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Nestor Makhno

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(from a report made to comrades on January 21 1933)

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Comrades, before I share with you my memories of Comrade Nikolai Rogdaev, I shall allow myself to digress for a minute and say a few words about our heavy losses generally in the last 12 to 15 years.

It's painful to dwell on this subject – it's almost impossible not to succumb to overwhelming emotions of grief, of deep pain and sorrow – because of the deaths of a whole series of renowned and steadfast comrades who were totally dedicated to our movement. It's difficult to speak about this and even more difficult to see it happening and be helpless to do anything about it.

As you are all well aware, only a week has passed since we buried an old, and for all of us, dear and unforgettable comrade – Maria Isidorovna Goldsmit¹, also known in our revolutionary

¹ Maria Isidorovna Goldsmit (1858-1933) was a close associate of Peter Kropotkin for many years, in fact his closest associate during the period 1897-1917, and like her mentor combined serious scientific work (she was a professor of biology at the Sorbonne) with developing and publicizing anarchist ideas. She

press under the pseudonyms Maria Korn and Isidin. Standing at the grave of this comrade, most of us I'm sure felt like orphans without her; for most of us are well aware of what we have lost in this comrade we buried. We respected her, or at least most of us did², not only as a comrade and a friend but as one of the pioneers of anarchist revolutionary doctrine who, along with Kropotkin, Élisée Reclus, Cherkezov³, and others, developed and propagated that doctrine over the last 35 years.

But – I repeat – over the last 12 to 15 years we have been hit by a whole series of terrible physical and moral blows of the same type. It's almost as if some sort of dark cloud hovers over the ranks of the Russian anarchist movement and plucks from our midst our best practical and theoretical human resources. We experience this and we suffer – we suffer much more than any of our comrades of other countries.

At the moment our movement was locked in a life-and-death struggle to save the Russian Revolution, we lost P. A. Kropotkin and one of the outstanding popularizers of syndicalism and someone renowned for his polemics with the foes of anarchism –

helped Makhno with the preparation of his memoirs and also assisted him financially, despite expressing strong disagreement in the anarchist press with the Platform, the program developed by Makhno and Peter Arshinov in the 1920's based on their experience of the Russian Revolution.

² At this point in his life Makhno was not on good terms with many anarchists, having engaged in sharp polemics on behalf of the Platform. Politically he was rather isolated, as his attempts to reconstruct the anarchist movement had been rebuffed and his main collaborator, Peter Arshinov (1887-1937), had apparently defected to the Bolsheviks. In the past he had always written warmly about Arshinov, but in this essay one senses a certain peevish tone.

³ Varlaam Cherkezov (1846-1925) was a Georgian anarchist of aristocratic origins. As well as being a revolutionary activist he devoted his considerable literary talents to libertarian critiques of social democracy.

Comrade Gogeliia⁴. And around 1925 we lost Comrade Cherkezov, in 1926 we lost Karelin⁵, in 1931 we lost Comrade Raevsky⁶, and in 1932 we lost Comrade Nikolai Rogdaev⁷ who had been exiled by the Bolsheviks. And at the beginning of the current year, a year fraught with omens of political and social catastrophes, we lost Maria Isidorovna Goldsmit-Korn-Isidin.

All these people were nourished on the soil of Russian revolutionary rebelliousness and developed into titans of anarchism – both as activists and theoreticians – not only in the Russian but also in the international anarchist movement. We could take each one of them and say many fine things and draw valuable lessons, and that applies not only to the younger generation but also to those of us who see ourselves as the most senior and experienced guardians of our movement. For despite the teachings of our movement, we're inclined to say – irresponsibly, without blushing or feeling

⁴ Georgi Gogeliia (1878-1924) was a Georgian anarcho-communist who was attracted to anarchism while studying abroad. A prolific writer and editor, his revolutionary activities were hampered by chronic tuberculosis.

⁵ Apollon Karelin (1863-1926) studied to be a lawyer before embarking on a long march through the Russian revolutionary Left, becoming an anarcho-communist in 1911. During the Russian Revolution he occupied important government positions thanks to his espousal of "Soviet anarchism" which advocated collaboration with the Bolsheviks. In later years, unable to pursue political activities in Russia, he contributed articles to the same foreign anarchist periodicals which published Makhno's writings.

⁶ Maxim Rayevsky (188? -1931) was a Russian anarchist who became an anarcho-syndicalist after studying abroad. He edited anarcho-syndicalist periodicals in France and the United States before returning to Russia in 1917. He supported the Bolsheviks during the Civil War, but later organized an underground anarchist youth group. His anarchist activities were not as dangerous to him in the Soviet Union as his supposed friendly relations with Trotsky.

⁷ Nikolai Rogdaev (1880-1932) died in Tashkent but the exact date of his death remains unknown. According to one tradition he was stricken with a heart attack in a street named after Sacco and Vanzetti. His real name was Nikolai Ignatevich Musil, and he came from a family of Czechs who had emigrated to Russia.

ashamed: “We don’t acknowledge individuals, we’re against the cult of personality on principle...”

We, the Russian anarchists, could sort of reconcile ourselves to the passing of Kropotkin, Cherkezov, and Karelin, since their deaths were almost natural: their advanced age drained their physical strength, removing them from us and our movement and warning both them and us of their impending deaths. Nevertheless we can’t possibly reconcile ourselves with the deaths of the other comrades mentioned above. In particular, all (or almost all) of us present here cannot accept the premature, completely unexpected – I would even say incomprehensible – death of our comrade and friend Maria Isidorovna Goldsmit⁸. But let’s not blame the dead. And now it has fallen to me to speak at this meeting about Nikolai Rogdaev. I’m only mentioning Maria Isidorovna because her death has cast a shadow over our meeting. We are gathered here to honour the memory of Comrades Nikolai Rogdaev and Maria Goldsmit and I believe a tribute to Maria Isidorovna will be delivered by another comrade. I have been personally entrusted with speaking about Comrade Rogdaev and I welcome the opportunity of making this report to you, comrades, about this indefatigable and distinguished revolutionary-anarchist fighter of underground Russia.

What sort of person was Comrade Rogdaev?

Nikolai Rogdaev was born into a family of the intelligentsia in Vizhma province. From an early age he was attracted to the ideas of Narodnaya Volya [People’s Freedom] and was persecuted by the satraps of autocratic Russia. At the beginning of the 20th century he went abroad, where he met P. A. Kropotkin, É. Reclus, and Maria

⁸ Maria Goldsmit took her own life on January 11 1933. She was suffering from depression brought about by the death of her mother (also a revolutionary) only two days earlier after a long and devastating illness.

in a timely fashion to “Probuzhdeniye” because the author had lacked the funds for postage. Then he became dangerously ill and ended up in the hospital.

Korn (then still young and not yet active as an anarchist). His encounters with these comrades, as well as the fact he was already fluent in two foreign languages, helped him to a broader understanding of the ideas of anarchism; previously he was only familiar with the Bakunin type of insurrectionary Russian anarchism of the 1870’s and 1880’s. From Western Europe, Rogdaev made his way to Galicia. Here, in the cities of Stanislavov [now Ivano-Frankivsk] and Lviv, he made contact with young revolutionary anarchists, and created a small group of anarcho-communists (7-10 persons). With the help of this group he obtained documents which allowed him to return illegally to Russia at the end of 1902.

On his way north towards his own native region, he stopped to visit one of his acquaintances from Paris and Geneva – a teacher from the city of Briansk in Orlov Province. With the help of friends he was able to create an anarcho-communist group in Briansk. He ended up spending a lot of time in Briansk because he became absorbed in propaganda work among the workers and among the intelligentsia. But as soon as the group expanded and developed its own activity in the areas of propaganda work and study circles, it attracted the attention of the police. The police arrested one of the study circles and were on the trail of Rogdaev. He fled from Briansk to the city of Nezhin in Chernigov Province. In Nezhin Rogdaev met some people he knew from Briansk who were also on the run from the police but who had family connections in Nezhin. At the request of these friends Rogdaev remained in Nezhin and helped create another anarcho-communist group.

A number of excellent working class propagandists came out of this Nezhin group – personally taught by Rogdaev (in Briansk and Nezhin he was known as “the teacher”). By means of activists

from these two cities anarchism was introduced into the Briansk engineering works⁹ in the city of Yekaterinoslav.

In the summer of 1903 Nikolai Rogdaev was charged by his comrades with the mission of going abroad again to set up a network which could transmit a steady supply of anarchist literature and weapons. Upon crossing the Russian border, Rogdaev met with the members of his first group in Lviv. He learned that this group had mushroomed and had created small militant anarcho-communist groups in a number of Galician cities. They had also established close relations with an group of Austrian anarcho-communists in Vienna. Rogdaev conceived the idea of unifying all these groups into a single organization. But after their first conference he was convinced that “the Slavic and German temperaments are not compatible,” and rejected his own notion. But he visited Vienna and the Viennese comrades and ended up adopting some of their practices while passing on some of his own. From there he travelled on to Geneva, Paris, Brussels, and London. Here he again met with veteran anarchists and collected left-wing literature, although regrettably not enough of it was anarchist, which he sent through his Galician comrades to Russia. He smuggled weapons himself to Nezhin. However this time he didn't tarry in Nezhin. He had his sights set on Yekaterinoslav where his comrades from Nezhin and Briansk were in great need of a good anarchist-propagandist. Thus the indefatigable revolutionary fighter Nikolai Rogdaev made tracks for Yekaterinoslav. In this city among the workers of the Briansk steel plant Rogdaev soon made his mark as a revolutionary-anarchist propagandist, organizing the first Yekaterinoslav anarcho-communist group from such self-sacrificing fighters as Rublevsky, Yan, Olik, and a number of others. (Olik subsequently threw himself from a

⁹ The Briansk Engineering Works in Yekaterinoslav was a steel rolling mill started in the 1880's by entrepreneurs from the Russian city of Briansk. By the early 1900's it employed as many as 10,000 workers. The plant still exists.

paper “Rassvet” [Dawn]. The “Probuzhdeniye” comrades didn't bother to explain that “Rassvet” wasn't an anarchist publication, but rather the organ of a Russian emigrant worker society. Instead they rushed to accuse the Moscow comrades of being agents of Soviet power, possibly even agents of the GPU. And this was at a time when this Soviet power with its GPU was tormenting and continues to torment the bodies and minds of these comrades.

It's true, all this has little to do with our memories about Comrade Nikolai Rogdaev. But it's worth mentioning these things now for thanks to such goings on we have committed mistake after mistake, and ruined our great common cause here in emigration. And the GPU, slowly but surely, destroyed the life of a great pioneer of Russian revolutionary anarchism – the glorious rebel anarchist-communist Nikolai Rogdaev. And now this rebel is neither beside us nor far from us. He died while deprived of freedom and normal nourishment and lies on the remote Transcaspian steppe... But let all of this serve as a lesson for the future – both for us and for the younger generation.

And you, dear friend, our comrade and brother, rest in peace. For your cause is our cause. It will never die. Renewed, re-invigorated, beneficial for the lives and struggles of toiling humanity, it will find its resonance in successive generations of the living...

Friend, we will always remember you!

Cursed be those who vilely slandered you and tormented you in their petty, mean-spirited fashion, slowly but methodically. They tormented your spirit and your heart until you were dead.

France, 1933.

From the editorial board of “Probuzhdeniye”:

This article of Comrade Makhno was found among his papers after his death. It was forwarded to us by G. Kuzmenko²¹, who informs us that it was not submitted

²¹ Galina Kuzmenko (1892-1978) was Makhno's (estranged) wife, who received his papers after his death. This archive has not survived.

outstanding abilities as an educationalist and transferred him from the Caucasus to Moscow.

In Moscow Rogdaev encountered long-time adherents of the ideas of revolutionary anarchism, people experienced in both theory and practice, and found a common language with them. He occupied himself with reading articles and reports about anarchism in Western Europe; in particular he followed the activities and writings of Malatesta, F. Domela Nieuwenheis, and others, and drew them to our attention... And he took an active part in analyzing the state of our Russian anarchist movement. But he soon found such important work could not be pursued in the shadow of the G.P.U. Rogdaev then made a request to our "Group of Russian Anarchists in Paris." He asked us to look into finding a printer and the necessary funds to publish an "Almanac" on the history of the anarchist movement in Russian before and during the Revolution. He promised to prepare all the materials for this Almanac in Russia, with the help of our friends there. He placed great hope in such an Almanac as an important aid in teaching our young anarchist generation about practical ideological work.

Alas, this was not to be! Arshinov at this time was busy developing the "theoretical" foundations (if one may call it that) of a new direction in anarchism and, apparently, could not devote the necessary attention to this great project of Comrade Rogdaev and his circle of friends. Or maybe he just wasn't interested. As for myself, I had already left the group and suitable people for such a project were lacking among the remaining members. And it wasn't feasible to hand the project off to the American comrades, since the majority of them were firm supporters of Arshinov while the minority was weak. In addition, I had personally become somewhat estranged from most of my American friends by that time, partly by my own fault and partly because of the splits that were happening. I couldn't approach the "Probuzhdeniye" [Awakening] group about the Almanac because some of the comrades of this group had attacked our Moscow comrades for criticizing the news-

steamer into the Dnieper while being fired upon and perished in the turbulent river.) And in another two or three months our Nikolai had created a group made up exclusively of intelligentsia in the settlement of Amur (near Yekaterinoslav), a group later headed by the elder Ozersky – Moisei Ozersky. This group concentrated exclusively on terrorism and was a school for terrorists. Rogdaev himself proved to be a reliable and inspirational role model for this field of activity. However, as usually happened, he was soon compelled to flee Yekaterinoslav and its environs. At the beginning of 1904 Comrade Rogdaev was accompanied by Moisei Ozersky to the Austrian border and, with a heavy heart, he left Russia.

For the time being Comrade Rogdaev remained abroad. Only some of his comrades in Nezhin and Mosei Ozersky knew his whereabouts. More than a year passed by. Then it was autumn 1905. The total defeat of the bourgeois-autocratic system's adventure in the Far East at the hands of Japan became widely known. Inside Russia revolts of revolutionary toilers flared up. In the big cities barricades were thrown up and fiercely defended. Rogdaev rushed across the border into Russia. But now he did not stay in the places where he had previously created anarcho-communist groups. He visited them only to let them know he was still alive and that sooner or later they would see him in the forefront of their own forces fighting to make anarchism a reality in practice. Right away he took off for Moscow. He believed whole-heartedly that Moscow would be the centre from which would radiate the impulse of anarchist practice and which would provide moral inspiration for all the anarchist groups striving for the Social Revolution. For during this period in the life of Russia only we, the anarcho-communists, were putting forth the slogans of the Social Revolution, and only we defended these slogans to our last breath...

Rogdaev arrived in Moscow when the Revolution was already losing ground in the desperate struggle with the forces of reaction.

Moreover he was not able to make contact with the people he had been referred to in Nezhin. So he was forced to look for kindred spirits in the streets, at the gates and barricades, and among the crowds of people. And he, as a true revolutionary possessed of the gift of oratory and the passion required of a fighter at such moments, quickly made the necessary contacts in the masses of revolutionary people and made his way through everything to the Red Gates, where he was able to get accurate information about those districts where the anarchists, and the revolutionary workers supporting them, had erected barricades and were defending them with great heroism. Two or three days later Rogadaev made his way to these barricades and, under the pseudonym (if I'm not mistaken) of "Nepimirimy" ["the Implacable"], he took part with his customary revolutionary enthusiasm in the activities going on at these barricades and in these districts. But Rogadaev was not able to display his revolutionary-anarchist capabilities to the full extent on the Moscow barricades. For within a week the revolutionary forces of Moscow were defeated. The city and its suburbs were once again in the grip of the black reaction of the bourgeois-autocratic system. A wave of mass searches, arrests, and shootings rolled over Moscow. The bourgeoisie exacted a cruel revenge against the Revolution and the bearers of its ideas. Rogadaev made his way out of Moscow with the greatest difficulty into the countryside and then fled to the far revolutionary South – to Yekaterinoslav. That was the time when the South had not yet surrendered – in the cities and large villages the revolutionary toilers were still putting up a desperate fight against the attacks of the Reaction. Here Rogadaev, along with two or three comrades who were enthusiasts like himself, put together a Yekaterinoslav organization of anarcho-communists from the previously created groups. Upon his initiative and with his direct participation this organization carried out the expropriation of a mail train on the Yekaterinoslav railway line. The money taken in this action was used to set up a print

Lenin, for the Cheka clamped down on him so he not only could not speak at any kind of meetings, but he also lost the freedom to travel from one place to another. After this everything he did was subject to the approval and supervision of the Cheka, and his life was basically run by the Cheka. So it happened that Rogadaev had, so to speak, to take on a new revolutionary anarchist orientation. He contemplated going underground and being more active in that way, just he had served our movement earlier. For this purpose he began to recruit reliable comrades from among our young and energetic friends. But he encountered many obstacles. By that time a whole bunch of long-time activists of Russian anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism had already gone to work in Soviet institutions – some because they were worn down by hunger, others because they had simply switched loyalties. The Bolshevik brass, quite familiar with Rogadaev, used him as a warning example for our comrades who were working for them, condemning him for being secretly hostile to Soviet power and increasing the Cheka's surveillance of his activities. Confronted with this surveillance and similar deliberately imposed stresses on the life of Comrade Rogadaev, our young comrades were naturally hesitant about going underground, and Rogadaev found himself alone in seeking to follow that path.

And so our valiant Nikolai, suffering mental torment and exhausted physically, batted about by the cursed paws of the Cheka, suffered stoically from starvation for several months. But in the end he took a post in the Commissariat of Education, rapidly progressing to the position of general secretary of the Department of Renewal, part of the Caucasus Executive Committee of Soviets in Tiflis. Here he created an atlas and dictionary of Oriental studies for this department, and advanced to the first ranks of scientific workers in this field. Simultaneously he established contact with anarchists abroad, in particular with our group in Paris. He wrote articles and provided material support for our journal "Delo Truda." Senior Bolshevik officials took note of Comrade Rogadaev's

So because of Volin's presence in the Makhnovist movement (although Volin had in fact already left our movement), Uncle Vanya refused to respond to my repeated appeals to join the Makhnovshchina. And of course I could do nothing. I no longer had the time or the strength to convince him that Volin was no longer part of our movement...

However I knew that Uncle Vanya did not cease to take an interest in the fate of the movement I directed. As proof of this I can mention his numerous letters, as well as a remarkable declaration he made to Lenin.

As is well known, in 1920 Vladimir Ulyanov-Lenin, a close personal friend of Uncle Vanya from emigration, summoned him to Moscow – to the Kremlin – and offered him, since he knew European languages, a high post in the staff of the commander-in-chief of the Western Front. At the same time he asked Uncle Vanya to visit Makhno's headquarters and convince Makhno to submit to "Soviet" power.

Then Uncle Vanya replied to Lenin:

"As you well know, Vladimir, Soviet power under the direction of your party destroyed all the anarchist organizations. As a veteran revolutionary-anarchist, this precludes my accepting your offer of a position...

"As for trying to convince Makhno, that's quite impossible. You have done everything possible to compel Makhno to come forward on behalf of the toiling population against the tyranny imposed by Soviet power. These working people have created a revolutionary insurgency which recognizes Makhno as its leader."

Lenin spoke at length with Uncle Vanya on this subject, but the latter would not agree to anything and returned again to Samara. However he soon felt the consequences of his frank discussion with

gained access to the Okhrana files, which vindicated Rogdaev but also implicated several formerly prominent members of the anarchist movement. For details, see Michael Confino, *Anarchistes en Exil* (Paris, 1995), pp. 460, 467.

shop at the place of residence of the Tsar himself – at Livada near the city of Yalta.

The publication of timely literature, in particular flyers appealing for help for the organization, soon evoked a sympathetic reaction among workers, peasants, and the revolutionary intelligentsia. Comrade Rogdaev expertly selected a team from within the organization which he turned into fine propagandists and organizers. It was thanks to his efforts that the Yekaterinoslav organization was the source of a number of excellent activists of anarchism, some of whom were responsible for inspiring and directing that organization over a period of many years. In fact some of them are still around, despite all the machinations of the Bolshevik dictatorship which has hounded them from one place of exile to another.

And it was while he was based in Yekaterinoslav that Nikolai Rogdaev, under the pseudonym Uncle Vanya¹⁰, became famous throughout Russia. He was particularly renowned for his selfless courage in rescuing condemned prisoners who were being conveyed under escort from the court where they had just been sentenced to death to the prison where the sentence was to be carried out.

Such daring enterprises, meticulously planned, were characteristic of the Yekaterinoslav organization under the ideological and organizational leadership of the tenacious "Uncle Vanya," who usually played the primary role in these schemes.

Rogdaev – Uncle Vanya – was responsible for splitting the Socialist-Revolutionary organization in Sevastapol at the beginning of 1907 when 50 members, the most outstanding workers of the organization of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party, led by Comrade Mitrofan, accepted the ideas of anarcho-communism and formed their own organization under the slogan "Freedom

¹⁰ "Uncle Vanya" is the title character of a popular play by Chekov. Applied to Rogdaev the name was surely ironic, for the fictional Vanya was an indolent, incompetent failure.

Is Inside Us”. Mind you, Uncle Vanya was the last person to brag about this matter, especially since the person officially responsible for the SR split was Comrade Sergei Borisov¹¹, leader of the international group of anarcho-communists. But Comrade Borisov would never have made any headway in this direction on his own without “Uncle Vanya.” Moreover, in all the negotiations and debates with Mitrofan’s SR group the leading role was taken by Uncle Vanya. At the instigation of Uncle Vanya the apartment of Comrade Borisov was used to set a trap for the most prominent officials of the Sevastapol police force and the local section of the Okhrana including its chief. As a result almost all of these persons were blown up by a specially prepared bomb of the Macedonian type.

In the area of debates with opponents of anarchism, Uncle Vanya never let down our propagandists. Always, when our opponents called for a debate on principles, our comrades would send for Uncle Vanya. And our opponents always suffered defeat and their ranks were most often depleted while ours expanded, for the workers and revolutionary intellectuals abandoned them and transferred to our side.

In 1907 Uncle Vanya represented Russian anarchism at the International Congress of anarchists in Amsterdam.

At the Amsterdam Congress Uncle Vanya enjoyed a well-deserved status as the first among equals of the representatives of the Russian anarcho-communist movement.

Representatives of the anarchist movement from other countries who were present at this congress speak even now of the impact of Nikolai Rogdaev – Uncle Vanya. The delegates were thrilled by his speech, which was characterized by its serious tone – full of the profundity of anarchist thought and revolutionary élan. One

¹¹ Sergei Makarovich Borisov (1884-?) was born in Kharkov and began work there as a lathe operator at the age of 16. At first he joined a social-democratic group, but soon switched to the anarchists. See Viktor Savchenko, *Anarchist-terrorists in Odessa (1903-1913)*, (Odessa, 2006) [in Russian].

– Lopukhin¹⁹. It was evidence supplied by Lopukhin which led to the exposure of the provocateur Azef, who worked for both the Socialist-Revolutionaries and the tsarist Okhrana. The revolutionary Russian emigrant community regarded Burtsev as an “infallible” expert in the exposure of provocateurs and set him on a pedestal. Our anarchist emigrant milieu also did not refrain from this uncritical adulation. For some reason Burtsev was regarded even by the anarchists as a sage and they often referred matters to him, matters both great and small, and asked him to investigate them and offer his considered opinion. So it was that some lowlife types cast aspersions on Comrade Nikolai Rogdaev, whispering behind his back that he was a provocateur. The context was as follows: the activities of the Russian anarchist emigration suffered a setback because one of their active workers was arrested by the police. Our community immediately consulted Burtsev for his opinion. But Burtsev only speculated that this provocation obviously originated with a prominent anarchist activist, and that the most prominent anarchist activist was Rogdaev. This provided a weapon in the hands of these low life types, who were trying to undermine Rogdaev’s reputation as the leading pioneer of underground Russian anarchism. Because of the vile rumours circulating, a number of experienced anarchist activists, including Orgeiani [Gogeliia] and M. Korn, set up an unofficial court to try Rogdaev’s case. This court investigated these patently false allegations and categorically rejected them.]²⁰

¹⁹ Alexei Lopukhin (1864-1928), once the highest police official in Russia, was a liberal who objected to police provocations and cooperated with Burtsev.

²⁰ Throughout the first half of Rogdaev’s revolutionary career, he was dogged by accusations that he was an agent of the Okhrana. Previous to the episode Makhno mentions, such accusations had been made by the Bund (a Jewish socialist party active in the Russian Empire) and Bulgarian social-democrats. The only basis for these accusations was that he had been arrested several times by the Okhrana (in 1900, 1901, 1903, and 1906) and released after a relatively short detention. This persecution so incensed Rogdaev that he went on a witch-hunt himself, trying to expose Okhrana agents in the Russian anarchist movement abroad. After the Russian Revolution of February 1917, the revolutionaries

region, Lenin and Trotsky declared me and our insurgency outside the law and sent their own slaves against us and against the Revolution. And Uncle Vanya and the courier remained in Samara and immediately released a fiery proclamation of protest which explained to the toilers about the dark treachery of the Bolsheviks, about how they misled their own Red Army soldiers-slaves, and hurled them against us...

After that I was left almost alone with our glorious insurgent peasants and workers. Arshinov disappeared around that time, but I never ceased to think of Uncle Vanya and regret that he was not beside me.

But the next few months were fortunate for me. My partisans inflicted heavy defeats on the Denikenist corps in Ukraine. I cleared eleven uyezds and two gubernia capitals¹⁷ of Denikenist troops and their civilian apparatus. Our comrades began to flock around again; but now I was less naive in my dealings with them. My attention was fixed on Samara, on Uncle Vanya. At the first convenient moment I sent another courier to him. And what did I receive from my beloved Uncle Vanya? He sent a message back by my courier: "I have received information (perhaps it isn't true) that Mikhailovich [read Volin – N. M.] is playing a large, even dominating, role in your movement. I've never had any personal relations with him except for the fact that he once stuck a knife in my back; this I will never forget..."

[Note: This refers to the time when Mikhailovich (Volin) worked for V. L. Burtsev¹⁸, who had access to a former chief of the Okhrana

¹⁷ Yekaterinoslav and Berdiansk, the capitals of Yekaterinoslavskaya and Tavricheskaia gubernias (provinces) respectively.

¹⁸ Vladimir Burtsev (1862-1942) was a Russian revolutionary scholar and publisher renowned for exposing agents of the Okhrana (tsarist secret police). Ironically Volin, who had fled Russia in 1907, left the Socialist-Revolutionary Party and joined the anarchists after Burtsev's exposure of the double agent Evno Azef.

of the most reserved anarchists – Errico Malatesta – praised this speech enthusiastically, and Comrade Luigi Fabbri still remembers the moment with a sense of rapture. Rogdaev – Uncle Vanya or simply "Uncle", as he was known in the South of Russia among anarchist workers and peasants – presented his experiences as a revolutionary-anarchist militant. But rather than summarize his speech at the Amsterdam Congress it would be better to refer our young comrades to the version published in the journal "Burevestnik" for 1907, or even better – the "Appendix of the Russian Anarcho-communists to the Amsterdam Congress." The latter document was distributed in Russian as a special brochure which went through several printings and assisted greatly in the growth and activity of our groups. By consulting these documents, the comrades can form their own opinions about what Comrade Rogdaev meant to our movement and what sort of role he played in its development...¹²

At the beginning of 1908 Nikolai Rogdaev again appeared in Russia. This was the time when the Yekaterinoslav organization had a number of remarkable successes in its campaign of terror against tsarist satraps as well as rescuing condemned prisoners from convoys and prisons. Especially noteworthy was the spectacular rescue of Comrades Tato and Shura Mudrov from the Sevastopol prison on June 21 1907 (by means of blowing a hole in its wall). Preparations were made to break our comrades out of the Yekaterinoslav and Simferopol prisons, and Uncle Vanya was absorbed completely in organizing these escapes. Mind you, only the Simferopol operation was successful. He was not successful in Yekaterinoslav, and our best comrades together with some Socialist-Revolutionaries were shot down on the roof of the rear part of the prison structure, and many others were shot by prison

¹² The minutes of the Congress have been published in English as *The International Anarchist Congress - Amsterdam (1907)*, ed. M. Antonioli and N. McNab (Edmonton, 2009). The Appendix to this volume, pp. 161-270, contains Rogdaev's reports on the situation in Russia.

guards and soldiers by order of the governor. But all this happened due to causes originating inside the prison.¹³

Because of this action by the governor, Uncle Vanya and the Yekaterinoslav organization organized his assassination as well as the killing of a number of other high officials of the city and the provincial government.

At the beginning of summer Uncle Vanya carried out a whole series of debates with Social-Democrats and Socialist-Revolutionaries near Yekaterinoslav, in Aleksandrovsk, and near the village of Voznesenka. These debates were conducted at night in fields or in clearings in the woods. Each of the sides in the debate brought their own members and friends, so often as many as several hundred people showed up. Our boeviks [militants] had their work cut out for them in these situations because security for these debates was the exclusive responsibility of our comrades, who were trusted by both the Social-Democrats and the Socialist-Revolutionaries.

As a result of these serious and protracted debates, the Social-Democrats, it's true, were scarcely affected, but the Socialist-Revolutionaries at Yekaterinoslav and even more so at Alexandrovsk and Vosnesenka were completely vanquished. Their best members, such as Borisov, Yatsenko, and Chaika – and even whole committees of the SR organizations, crossed over to our ranks.

After this the name Uncle Vanya passed from mouth to mouth in the villages and factories as a great and intransigent fighter for justice. Masses of workers and peasants made contact with the anarchists to request over and over again that meetings be set up which would be addressed by "Uncle Vanya." But the police were hot on the trail of Uncle Vanya and he was forced to keep on the move. He

¹³ This horrific event occurred on April 29 1908. Thirty-two prisoners were killed and another 50 wounded. Two years later Makhno himself was incarcerated in the same cell in the Yekaterinoslav prison where the ill-fated escape attempt began.

ers, and the progressive intelligentsia awaited him with joy and impatience. And of course this poster had a great effect on all our groups and we prepared a warm welcome for Uncle Vanya.

But the arrival of these two titans of anarchism (as they were at that time) didn't happen because the iron hordes of the German-Austrian Army were sweeping across the whole of Ukraine and were already at the approaches to Yekaterinoslav. But still the workers and peasants hoped and waited and constantly pestered yours truly at congresses and numerous meetings with their question "When is Uncle coming?"

At the beginning of 1919, when I was already at the head of the Revolutionary Insurgent Movement (Makhnovist), Uncle Vanya moved from Moscow to Samara and worked in the Samara federation of anarcho-communists.

The movement directed by me spread and freed a huge territory from the Denikenist pomeshchik-backed counterrevolutionary hordes. All the best forces of our Gulai-Polye group of anarcho-communists were thrown into the fray. There were few anarchists from elsewhere and the majority of them were from Jewish families and were poorly informed about peasant issues. Arshinov occupied the job of my personal secretary and was also absorbed in producing the insurgent newspaper "The Road to Freedom."

A group of 35 anarcho-communists arrived from Ivano-Vosnesensk but they included few propagandists. I felt that in a month or two we would find ourselves unable to provide propaganda services to the liberated regions. We needed Uncle Vanya so I, after consulting first with Arshinov, and then with the army staff and the Insurgents' Council, provided a courier with the appropriate documents and the necessary funds, and sent him to Samara to Uncle Vanya. But half way to Samara the Bolsheviks arrested him and several days passed before I was able to secure his release. Then it took several more days to prepare another courier. But before this second courier reached Samara, and before Uncle Vanya and his partner could get ready to depart for our

little time in it. Of the ways of our movement before Rogdaev's emigration they knew nothing at all.

And Uncle Vanya didn't interfere with them. On the contrary, burning with the sincere revolutionary enthusiasm which he always and everywhere displayed, he applied himself to propagandizing the ideas of anarcho-communism without, however, disdaining the dirty work which the "swelled heads" in the anarchist movement always avoided, believing their role was to sit in federations and conferences or on the editorial board of their journals, busying themselves with scribbling on paper.

In Petrograd – present-day Leningrad – there was scarcely a factory or plant where Uncle Vanya had not spoken after his return from abroad, spreading the ideas of anarchism. And, arriving in Moscow in the spring in 1918, he continued his propagandizing efforts on behalf of the Moscow Federation of Anarchists. Here he again clashed in debates with the Bolshevik big shots – Lenin, Trotsky, and the rest. He demolished them in fine style, pulling the audience to his own side. But standing behind the Bolshevik leaders at that time was an already powerful political force – the Cheka. As a result these leaders were free to do as they pleased and shamefully trampled on the body of the Revolution...

During the same spring, the Bureau of Anarchists of the Donets Basin announced in its organ "The Anarchist," with corresponding posters sent to all the cities and large villages, that in the near future two anarchists – Yuda Grossman-Roshchin¹⁶ and Uncle Vanya – would be arriving in Yekaterinoslav to propagandize the ideas of anarcho-communism and that they would be making a tour of the whole region. And you couldn't help noticing how worried the state socialists in our region became. They knew Uncle Vanya from their previous debates with him. And the peasants, the work-

¹⁶ Yuda Grossman-Roshchin (1883-1934) was a Jewish-Ukrainian anarchist intellectual who started out as a fanatical anarcho-communist and later became an equally fanatical anarcho-syndicalist. Makhno writes of him contemptuously in his memoirs.

had an abiding faith and hope that in the places where he had been active there would remain a core of comrades resolutely devoted to the cause of anarchism. And when autumn arrived, Uncle Vanya travelled to the city of Khotyn (province of Bessarabia) and then made his way through Austria to Geneva and Paris. There he got tied up for several months in debates with the so-called "leader" of the world proletariat – Vladimir Lenin.

In 1909 Uncle Vanya was back in Russia, helping to create the Southern Federation of Anarchists, organizing a conference in connection with the formation of this federation, etc.

It was at this time that members of the Gulai-Polye, Amur, and Khotyn anarcho-communist groups carried out the expropriation of the Khotyn post office to the tune of 89,000 rubles. Part of this sum was allocated to set up a third print shop (for by this time our organization's second print shop had already been discovered by the police). The rest of the money the organization decided to spend on weapons, on the publication of a special collection of articles on the history of the anarchist movement in Russia, and on literature in general. The organization entrusted this work to Uncle Vanya, who immediately went abroad.

Uncle Vanya fulfilled this mission with his customary efficiency and thoroughness. He forwarded to our groups two or three shipments of weapons of various calibres, with ammunition; and innumerable shipments of literature. Simultaneously he busied himself with organizing the publication of "The Almanac"¹⁴ on the history of our movement in Russia. He published this work in the conscientious and painstaking manner which characterized his commitment to our movement.

From this time on our renowned Uncle Vanya did not return to Russia, at least not until the Revolution of 1917. But while

¹⁴ Almanac: a collection of articles on the history of the anarchist movement in Russia (Paris, 1909) [in Russian]. This work is available online at http://socialist.memo.ru/books/perli/Almanach_Anarchiste.zip.

he remained abroad, Uncle Vanya maintained close contact with the practical anarcho-communist movement and exercised an appreciable influence on it. He had an impact on a whole series of anarchist initiatives in the former South Russia (the present-day Ukraine), a striking example of which occurred when almost the entire Gulai-Polye group was imprisoned. Uncle Vanya wrote to our fearless and renowned terrorist – the hero Aleksandr Semeniuta¹⁵, then still at large: “The Gulai-Polyans must be liberated, no matter what...” Semeniuta got in touch with me to find out what would be the best way to carry out an attack on the prison and free us. And I well recall how a group of our militants arrived from abroad to carry out this mission, having receiving a signal from Uncle Vanya.

And so Uncle Vanya carried on his tireless work abroad, at a distance from the rebellious South Russia. Our enemies did not admire him for this, and some of them were to be found in our own ranks, especially the dabblers who migrated to us from the ranks of the political parties. These people tried to undermine Rogdaev’s accomplishments under the black banner of anarchism in underground Russia. But they did not succeed, despite cooking up a sordid fabrication against him, according to which he was suspected of dealing in provocation, like Azef. But Rogdaev was incorruptible all his life and followed his own crystal-pure path as a militant anarchist steadfastly and proudly.

Abroad during the years of the World War, Uncle Vanya remained an unshakeable anti-militarist. In spite of his personal respect for Kropotkin, Grave, and other theoreticians of anarchism, he did not follow their line on the War, rather he pursued his own activities as an anarcho-communist propagandist and activist. As a natural consequence of this, he attacked the War and its

¹⁵ Aleksandr Semeniuta (1883-1910) was one of the founders of the Gulai-Polye anarcho-communist group “Union of Poor Peasants”. Eventually he was killed in a gun battle with police and Cossacks.

defenders with great energy. With this goal in mind and with the object of supporting the comrades in our ranks who had taken an anarchist anti-militarist stance, he created the journal “Nabat” [Tocsin] and devoted all his energies to this organ.

Then the Russian Revolution of 1917 broke out. Some “Russian revolutionaries” hastened to use the services of the German General Staff to return to Russia. Others, less notable for their hatred for the War, exercised their rights as Russian citizens, as “inhabitants and patriots,” to make their return from the countries of the Entente without the slightest hindrance. But Uncle Vanya found himself stuck in Switzerland. The politico-patriots did everything they could to make sure this anarchist rebel stayed away from the Russian Revolution as long as possible. And so it was that Rogdaev, who had pioneered the creation and consolidation of the anarcho-communist movement in Russia, who had spared neither himself nor his followers in building this movement, was left for many long months cut off from this movement. And this happened at the very moment when anarcho-communism was legalized and had emerged on the political landscape as a potential mass revolutionary movement. He was unable to support the movement directly with his organizational talent or his powerful, inspirational, oratorical skills.

In order for Rogdaev to break free of the barriers set up by the provocational activities of patriots – enemies of both the Revolution and our movement – intervention was required on the part of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of the Soviet of Workers’, Peasants’ and Soldiers’ Deputies. Only a protest by this temporarily revolutionary organ of the Russian toilers freed Uncle Vanya from outrageous travel restrictions and allowed him to travel to Russia.

But his arrival in Russia was already too late. Our movement was already in the hands of new-comers who were scarcely familiar with the spirit of underground Russian anarchism, having spent