

A word from the Makhnovists to the labouring cossacks of the Don and the Kuban

Revolutionary Insurgent Army of Ukraine

June 1920

Comrade labouring Cossacks! For two years you languished under the oppression of the Tsarist general Denikin. For two years your deadly enemies, the pomeshchiks and barons, forced you to defend the interests of the rich, the oppressors of the working people. For two successive years you were forced to knuckle under, and by your own sweat and blood the rich made themselves richer, feasted and led depraved lives. For two years in the region of the Don and the Kuban the tears and blood of the workers of the plough and hammer flowed. For two successive years, labouring cossacks, the revolution was stifled in your land.

But through your efforts, comrades, the yoke of Denikin and his commanders was thrown off and in the Don and the Kuban the revolution triumphed once again.

However, comrades, before you had time to recover from the nightmarish experience of Denikin, a new oppressor appeared in your land. The Communist-Bolshevik Party, seizing power, sent their own commissars and chekas to your villages; they ridicule you, labouring cossacks, as much as the Tsarist thugs did.

As in the time of Denikin, punitive detachments of the Bolshevik authority take away your bread and cattle and pick up your sons; and if you try to protest the violence perpetrated upon you, they flog you, imprison you, and even shoot you.

Is this the reason, comrade labouring cossacks, that you rose against Denikin, to take on a new yoke now in the form of the Communist-Bolsheviks? Is this what you shed your blood for, to permit the commissars and lovers of power to rule over you now, to suppress and coerce you?

Listen well, brothers, to what we, the revolutionary peasant-Makhnovists, tell you. We were also oppressed after the revolution by a whole series of authorities and parties. First the Austrian and German authority, along with the Hetman, tried to rule over us, then the adventurist Petliura, then the Communist-Bolsheviks, and also General Denikin. But we very quickly discouraged them in order to continue our own project and, as you probably heard, as early as the summer of 1918, under the leadership of the Gulyai-Pole peasants and other working people, and of the anarchist revolutionary Nestor Makhno, whom the Tsarist authority imprisoned for over ten years for his love of the working people, we rose and drove off the Austro-German bands, and after that, for the last two years we have continued to fight against all oppressors of the working

people. We are now engaged in a merciless battle against the agents and commissars of the Bolshevik authority, killing them and driving these tyrants from our regions.

The ranks of our revolutionary insurgent detachments are growing daily. All the oppressed and aggrieved are joining our ranks and the time is near when all the working people in our region will rise and expel the authority of the Bolshevik political charlatans, just as they expelled Denikin.

However, once the Bolshevik tyrants are expelled, we have no intention of giving anyone whatsoever authority over us because we Makhnovists realize that the working people are no longer a flock of sheep to be ordered about by anyone. We consider the working people capable of building, on their own and without parties, commissars or generals, their own **free soviet system**, in which those who are elected to the Soviet will not, as now, command and order us, but on the contrary, will be only the executors of the decisions made in our workers' gatherings and conferences. We will strive for this, so that all the wealth of the country, that is, the land, the mines, the factories, the workshops, the railroads, and so on, will belong neither to individuals nor to the government, but solely to those who work with them. We will not lay down our arms until we have wiped out once and for all every political and economic oppression and until genuine equality and brotherhood is established in the land.

This, comrades, is what we are fighting for and what we are asking you, the labouring cossacks of the Don and Kuban, to fight for.

In our insurgent army there were quite a few cossacks of the Don and Kuban; they formed two cavalry regiments which bravely and selflessly fought together with us against the Denikinists. Now we are calling you, the labouring cossacks, to our insurgent ranks for the joint struggle against the tyrants and Red hangmen, Trotsky and Lenin. The slaves have obeyed and suffered long enough the yoke of those who call themselves the worker-peasant authority. To arms and into the ranks of the revolutionary insurgents and then we will quickly put an end to the plans of those who wanted to oppress and burden us.

Comrades, do not believe the rumour that says we are bandits and a small group. It is a lie spread by the commissars solely to confuse the worker-peasant folk; the working people know that the Makhnovists are honest labourers who, not wanting to carry a burden, rose in order to liberate themselves once and for all from every oppression. Do not believe the Bolshevik papers, which write nearly every day that Bat'ko Makhno is dead and we Makhnovists smashed. It is not true. Bat'ko Makhno lives and together with us daily defeats regiments and punitive detachments of the commissar authority and causes a mortal panic in the Red oppressors.

Rise, labouring cossacks, against the oppression and coercion of the commissars. Do not tolerate them in your villages. Do not pay taxes to them. Do not give them bread. Do not give your sons to be soldiers. Organize your own insurgent detachments. Kill the oppressors. Unite with us. We will give you every possible assistance.

The slaves have endured enough! It is enough that we have been mocked in every possible manner!

Long live the rising for a genuine worker-peasant soviet system!

Long live the free Don and Kuban!

Long live the brotherly union of the working people of all countries and nationalities!

Long live the socialist revolution!

Council of the Revolutionary Insurgents of Ukraine (Makhnovist)

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