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Draft Declaration of the Revolutionary Insurgent Army of Ukraine

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1919

*Adopted on October 20, 1919 at a session of the Military
Revolutionary Soviet.*

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Nestor Makhno: Anarchy's Cossack

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The toiling classes of Ukraine are today confronting events of enormous importance and historic implications. Without doubt, the significance of these events goes beyond the limits of the revolutionary insurgent army's activity. But, being in the vanguard of the fight in progress, the latter deems it its duty to spell out to the toilers of Ukraine, Russia and the whole world the aims for which it fights, as well as its analysis of recent happenings and the current situation.

In February-March 1917, Russia and Ukraine experienced the *First Revolution*, which led to the fall of Tsarist autocracy and brought about the advent of a State political power comprised at first of personages from the big industrial bourgeoisie and then of representatives of the small and medium

bourgeoisie. Neither of those two governments proved stable. Eight months were enough for the revolutionary masses to overthrow these authorities which had nothing in common with the interests and aspirations of toilers.

As early as July 1917, the necessity of a *Second Revolution* was apparent. This took place at the end of October and paved the way for seizure of State power by the Bolshevik Social Democrat party which looked upon itself as representing the revolutionary proletariat and poor peasantry or, to put it another way, the social revolution. That party was very soon waging an ongoing campaign against all competing parties with an eye to arrogating power to itself. Since its watchwords coincided with the aspirations of the toiling masses, the latter threw their weight behind it when the crucial time came. And so this eight month period of government by the bourgeoisie in coalition and of rivalry between the differing political parties ended in the Bolshevik Party's taking power.

However it very quickly became apparent that this party and this State power — just like any party and all State power — functioned only for themselves and turned out to be utterly powerless to achieve the great objectives of the social revolution: by virtue of that very fact they were a hindrance to the free creative activity of the toiling masses who alone were capable of tackling this task. It is self-evident that in controlling the whole of economic and social life, any State power inevitably gives rise to new political and economic privileges and undermines the very foundations of social revolution.

The Bolshevik-Communist Party's inability to offer an authentic avenue of struggle for socialism quite naturally led to discontent, disappointment and bitterness among the toiling masses. The disorganized condition of economic life, the consequence of a bad agrarian policy led to serious disturbances in the countryside. The Bolshevik authorities have succeeded, however, in organizing in Russia a mighty State machine and a

compliant army which it uses as its predecessors did, to stamp on any manifestation of popular discontent and resistance.

In Ukraine the situation is otherwise.

Before making the acquaintance of the Bolshevik authorities, Ukraine was occupied by the Austro-Germans who installed their vassal, the hetman Skoropadsky there. They were replaced by the power of Petliura. The excesses of these authorities triggered an explosion of outrage from the people and a wholesale rejection of the very idea of State power, which assumed the form of a mighty popular insurgent movement, driven by an authentically revolutionary anti-party and anti-authoritarian mentality. In a series of engagements after the departure of the Austro-Germans, revolutionary insurgents purged Ukraine of supporters of the hetman and of Petliura: the Bolshevik-Communist authorities seized upon this to arrive and ensconce themselves in the spring of 1919, bringing disappointment very quickly in their wake. Within a few months, the discontent and hostility of the toiling masses of town and above all of countryside was made violently manifest. Large regions, such as the provinces of Ekaterinoslav and Tavrida, began to drift more and more unmistakably towards economic and social self-organization on a basis of animosity towards parties and State power. No political activity was allowed there. Towards the end of the summer, the whole country was prey to huge peasant insurgent movements against the Communist Party's arbitrary rule. The *Third Revolution* comes to light and guides this widespread insurrection.

Meanwhile, the reaction had raised its head. The *Third Revolution* stood against the attempt to restore the old regime. In the hope of finding themselves once again masters of the situation by annihilating both their enemies — the revolutionary insurrection and the reaction — the Bolshevik authorities plotted and treacherously facilitated the crushing of the main core of the Makhnovist insurgent army. However the State ma-

chinery and armed forces of the Bolshevik-Communist authorities in turn proved incapable of putting down roots in Ukraine and of replacing the revolutionary insurgent movement in its fight against Denikin. The revolutionary insurgents emerged from these difficult circumstances weakened but not defeated. Driven far from their home ground, they strove to survive at any price and while roaming other regions of Ukraine they prosecuted an all-out struggle against the Denikinists, against Trotsky's deliberate misrepresentations and the dangerous setback to the revolution.

Now the flames of peasant insurrection and the struggle against reaction are raging throughout the whole Ukraine. A new enemy of the toilers appears, in the shape of Petliura's bourgeois, republican government. A confrontation, at once inevitable and critical (only time will tell who will emerge victorious from it) pits the notion of libertarian organization as taken up by significant masses in Ukraine against the notion of political power — be it monarchist, Bolshevik-Communist or bourgeois republican.

Such, in broad outline, has been the hard revolutionary experience that we Makhnovist insurgents have been through over these past two and a half years of revolution. It only remains for us to add that in our region and in many another more distant one, we have been witnesses to and participants in successful essays in libertarian social and economic organizing, free of interference from any government. Most of them were interrupted only following violent intervention by some authority or another.

The upshot of this difficult but enriching experience, as well as the theoretical tenets that characterize it, leads us to make the following clear and specific declaration:

The unraveling of the revolution has convinced us beyond all question that no political party and no State authority is capable of resolving the great issues of our day, or of re-launching and organizing the country's devastated economy while stim-

part of any State or capitalist power, and to guarantee them freedom of social construction.

Relations with foreign states.

The expanded congresses that represent all the organizations from the towns and villages — which make up the free society — will appoint a commission whose task it is to maintain regular relations with foreign states. This activity ought to be public and free of ambiguousness: no "secret diplomacy" can be countenanced. Issues that the commission cannot resolve will be left for extra-ordinary congresses to debate and determine.

Such, as we see it, are the bases upon which the free, just and wholesome society for which we are fighting, should be founded.

It is not for us to impose these ideas upon the toiling populace through coercion: our reckoning is that our duty is merely to make our view known and to offer workers and peasants the chance to debate this viewpoint freely — this and others as well, so that they may have absolute freedom to opt for this or that path to the economic and social reconstruction of society.

We are convinced of it: it is only by appealing to the most comprehensive freedom of inquiry and experiment in matters of reconstruction that the toiling population will be able to devise the natural route that leads on to an authentic and wholesome socialism. This freedom of inquiry and experimentation in construction we shall maintain and defend with all our might: it will no doubt be defended in the same way by all the toilers of Ukraine whom we call upon to take a hand in our great common fight, amending as the need arises the inevitable mistakes and shortcomings, by displaying their sympathy and bolstering it through the continual recruitment of new fighters and defenders of freedom. It is through the concerted efforts of the broader community of toilers that the shape of the new society will be freely molded, and by defending this entitlement to creative freedom with armed force that *we shall win*.

determination. We declare that the toiling folk of Ukraine's towns and countryside have shown everyone through their heroic fight that they do not wish any longer to suffer political power and have no use for it, and that they consciously aspire to a libertarian society. We thus declare that all political power of whatever provenance, that seeks to rule and direct by means of constraint and arbitrariness, is to be regarded by the toiling Ukrainian masses as an enemy and counter-revolutionary. To the very last drop of their blood they will wage a ferocious struggle against it, in defense of their entitlement to self-organization.

Needless to say, in the society founded on truly soviet foundations, such as we have spelled them out, the question of proportional representation and other political procedures do not arise.

Culture and education.

In a free society, culture and education cannot be the monopoly of the State, nor of government. They can only be the concern of individuals and organizations freely and naturally united with one another. The living and free creation of the cultural values to which the spirit of the toiling masses will cling only come about in those conditions.

Civil liberties.

It must be self-evident that the free organization of society affords every practical opportunity for realization of what are called "civil liberties:" freedom of speech, of the press, of conscience, of worship, of assembly, of union, of organization, etc.

The defense of society.

For as long as the free society may need to look to its defenses against outside attack, it will have to organize its self-defenses, its army. We see this as a free contingent, founded on the principle of election to positions of responsibility, and closely tied to the populace. It should be placed under the authority of the toilers' organizations of the towns and countryside, so as to protect them against any violent trespass on the

ulating and meeting the needs of the toiling masses. We are persuaded that in the light of this experience, huge masses of the peasants and workers of Ukraine have come to the same conclusion and that they will not countenance any political oppression.

Our reckoning is that in the near future all the toiling classes will arrive at the same conclusion and that they themselves will see to the organizing of their professional, economic, social and cultural lives on the basis of free principles, dispensing with the oversight, pressure and dictatorship of any personage, party or power whatever.

We declare that the popular insurgent movement presently developing in Ukraine represents the start of the great *Third Revolution* which will once and for all free the toiling masses of all oppression by State and Capital, be it private or statist.

We declare that our Makhnovist insurgent army is merely the fighting core of this Ukrainian people's revolutionary movement, a core whose task consists everywhere of organizing insurgent forces and helping insurgent toilers in their struggle against all abuse of power and capital. Ukraine is on the brink of a genuine peasant social revolution. That is the import of the situation. We Makhnovist insurgents are the children of that revolution, here to serve and protect it. Whenever it spreads like a mighty brushfire through the whole of the toilers' Ukraine, freeing it of all aggressors and all powers, we faithful fighters will mingle with the millions of people's insurgents. Then, shoulder to shoulder, we will partake in the free building of a new life.

As regards our thinking on the essential issues of economic and social reconstruction, we regard it as essential that the following be stressed: once toilers have the freedom required to determine their fate for themselves, they will naturally and inevitably, the vast majority of them, move towards realization of genuinely communist social principles. We reckon that only the toiling masses have the capacity to enact these principles,

provided that they have access to the completest freedom of socio-economic creation. Thus we consider imposition of our ideal by force as quite irrational and out of place. We think, likewise, that it would be wrong to seek to trail the masses along in our wake, by means of leadership from above. We mean to restrict our role to simple theoretical and organizational assistance, in the form of proposals, advice, suggestions or guidance. Our thinking is that whereas the people should have the opportunity to listen to all opinion and advice, they alone should decide to act upon them with absolute independence and freedom, without interference from parties, dictators or governments of any sort.

We make every effort to communicate these views to the toiling masses, whilst focusing their attention upon their own autonomous role in free soviet construction.

The soviet system.

Our conception of an authentic system of free soviets we express as follows. In order to introduce a new economic and social life, the peasants and workers naturally and freely set up their social and economic organizations: village committees or soviets, cooperatives, factory and workshop committees, mine committees, railroad, Post and Telegraphs organizations and every other union and organization imaginable. In order to establish natural liaison between all these unions and associations, they set up agencies federated from the bottom up, in the shape of economic soviets whose technical task is to regulate social and economic life on a large scale. These soviets may be district soviets, town soviets, regional soviets, etc organized as the need arises on a basis of free principles. In no case would these be political institutions led by this or that politician or political party, who would dictate their wishes (as happens behind the mask of "soviet power"). These soviets are only the executive arms of the assemblies from which they emanate.

Such a soviet arrangement is a true reflection of the organization-of the peasants and workers. If this creation is

will begin to be in plentiful supply thanks to the organization of the new need-centered economic machinery

The day is not far off when every toiler, thanks to his labors on society's behalf (and thus on his own behalf as a member of society) will upon producing the necessary proof, be able to obtain those products and goods he cannot do without.

The national question.

Clearly, each national group has a natural and indisputable entitlement to speak its language freely, live in accordance with its customs, retain its beliefs and rituals, draw up its school books and have its own managerial establishments and agencies: in short, to maintain and develop its national culture in every sphere. It is obvious that this clear and specific stance has absolutely nothing to do with narrow nationalism of the "separatist" variety which pits nation against nation and substitutes an artificial and harmful separation for the struggle to achieve a natural social union of toilers in one shared social communion.

In our view, national aspirations of a natural, wholesome character {language, customs, culture, etc.) can achieve full and fruitful satisfaction only in the union of nationalities rather than in their antagonism. One people's struggle for liberation leads naturally to the same chauvinistic struggle on the part of other peoples and the upshot, inevitably, is isolation and animosity between the different nations. Of necessity, this appreciation of the national question, a profoundly bourgeois and negative one, leads on to absurd and bloody national conflicts.

The speedy construction of a new life on socialist foundations will ineluctably lead to development of the culture peculiar to each nationality. Whenever we Makhnovist, insurgents speak of independence of Ukraine, we ground it in the social and economic plane of the toilers. We proclaim the right of the Ukrainian people (and every other nation) to self-determination, not in the narrow, nationalist sense of a Petliura, but in the sense of the toilers' right to self-

free and voluntary contributions from toilers. In a context of free and independent construction, these contributions will undoubtedly produce the best results.

By implication, the State's centralized public treasury, in whatever form it may appear (even-in the guise of "People's Bank") should be wound up and replaced by the decentralized system of genuine people's banks established along cooperative lines. The founders and depositors of these banks should be workers and peasants only, that is to say their associations, unions and organizations, on the basis of a freely agreed levy.

In the case of unavoidable outlay on this or that undertaking or service at a regional or even national level (take Posts and Telegraphs, for instance), the general congress or soviet of that agency should receive the required sum from the people's banks. These latter may be communal, soviet or social, etc. as the case may be. The amount of these voluntary contributions will be determined by reckoning social needs and outlays. Not one single kopeck of the people's money may be spent without the express permission of the organization (be it congress, commune, soviet or union). At the appointed time, the different social services and agencies submit their projected expenditure to their respective agencies which, if need be, endorse the projected budget.

Such, in broad outline, is the financial system which we think should be employed during the time when currency and money circulation are still extant. Only that sort of an arrangement is going to be fully compatible with an authentic soviet system.

As regards currency as such, at the outset there may be more of this in circulation than needed. Thus, as the new organization of labor is reinforced and develops, workers and peasants will move from the money system towards the system of simply recording social labor performed. Such recording will afford the bearer the right to draw from social stores and markets those items and articles of which he has need, and which

indeed the free handiwork of the peasant and worker masses themselves, if the bracing economic work of all the grassroots agencies and federative soviet organizations begins to attract more and more toilers, without any interference or arbitrary meddling by any party or authorities whatever, then, by our reckoning, it will be possible speedily to introduce an economic and social system based on the principles of social equality, justice and fraternity and thereby put paid to the existence of class differences, political parties and States, as well as the domination of one nationality over others. Gradually and naturally the backward and non-toiler strata of the population will be absorbed into this system. All "political activity" which leads inescapably to creation of privilege and a mechanism for economic and political enslavement of the toiling masses will be proved redundant in practice, and "political" organizations will tend to wither away of themselves.

Our answer to the questions that will be put regarding "official" agencies and sundry social pursuits relating to education, medicine, statistics, registration of marriages, deaths and births, etc. is that maximum scope will be afforded the priceless and prolific initiative of the individual, within the framework of the soviet. All of this will be no problem and will be best resolved by local agencies of self-governance.

Judicial and administrative machinery.

As far as the depiction of this machinery as necessity goes, we must first of all reaffirm our position in principle: we are against all rigid judicial and police machinery, against any legislative code prescribed once and for all time, for these involve gross violations of genuine justice and of the real protections of the population. These ought not to be organized but should be instead the living, free and creative act of the community. Which is why all obsolete forms of justice — court administration, revolutionary tribunals, repressive laws, police or militia, Cheka, prisons and all other sterile and useless anachronisms — must disappear of themselves or be abolished from the very

first breath of the free life, right from the very first steps of the free and living organization of society and the economy.

The free organizations, associations and soviets of workers and peasants must themselves prescribe this or that form of justice. Such justice should not be enforced by specialist officials, but rather by trustees who enjoy the confidence of the local population, by arrangement with it and utterly repudiating sanctions prescribed in the past. Likewise, popular self-defense must be based on free organization, and not left to specialist militias. Not only does formal organization of justice and defense by the State not achieve its aims, but it is a betrayal of all true justice and defense.

The question of supplies.

At present this question could not be posed any more acutely. Resolution of it is of the utmost urgency, for the whole fate of the revolution hinges upon it right now. The major flaw in the previous revolution [the Bolsheviks' — A.S.] proceeded from the complete disorganization of supplies, which' led to a dichotomy between town and countryside. The toilers must pay the utmost attention to it. This issue was particularly easy to resolve at the beginning of the revolution, when life was not yet in complete disarray and when food was available everywhere in more or less adequate supply. At that point, the contest between socialist parties for control of political power and then the Bolshevik party's struggle to hold on to it, monopolized the attention of the workers and peasants who left the question unresolved and failed to display sufficient vigilance. As for the Bolshevik authorities, they proved quite naturally incapable of resolving the matter.

Here too we reckon that a just resolution of this matter and restoration to order of everything relating to it can only be devised by the toilers themselves through their free organizations. None but they will be able to settle the matter viably. In this regard, the toilers must fight shy of disunity, and close unity between workers and peasants has to be achieved. This will

lution to the supply issue and the division of the land, as well as the financial question which <is also closely bound up with the worker question.

The housing issue is part and parcel of this and so we are offering only the essence of our position on this matter: one of the primary tasks of the free worker organizations is to see to equitable allocation of available accommodation and thereby pursue the construction of requisite housing and this is achievable only in collaboration with those in charge of housing management (the house and district committee).

The financial question.

The financial system cannot be divorced from the capitalist system. The latter will soon be replaced by free communist organization of the economy, which will incontrovertibly lead to the disappearance of the finance system and its replacement by direct exchange of produce through the social organization of production, transportation and distribution.

However this transformation will not be effected in a day. Although the monetary system today may be in complete disarray it must of necessity continue to operate for a time. For the moment, it is vital that it be organized on new foundations.

Thus it is not a matter of retaining or re-establishing it, but only of adapting it on a temporary basis to fairer ground rules. Up until the October coup d'état, the people's wealth was concentrated either in the State's hands or in those of the capitalists and their agencies. Compulsory taxation and growing exploitation were at the root of this concentration. The Bolshevik-Communist authorities set themselves above the toilers as a boss-exploiter-State. They see themselves as the rulers and organizers of the country's monetary system. In fact the Bolshevik State and its officials have sole disposition of the people's wealth. In our view, this situation has to change radically.

In keeping with the introduction and expansion of the system of free toilers' soviets, ushering in a new and free life, all compulsory taxation should be discontinued and replaced by

organizations and unions in natural and free association with one another and in liaison with peasant organizations through the good offices of their economic soviets.

It is our conviction that only such a resolution of the labor issue will release the energy and activity of the worker masses, give a fresh boost to repair of the devastated industrial economy, render exploitation and oppression impossible, and put paid to speculation and swindling and bring to an end the artificial escalation of prices and runaway rise in the cost of living.

We have come to the belief that only the workers, with the help of their free organizations and unions, will be able to secure their release from the yoke of State and Capital (private and state alike), take over the working of mineral and coal reserves, get workshops and factories back into operation, establish equitable exchanges of products between different regions, towns and countryside, get rail traffic moving again, in short, breathe life back into the moribund shell of our economic organization.

No State authorities, no party, no system for direction and supervision of workers, commissars, officials, political activists and others can, we are thoroughly persuaded, meet the target set. The organization of work, production, transportation, distribution and exchange should be the task of free workers' unions, abetted by experienced and competent individuals, in a context of free labor in factories and workshops.

In order to ensure that such organization is active and its development fruitful it is vital that, above all else, genuine worker congresses and conferences be prepared on free foundations, without pressures or dictatorship from parties or individuals. Only those free congresses and conferences will have the capacity to arrive at an effective resolution of all the urgent issues of worker life and of worker construction along necessary and purposeful lines.

Needless to say, just resolution of and further progress on the worker question are largely dependent on an equitable so-

not be hard if they dispense with political organizations and verbose politicians. Released from all political authority, the towns will convene a comprehensive congress of workers and peasants and this will establish among its priorities the supply question and the re-establishment of economic links between towns and countryside, setting in train an equitable exchange of basic necessities. It will be up to trades organizations, co-operatives and transport agencies to take this further. Suitable agencies will be set up to seek out, consolidate and relaunch industrial and agricultural production: these will introduce a system for trade and fair distribution of goods. In this context, the workers' and peasants' cooperatives and free associations will have to play a crucial role. Only in this way, we reckon, can this particularly important issue of supply be resolved.

The land question.

The process of rebuilding and rapidly improving our agrarian economy which is at present in ruins and very limited, requires reorganization of the working of the land through absolutely free and voluntary decision-making by the toiling agricultural population in its entirety (obviously help from experts can be assumed). The village traders will have to be removed from this process quickly. We are persuaded that the solution to this problem of land will emerge unaided through communist organization of the peasant economy. Everyone will quickly be persuaded that growth of output and the meeting of all needs can only be ensured by the community and not by private individuals. However, any imposition of communism through constraint or top-down administration must be rejected.

The Bolsheviks' decree regarding "nationalization of the land," which is to say the placing of all lands in the hands of the State (in fact the hands of the government, its agencies and functionaries) must be disregarded. A State take-over of land will inescapably lead, not to fair and free agricultural structures, but to the reappearance, of a new exploiter and

master in the shape of the State, which will have recourse — as bosses do — to wage slavery and will impose all manner of corvees, levies, etc. upon the peasantry by force, just as its pomieschiki predecessors did. The peasantry will reap no advantage from being faced by just one master — the State — even more powerful and cruel than the thousands of little bosses, masters and pomieschikis. Lands seized from great estate owners should not be at the disposal of the State but placed in the hands of those who actually work them: the peasant organizations, free communes and other unions.

The manner in which the land, equipment and very organization of the agricultural economy are to be handled should be worked out freely at peasant congresses, after discussion and passed as resolutions, without any interference by any authority whatsoever.

We consider that solution of all these matters by the peasants themselves will usher in a natural process of expansion of the social organizations of the peasant economy, beginning, say, with egalitarian and commensurate division of the land, farm equipment and livestock: with social organization of labor and of the distribution of produce on a basis of cooperation: with social usage of the land and equipment, etc.: that is to say, according to a more or less avowedly communist formula. The manual and mental exertions of experienced and capable villagers, in close concert with workers' organizations, will complement this process and speed its development. Meanwhile, private holdings will be speedily and easily whittled down. The active peasant population will readily gain the upper hand over representatives of the large proprietor class by first of all confiscating their estates for the benefit of the community and then integrating them naturally into the social organization.

Let us draw the attention of the peasant population to expanded cooperative organizations (artels) and production for distribution. Our reckoning is that cooperative organization is, as an initial phase, the most appropriate and natural step along

the road to constructing the agricultural economy on new foundations.

What is called the "soviet economy," where, inevitably, wage-slavery and arbitrariness and violence from Bolshevik-Communist functionaries prevail, must be wholly eradicated. The issue of the role of capable and specialist agronomists, as well as sundry other problems can be settled through discussion, as will decisions taken by peasant organizations and peasant congresses. Wage-slavery in all its manifestations must be eradicated beyond recovery.

It is all too apparent that a fair solution and further evolution of the land question are largely and closely dependent upon an equitable solution of the labor question. It is also up to the workers' organizations to establish a number of links with the villages ... enough such links to be in a position to barter all sorts of industrially produced materials and items for agricultural produce. Only a close, brotherly union of worker and peasant in organizations for mutual aid in production and in economic exchange, will be able to devise a natural, well-planned and fair solution to the agrarian question.

The labor question.

Having witnessed many an attempt mounted by various political parties, "businessmen" or "erudite personages" to resolve the labor issue: and having scrupulously examined the idea and the results of state take-over (nationalization) of the means and instruments of worker production (the mines, communications, workshops, factories, etc) as well as of the workers' organizations themselves (trades unions, factory and workshop committees, cooperatives, etc.), we can announce with certainty that there is one genuine and fair solution to the workers' question: the transfer of all the means, instruments and materials of labor, production and transportation, not to the complete disposal of the State — this new boss and exploiter which uses wage-slavery and is no less oppressive of the workers than private entrepreneurs — but to the workers'