his home area. He may have contacted Kotsur on the retreat to Uman, but in the circumstances there could be no permanent linkup, especially after the recent experience with Hryhoriyiv. There was the contact with non-Bolshevik insurgents to the north-east of Katerynoslav city at the end of 1919. During the wanderings of July and August 1920, the Makhnovists met up with, and in some cases absorbed, small nationalist bands. We have already referred to the linkup of the Butavetsky band with the Makhnovists near Zinkiv in August 1920.

There is hardly any detailed information on 1921, a fact which is mostly accounted for by the constant pursuit of the Makhnovists by the Red Army. One intriguing question which cannot yet be properly answered is whether Makhno made a positive attempt to link up with Antonov in Tambov province, part of which was in open revolt against the Communist regime from August 1920 to about June 1921.

Only recently has a full-length study of the Antonov movement been published, a very welcome partial enlightenment of what has long been an area of the civil war deliberately obscured by the Soviet regime. Many questions about the Antonovschina still remain unanswered.

In some ways the two movements were very similar: the key role of the individual, which in both cases is significantly part of the answer to the question: why did peasant insurrections take such a specific, well-organised form in left bank Ukraine and Tambov, rather than anywhere else? They both had special guard detachments of picked followers, showing a contemporary realisation of this fact. The basic grievances of their peasant followers were economic, principally Bolshevik land policy and the forced requisitioning of grain by troops and worker detachments. Both had much wider support than the kulaks sometimes ascribed to them by Soviet authors. Their intelligence services were similar both in their efficiency and their personnel - often women and children. Both were master tacticians, especially in guerilla warfare. Their military organisation was also good. Even some of the same Communists fought both of them: Antonov-Ovseyenko, twice commander of Red forces in Ukraine, appointed civilian plenipotentiary against A. S. Antonov; Shlikhter, Ukrainian Food Commissar in 1919, later chairman of the Tambov provincial soviet executive committee; Uborevich, commander of an army in the Ukraine in 1920, Tukha-chevski's deputy in the final offensive against Antonov from May 1921 onwards; and Fedko, commander of the ill-fated 58th division in the summer of 1919, who was head of armoured forces under Tukhachevski.

The differences between them explain why the Makhnovschyna lasted over four years, the Antonovschina less than one year. The initial area of the Makhno movement was larger, and later expanded, whereas the Antonov region was restricted to the southern half of one province throughout its existence. The Makhno movement became established earlier, and was well-known before its break with the Soviet regime. A crucial factor was the period of peace between the Bolsheviks and Makhno during the first half of 1919, something Antonov never had. It allowed for political and social development as well as military build-up. It followed from this that Makhno attracted much more support, which was increased and deepened by the positive ideology of Makhno and the anarchists who came to help him. This was not a matter of being anti-state and anti-town - all the Greens, including Antonov, shared this view in a less sophisticated form - but of a positive land policy and a realisation of the need to link up with the towns on a federal basis in the post-revolutionary society. Lastly, while Makhno was no nationalist, he could draw on the nationalist feeling of many peasants resentful of the russified towns. This was not so marked in his own region, but does explain the friendly reception he received on his wanderings.

Both suffered bad defeats in June 1921; these can be put down to the introduction of NEP, new Red tactics, the lack of cover for guerillas, and, in Antonov's case, the self-imposed limitation to the original area of the outbreak. Once the message of NEP started to get through to the exhausted peasants, neither received the support necessary to continue. The quartering of troops on rebel villages, especially those on the lines of march of the partisans, first brought in by Eideman, one of Frunze's commanders in the Ukraine in 1920-21, was copied by Tukhachevski and his

subordinates against Antonov. Neither left bank Ukraine nor southern Tambov province have much cover, for there are no mountains and little forest. Any remaining spirit of resistance was quailed by overwhelming Red numbers and materiel, and the drought and famine of 1921.

In a strictly military sense we can think of Makhno and Petliura as the leaders of the largest military forces in the Ukraine during the civil war, as the chief otamany of the left and right banks of the Dnieper respectively. What primarily distinguishes them from Green leaders such as Antonov and Hryhoriyiv is their conscious and specific ideologies. Both operated on a national scale. In terms of power politics, they occupy an intermediate position between the might of Reds and Whites, and the bands of the Greens. The Greens flourished only when the prolonged absence of strong authority resulted in a power vacuum in the countryside. In the west, Petliura filled it briefly, in the east Makhno similarly. Alike to Red and White, the Greens were a local nuisance who could be dealt with as soon as the main enemy had been defeated. They both had similar attitudes to Makhno and Petliura: to be used when necessary, then disposed of.

11 Anarchism and the Anarchists

Anarchist involvement in the Makhno movement is indisputable on three levels: Makhno himself, the Hulyai Pole and other local anarchist groups, and the participation of anarchists from outside, mostly intellectuals. The fortunes of Makhno and the Hulyai Pole group were closely bound together. At first, in the pre-war days, especially in the years 1905-9, Nestor was but a junior member of an established peasant anarchist-communist group. After he became famous, it was the freedom for anarchist activity which he established that enabled the group to revive and flourish.

The activities of the group in pre-war times have already been discussed, but something remains to be said of ideology. The group was anarchist-communist: its members wanted a society based on the free associations of communes following the overthrow of the state. Expropriation and terrorism were justifiable means to this end. Anarcho-syndicalists looked to the French movement of the time in their emphasis on industrial workers rather than peasants, their activity directed towards the general strike which would paralyse capitalism and enable the organised workers to take over society. Anarcho-individualists wanted little or no organisation in the present or future: some of them also believed in terror.

Makhno's anarchism was firmly rooted in this communist tradition, hardened both by his experiences in 1905-9 and his subsequent imprisonment, where Arshinov confirmed his beliefs. He kept to them for the rest of his days, even in the bitter disappointment of exile. Nor did he disguise his beliefs at any time.

The central question is how far Makhno, the local groups, and the outsiders influenced the Makhnovschyna. Can the Makhno movement be labelled anarchist? There has been a tendency among writers sympathetic to it, such as Arshinov and Volin, to spread Makhno's anarchism onto the Makhnovschyna, without proving this extension. As for literature, the link is quite clear, most of all in the Project-Declaration of the RVS of October 1919. One extract will suffice to show the tone of the work:

On the departure of the Austrians and Germans, the revolutionary insurgents in a series of powerful blows drove the Hetman and the Petliura regime from the Ukraine, once again clearing the way for the communist authority. ...

Disappointment set in with accustomed speed. Within a month the dissatisfaction and animosity of the toiling masses, and more especially of the peasants, was showing itself in full force. Entire regions - the provinces of Katerynoslav and Tavria - were more and more definitely striving towards free socio-economic organisation on a non-party and anarchist basis. ... By the end of the summer the Ukraine was seething with peasant insurrections and a widespread insurgent movement resulting from the unjustified trust the masses had placed in the Communist Party. ... At present ... in the midst of the struggle starting between the third revolution and the

monarchist reaction, there has appeared . . . the bourgeois-republican government of Petliura. ... A decisive clash between the new free anarchist organisations already being constructed by a considerable number of the Ukrainian masses, and the idea of political power, whether monarchist, communist, or bourgeois-republican, is inevitable.¹

This is nothing if not an anarchist analysis of recent history, and in fact Volin wrote much of it. Most of the rest of the surviving Makhnovist material was also written by anarchists. Volin was an editor of and contributor to 'The Road to Freedom'. The paper, indeed, only appeared shortly after the arrival of Arshinov in Hulyai Pole in April 1919, although the groundwork had been laid by local anarchists. Arshinov also signed the proclamation against Hryhoriyiv in May 1919, as a member of the Cultural-Educational section of the army, the propaganda part of the movement. It was precisely in this section, sometimes directly attached to the army, more often to the RVS or its 1920 successor, that the incoming anarchists predominated, for which they were certainly more suited than military work; most of them were educated townspeople who knew little of fighting.

By contrast, both Makhno himself and his leading followers such as Karetnyk, Marchenko, and Schus, many members of the Hulyai Pole group, went into the military side: they had in fact no option if they were to defend their homes against all-comers. Like Makhno, they stood in awe of their intellectual comrades in the towns. Inevitably there were rifts, especially when the intellectuals felt Makhno was acting in an unanarchist manner, and many of them left him; we shall return to this point.

We do not need to turn to Bolshevik publications to show the limits of anarchist influence on the masses who followed Makhno. We have a better source than the jaundiced anarchists who left him, an article in 'The Road to Freedom' in July 1920, which puts the position with admirable succinctness:

The Makhnovist army is not an anarchist army and does not consist of anarchists. . . . Inasmuch as the Makhno movement reflects the striving of the lowest layers of the people for their self-emancipation, and stands steadfastly for the defence of the toilers against the violence of White landlords and Red commissars, the anarchists take part in it, doing all they can to widen and deepen it, to make it more and more consistently anarchist. Comparatively little has been done to date because the insurgents have been fighting continuously, and because of the lack of significant ideological strength.²

There is a hint of tension in that last line between the anarchists in the movement and those outside, and it must be admitted that Nestor never achieved the rapport with his fellow anarchists which he did with his fellow peasants. The theoretical attitude and practical cooperation of the main body of anarchists in contact with Makhno, the 'Nabat' (Alarm) confederation, which covered the Ukraine from the end of 1918 to the end of 1920, underwent considerable change. It was founded at Kursk in November 1918, and Volin was one of its chief ideologues. Previously

¹ Teper, p. 83.

² 'The Road to Freedom', 5 July 1920.

an anarcho-syndicalist who had returned from the USA in 1917, he had lectured in the Russian provinces, and had become convinced of the vital necessity for the ideological unity of the anarchist movement in face of the Bolshevik offensive. He now advocated a united anarchism, and this became Nabat policy. The revolution was to be 'Equally, anarcho-communist in type . . . and syndicalist in organisational method. ... On this basis, some, even if not all, types of individualist can co-operate with us'.³ Outside the Ukraine, this had little success: Volin was disowned by his syndicalist comrades in the north.

Contact was made between the Makhnovists and the Nabat Confederation set up in Kharkiv following the Bolshevik advance, as early as January 1919, when Bilash, on a military mission, made a point of visiting Nabat, which agreed to send literature and agitators to the insurgents. In the same month a Nabat group was in existence in Hulyai Pole, separate from the established peasant group, and publishing its own paper. The Nabat group was criticised by Pravda for putting out an appeal to Red Army soldiers, urging them to overthrow the Soviet authority. The following month, the secretariat appealed to Makhno for help against Bolshevik harassment, but without result.

As early as the Kursk founding conference one of the resolutions passed urged active anarchist participation in the insurgent movement. A similar resolution was passed at the Yelyzavethrad congress in April 1919. By that time there were Nabat groups in Yelyzavethrad, Hulyai Pole, Katerynoslav, and Kharkiv, probably Odessa, and possibly others. An advert for a regiment being formed at Hulyai Pole was published in Kharkiv Nabat in March 1919.

The hopes of Nabat placed on the insurgent movement, which had been generally optimistic at the time of the Kursk conference, were in the early months of 1919 becoming firmly fixed on Makhno. The most obvious example of this is an issue of Odessa Nabat in June, which devoted three and a half out of four pages to him. Equally, however, Hulyai Pole Nabat was much concerned with events out-with the area; protests about Cheka activity against the Kharkiv anarchists, against arrests of Nabat members in Katernynoslav, against the detention in Katerynoslav of a member of the Nabat secretariat who had been working in Hulyai Pole.

A further proof of friendly relations was the decision, probably taken in mid-May, of the secretariat to move from Kharkiv to Hulyai Pole, from a hostile to a friendly environment. Because of the deterioration in the military situation, they never in fact arrived there. By May, outside anarchists were playing a large part in the movement, especially in propaganda; apart from Nabat, a large contingent from Ivanovo-Voznesensk, the textile town north-east of Moscow, had arrived, as well as individuals from other cities and towns under Bolshevik control, where freedom of speech was as much and increasingly circumscribed for anarchists as for the rest of the left. Among the arrivals from Moscow was Arshinov.

The paper 'Nabat' was revived in the autumn of 1919 in the towns under Makhnovist occupation. Nabat enthusiasm for the Makhnovschyna was then at its height. It seemed as if the resolutions of Kursk and Yelyzavethrad were about to be realised. The tone of the second number of the new issue of Katerynoslav Nabat, published early in November 1919, was decidedly optimistic: there was a way forward for the revolution, now that the Makhnovists had rescued it from an impasse. The inhabitants, naturally cautious, should cast off their inertia now that they were able to take an initiative. The last issue before abandoning the city for the second time takes

³ Pervaya Konferentsiya, pp. 14, 15, 17.

a similar line in discussing what would happen when the approaching Red Army met up with the insurgents:

Seeing that the Red Army is a compulsory, regular army, disciplined from above and centralised, anarchists consider it in principle not to be a revolutionary army, although they recognise that there are some revolutionary elements in it.

The partisan-insurgent army, made up of the wide masses risen in revolt and actively inclined towards the revolution, should be seen as the true defender of the social revolution.

We are not hostile to the Red Army, on the contrary, we call for the union of the Red and insurgent armies, as they have common personnel - workers and peasants - and a common aim - the annihilation of the counter-revolution. . . .⁴

It seems that all was not as well as appeared on the surface in print between Makhno and the anarchists. There was the big row over the Polonsky affair between the RVS and the army staff. During the second occupation, there were rumours of an open letter from the Nabatovtsy urging Makhno to prevent the disintegration of the army, and to stop drinking himself. The fact that the Makhnovist army did disintegrate soon afterwards would certainly give pause for thought to those who had so recently expected so much of him. There was a change of attitude at a secret meeting of the illegal secretariat with a few supporters in Kharkiv in February 1920. It was decided to concentrate on the towns as a better revolutionary prospect. Nonetheless, contacts were resumed in March, when a member of Nabat safely made the hazardous journey from Kharkiv to Polohy and back.

A more representative meeting was held in Kharkiv in April, where once again Nabat as an organisation came down in favour of the greater revolutionary potentialities of the countryside. This choice was prompted by renewed hounding by the Bolsheviks in the cities and the restored communications with Makhno. One particular possibility for the Makhno movement not open to a town group was the winning of territory which could be held for anarchist social experimentation. On this, it was resolved that:

The insurrection must cease its aimless and thoughtless wandering from one place to another, but must rather strive to conquer territory . . . with the aim of starting more quickly on the construction of the classless society.⁵

Following the meeting, a further delegation of three was sent off to obtain Makhno's agreement. This was forthcoming, the Nabat-ovtsy accepting his condition that the centre of Nabat activity be transferred to the Makhnovschyna and its armed forces.

The three delegates stayed for some time with Makhno during 1920. Aron Baron, a leading Nabat member, may have been an observer at the 3rd Hulyai Pole congress in April 1919. Teper later became a Bolshevik and wrote an account of Makhno which, being published early on, in 1924, gives valuable information. At first they got on well with the insurgents, but differences soon appeared: Baron, the most active, acquired pretensions to the political leadership

⁴ Yekaterinoslavski Nabat, 7 January 1920.

⁵ Teper, p. 17.

of the movement. This was frowned on, but what really made him unpopular was attempting to interfere in military decisions. Further disagreement arose over the question of conquering territory for anarchist experimentation. Any reasonable land would do for the anarchists, but Makhno wanted his home area. Personal relations between Nestor and Baron deteriorated, and both Baron, and, later, Teper, quarrelled with Popov, the former left SR who was Makhno's secretary for most of 1920, and who resented the outside anarchists who served to reduce his own influence. According to Teper, Popov threatened to 'fill in' both Baron and himself.

It was therefore with a fresh sense of disillusion that a further Nabat conference met illegally in Kharkiv in September 1920, although neither before nor after it were relations totally broken off - Arshinov stayed with Makhno, Volin was in prison from January to October 1920. Baron, Sukhovolski (the third delegate), Teper and Arshinov all attended. Speaking of the Makhnovschyna, Baron declared: 'Better to vanish into a Soviet prison than vegetate in that terrible atmosphere'.⁶ The main resolution on the Makhnovschyna was highly critical, but not to the extent that Baron wished: it also met opposition from a minority which included Sukhovolski and Yosif the Emigre, the anarchist financial expert, and a personal friend of Nestor's, Arshinov and Volin; both Sukhovolski and Yosif disappeared soon after en route to Makhno to patch things up.

Nonetheless, in the October 1920 agreement the insurgents insisted that all anarchists in Soviet prisons, including the Nabatovtsy be released and allowed full freedom of political activity. This shows Makhno's strong and continued attachment to anarchism. At least one of those who attended the conference, Levandovski, went to Hulyai Pole during the ensuing short period of peace, and in exile wrote favourably of his reception.

Simultaneously with the attack on Hulyai Pole on 26 November, the Bolsheviks rounded up all known anarchists in the Ukraine. Many of them were in Kharkiv for a Nabat conference scheduled for early December. Volin, barely out of prison, had been negotiating the day before with Rakovski, the Ukrainian Prime Minister, about the implementation of clause four of the political section of the October agreement. He had been promised a satisfactory outcome: this came at 3 a.m. on the morning of the 26th-he was arrested. Hundreds of others suffered the same fate, and Nabat was utterly smashed. Arshinov alone remained with Makhno, till the spring of 1921. Most of those arrested disappeared into the Soviet concentration camps: a few lucky ones including Volin and the anarcho-syndicalist Maximov in the Taganka prison in Moscow staged a hunger strike which came to the notice of the Spanish syndicalist delegates to the Profintern, the trade union equivalent of the Comintern, and were reluctantly released by the Soviet government. The Makhno movement survived its comrades for but a few months.

Makhno did not enjoy good relations with the anarchists in the latter part of his exile. At first he had been treated as a martyr to the cause, which he was, but ideological differences soon arose. These centred around the publication in 1926 by Makhno and Arshinov of the 'Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists', known as the 'Platform', an attempt to analyse what had gone wrong in the Russian revolution, and suggesting a much tighter anarchist organisation in future. This idea immediately fell foul of the majority of European anarchists, and also some of the Russian exiles, including Volin. The resulting bitter polemic lasted into the early 1930s. To add to his sense of isolation, Nestor quarrelled with one of the collaborators on his memoirs, and with Arshinov, who decided to accept the Soviet regime, and returned, only to disappear in the purges.

⁶ Teper, p. 99, n. 1.

Only at Makhno's funeral in 1934 did Platformists and their opponents speak to each other again, although relations with Volin were on the mend before the end. Right up to his death, Makhno maintained his anarchist and anti-state communist viewpoint. In 1932 he wrote:

Any state destroys, suppresses, enslaves all the best innate spiritual values that push for freedom and are based on solidarity. The activity of the Russian proletarian state only serves to reinforce our argument: each year it becomes clearer that its proletarian nature is a fiction, that its aims are not those of the Great Russian Revolution - indeed, these days, death and destruction await those who think and act in an independent manner without the sanction of the state, about revolution, its victory, a new life without authority . . . How ... the total liberation of the toilers will be achieved is the question now before the anarchists. A clear answer is needed not only for the struggle of the workers against the bourgeois-capitalists of the world, but also for us anarchists, for on the answer we give will greatly depend the anarchist influence on this struggle and its outcome. The proletariat must not repeat the mistakes of the Russian Revolution.⁷

Of the leading lights of the Hulyai Pole anarchist group, Olexander Semeniuta was dead before the Great War, and Antoni had gone into exile. The group itself managed to keep going-just. In 1917, Makhno's reputation as the only returning political deportee gave him an immediately pre-eminent position in a group in which inexperienced new members predominated. He used this position to secure adoption of his organisational ideas, ditching the spontaneous combustion approach of 1905 in favour of steady practical work in peasant unions and the organs of local administration, with the twin aims of activating the mass of peasants and driving out the local organs of the Provisional Government. A group office was opened, and a declaration written.

With the anarchist movement in the towns hardly able to cope with the work there, the anarchist-communists of Hulyai Pole were, to their regret, thrown back on their own resources. Re-reading Bakunin, Kropotkin and others had failed to give them the concrete answers they were looking for. By the end of 1917, the group had accomplished the two initial tasks of greatly increasing peasant involvement in local affairs and driving out the representatives of the Provisional Government. The next step, whether to get involved in military affairs, came up at the turn of the year over the Cossack troop trains at Olexandrivske. Nestor's argument that the group must be in the vanguard of the struggle against the hirelings of the counter-revolution was accepted.

Group influence also showed in the communes, Makhno himself working on one, and also in the question of education when this was raised within the communes. The only people who had any positive ideas to replace the old system were group members who had read about the Spanish libertarian educationist Francisco Ferrer. At the same time, early 1918, the energies of the group were increasingly taken up with the struggle against the growing nationalist influence. When the local leader of the Ukrainian SRs started publicly threatening the anarchists with retribution when the Germans came, the secretary of the anarchist group replied in kind, and soon after the nationalist involved was murdered. Makhno did not agree with this and suggested a joint commission, which was able to patch things up temporarily. Some younger members of the group

⁷ Makhno, *Probuzhdenie*, No. 18, pp. 45, 48.

alleged that 'Comrade Makhno wanted to change his mind about open counter-revolutionaries. He could in this way deal a severe blow to the unity of the group'.⁸

A post-mortem on the April 1918 debacle was held at the Taganrog conference. Makhno urged those group members still at liberty in Hulyai Pole to 'Hold up higher and more decisively the black banner of our peasant group of anarcho-communists, on which is written, as you friends know, "Always with the oppressed against the oppressors."'⁹

Makhno's return in July 1918 was a catalyst to renewed anarchist activity. During the autumn, this occurred in Novospasivka and Mariupil, and in October a Hulyai Pole Union of Anarchists also included the groups of Dibrivki and Pokrovske. By early December an anarchist club had been reopened, and the union had published leaflets calling for a fight against reaction.

There is less information on the group in the first half of 1919. It opposed the January/February agreement with the Bolsheviks, and at the Yelyzavethrad Nabat congress the Hulyai Pole delegate was the most anti-communist in a meeting not noted for its friendly feelings towards the Soviet regime. It seems that the local group may have had some differences with the Hulyai Pole Nabat group.

There was certainly friction between both groups and Makhno over the agreement with the Bolsheviks, Nestor being increasingly preoccupied with military affairs. Makhno had to cooperate with the Red Army against the Whites, while the peasant and Nabat groups could afford ideological purity.

The peasant group then disappears from view. Many of its members were prominent in the subsequent military struggle. When it is recalled that the group had earlier been heavily involved in peasant work including the communes, which had restarted in January 1919, it is reasonable to assume that they were less active on the propaganda side. This is further suggested by the arrival of the outside anarchists from the turn of the year, and by the fact that Arshinov, and probably others, became immediately involved in the work of the Cultural-Educational section of the RVS.

After the summer of 1919 Makhno was never in Hulyai Pole long enough for the group to function effectively and openly. However, the cohesion gained by it in its early continuous history down to 1917, and more especially its welding together by Makhno in the twelve months after the February revolution ensured his hold on the region, and provided him with good friends, good comrades, and good commanders. The banishment of the student Antoni to Hulyai Pole by the Tsarist police had certainly had remarkable results.

Perhaps because the nationalists had been discredited earlier in the year, there was some growth in left SR (of the Russian rather than Ukrainian variety, in ideological terms) influence in Hulyai Pole in the autumn of 1918. Some were personal friends of Nestor's, and one, Myrhorodsky, was working closely with Makhno and the anarchist group before the end of the year: he was sent with Chubenko to find out what was happening in Katerynoslav in December. Relations became closer in early 1919. Perhaps, disillusioned with the Bolsheviks, the left SRs were attracted by the military prowess of Makhno, at least he was no nationalist. Slogans were similar - both could support the union of toilers on a basis of equality, brotherhood, and freedom: both relied heavily on peasant support. By the spring, the two groups were actively cooperating. The left SRs were active in the preparations for the abortive fourth congress.

⁸ Makhno, *Russkaya*, p. 192.

⁹ Makhno, *Ukrainskaya*, p. 13.

Like the anarchist group, the left SRs disappear from view following the Denikin offensive, with one exception. This was Popov, one of the left SRs in Moscow. Differently from the rest, he ended up in 1920 in the Ukraine, where he became Makhno's personal secretary.

There remains the strange affair of the Leontiev bombing in Moscow in September 1919. A number of Communist party members were killed. The origins are obscure. The leading spirits were Kovalevich, a Moscow railway worker who visited Hulyai Pole in May 1919, then returned north, and Sobolev, an Ukrainian anarchist who carried out a number of expropriations in and near Moscow, in cooperation with left SRs and Maximalists. Another anarchist who arrived in Hulyai Pole early in 1919 and helped to set up the kon-trrazvedka, Glagzon, was supposed to have been involved on the financial side. Popov's name has been mentioned, but no proof offered. It is very unlikely that Makhno was directly involved for he was in the middle of the retreat to Uman and Perehonivka, and the communication difficulties alone would have been insurmountable. Doubtless, Makhno would have welcomed the demise of the Soviet regime, but he always put the defeat of the Whites first.

12 Anti-Semitism

An anarchist who later turned Bolshevik nailed the lie of Makhno's anti-Semitism, though this does not necessarily mean that the Makhnovschyna was also free from it. Makhno, Teper said, was neither nationalist nor anti-Semitic. Another anarchist who spent some time in Palestine between the war convinced some of her fellow Ukrainian Jews that Makhno had not been a perpetrator of pogroms by saying that if he had been, so had she, and by refuting their erroneous and highly variable personal descriptions of him. Makhno was deeply concerned by the accusations of anti-Semitism against himself and the movement. In June 1926 he had a debate in a Paris club with a novelist named Kessel who had written a romanticised story about Makhno, on the subject. In an article republished at the time of his death, Makhno said:

I challenged for the first time the Jews - bourgeois, socialist, and Yanovski (Soviet) type anarchists - who accused both myself and the revolutionary peasant and worker liberation movement of the Ukraine of having made pogroms against the Ukrainian Jews. I have told them that, instead of spreading this wicked calumny, they would do better to state frankly where and when I or my insurgents provoked or took part in pogroms. . . . Up to the present, such proofs have not been forthcoming.¹

Even apart from these sources, there is overwhelming evidence that Makhno himself was not anti-Semitic. Antonov states that in the spring of 1919 there were no grounds for accusing Makhno on this, who was rather fighting anti-Semitism as much as he could. Antonov reprints an appeal put out at the time against anti-Semitism by the Hulyai Pole RVS executive committee over the signatures of Makhno and Veretelnik. Alexander Berkman, on his tour through Russia and the Ukraine with the train of the newly formed Museum of the Revolution in 1920, spoke with the daughter of his host in Mykolaiv. She had heard Makhno speak there, threatening merciless punishment for any pogrom-maker. On 5 August 1919, *Izvestiya* reported the killing of Hryhoriyiv and quoted the resolution at the meeting afterwards, in which one of the charges against Hryhoriyiv was anti-Semitism. Two months earlier, *Pravda* had published a Makhno appeal against pogroms. Even Denikin, while alleging that the insurgents were anti-Semitic, said that Makhno himself was not.

Most of the allegations are of a very vague and general nature, and the authors concerned not very reliable. One not only suggested that Makhno had murdered and tortured thousands of Jews and destroyed all the Jewish colonies in the southern Ukraine, but had also issued a proclamation against pogroms because of pressure from Petliura, in turn pressurised by the Western Allies of the Great War! Kessel tells a similar tale.

The numerous orders and appeals of Makhno against pogroms were not issued merely for appearances. It will be clear from the above that any incidents (we shall refer to a few later) in the Makhnovschyna took place against Makhno's own strong beliefs, inclinations, and orders. In this respect he stands out from the other-otamany in the Ukraine. One author lists Struk, Hryhoriyiv,

¹ *Le Libertaire*, 3 August 1934.

and Shepel as responsible for many of the pogroms of 1919 (the worst year) and also ascribes a number to other otamany, and to the nationalists: not one is alleged against Makhno. For the period January to September 1919 the Central Committee of Zionist Organisations in Russia gives the following statistics: 210 pogroms in Kiyiv province, 56 in Volyn, 62 in Podol, 23 in Kherson, 1.5 in Poltava, 7 in Chernihiv, and one in the town of Katerynoslav. The worst offenders were the Nationalists with 15,000 victims, then the Volunteer Army with 9500, and Hryhoriyiv; followed by Sokolovsky, Struk, Yatsenko, and Soviet troops (500 victims). Again no mention of Makhno, and it is further significant that almost all these pogroms occurred on the right bank, western Ukraine, where the local otamany and the Nationalists were strong. Very few took place on the left bank, where Makhno's influence predominated, the nearest being in Katerynoslav town and Kherson province: none in the provinces of Katerynoslav or Tavria. Even granted the lower level of Jewish involvement in left bank trade, the almost total lack of anti-Semitic manifestations would show that Makhno's appeals, at a time when anti-Semitism was fast becoming fashionable, did not go unheeded by the population. There were a number of Jewish colonies in the south-east Ukraine.

There was an unfortunate incident during the advance of the Central Powers and Rada on Hulyai Pole. A Jewish volunteer company was won over by the local nationalists. This, together with the treachery of a member of the anarchist group, Lev Schneider, who ripped down the portraits of Bakunin and others in the group's office, led to ill-feeling against the Jews among the local people. On his return in July, even Makhno had a hard time pointing out that the Jews as a race had not been to blame, rather the invaders: Jews, he said, were divided into rich and poor classes, just like any other race.

In February 1919 Makhno called together the leaders of the local Jewish colonies, and, on hearing that there had been a few robberies and beatings, urged them to organise their own self-defence, and gave them rifles and ammunition for this purpose. When there were murmurs at this - continued anti-Jewish feeling in evidence - he and the newly-formed cultural-educational section of the army held a large number of meetings on the subject.

There is other evidence of this feeling. In the first of three known incidents, a detachment of soldiers in the Tsarekostyantynivka area refused to obey their commander, Kurylenko, and plundered Jewish colony no. 2. Makhno does not record any specific action against them, but declared the death penalty for such activities in future. On the very day that Kamenev came to see Makhno, the latter was travelling up the Berdyansk line to meet him at Hulyai Pole. En route at Kyrylivka station he noticed a placard saying 'Smash the Jews, save the revolution, long live batko Makhno!'² On finding out that the person responsible, the stationmaster Khizny was an insurgent, a personal friend who had fought against the Whites, Makhno nonetheless had him shot soon afterwards. On 12 May 1919, about 20 Jews were murdered at the Jewish settlement of Gorkaya. It is not clear whether insurgents under Dermendji were responsible, or whether local peasants were taking revenge on hearing that three insurgents had been murdered at the colony, but a special commission of Nikolai, brother of the well-known insurgent Olexander Chubenko, Petrov, chief commissar attached to the Makhnovist forces, and three rank and file insurgents, was set up to inquire into and judge the case. It was decided that all the accused, having been found guilty of the pogrom, should be sent to the front. Makhno did not think this good enough, had the case reopened the following day, and persuaded the commission to have the ringleaders shot. In August 1920, after uniting with some nationalist detachments, a pogrom took place in

² Arshinov, *Istoriya*, p. 208.

Shishaki village. Makhno had ten to fifteen of the ringleaders shot at once. The Makhnovist paper described the incident as 'a pollution on the good name of our movement'.³ Apart from certain personal considerations - a Jew helped him to cross the Russo-Ukrainian border in July 1918, and friendship with a number of Jews, including Volin and Yosif the Emigre - the basis of Makhno's hostility to anti-Semitism was his anarchism. Anarchism has always been an international creed, explicitly condemning all forms of racial hatred as incompatible with the freedom of individuals and the society of equals. This view shows in many of the Makhnovist proclamations and leaflets, and is most explicit in 'Order No. 1', issued at the end of July 1919, just after Hryhoriyiv had been dealt with:

1. The goal of our revolutionary army, as also of every insurgent who has just joined it, is a strenuous struggle for the emancipation of all toilers of all Ukraine from all oppression. Thus every insurgent must constantly remember, and put into practice wherever he may be, the idea that there can be no place for those who seek, under cover of the revolutionary insurrection, to satisfy their instincts for profit, violence, or looting at the expense of the peaceful Jewish population.
2. Each revolutionary insurgent must remember that the enemies of himself, as well as of the entire people, are the rich bourgeoisie, Russian, Ukrainian, or Jewish; their enemies are all those who defend the unjust regime of the bourgeoisie, such as the Soviet commissars, members of repressive expeditionary forces and extraordinary commissions, who go from town to town and village to village, torturing the toiling people who refuse to submit to their arbitrary rule and dictatorship. Every insurgent is instructed to arrest and forward to the army staff any member of these expeditionary corps, Chekas, or other institutions which aid in the suppression and subordination of the people; in case of resistance, the only alternative is shooting on the spot. On the other hand, all violence against the peaceful toilers of any nationality whatsoever is unworthy of a revolutionary insurgent, and should be punished with death.⁴

If further proof were needed of the low level of anti-Semitism within the Makhnovschyna, and not just Makhno's personal record in the matter, then the continual participation in the movement of both intellectual Jews from outside, and Jews from the local peasant colonies, would provide it. One of the Jewish anarchists who left him in 1919 has stated that she did so because of his distortion of anarchism, not his anti-Semitism or that of his followers. In early 1919, despite the bad experience of the Jewish company in 1918, a special battery was set up, serviced by a Jewish half-company. Some at least of the artillerymen had seen service in the Great War. Makhno had a moving meeting with them just before they left for the front. They later fought stubbornly against the May White offensive, many including their commander being killed.

As in many other revolutionary movements in the Tsarist Empire, the influence of Jews was very strong on the intellectual side. This was largely caused by the anti-Semitic activities of the Tsars. Makhno himself, increasingly preoccupied with military affairs, tended to leave propaganda, including the combating of anti-Semitism, to the intellectuals then arriving in Hulyai Pole. Of the leading members of the cultural-educational section of the army, one, Arshinov, was Russian, the other, Eikhenbaum-Volin, was a Jewish doctor. As already noted, Volin was active in the

³ Lebed, p. 43.

⁴ Arshinov, *Istoriya*, pp. 211-3.

RVS, involved with 'The Road to Freedom', and in the negotiations over clause four in October-November 1920. Other Jewish members of the section included the printer Aly-Sukhovolski, Yosif the Emigre, and the secretary of the section, Yelena Keller. Yosif was at one time a member of the RVS, and a close friend of Nestor. Kogan, a Jewish colonist, was chairman of the RVS in the first half of 1919, but then left once more to work in a poor Jewish settlement. The head of the kontrrazvedka, Lev Zadov-Zinkovski, was Jewish. The leading anarchist in the Makhnovschyna in 1920, Aron Baron, was also a Jew: Sukhovolski was also active in the movement at that time. When Baron quarrelled with Makhno, there is not even a hint of accusations of anti-Semitism, nor in the resolutions of the Nabat conference in September 1920, at which Baron expressed his disillusion and disappointment in the Makhnovschyna.

Among the more serious allegations of anti-Semitism are reports from Bolshevik activists among the Makhnovist forces in the spring of 1919. Once again, the accusations are not specific. In the second half of March, a special committee of the Supreme Military Inspectorate considered that there was 'anarcho-anti-Semitic' agitation in Katerynoslav, disrupting the garrison; anti-Semitism was on the increase in Makhno's brigade. In mid-April, Lukomski, divisional commissar to Dybenko, reported disorganisation and strong anti-Jewish feeling in the 'Truth' detachment, but does not mention any in the other Makhnovist units, four regiments and the artillery. A propagandist on an armoured train at the end of April stated that political activists were refusing to work in Makhno's units, resulting in banditry, pogrom agitation, and the beating up of Jews. It can be observed that the Bolsheviks might well have found a hostile atmosphere without disintegration and anti-Semitism being necessary causes or consequences.

There are many other similar allegations, and I have been careful to examine those that were either contemporary, or could quote chapter and verse, and preferably both. There is for example the evidence of Igrenyev, a lecturer at Katerynoslav university, who had a Makhnovist machine-gun detachment quartered on him in December 1918. Its commander stated that

Our batko is a real general, a second lieutenant in the Tsarist Army. He's a true communist, not like the Petliurists, who have been bought by the Yids. . . . We only kill Yids and Germans -they're the main bourgeois anyway.⁵

This is truth hopelessly mixed up with fantasy. This would be a charitable description of Gutman, Lvovski, Hodgson and others on this subject.

The last word should go to the Jewish historian Cherikover, with whom Volin recorded an interview, but who has also testified independently. Volin records him as saying that

1. It is undeniable that, of all these armies (in the civil war) including the Red Army, the Makhnovist behaved best in regard to the civilian population in general and the Jewish population in particular. I have numerous testimonies to this. The proportion of justified complaints against the Makhnovist Army by comparison with the others, is negligible.
2. Do not let us speak of pogroms alleged to have been organised by Makhno himself. This is a slander or an error. Nothing of the sort occurred. As for the Makhnovist army, I have had hints and precise denunciations on this subject. But, up to the present, every time I have tried to check the facts, I have been obliged to declare that on the day in question no

⁵ Igrenyev, p. 238.

Makhnovist unit could have been at the place indicated, the whole army being far away from there. Upon examining the evidence closely, I established this fact every time, (that) with absolute certainty, at the place and on the date of a pogrom, no Makhnovist unit was operating or even located in the vicinity. Not once have I been able to prove the presence of a Makhnovist unit at the place where a pogrom against the Jews took place. Consequently, the pogroms in question could not have been the work of the Makhnovists.⁶

⁶ Volin, *The Unknown*, pp. 265-6.

13 Some Ideological Questions

Among the many cultural and educational activities of the Makhnovists were the usual papers, pamphlets, leaflets, and meetings. In addition, there were conscious attempts, especially (but not only) in Hulyai Pole, to organise education, schooling, and theatre, and there was music. Attached to the army during 1919 and 1920 was a cultural and educational section, about which we have a reasonable amount of information from its leading lights, Volin and Arshinov.

Unfortunately but inevitably the emphasis within the movement from the middle of 1919 onwards was very much military, Makhno himself spending his time increasingly at the front or on the move. It has already been indicated that, with the local anarchists similarly involved, cultural and educational work was largely carried on by anarchists from the outside. However, the initial impetus in founding the cultural organisation in the army was taken by Budanov, a member of the Hulyai Pole group. Leaflets had been put out previously, but this initiative marked the birth of a specific propaganda setup. He was aided on arrival by the Ivanovo-Voznesensk anarchist group, followed in April by Arshinov, who became Nestor's secretary, edited 'The Road to Freedom' from the first issue, and signed political statements, such as the manifesto against Hryhoriyiv. The arrival of Volin and Yosif the Emigre, both prominent in Nabat, in August 1919 during the retreat to Uman, greatly strengthened propaganda work. Shortly after his arrival Volin became chairman of the RVS, confirmed in that position at the Olexandrivske congress, and was on the editorial board of 'The Road to Freedom' in Katerynoslav. The section continued to exist on into 1920, until the military position at the end of the year made its functioning almost impossible.

One of the most remarkable achievements of the Makhnovists was to preserve a freedom of speech more extensive than any of their opponents. The information comes from the occupation of Katerynoslav at the end of 1919, and is confirmed by both Bolshevik and White sources. In addition to Nabat, 'The Road to Freedom', and 'Shlyakh do Voly' an Ukrainian edition of the latter, the Bolshevik paper 'Star' reappeared, and right and left SR papers were also published. The Makhnovists issued a declaration on the subject early in November 1919 in Katerynoslav:

1. All socialist political parties, organisations, and tendencies have the right to propagate their ideas, theories and views and opinions freely, both orally and in writing. . . . Note: Military communiques may not be printed unless supplied by 'The Road to Freedom'.
2. In allowing (this) freedom to propagate their ideas, the Makhnovist Insurgent Army wishes to inform all the parties that any attempt to prepare, organise, or impose a political authority on the working masses will not be permitted by the revolutionary insurgents, such an act having nothing to do with the freedom of ideas and propaganda.¹

¹ Arshinov, *Istoriya*, pp. 151-2.

The only comparable statement in the civil war was the Kronstadt programme. Unlike the sailors there, the Makhnovists had the chance to put this into practice. It is surely very much to their credit that they did so.

The most valuable single collection of leaflets is the eleven, all dating from 1920, issued variously by the army staff, the Soviet of Revolutionary Insurgents, and the cultural-educational section. Most are appeals to the Red Army to stop fratricidal warfare, but there is also a brief and direct statement by the section on the movement and its aims. Other leaflets have a very wide range of subject: denouncing Petliura, the proposed clause four of the October 1920 agreement, urging the peasants to take over the land before the convocation of the Constituent Assembly, copies of a pamphlet on free Soviets run off in March 1921 when on the move.

In addition to 'The Road to Freedom' and 'Shlyakh do Voly', a paper was published especially for the rank and file insurgents, 'Golos Makhnovtsa' (Makhnovist Voice). Of these, 'The Road to Freedom' was the longest lasting and widest known. The first three issues were published in the spring of 1919 in Hulyai Pole, numbers 4-42 were issued in the autumn, mostly during the second occupation of Katerynoslav. The tone was set clearly from the first three issues, all headed by a quote from Bakunin. Makhno himself contributed at some length. He indicated the role of the paper in the very first number:

The independent activity of the masses has compelled official Bolsheviks such as Trotski to write pogrom-type articles calling for the dispersal of anarchist groups, federations, unions, for the rooting out of such an evil breed. . . . But the insurgents, who initiated the revolutionary cause, the people's cause . . . aren't going to let themselves be deceived now. Their paper, 'The Road to Freedom', will ring the alarm, echoing throughout the world in favour of freedom and popular justice, for a society where there will be no authorities, or laws written by them, where in the free, boundless depths of the earth, man will be man, and conscience and freedom will be the marks of the human world.²

Apart from the immediate issues - military news, fulminating against anti-Semitism, the Bolsheviks, Hryhoriyiv and the Whites, there was anarchist news and propaganda written by Arshinov, Volin, Roschin, Uralov, and others from the north who visited Hulyai Pole or came to stay. There were also more practical articles on the reorganisation of communes and the need to deal with food speculation by bringing its distribution under poor peasant control.

'Golos Makhnovtsa' was published during the Vrangeli armistice period, and is known only from a facsimile in Teper's book. Few numbers of 'The Road to Freedom' survive, and only one of Shlyakh do Voly, No. 9 of December 1919 in Katerynoslav. Nabat, though not an insurgent paper, flourished under Makhnovist protection. The language used in all papers was for the most part direct and addressed to workers and peasants, but some of the theoretical articles would certainly pose difficulties for the barely literate.

The two most important documents put out by the Makhnovists were the 'Project-Declaration of the Revolutionary Insurgent Army of the Ukraine (Makhnovists)', and 'General Theses of the Revolutionary Insurgents (Makhnovists) concerning Free Soviets.' The former was passed by the Army RVS in October 1919 and first published in Olexandriivske. There was much discussion on the second which were not finally put out until after the accord against Vrangeli, in Hulyai Pole.

² 'The Road to Freedom', 17 May 1919.

Unfortunately, only the former has survived, and that in Bulgarian. It is both a survey of recent revolutionary history from a libertarian viewpoint, and an outline of the way forward and the bases of the free anarchist-communist society.

Some of the most remarkable stories around Makhno are to do with music. He was supposed to have kept captive a grand opera tenor, who was obliged to perform for his benefit. Trotsky substituted a choir of Estonian musicians. On more solid ground we learn of the playing of 'The March of the Anarchists' on May Day 1917 in Hulyai Pole, of an orchestra welcoming Antonov, of a meeting with music at Novopavlivka at the end of June 1920. A former White relates a fascinating story of hearing music on Moscow radio which he had heard sung to different words, by members of the Makhnovist staff quartered on him in Katerynoslav 34 years earlier, in 1919.

Then as now the harmonica was very popular, although Nestor protested that he could not play it. The Makhnovists had some of their own songs, including 'The Song of the Makhnovists', and a version of the hit song 'Yabluchko' (Little Apple), of which there were also Red and White versions. The Makhnovist one dates from 1919, and has Denikin wondering what on earth has happened to his British supplies. The smiling Makhnovist well knows the answer. It ends with a vow not to allow the return of the Tsar: the people themselves must create anarchy.

There is little of the other arts to record. While in Astrakhan in 1918 Makhno published his first verses. A poem written by insurgents in hospital, bitterly complaining about conditions there, appeared in the Katerynoslav Bolshevik paper 'Star'. There was an amateur theatre in Hulyai Pole, well supported, and among the productions was a play by a local peasant set in 1919, performed during the 1920 armistice. The cultural-educational section was active in this field: it performed at Polohy on 22 November 1920 in aid of wounded insurgents, Makhno appearing in person. The entertainment included an act of a play and a Dutch auction.

Makhno had had help from the teachers as early as March 1917: they had been active in 1904-5. In April 1919, Antonov was told that there were three intermediate schools in working order, despite the upheavals of the Central Powers' invasion and the Hetmanate. We have mentioned that the Project-Declaration indicated that the language of school instruction should be that used in the locality: in other words, Russian would not have the special position it had under the Tsars and still enjoys under the present regime. The decision on this was to be made by parents, teachers, and pupils -not the army. By October 1920, there were very few teachers left: most had fled to the towns, and few, if any, schools were functioning. The survivors had not been paid for months, the school buildings had been abandoned. Nonetheless, plans were drawn up for a more hopeful future. The schools were to be under the direct control of the toilers, and were to develop individuals as well as instil knowledge. Church and state would be separated. Teachers would be supported by the communities whose children they taught. A scheme for adult education was envisaged.

The ideology was that of Francisco Ferrer. His ideas were very popular among the anarchists of the time. Makhno took a personal interest in the plans and preceding discussion. Basic education came before the fanciful scheme of Levandovski for an anarchist university in Kharkiv, to be financed by ten million roubles from the Hulyai Pole soviet. Needless to say, all was destroyed when the Bolsheviks launched their final attack. Even if we discount the propaganda work of the cultural-educational section, the record of the Makhnovists in the arts and the freedom of the press in the stress of a civil war was better than the remaining contestants, for all their greatly superior resources.

The Makhnovists saw the destruction of prisons both as an ideological and a practical blow for freedom. Some of the Bolshevik criticisms of this will be discussed below. Arshinov sums up the anarchist attitude:

Prisons symbolise the slavery of the people, and have never been built except to house the people, the workers and the peasants. For a thousand years, the bourgeoisie of all countries have used the prison and the scaffold to subdue the rebellious and oppressed masses. At the present time, the prisons of the socialist-communist state swallow up mainly the proletariat of town and country. A free people has no need of prisons, and where there are prisons, the people are not free. Prisons are an eternal menace to the toilers, an attempt to stifle their conscience and free will, and an index of their serfdom. This was the attitude to prisons, and the reason why the Makhnovists demolished them wherever they went.³

Makhno himself shared this view. At Olexandrivske at the beginning of 1918, he was reminded of the fact that he had been twice inside the prison there, and regretted that he did not have enough dynamite to blow the place up. His Bolshevik allies of the time would hardly have let him do this. One of the first things Makhno did on his return from prison in 1917 was to have a look at the Tsarist police archives: he wanted to find out who had betrayed the remnants of the group after he and many others had been put in prison. In Olexandrivske in early 1918 he came across the informer, Sharovsky, and had him shot in quick time. Others, arrested for being born into the wrong class, such as the liberal landowner Mikhno, or Maximov, his prosecutor in 1910, he returned to the prison wagons rather than shoot them.

The first occasion on which Nestor was able to deal with a prison as he wished was at Katerynoslav at the end of 1918. This was not the first nor the last time this prison suffered in the civil war. In May 1918, a group of armed anarchists in retreat had released all the inmates, to the loud complaints of Pravda. In May 1919, Skachko abandoned the city in panic in the face of Hryhoriyiv's advance, and for a few hours 'anarchy' reigned in the city. Control was in the hands of an imprisoned Makhnovist, Maxiuta, who was shot on the orders of Averin, the local party leader, who kept his nerve, unlike Skachko.

On their return to Katerynoslav at the beginning of November 1919, the job was done more thoroughly: the prison was emptied, and kerosene, in very short supply at the time, was poured on the buildings, which were then fired. Similar action was taken in other places under insurgent occupation: at Olexandrivske, Kryvy Rih, and Berdyansk, said to have taken place in front of and aided by a large crowd. At Katerynoslav and Olexandrivske some of the prisoners joined the Makhnovist army.

The blowing up of prisons was indeed in the measure of symbolic acts: it did not advance the cause of the third, libertarian revolution militarily, but it did show an earnest intent. To the Bolsheviks, such action was a waste of time, if not puerile: the energy and resources expended could have been put to much better uses. On the other hand, the Bolsheviks could conceive of a use for prisons in their present and future societies. Whether, as the anarchists averred, prisons would not be needed in a future society, is another question. As they felt, so did Makhno feel, that they would not. Prisons were a reminder of what they had suffered and what they were fighting against, whatever the regime.

³ Volin, *The Unknown*, p. 160; Arshinov, *Istoriya*, p. 149.

Part 4 Exile

14 The Bitter End

On 2 September 1921 a Romanian paper of Communist sympathies reported the arrival of the decimated Makhnovist forces in the country. Three days earlier, a government paper had mentioned the crossing into Bessarabia of seventy-seven cavalry, including Makhno, wounded, and his wife. The drought and consequent low level of the river had helped them. They were immediately disarmed and interned. Two hours later, pursuing Red soldiers crossed in their turn. Following the initial imprisonment, Makhno and his wife were let out of the camp and allowed to live in Bucharest under police surveillance while the wounds healed; the rest of the insurgents had to stay in the camp.

The specific and rather early date of 2 September is mentioned concerning Makhno contacting the Petliurist mission. One source suggests that Makhno offered to undertake joint action to rid the Ukraine of its enemies; in return for this interest, it is said, the Nationalists made the arrangements above referred to, and had a series of conversations with the Makhnovists. Another source even has him contacting Vranghel's representative in Romania, General Herroys. This latter is very unlikely indeed, but feelers to the Nationalists in this desperate situation are a possibility. They did not come to anything.

At governmental level, there were acrimonious exchanges between Rakovski for the Ukraine and Chicherin for the Russian Federation on one side, and Averescu, succeeded by Take-Ionescu, one of the best-known figures of inter-war Romania, on the other. The initial protest appeared in *Izvestiya* on 23 September, six days after it was lodged, but thereafter the papers seem to have lost interest. The extradition of the insurgents as common criminals was demanded. In response the Romanians took up a formal and legal attitude, correctly pointing out that there was no criminal extradition treaty in force between the two countries. In a note to Chicherin on 29 October, Ionescu was speciously claiming, two months after the crossing, that he didn't know if Makhno was among the recent internees! The Russians were exceedingly irritated by the Romanian refusal, but even Trotsky could do little except pour his sarcasm on the Romanians for their behaviour.

Romanian motives are of some interest. Certainly, their relations with the Soviet government were bad, but they did not wish to go out of their way to antagonise a powerful neighbour. Makhno could be either a possible ally or a useful bargaining counter. These considerations would certainly explain why Makhno was still in Romania at the beginning of April 1922. On the Soviet side, a Chekist who had had experience of negotiations with the Makhnovists in 1919 was sent to the northern end of the Romanian border: it was anticipated that Makhno might, with or without Petliura, make an attempt to re-enter the Ukraine, perhaps from Poland.

The British military attache, Colonel Duncan, picked up Makhno's trail at the end of March 1922. Even then, he could get no official admission that a man called Alexeiev was in fact Makhno. Although the Romanians denied having helped Makhno or other insurgent leaders, they certainly adopted an attitude of benevolent neutrality.

Duncan forwarded an extract from a Romanian paper on Makhno's activities to the Foreign Office in London:

We stated in an article on the doings of General Vranghel that Russian refugees in our country did not always understand how to recognise hospitality, but agitated among the Russian population in Bessarabia. Now we have confirmation of this assertion. We learn that N., the well-known Ukrainian insurgent leader, accompanied by his wife and twelve companions, all fully armed, have been holding up peasant carts on the main roads and attempting by force to provide themselves with the means of reaching the Ukrainian frontier.

N., his wife, and six followers were arrested, but the others managed to escape. This man was formerly interned in the Military Hospital in Bucharest under the supervision of the secret police, whom he has managed to evade.¹

Since Makhno had escaped from house surveillance, and had also been picked up while on his way either directly or via Poland back into the Ukraine, the Romanians decided they had had enough of him. On 11 April they expelled him, his wife, and at least two of the other insurgents into Poland. There had been no change in the Soviet attitude meantime: the terms of an amnesty for opponents of the regime on 12 April 1922 excluded Skoropadsky, Petliura, Tyutyunnyk, Makhno, Vranghel, Kutepov and Savinkova select band!

Arrested immediately in Poland, Makhno and his companions were initially placed in a refugee camp, then transferred to a second such camp at Szczepiarno. The latter at least had also Nationalist internees. Nestor is said to have written a letter to Pilsudski, asking permission to seek political asylum in Czechoslovakia, but nothing came of this. But the Polish authorities did intercept his correspondence: they concluded that he was involved in a nationalist plot to stage a separatist uprising in Eastern Galicia, then under Polish rule, and join it to Soviet Russia. Plot there might have been, but it is difficult to imagine either Makhno or east or west Ukrainians planning to bring Eastern Galicia under Soviet rule. The touchiness of the Poles is explained by the fact that they had only recently re-acquired the territory from the successors of the Tsars, and were only too aware of the large and hostile Ukrainian minority there.

Nonetheless Makhno, Halyna, and two insurgents were arraigned under article 102 of the Polish penal code, namely treason to the state of Poland, carrying a possible sentence of ten to fifteen years. Once again the Bolsheviks tried extradition, again unsuccessfully for the same reason, no extradition treaty. Six months after arrival at Szczepiarno, Makhno was transferred to Mokotow prison in Warsaw, where he was held for thirteen months without trial. His wife was sent to Paviac prison, where she gave birth to a girl. Nestor was allowed to see her only once, his own health was poor with the reappearance of TB from his Butyrki days. One author who had known him in Katerynoslav came across him by chance in prison in Warsaw. Hearing that Makhno was in the prison, he got permission from a friend in the Ministry of the Interior to visit him. He found Makhno receptive and wanting to return to the Ukraine to continue the struggle against authority, especially the Bolsheviks.

Prosecution testimony was based almost entirely on the testimony of an agent provocateur working for Polish intelligence, who had been found in possession of an incriminating letter.

¹ Public Records Office, 8212-223.

Even the evidence of handwriting experts was largely inconclusive. Foreign and exiled anarchists suspected Russo-Polish collusion, but this did not materialise, perhaps because of the bad state of their relations, or because the Russians may have been unwilling to pay the political price demanded. After five days of trial the accused were acquitted on grounds of insufficient evidence. This was on 1 December 1923, but Makhno was not released until 4 January 1924, being directed to live in the district of Poznan under police supervision. Similar terms were applied to those of his companions still with him, presumably including his co-defendants. There is no reference to Halyna or his daughter Lucia.

In July 1924 he received permission for himself and his family to go to Danzig. On or soon after his arrival he was found to be quite ill with TB. As it was a communicable disease, the police took him to the City Hospital. He escaped from the hospital and lived illegally, while desperate attempts were made to get him into Germany before he could be arrested and imprisoned. Among those helping were Volin, already in Berlin after being thrown out of Russia in 1921, other anarchists, Russian and foreign, and the League for the Rights of Man. In the end he did get into Germany, but he had first to double back into Poland, and leave Halyna behind.

On arrival in Germany in the late winter of 1924-5, Makhno went to Berlin. There, apart from Volin and the anarchists of the German Black Cross, he met the German Rudolf Rocker and the Italian Ugo Fedeli, both well known in international anarchist circles. Fedeli had many conversations with Makhno, of which unfortunately only two fragments have survived. It may have been in Berlin that Fedeli obtained the collection of Makhnovist leaflets now in Amsterdam. Rocker had spent many years organising the Jewish workers of the east end of London, and had learnt Yiddish for the purpose. In speaking to Makhno he had to use Volin as interpreter, for Makhno spoke not a word of German. Rocker described the not atypical life of Volin in Berlin:

Our toughest task was to discover a spot where the Volin family of seven could all be under the same roof. The only shelter our committee could find for them was an attic which could be heated. ... He was . . . almost immune to outer circumstances and personal hardship. Having an unusual faculty for concentration, he could go on with his writing, apparently without difficulty, in the same attic where his whole family had to sleep, eat, and carry on their daily lives.²

Volin could at least scrape a living through writing propaganda in German, but for Makhno life would have been even more difficult. He was no cosmopolitan like Volin, Rocker, or Trotsky, but a homesick peasant with little knowledge of foreign cultures.

Volin preceded him to Paris, following an invitation from a leading French anarchist, Sebastian Faure. The attraction of Paris was that at the time living conditions were better there. By April 1925 at the latest Nestor had arrived there, but found the city no more congenial than Berlin. In a letter written soon after his arrival, he said: 'I am now staying in Paris, amongst a foreign people and political enemies whom I have so often declaimed against'.³ He was to stay in Paris for the rest of his life.

Always rather short with piercing eyes, he changed little in outward appearance, but much inside. He weighed about nine and a half stone, and would have weighed more but for his illness.

² Volin, 79/7, p. xii.

³ Semanov, p. 60.

Among his scars were a bullet that had smashed an ankle, making him limp. Another had scarred his cheek, although this has also been ascribed to his wife after a quarrel in Poland. He had married Halyna, who joined him in Paris from Poland, in the summer of 1919, at the height of his fame. She was the daughter of a police clerk on the South-Western Railway, the granddaughter of an ex-serf; her home town was Pischany Brid near Yelyzavethrad. She finished a four-year teacher training course at Dobrovelychkivka in 1916, and was appointed to a primary school in Hulyai Pole. She left with Makhno when the retreat started, more than a helpless spectator or a moral support, for she could handle a machine-gun. On the retreat, the insurgents passed through Pischany Brid. Her parents refused to leave, and the Red Army retreating behind them shot her father. She therefore had good reason to hate the Bolsheviks, but was a nationalist rather than an anarchist, initially attracted perhaps by the prestige of being the 'batko's woman'. They quarrelled in exile in France a great deal, separating and coming together again several times. She resented having to work to help keep him, and even at one time went so far as to apply to Moscow for permission to return, but nothing came of it.

Although it is the most recent, the exile in Paris is in many ways the most obscure part of Makhno's life; he was no longer a participant in great events, and records of those events now passed him by. One of the French anarchists, May Picqueray, who helped many foreign comrades to find their feet in Paris, put him and his family up in the country for a few days, then helped him find a room above a shop in Vincennes, thence soon after to rent a room and kitchen on the fourth floor in the rue Diderot nearby. Arshinov and his family lived on the floor above. He stayed there for the rest of his life. The flat and the environment were depressing, but they were little worse off in this respect than their French comrades.

Nestor never learnt French properly. He tried, and failed, to learn a dictionary by heart. He was desperately homesick, and the language barrier and frequent illness only made him more depressed. He worked sporadically, on a few occasions at his trade as a house painter. At one point he got work as a messenger boy with the sympathetic publisher of a pacifist journal, but this folded after a few months. At another, he and Arshinov were working on a Russian refugee scheme for handmade shoes which had a brief fashion, but this collapsed when French manufacturers took up the idea. He spent much of his time sitting on a bench in the Bois de Vincennes.

Anarchists throughout the world issued a number of appeals to help him survive: May Picqueray played a large part in getting it going, started by French anarchists and sympathisers in April 1929. From this, a Makhno Solidarity Committee was formed. The Union of Russian Anarchist-Communists in the Argentine issued a similar appeal. He had a monthly income, largely contributed by the CNT, the Spanish anarcho-syndicalist trade union, for the Spanish anarchists greatly admired him. Even so, not enough was coming in: receipts were about one-third of the target of 1000 francs, subsistence level. He picked up the money at the offices of *Le Libertaire*, the main French anarchist paper, the monthly visit latterly being his only contact with the French movement. Even this paltry sum diminished as some of the subscribers stopped sending money. In the summer of 1931 the French laid on a grand fete for him, billed as 'Solidarity for Makhno', but it was regular income he needed.

He was passionately fond of his daughter Lucia, and tended to spend money on her and go without himself, thus further weakening his health. In a Russian language paper, *Rassviet*, we read, in March 1933:

Dear Comrades, sad rumours have reached us that comrade Makhno, now in France, is greatly in need of help. A comrade writes: I have in mind Makhno. He is living all the time in an extremely serious situation. He is completely incapable of earning his living as a worker. Everything about him is broken and depressing. Naturally, he is able to get some sort of work with comrades, but he earns almost nothing from this. ... A short time ago his landlord took over the flat, and I don't know where he is living now'. It is our duty to help Makhno, who has suffered for the revolutionary cause, and for the great principles of our ideas.⁴

In October 1928 he had an unsuccessful operation for the removal of a dum dum bullet in his foot, and was in much pain from it thereafter. He had drunk quite a lot back in the Ukraine, but seems not to have done so in the early days of exile. With increasing personal and political isolation added to physical deterioration he drank more, especially when the TB spread to his second lung, probably in 1932.

In the early days of exile, one glass of wine only had made him tipsy at a dinner given in his honour by Italian anarchists in Paris, and he had liked nothing more than a discussion of old times in a cafe with friends over a bottle of wine. Trotsky was especially hated, and the anarchists were full of glee at his downfall in 1929, hoping that Stalin's turn would be next. On one such occasion he was in a Russian restaurant with May Picqueray, Alexander Berkman, the Jewish anarchist watchmaker Schwarzbart and others, when Petliura walked in. Makhno's attitude is not recorded, but Schwarzbart turned pale. The following day in June 1926 Schwarzbart assassinated Petliura, whom he held responsible for the pogroms in the Ukraine during the civil war. At his trial in October 1927, the defence blamed the pogroms on the Whites, peasants, and Makhnovists. A letter of protest from Makhno was not read out in court. Earlier in the year, in the spring, Makhno had been arrested at a political meeting, and along with other foreign anarchists present, given forty eight hours to quit the country. He was saved by the intervention of the French pacifist Louis Lecoin, who used a contact in the police to ensure the destruction of the Makhno dossier. He and Halyna had just come together again.

Despite these atrocious conditions, Makhno was politically active in Paris. In June 1926 he had the public debate with Kessel on anti-Semitism in the Ukraine. He wrote many articles both for the Russian language emigre anarchist press, such as *Delo Truda*, the anarchist-communist paper started in Paris by Arshinov, and *Probuzhdaenie*, a similar paper published in the United States. He also wrote for *Le Libertaire*, which reciprocated by devoting the entire issue of 3 August 1934 to him on the occasion of his death. Occasional articles for the non-anarchist emigre press, which he regarded as another chance to put his views across, were frowned on by fellow-anarchists, who saw in them a chance for enemies to attack Makhno and the anarchists in general for lack of principle.

Of great importance was the start he made on writing his memoirs. He was helped at the start by a fellow exile, Ida Mett-Lazarevich, who made vain efforts to put his indecipherable and meandering manuscripts into some sort of order. The two quarrelled over this, and Ida refused to make it up. He also quarrelled over the 'Platform' with his chief collaborator, Volin, with the result that, although the first volume appeared in Russian and French in 1929, selling only a few copies, the second and third volumes did not come out until after his death, in 1936 and 1937 respectively.

⁴ Nettlau Archive.

A projected fourth volume, covering the period after December 1918, has unfortunately never appeared. It was among the papers that Makhno took with him into hospital in his last illness, was taken by Volin on his death, passed to Volin's executor, Dubinski, on Volin's death in 1946, and was handed back to Volin's sons along with the other papers by Dubinski's son not long after the death of his father. The papers have not been seen since, and it is possible that they have found their way back to the Soviet Union.

As if personal difficulties were not enough, two other factors increased Nestor's misery. The state of the French movement was far from healthy. It was but a shadow of the pre-war CGT (General Confederation of Labour), many of whose members had been attracted into the new Communist Party in 1919-20. Even the CGT paper *L'Humanite* was taken over-hence *Le Liberaire*, a weekly, where *L'Humanite* had been a daily.

On top of this was the ideological quarrel over the 'Platform', which has already been briefly discussed. The original draft was published in 'Delo Truda'. Arshinov wrote most of it, although Makhno helped. The uncoordinated groups had been easily picked off by the Bolsheviks: a general union of anarchists, with a central executive committee for action, would ensure that this mistake would not be repeated. Makhno was the only prominent anarchist who agreed with Arshinov.

In 1927, Volin, supported by a number of other Russians, published a scathing attack on the 'Platform' and on Arshinov personally. The call for a central committee especially aroused their ire. However much the authors might delimit it, the term was irredeemably associated in anarchist minds with the Bolsheviks. Therefore the suggestion was totally unanarchist, and a reflection of the fact that Arshinov had been a Bolshevik before he had joined the anarchists way back in 1906. From there it was an easy step to accuse Arshinov of wanting to create an anarchist party. Arshinov quite naturally rejected this interpretation in a counter-attack on Volin and his supporters. Makhno then weighed in with his own attack on Volin, which took the form of belittling his role in the Makhnovschyna. This in turn brought in Alexander Berkman, Emma Goldman and other non-Russian anarchists into the controversy, almost all siding with Volin. At the 10th congress of the Union of Revolutionary Anarchist-Communists in the spring of 1930 the 'Platform' was well beaten. Although the controversy died down-it was the time of the rise of Hitler-it left Makhno with fewer friends than ever.

To crown all came the break with Arshinov in 1932. The latter announced he was reconciled with the Bolsheviks, and was planning to return to the Soviet Union. This he did in 1934, publicly endorsing the Stalin regime. The opponents of the 'Platform' felt they had been right all along, and for Makhno this was salt in the wound.

Arshinov even went as far as to publish a pamphlet entitled 'Anarchism and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat', to which Makhno made emphatic rejoinder in *Probuzhdenie* in 1933:

The brochure shows he has fallen completely into the Bolshevik mire. ... In his time he has castigated anarchist turncoats to Bolshevism, but he doesn't say he is now leaving anarchism; he is very craftily trying to introduce Bolshevism into anarchism and its ranks, using methods hateful to all socialists and anarchists, portraying Bolshevism as the natural outcome of the Russian revolution and of the workers' cause within it. ... Like the Bolsheviks he is impudent, stating that 'The state of the USSR is the germ of a new world, the world of liberated labour. ... Anarchists must enter

into close contact with this state and help it in its struggle with the dark forces of the old world.' Is this not a complete recantation in the name of Bolshevik treachery towards freedom and free labour?

... He [Arshinov] is vainglorious and power-seeking. Unknown in the Russian revolution till he was taken from his useless work

in Moscow in 1919 into the 'storm of revolutionary praxis', later ... he went off to write his history of the Makhnovschyna. As a result he became one of the activists in the international anarchist movement, and started thinking of himself as a leader of anarchism, for which position he sought and found theoretical foundations. It was an easy step, as easy as into Bolshevism.⁵

On 16 March 1934 Nestor was admitted to the pauper Tenon hospital, near the Pere Lachaise cemetery, in the last stages of TB. Halyna came to see him. She sensed a wish to mend fences with Volin before he died, and this was done. He got no better, and two operations early in July 1934, one on his old foot wound unsuccessfully opened up in 1927, the other major lung surgery involving an oxygen tube, mortally weakened him. Although still awake on 24 July, he lost consciousness that evening, and died early the following morning, a Wednesday, after briefly regaining consciousness, aged 44, but looking like a little old man.

The funeral and cremation took place on 28 July. Five hundred Russian, French, Spanish and Italian comrades attended at Pere Lachaise, the cemetery of the Commune. The French anarchist Benar spoke first, followed by Volin and others. Halyna was too overcome to do so. Volin used the occasion to refute the Bolshevik allegations of anti-Semitism. Then followed the cremation, the ashes placed in an urn, the urn set in the wall with a simple inscription bearing just his name.

Apart from the anarchist papers, Nestor's death was noted in *L'Humanite*, the daily *La Journee Parisienne*, and, rather surprisingly, the semi-official paper of the Foreign Office, *Le Temps*. In its issue of 28 July, it recorded a fitting comment which could be Makhno's epitaph:

It is certain that Denikin's defeat owed more to the peasant insurrection under the black Makhnovist banner than to the successes of Trotsky's regular army. The Makhnovist bands tipped the scales in favour of the Reds, and, if Moscow may now want to forget the fact, impartial history will remember it.⁶

⁵ Makhno, *Probuzhdenie*, No. 19, pp. 56-7.

⁶ Onatsky, p. 968.

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AV *Anarkhicheski Vestnik* (Berlin).

ARR *Arkhiv Russkoi Revoliutsii* (Berlin).

AR *Armia i Revoliutsia* (Moscow).

CI *Centre Internationale de Recherches sur VAnarchisme (annexe)* (Marseilles).

Ch. *Chasovoi* (Paris).

CP *Commission Preparatoire de l'Internationale de Federations Anarchistes* (Paris).

Cr. *Crapouillot* (Paris).

DT *Delo Truda* (Paris).

DTP *Delo Truda-Probuzhdenie* (Chicago).

KS *Katorga i Ssylka* (Moscow).

KA *Krasny Arkhiv* (Moscow).

LR *Litopys Revoliutsii* (Kharkiv).

NT *New Times* (Moscow).

NM *Novy Mir* (Moscow). *Plus Loin* (Paris).

Pr *Probuzhdenie* (Chicago).

PR *Proletarskaya Revoliutsiya* (Moscow).

RP *Rabochi Put* (Berlin).

RA *Revue Anarchiste* (Paris).

RD *Rozbudova Derzhavy* (Montreal).

RP *Russkoe Proshloe* (Petrograd).

RR *Russian Review* (New Haven, Connecticut).

SN *Soviet News* (London).

Su *Suchasnist* (Munich). *Terre Libre* (Paris).

TJ *The Journal of Economic History* (New York).

UIZ Ukrayinskyi htorychny Zhurnal (Kiyiv).
 VV Voenni Vestnik (Moscow).
 VR Voina i Revoliutsia (Moscow).
 Vol Volonta (Naples).
 VI Voprosy htorii (Moscow).
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