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Review: The Struggle Against the State and Other Essays

The Struggle Against the State and Other Essays.
Nestor Makhno. Edited by Alexandre Skirda. 114
pages. AK Press. £7.95.

Anarchist Communist Federation

1997

“Organisational responsibility and discipline should not be controversial: they are the travelling companions of the practice of social anarchism”.

This collection of articles was mainly published in *Dielo Trouda*, the excellent anarchist communist review produced in exile in Paris by Makhno, Piotr Arshinov and Ida Mett. Many of the articles address themselves to the problems of the Russian Revolution, and above all, the insurrectionary movement in the Ukraine, the Makhnovschina, inspired by Makhno himself. Others address themselves to the false accusation that Makhno and the movement were anti-Semitic and carried out pogroms against Jews. The Dielo Trouda group correctly analysed the role of the Bolsheviks and the nature of Soviet society. As Makhno remarks: “It has come

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to pass in History that the workers have defeated Capital, but the victory then slipped from their grasp, because some State power emerged, amalgamating the interests of private capital and those of State capitalism for the sake of success over the toilers”.

Also of great value are Makhno’s reflections on the Spanish Revolution of 1931. He notes with uncanny foresight that: “The FAI and the CNT (Reviewer’s note: The Iberian Anarchist Federation and the mass anarcho-syndicalist union the General Confederation of Labour) ...must not be afraid to assume the reins of the strategic, organisational and theoretical revolutionary leadership of the toilers’ movement. Obviously they will have to steer clear here of unity with the political parties generally and with the Bolshevik-communists in particular, for I imagine that their Spanish counterparts will be worthy imitators of their Russian mentors...So they will inevitably betray their allies and the very cause of the revolution”. If only the Spanish libertarian movement had heeded these words in 1936! Indeed Makhno has sharp criticisms of the Spanish movement, apt for anarchism internationally and still pertinent today. “...because anarchism possesses no hard and fast program, because the anarchist activities that have been carried out have been, and are still, conducted amidst the most utter dispersion, rather than springing from a tactical unity determined and enlightened by a theoretical unity, by a single shared goal”.

This leads on to Makhno’s observations on organisation, some of which are included here. In his direct, no-nonsense way, he effectively argues for the need for efficient organisation and saying that: “Anarchism can no longer remain walled up inside the narrow parameters of a marginal thinking to which only a few tiny groups operating in isolation subscribe”.

Throughout this collection of articles one is conscious of the intransigent and clear sighted revolutionary spirit of Makhno. It is a pity that this is not adequately served by the book. The original French edition included, in addition to the

articles printed in English, Alexander Berkman’s account of the Makhnovists, as well as *Memories of a Makhnovist Partisan*, by Ossip Tsebry. Now admittedly, this last text has been issued as a separate pamphlet by the Kate Sharpley Library, but it would have been nice to have had this edition in its entirety, especially given the price! Similarly, the translation work is sometimes sloppy. Despite these reservations, the book should be read by all libertarians and those searching for alternatives to Leninism.