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Anarchy's Cossacks

The Guru

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The Russian Civil War saw the emergence of a large number of spontaneous insurrectional movements affiliated to neither of the two major protagonists. Notwithstanding that some of these rebellions ended up being subordinated to one or the other, out of political opportunism or survival instinct, most of them rose with equal hatred against the Whites' backward feudalism and the Reds' Commissar Dictatorship. They shared the common characteristic of putting forward a rather indefinite political programme and squandering vital resources and energy in conflict among themselves, proving incapable of co-ordinating efforts with other insurrectional forces. Prone to quick decline, they failed to achieve any impact proportionate to their number. One remarkable exception was the Makhnovist insurrection, the "Makhnovshchina", inspired by its eponymous emblematic guide, Nestor Makhno. This movement distinguished itself from other insurrectional movements through its clear and unyielding political programme, remarkable level of organization, outstanding military performance, noteworthy impact on the course of the Civil War, and, finally, relative durability. The Makhnovist movement flourished in South Eastern Ukraine, a region with a tradition

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of peasant independence and rebellion, at a time of disruption and instability caused by a semi-permanent state of war. The Nationalists, with their ambiguous social programme, had failed to gather the support of the poor peasantry. The wrongs of foreign occupation and puppet regimes created the conditions for a strong partisan movement. The exactions of the Bolshevik food detachments that robbed the peasants of their grain and livestock, and the Cheka's brutality caused huge resentment in the countryside and prevented the Bolsheviks from winning over Makhno's supporters. The Makhnovists adhered to the principles of Revolutionary Communism. Their irreconcilable rupture with the Leninist position came when the Bolsheviks seized command of the State and took a complete u-turn in their political programme, going from their claim of "All power to the Soviets! "(Councils) to the transformation of the latter into servile executors of the Kremlin's will. The Makhnovists defended the independence of the Soviet, source of all political life, against all unwanted authority. Their centralized organs of government acted not as supreme enlighteners of the masses, but rather as their emanation, with a role of co-ordination and convergence. Refusing the premise of the masses' immaturity, on which the Bolsheviks based their Party dictatorship's legitimacy, they implemented Communist principles immediately and abolished private property and money while rejecting to resort to coercion, censorship or forceful requisition as a means of political consolidation. While the Bolsheviks considered the peasantry as a backward mass impregnated with reactionary prejudices, the Makhnovist movement was driven by a vigorous, down-to-earth, peasant spirit, and regarded the urban proletariat with distrust; an element that would ultimately hinder its expansion.

Nestor Ivanovich Makhno came from a poor peasant family from Huliai-Pole in the province of Ekaterinoslav. After a childhood of toil, he joined the local Communist Libertarian

Group, was incarcerated in August 1908 and sentenced to life imprisonment. The February Revolution opened the doors of his prison, and Makhno returned to Huliai-Pole. Back in Huliai-Pole he helped organise a peasants' union, and was elected to the head of each of its constituent comities. The peasant union expropriated land from local landowners and distributed it to the poorest. In January 1918 Makhno gathered an armed force of 900 men and joined the Red detachments fighting the forces of the newly constituted Ukrainian nationalist Rada. One month later and with a force of up to 1,500 he engaged the invading Central Powers' troops in a series of harassing, skirmishing actions. His group dispersed after the betrayal of his Jewish company, Makhno started a peregrination through the country and ended up in Moscow, where he had an interview with Lenin. When he returned to Huliai-Pole, the Brest-Litovsk treaty had been signed, ending the hostilities between the Central Powers and the Bolsheviks. Signs bearing the inscription "Deutsche Vaterland" –German Homeland" stood on the Ukrainian borders, and a puppet governor, Skoropadsky, had replaced the Rada's authority. Along with some comrades destined to eminent roles in the future Makhnovist Army, Makhno organized several armed insurrections and initiated guerrilla warfare against the Varta, Skoropadsky's militia, and the Central Powers' garrisons. Makhno's partisan forces featured a brilliant innovation, the tatchanka, a horse cart used as an infantry transport and/or a machine gun platform. It was soon to be adopted by all other armies battling in Ukraine, even though none would integrate it into their combat apparatus with comparable expertise. The Armistice was signed less than 3 months later and the Central Powers retired from the Makhnovist area of operations, with the Nationalist militias in their wake. The Makhnovist nucleus had grown to a several thousand-strong army of battle-hardened volunteers. It had centralized headquarters and an efficient logistics and intelligence network

rooted in the unconditional support of the local peasantry. The Makhnovists combined expert deception tactics with concentrated mobile firepower provided by tatchanki units and the tremendous shock power of their cavalry, very probably the best of the whole conflict. To supplement their sabre, the Makhnovist Insurgents used sawn-off barrel guns on horseback, and their mounted troops could travel 60–100 km a day. The lack of armament manufactures constituted the only handicap of the Insurgent Army. It had to rely exclusively on captured equipment for a precarious supply of weapons and ammunition, resulting in a permanent underutilization of its military potential. In 1919, the Makhnovists' enemies too had changed. No longer foreign troops demoralized by a long war ending in defeat, a new foe loomed on the horizon: the White officers' regiments and the Cossack troops of general Denikin. In January, the Makhnovist Insurgent Army held more than 550 km of front. 15,000 infantry, 1,000 cavalry and 40 MGs manned the south front, facing Mai-Maievsky's troops. 10,000 men manned the northern front, facing the Petliurians, and another 2,000 manned the western front, against German colonists' detachments and other Nationalists. Not counting the autonomous partisan detachments, a total of 29,000 men were engaged on the frontline and 20,000 waited in reserve, lacking firearms.

Under the military pressure of their common arch-nemesis and in spite of their mutual ideological mistrust, Makhnovists and Bolsheviks concluded a military alliance. The Insurgent forces were nominally subordinated to the Red Army, but maintained their specific internal structure, based on voluntary commitment, self-discipline and election of all commanders. Still unaware of the Bolshevik regime's true nature and hoping that their disagreements "could be confined to the realm of ideas", the Makhnovists identified the struggle against the Tsarist forces, whom they knew only too well, as an absolute priority. They considered unity of command

impulse of the Glasnost, set about a profound revision of the regime's historical past and (posthumously) rehabilitated the movement. In the West, a handful of new-school historians has unearthed the Soviet early sources and some scarce, but fundamental, original Makhnovist documents that had escaped the Bolshevik *autos-da-fé*. Even if initially only marginally noticed, they have presented a perception of the Makhnovist insurrection based on rigorous and detailed historical research rather than propagandistic fabrications. Under this new light shed on the question, the thesis of banditry and brutality against the local population evaporate. The die-hard accusations of anti-Semitism fall into ridicule when facing the established fact that many of the most prominent leaders among the Makhnovists were Jewish and that thousands more participated in the regional assemblies set up by the Insurgents or fought among their ranks. Firm evidence further ascertains the uncompromising attitude of the Makhnovists towards anti-Semitism: the death penalty was invariably applied to anyone guilty of such wrongdoing. Concerning the Makhnovists' alleged unreliability and the swinging nature of their allegiance, the accusation is disproved by the accurate and factual reconstitution of their tumultuous relationship with the Bolsheviks. Once again evidenced by the reports of the very Bolshevik officials involved in the dealings, it clearly appears that the Makhnovists opposed the deceitful schemes of Bolshevik *realpolitik* with a scrupulous, maybe naïve, and certainly fatal, observance of their mutual agreements' terms.

of the anti-White forces as a positive measure, especially if it allowed them to obtain much needed military equipment, which the Bolsheviks promised to supply according to their needs. The Kremlin authorities, with little more than token forces in the area, could hardly turn back such an opportunity of seizing the operations' supervision. More important still, the treaty guaranteed free circulation for their political commissars — extremely unwelcome in other circumstances-. They immediately carried out intelligence operations and insidious propaganda campaigns, as a preparation for future action against the Insurgents. Indeed, Trotsky loathed the Makhnovists' successes. The fast pace of their growing influence and their organizational achievements showed no sign of slackening. He knew they could constitute a dangerous pole of attraction for revolutionary militants, as many Bolshevik field commanders in contact with them hardly contained their admiration. Numerous written documents have clearly demonstrated that Trotsky only accepted this momentary partnership to use, or if possible, exhaust, the Makhnovists in the pursuit of Moscow's war goals, and from the very beginning was waiting only for the propitious moment to backstab them. Shortly afterwards, Moscow stopped all deliveries to the Makhnovists, after supplying them with 100,000 rifle rounds, many of them defective, and 3,000 Italian rifles, each with a mere 12 rounds of an otherwise unobtainable calibre. In February-March 1919, Makhnovist forces amounted to 30,000 men, with 70,000 unarmed in reserve, whom Moscow refused to arm. Makhno complained vehemently. The Insurgents had fulfilled their part of the deal: they had sent two of their regiments to aid the Reds in the Crimea against the German colonists detachments, and according to Bolshevik demands, had attacked in the direction of Taganrog, enjoying limited success but unable to exploit it due to severe ammunition shortages. But thousands of Makhnovist volunteers were being sent back because there

was nothing to equip them with, while inert Red formations of doubtful loyalty received full allotment. To make things worse, the Cheka's interference in the midst of Makhnovist territory was growing bolder every day and the Makhnovist movement was targeted by a slanderous press campaign, commandeered by Trotsky to counter its expanding popularity. Antonov-Ovseenko, commander of the Ukrainian front also protested vigorously. He acknowledged the Makhnovists' political integrity and outstanding military merits and backed Makhno's claims. He would soon be removed, and replaced by Vatsetis. Kamenev, sent over to assess the situation, was impressed by Makhno and pleaded for conciliation. Trotsky refused. No need to say, the relationship between Reds and Blacks became increasingly tense. Grigoriev, until then allied to the Bolsheviks, turned against them in May 1919. A former Tsarist officer, he had risen to become a demagogue and freelance warlord who enjoyed support from the poor peasantry. He was also a competent general, had 30,000 rifles and an unusual quantity of heavy equipment at his disposal. He controlled a large portion of territory, to the west of the Makhnovist operating grounds. Above all, the Kremlin feared an alliance between Makhno and Grigoriev, which could prove fatal for the Bolshevik influence in the southern half of Ukraine. All Red reinforcements scheduled for the Southern front against Denikin were diverted to counter Grigoriev. Much to Makhno's alarm, some of the Reds' best troops were even withdrawn from the frontline. Many of them would end up siding with Grigoriev. Denikin's grand offensive consequently met a very thinly held front in the Bolshevik sector. Skhuro's Cossacks breached the Red defence line, and outflanked the Makhnovists position. Deprived of supply while confronting, for the first time, large numbers of tanks and armoured cars, the Insurgents faced a very precarious situation. Trotsky completely disregarded the breakthrough's gravity and his whole attention remained focussed on his

propaganda too strove at denying the Makhnovist insurrection any legitimacy. Furthermore, their survival relied on western governments' military support and, after the war, on their charity. White pogroms and other massacres shocked the public opinion of most of the "liberal" democracies, and the Whites did their best to blame their atrocities on the Makhnovists and other Green bands. Thereafter, Western moral posture against Communism has been comfortable in designating the brutal horrors of Bolshevism as the only possible outcome of any communist aspiration. The Makhnovist "alternate" experience, founded on theoretical communist principles, constituted an embarrassing counter-example, and Makhno's opinion of Western bourgeois democracies invited no publicity. The Bolsheviks' most slanderous version of the Makhnovshchina phenomenon therefore met an unusually unreserved acceptance among mainstream Western historians and achieved considerable penetration in their perception of that historic episode. The thesis of Makhnovist anti-Semitism and banditry were, and are still, widely accredited. The Makhnovist Insurgency's military and political achievements have thus been systematically underrated, distorted, and gradually obliterated from History. Blatant inaccuracies have by now settled in among western historians, as recently published material tends to prove, in spite of the fact that some seriously documented work on the question has already surfaced. As an example, excellent "generalist" historians such as Bruce Lincoln rely strongly on Soviet official military history from the 1950's for documentation, and therefore, among other things, completely overlook the Makhnovist key contribution to the final campaign against Wrangel. They simply vanished from his orders of battle, including at the Sivash crossing, and are endorsed with the initiative of the alliance's breach, however senseless that might be. Interestingly enough, Soviet historiography from which all denigrating anti-Makhno stereotypes originate, has since 1989, under the

The Makhnovshchina's case is an interesting example of written history's subordination to political imperatives. The Makhnovist Insurgency, in spite of its undeniable importance in terms of political innovation and geographical amplitude, or rather, because of it, has long lingered in History's no man's land. Its adherence to the principles of Communism and insolent success in their immediate implementation were a thorn in the side of the Bolsheviks. Soviet historiography endeavoured to discredit the movement's history through successive rewritings and grotesque falsifications. It attributed to Makhno a psychotic and treacherous nature, and to the Makhnovshchina, a radical anti-Semitic character and systematic terrorist practices against the local population. It made them appear as either lawless bandits motivated by lust for blood and loot or active agents of the White counter-revolution, therefore emptying the Makhnovist movement of any specific political content liable to generate sympathy. However, Bolshevik sources contemporary to, or immediately subsequent to the events distinguish themselves from later official history. They are equally devoted to the political denigration of the Makhnovshchina, in order to justify its eradication and the inelegant methods employed. But these early, and ignored, reports generally limit their attacks to accusations of ideological deviance and other abstract allegations. The Makhnovists superior martial qualities, in terms of leadership, tactics and individual combativeness are fully acknowledged. More importantly, accusations of banditry and anti-Semitism, destined to have a flourishing future, are categorically rejected, with supporting evidence, as counter-productive nonsense. It is true that too many direct eyewitnesses of the events were still alive for excessive liberties to be taken with the truth. Usually useful as a counterweight point of view, little was to be expected from the adversaries of Communism for lifting the veil of lies on this episode. The Whites too had fought Makhno, so their

intention to liquidate the Makhnovshchina, incidentally the only force now left standing against the Whites in Southern Ukraine. In the midst of military disaster, instructions to the front commanders merely advocated political intriguing against the Makhnovists in view of a forthcoming eradication campaign. Aware of the Makhnovists' intention to summon a fourth Regional Peasant Congress, Trotsky outlawed it and issued a full declaration of war against the Makhnovshchina. Red forces, in full rout, were, of course, in no position to threaten the Insurgent Army, but Mai-Maievsky's White troops would terminally force the Makhnovists to give ground. Makhno, still giving priority to checking Denikin's advance, deemed the moment rather inappropriate for a collapse of the anti-White coalition. He offered the resignation of his whole General Staff, including himself, in a desperate appeasement gesture, and, with the Cheka already indulging in arbitrary arrests and executions, multiplied written protests in vain. Then of course, the front collapsed, and the whole of Eastern Ukraine fell into the White Generals' hands. Ekaterinoslav and Kharkiv were taken in June 1919. The Red Army had long left the scene and the Makhnovist Insurgent Army was thrown into a headlong retreat, accompanied by hordes of refugees fleeing White brutality. Makhno and his Staff, gradually reinforced by isolated elements that made their way through the enemy lines, reached the territory under Grigoriev's control. With both now opposed to Reds and Whites alike, an alliance was envisaged. But the Makhnovists got confirmation of their suspicions concerning Grigoriev's direct implication in anti-Semitic crimes and secret negotiations with the Whites. At the end of July, during a large meeting attended by 20,000 followers from each side, Grigoriev was denounced as a pogromist and shot on the spot. Some of his soldiers were integrated into the Makhnovist forces, soon to be discharged due to their ineradicable anti-Semitic prejudice. Others bore a strong grudge against Makhno and joined the Makhnovshchina's

enemies. At the end of August, Makhno's contingent of 3,000 infantry and 700 cavalry regrouped with the insurgent troops recalled from the Red Army, along with several Brigades of Red infantry who had arrested their officers and commissars and defected to the Anarchists. The Army was reformed and totalled more than 20,000 men. The flight of the Red Army's last elements from Southern Ukraine had left three adversaries face to face: the Nationalists, the Makhnovists and the Whites. Denikin, overconfident, decided to attack both Makhno and Petliura. With the bulk of his forces engaged towards Kursk in the race to Moscow, Denikin fielded a mere 15,000 men for this campaign, but the army was well-armed, well-supplied and included excellent formations. The Nationalists of Petliura sought to avoid combat, still hoping to reach an agreement on Ukraine's status. All White forces ended up converging towards the Makhnovist sector. Fighting was vicious, both sides displaying extraordinary bravery and ruthless ferocity. Initially, the Insurgents gained significant advantage over their foes, but the Makhnovist Army was plagued by crippling ammunition shortages, and the Whites benefited from a steady flow of modern war material. At the beginning of September, Makhno brought all counterattacks to a halt, and facing a new large-scale enemy offensive, ordered retreat. For two weeks, step by step, the Makhnovists gave ground. Burdened by more than 8,000 wounded or sick, they reached the area of Uman, under Nationalist control. The Whites manoeuvred and barred all avenues of escape. Trapped in a stranglehold, the exhausted, out-of-supplies Insurgent Army was less than 8,000 strong. The retreat had brought the Makhnovists more than 600 km away from their base of Huliai-Pole. They were now left with no other option than to stand and fight to the last man. Makhno carefully picked the stage of the decisive battle: the Insurgents encamped in the hilly surroundings of the village of Peregonovka, near Uman. The Whites had received orders to carry out the complete annihilation

side by side had instilled sympathy and admiration for the Makhnovshchina among many Red units. Makhno and his personal guard escaped with the complicity of a Bolshevik commander. Similarly, in the Crimea, Red soldiers refused to turn their guns against their former comrades, and the whole Makhnovist contingent was let through to Ukraine. This wave of insubordination infuriated Trotsky, all the more because the core of Makhnovist combatants had escaped his deadly trap. He ordered the Cheka to expurgate the Red forces of their insubordinate elements. The Red Army newspaper declared that 2,300 executions had taken place in two weeks. It is an interesting number to compare with the 8,000 total losses suffered during the whole final campaign against Wrangel. Makhno reassembled the remnants of his army. Ironically, the bulk of his forces was now made up from thousands of Red Army defectors, disgusted by their hierarchy's foul methods. The Kremlin sent new troops, including Budienny's Konarmii, to sweep into the Makhnovist region and hunt down the Insurgents. The praised Cossacks, much to Budienny's consternation, dared not approach Makhno's cavalry, with the notable exception of the 1st Brigade, which defected to the Anarchists with every man, horse and gun. Nonetheless, the Insurgents were doomed. With more than 150,000 Red soldiers on their heels, they manoeuvred across Southern Ukraine, slowly worn down by incessant combat. Their force had dwindled from 15,000 in December, to 5–6,000 in January and to a nucleus of 2,500 in March-April 1921. For five months more, operating in small detachments they fought a strenuous guerrilla war against the Red Army. On the 28th of August 1921 Makhno, his wife and the fifty last survivors of his personal guard crossed the river Dniester into Romania. The Makhnovist armed insurrection had breathed its last. In 1924, He arrived in Paris via Poland and Germany, and spent the rest of his life in poverty, dying in July 1934.

the White army yielded against concentric pressure and was put to flight. Driven back to his Crimean sanctuary, Wrangel concentrated his remaining forces on the isthmus of Perekop, a natural fortress, and entrenched. On the night of the 7th of November 1920, an elite Makhnovist detachment of 700 cavalry and 1,000 infantry manning 190 MGs, spearheaded the surprise crossing of the Sivash marsh and contributed crucial firepower to ward off enemy counterattacks. This breach in the defence perimeter made the White position untenable, and Wrangel ordered evacuation. Denied permission to rest, the whole of the Makhnovist forces carried on vanguard operations until the very last day of the campaign. The Makhnovist forces played a key role in the final destruction of the last White stronghold. They were used as a battering ram from the opening stages of the campaign until its very last act. This fact is distinctly acknowledged in a few very specific contemporary sources, namely reports of Red commanders present on the field. Makhnovist casualties amounted to 20% of initial strength (against 4% for the Reds). Later, Soviet historiography would all but obliterate their participation in the campaign. With the elimination of the last White bastion, the Makhnovists had outlived their usefulness. On the 26th of November, the Bolsheviks backstabbed the Makhnovists and launched a series of simultaneous attacks against all remaining Insurgent forces. The Cheka embarked on an extermination campaign to uproot the Anarchist insurrection. Thousands of people, on the grounds of simple suspicion, were arrested and promptly executed. 1,000 Insurgents of the Crimean contingent were caught by surprise and shot on the spot. The surviving 4,000 found themselves isolated, with more than 100,000 Bolshevik soldiers barring the way across the narrow isthmus into Ukraine. Makhno, recovering from serious wounds in Huliai-Pole, was also encircled by a horde of Red troops. But, in spite of the Red High Command's efforts to quarantine the Anarchists, two months of fighting

of the Makhnovist rebellion. They obtained guarantees of Nationalist neutrality and on the morning of the 26th of September 1919, launched an all-out attack, spearheaded by two elite all-officers cavalry regiments. After bitter fighting, the Insurgents fell back towards the village and prepared to die bravely, shooting their last cartridges. When all seemed lost, the White assault suddenly stopped. Then word spread among the Insurgents: "Makhno has drawn the sabre!" At the head of his "Black Sotnia" -200 men picked from among the very best – Makhno burst from behind a hill into the enemy's flank, with the black flag held on high. With unstoppable fury, he plunged into the bulk of the dismayed assailers, causing indescribable panic. The cornered Insurgents rallied and charged in his wake, picking up whatever weapons and ammunition the enemy had abandoned in its flight as they went. At the end of the day, victory was complete. The Makhnovists had captured an abundant bounty, including 100 MGs and 23 artillery pieces. Hundreds of White soldiers surrendered. Makhno, heedless of the state of exhaustion of his 7,000 remaining men, relentlessly pursued the scattered enemy army. In ten days, the Makhnovist vanguards, with Makhno in the lead, had covered at full gallop the 600 km back to Huliai-Pole. Soon the Makhnovists were back in control of the whole of Eastern Ukraine, abandoned 4 months earlier. They had even reached Taganrog, the base of Denikin's headquarters, causing considerable alarm. In October 1919, the army was back to 28,000 armed men, 200 MGs and 50 artillery pieces. The rather unknown battle of Peregonovka, which understandably neither the Reds nor the Whites made much publicity about, had an immense impact on the course of the Russian Civil War. It occurred with Denikin's troops within 200 km of Moscow, and White generals competing for the honour to enter the capital. The Red army was battered, and Lenin was preparing for exile. As Bruce Lincoln wrote, "...Makhno's revolutionary Partisan Army wrought havoc

in their rear. Early in October, Makhno took Berdiansk, an important port on the Sea of Azov, where he destroyed vital reserves of some sixty thousand shells just as Denikin launched his final assault on Orel. Within a fortnight, his fast moving columns cut the supply lines that connected Denikin's advancing columns with the Black Sea ports upon which they depended for weapons, ammunition, and supplies and seized a half-dozen other critical points, including the key centre of Yekaterinoslav. (...) Reluctantly, Denikin withdrew key units from his front and sent them to parry Makhno's attacks only to realize, too late, how costly that decision had been. Makhno's peasant partisans, he confessed later, 'destroyed our rear and the front at the most critical period'. (...) There is no doubt, a *Le Temps* correspondent reported from Moscow, 'that Denikin's defeat is explained more by the uprisings of peasants who brandished Makhno's flag than by the success of Trotsky's regular army'. In Ukraine, the Bolshevik troops had observed the fighting from a good distance. They were now quick to step into the void left by the Whites' hasty departure, and settled in like conquerors, brutally dispersing the anarchist councils set up by the Makhnovists during their advance. With half their numbers down with typhoid fever, including Makhno now in a deep coma, the Insurgents made the fatal mistake of not opposing the rapacious Cheka's implantation. They retired to the area surrounding Huliai-Pole and engaged in guerrilla warfare against both the Reds and the Whites through the winter 1919 and the spring of 1920. The Bolsheviks, in spite of the sheer weight of their numbers, were unable to gain the upper hand against the elusive Anarchist partisans. Defections to the Makhnovists were endemic and the Reds had to resort to non-Russian speaking contingents, less prone to political contamination, and very tight commissar guardianship. During summer, Makhno's spectacular incursions inflicted further humiliation upon the Reds: 4,000 selected men on horse or tatchanka conducted

a first 20-day raid, 1,200 km deep, followed by a second, 30 day raid, 1,500 km deep. The outcome was awesome: Red losses totalled 13,400 prisoners in addition to 26,000 to 30,000 killed, wounded or missing, among which there were 2,000 Bolshevik dignitaries who had been shot on the spot. The Reds could only take revenge for their military setbacks on the local population suspected of Makhnovist sympathies. These brilliant performances caught the attention of Baron Wrangel, now in command of a White army mounting its last desperate offensive. Hoping to come to some sort of arrangement on the basis of their common hostility towards Bolshevism, he sent his emissaries with offers of generous logistic support. Makhno had them executed before they could deliver their message. With huge resources mobilized on the Polish front, the Bolsheviks were unable to undertake decisive action against either the Makhnovists or the Whites. The advantages of an opportunistic alliance with Makhno were too obvious to be ignored, and in September 1920 Bolsheviks and Anarchists signed a military treaty against Wrangel. How did the Insurgents accept such an unnatural partnership with the Reds, with memories of their betrayal, massacres and devastation still fresh in all minds? Among the Makhnovist leaders, only a small majority were in favour of a coalition. Makhno himself hesitated. They had obtained written guarantees for their autonomy and promises of freedom for their numerous comrades languishing in the Cheka's prisons. As a token of apparent good will, the Bolshevik press, by now accustomed to the exercise, had done a complete U-turn, and Makhno the bloodthirsty brigand was once again hailed as a Hero of the Revolution. In addition, the Makhnovists would be able to fight to free their original lands, currently under White domination. In October 1920, the 6,000 strong Insurgent contingent attacked and liberated a vast territory, smashing Wrangel's best regiments in the process. Red infantry followed cautiously in its wake. Outflanked by Makhno's breakthrough,