

# **The Unknown Revolution, 1917–1921. Book Three. Struggle for the Real Social Revolution**

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# Contents

Foreword	3
<b>Part I. Kronstadt (1921)</b>	<b>4</b>
Chapter 1. Geographical Notes	5
Chapter 2. Kronstadt Before the Revolution	6
Chapter 3. Kronstadt as the Vanguard of the Revolution	7
Chapter 4. Kronstadt Turns Against the Bolshevik Imposture	14
Chapter 5. Last Act: The End of Independence	60
<b>Part II. Ukraine (1918–1921)</b>	<b>72</b>
Chapter 1. Mass Movement in the Ukraine	73
Chapter 2. Formation of the Makhnovist Insurrectionary Army	87
Chapter 3. Denikin's Offensives and Final Defeat	96
Chapter 4. The Makhnovists in the Liberated Regions	125
Chapter 5. Wrangel's Offensive and Defeat	143
Chapter 6. Third and Last War of the Bolsheviks Against the Makhnovists and Anarchists; Defeat of the Insurrectionary Army	150
Chapter 7. The Fate of Makhno and Some of His Comrades. Epilogue	164
Chapter 8. Testament of the Makhnovshchina to the Workers of the World	179

# Foreword

Independently of the reactions towards the right [which took place in Russia after the October Revolution of 1917] there also occurred, during and after the same period, a series of movements in the opposite direction. These were revolutionary movements, which fought the Bolshevik power in the name of true liberty and of the principles of the Social Revolution which that power had scoffed at and trampled underfoot.

Indeed, even within the ranks of the government and of the Communist Party itself, movements of opposition and revolt were provoked by the stifling statism and centralism, the terrifying tendency towards bureaucracy, the flagrant social impotence and the shameless violence of the Bolsheviks.

It was thus that, in the summer of 1918, the Left Social-Revolutionaries, who until then had participated in the government, left it, broke with the Bolsheviks, and declared against them. They soon succumbed under the blows of repression.

Later on, within the Bolshevik Party itself, there appeared what was called “the Workers’ Opposition”, the first manifestation of which constrained Lenin to publish his pamphlet entitled *Left-Wing Communism: an Infantile Disorder*. This “Workers’ Opposition” was likewise destroyed by the repeated blows of an implacable repression. It was followed by other movements of opposition, always within the government and the Party, and all of these were likewise suppressed with a crushing ferocity.

All these movements, which were strictly political and were frequently quite mild [in their criticisms of the Party], have little intrinsic interest. To be sure, the future historian will find in them very edifying material for describing and judging the regime. But from the viewpoint of the revolution and its fate they were basically “family quarrels”, despite the occasional fierceness of the struggle they provoked. If the oppositionists or rebels had won, the country would have had a change of masters without any alteration in its fundamental situation. The new masters would inevitably have been driven to adopt the policy and methods of their predecessors. For the people, nothing would have changed. Or rather, as the saying goes, “the more it would have changed, the more it would have remained the same thing.”

It was outside these “palace” disturbances that there arose from time to time various leftist movements — sometimes on a large scale — which were essentially popular, movements of the masses apolitical, strictly social and truly revolutionary.

We will concentrate primarily on two of these movements the most conscious, the most important, and the least known [outside libertarian circles] of them all; that of Kronstadt in March, 1921, and the vast and vigorous movement in the Ukraine which lasted for nearly four years, from 1918 to the end of 1921.

# **Part I. Kronstadt (1921)**

# Chapter 1. Geographical Notes

Kronstadt is a fortress, or rather, a fortified city, built two centuries ago on the Island of Kotlin, 30 kilometres west of St. Petersburg (now Leningrad) at the lower end of the Gulf of Finland. It defends the approaches from the Baltic Sea to the former capital, and is also the principal base of the Russian Baltic Fleet. The Gulf of Finland is frozen in winter, and communication between Kronstadt and Leningrad is carried on, for five months of the year (from November to April), over a snow road on top of the thick ice of the Gulf.

Kotlin Island — a narrow, elongated piece of land with very irregular contours — is 12 kilometres long. Its greatest width is from 2 to 3 kilometres. Its coasts are inaccessible and well fortified. The eastern part of the island, which faces Leningrad, contains the city of Kronstadt, the port and the docks, and occupies about a third of the total area. The north, west and south coasts are strewn with forts and bastions. Between these coasts and the city, at the time of the 1917 Revolution, the terrain was virtually desert.

To the north and south, the island is surrounded by many forts and batteries, projecting fairly far into the sea. On a point of the mainland, twenty kilometres away by sea and facing the island, there is the important fort of Krasnaia Gorka. On the other coast, facing the north shore of the island and ten kilometres away by sea, is the fortified cape called Lissy Noss.

Inside the city, the most noteworthy feature is the immense Anchor Square. Capable of holding up to 30,000 people, this square was formerly used for training conscripts and for military reviews. During the Revolution it became a regular popular forum. Whenever summoned, and at the slightest alarm, the sailors, soldiers and workers would rush there to hold monster meetings. During the winter, the same role was filled by the vast “maritime riding school.”

The population of Kronstadt comprised, first, the crews of the Baltic Fleet, quartered in vast barracks, then the soldiers of the garrison, mainly artillerymen, and, finally, many officers, officials merchants, skilled workers, etc., in all some 50,000 inhabitants.

## Chapter 2. Kronstadt Before the Revolution

The Baltic Fleet and the Kronstadt garrison played a role of the very first importance in the Russian Revolution. Many factors contributed to this. In the first place, the sailors were recruited for the most part from the working class, from whom the navy naturally picked the best-qualified, most literate and alert recruits. But workers of this kind were also the most advanced politically. Frequently, before going to serve in the navy, they had been budding revolutionaries, sometimes even active militants, and inevitably, in spite of discipline and supervision, they wielded a strong influence over their shipmates.

Moreover, since the sailors often visited foreign countries in the line of their duty, they were in a good position to compare the relatively free regimes of these lands with that of Tsarist Russia. Better than any other section of the people, including the army, they assimilated the ideas and programmes of the political parties, while many of them maintained relations with the emigres [in Western Europe] and read their forbidden and clandestine literature.

We should add that the proximity of the then capital, with its intense political, intellectual and industrial activity, contributed a great deal to the education of the men in Kronstadt. In St. Petersburg “political life” was at its fullest. There was an important mass of workers, and a numerous and turbulent youth at the University. The lively activity of the revolutionary groups, the ever more frequent and imposing disturbances and demonstrations, the scuffles that sometimes followed them, and the generally rapid and direct contact with political and social events, all induced the population of Kronstadt to take a lively and sustained interest in the internal life of the country, the aspirations and struggles of the masses, and the political and social problems of the day.

St. Petersburg, indeed, kept Kronstadt always on the alert, and sometimes in a fever. Already, in 1905–6 and in 1910, the Kronstadt sailors had attempted fairly serious revolts, which were severely repressed. But their spirit became all the more fierce and alive.

Finally, from the earliest days of the 1917 Revolution, the extreme leftist currents, the Bolsheviks, the Left Social-Revolutionaries, the Maximalists, the Syndicalists and Anarchists, all created active and well-organised centres in Kronstadt, and their activity soon exercised a considerable influence over the mass of the sailors.

For all these reasons, Kronstadt soon became the vanguard of the revolutionary people in 1917. Because of its energy, its developed consciousness, it was “the pride and glory of the Russian Revolution”, as Trotsky said when it was aiding him to take power. This did not prevent him from turning his cannons against this “glory”, whose members had now become “counter-revolutionary swine”, as soon as it took a stand against the deviations and impostures of the Bolshevik Party.

## Chapter 3. Kronstadt as the Vanguard of the Revolution

From February, 1917, for the whole duration of the Revolution, and nearly everywhere, the men of Kronstadt were in the thick of the struggle. They did not confine themselves to their local activity, energetic though it was. Full of revolutionary enthusiasm and combative ardour, well-endowed with strength and audacity, conscious of their role, they unfalteringly gave the revolution all that it asked of them – their fire and their faith, their awareness and their vigour. They became devoted militants, ready to sacrifice their lives, they became agitators and popular propagandists, distributors of revolutionary literature throughout the country, technicians of every kind, and, above all, incomparable fighters.

In February, 1917, Kronstadt immediately rallied to the Revolution. Rising up and taking possession of their city, the sailors felt obliged to perform a painful but, in their opinion, necessary action. On the night of February 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>, they seized and executed on the spot some two hundred notoriously reactionary senior officers. The rancour and hatred that had accumulated over long years was thus assuaged, for among the victims were those who, during the attempted revolt of 1910, had ordered several hundred sailors to be shot, as well as causing the famous drowning at Fort Totleben of several boatloads of captured seamen.

The execution of these two hundred officers was the only bloody episode, for the sailors protected to the utmost of their ability, not only those officers whom they esteemed and liked, but also those who had simply refrained from ferocity during the repression. Through the whole period [of the uprising], groups of seamen sought everywhere for their own officers, who had been lost in the tumult, and when they found that they had been arrested by some other crew, obtained their release and placed them in safety on their ships or in the barracks.

The sailors soon organised the first Soviet of Kronstadt. While it was initially very moderate (most of its members were Right Social-Revolutionaries or Mensheviks), this Soviet was propelled by the pressure of the revolutionary masses into sharp conflict with the Provisional Government. The immediate causes of these conflicts were insignificant, but their underlying import was serious and well understood by the masses. The government could tolerate neither the independent spirit nor the fervent activity of the men of Kronstadt. It sought at all costs to destroy the former and paralyse the latter; in short, to subdue the malcontents and entirely subjugate the city.

The first conflicts were settled amicably. After many meetings and deliberations, the people of Kronstadt considered it prudent to yield for the time being. At the same time, discontented with the weak attitude of the Soviet, they proceeded to elect new delegates.

Fresh conflicts with the Provisional Government soon broke out. Repeatedly, at the end of its patience, Kronstadt was on the point of an uprising, and only the feeling that the country would not yet understand this premature act made the sailors reconsider.

It was at this time that the first calumnies against Kronstadt were fabricated and circulated by the bourgeois press in Russia and abroad. "Kronstadt has seceded from Russia and has proclaimed

itself an autonomous republic.” “Kronstadt is coining its own money.” “Kronstadt is on the point of concluding a separate peace with the Germans.” These were some of the absurdities that were put about. Their purpose was to discredit Kronstadt in the eyes of the country, so as subsequently to be able to wipe it out without difficulty.

The first Provisional Government had no time to carry out this project. It fell, amid general hostility. Kronstadt, on the other hand, gained favour in the eyes of the masses.

The second Kronstadt Soviet was much farther to the left [than its predecessor]. It contained many Bolsheviks, several Maximalists and several Anarchists.<sup>1</sup> However, the activity of the Soviet, and the inevitable struggles within it between the diverse factions, counted for little in comparison with the enormous activity that went on among the workers themselves, on the ships, in the barracks, in the workshops. At the meetings which followed each other in rapid succession at Anchor Square, all the problems of the revolution were discussed and examined from every point of view; the population lived through intense and passionate days. In this way Kronstadt educated itself and prepared for the exceptionally active part which it was soon to play in the struggles ahead, in every stage of the revolution and in every part of Russia.

At first the sailors were favourable to Kerensky, but soon they realised his true role, and two weeks after the famous unsuccessful offensive of June 18<sup>th</sup>, Kronstadt took a definite stand against him and his government. [Its antagonism was increased when] Kerensky, having learned of the hostile feeling in Kronstadt, tried to arrest a number of sailors when they went to Petrograd and also attempted other repressive measures.

The disturbances in Petrograd, where a revolutionary machine-gun regiment opposed being sent to the front with arms in hand, and was fired on by troops loyal to the government, fanned the flames. It was then that, on July 4<sup>th</sup>, twelve thousand sailors, soldiers and working men and women of Kronstadt landed in Petrograd, carrying red and black flags and placards bearing such slogans as “All Power to the local Soviets.” The demonstrators marched towards the Tauride Palace, where the various factions, including the Bolsheviks, were deliberating on the political situation. They wished to broaden their demonstration and draw in the masses and garrison of the capital, so that the struggle might be pressed as far as the fall of the government and its replacement by that of the Soviets. Their example was not followed, and, after losing several men during skirmishes in the streets with troops that supported the government, they had to recognise their failure and return to Kronstadt without having accomplished anything. The new revolution was not yet due.

The government, for its part, did not feel strong enough to deal severely with the demonstrators, and, after protracted negotiations during which both sides prepared for a merciless struggle (Kronstadt actually formed battalions for the purpose of attacking Petrograd), they finally reached an agreement and everything became peaceful again.

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<sup>1</sup> For many reasons, the presence of Anarchists in the Soviets was rather unusual. Outside Kronstadt, there were some Anarchists in the Petrograd and Moscow Soviets. Elsewhere, an Anarchist in the Soviets was a rarity. As for the general attitude of the Anarchists towards the Soviets, this altered according to their development. Favourable at first, when the Soviets still had the character of workers’ organs, and when the revolutionary impetus allowed one to hope that they would be rendered satisfactory for certain useful functions, their attitude subsequently became sceptical, and finally entirely negative, as the Soviets were transformed into political organs manipulated by the government. The Anarchists thus began by not opposing the election of their comrades to these institutions. They later abstained and ended by pronouncing themselves “categorically and definitely against all participation in the Soviets which have become purely political organs, organised on an authoritarian, centralist, statist basis” (Resolution of the Nabat Congress at Elizabeth in April, 1919).



Certain features of this unsuccessful “sedition” are worth emphasising. The Bolsheviks played a preponderant role, and it was mainly their slogans that the demonstrators adopted. Within Kronstadt, their representatives were the principal organisers of the action. The sailors asked them: “What if the Party disowns the action?” They replied: “We will force it to support us.” But since the Central Committee had not made any decision (or had decided to abstain) and since certain well-known Bolsheviks were negotiating with other political factions, [the Bolshevik leaders] participating only “unofficially”, Lenin confined himself to delivering a speech of encouragement from a balcony and then disappeared. Trotsky and the other leaders refrained from any participation and kept out of sight. The movement was not theirs, they did not control it, and therefore it had no interest for them. They awaited their own hour.

A number of Bolsheviks, who had decorated an armoured car with a huge red flag bearing the initials of their Central Committee, wanted to place it at the head of the demonstration. But the sailors declared that they were acting, not under the auspices of the Bolshevik Party, but under those of their Soviet, and [sent the armoured car to] the rear.

The Anarchists, already influential in Kronstadt, took an active part in the action that day, and lost several men. But basically, it was a movement of the masses, of thousands of rebels.

After the July days, the bourgeois press again took up the calumnies against Kronstadt, insinuating that the rebellion was organised “with German money” (they even specified that each sailor was paid 25 gold roubles a day!) and speaking of treason. The Socialist press joined the chorus, and suggested that the movement was the work of “suspicious elements”. This campaign allowed Kerensky to threaten Kronstadt with severe repressions. But, as we have seen, he did not dare to act

The men of Kronstadt did not let themselves be intimidated in the least. They were becoming increasingly conscious of being on the right road, and also increasingly sure that the day was approaching when the masses would understand that the faith, the force and the aims that had inspired the activity of Kronstadt were also their own.

It was at this point that Kronstadt broke into an extraordinary and almost feverish activity. Its people began by sending a succession of agitators and popular propagandists into all parts of the country. Their slogan and rallying cry was “All power to the local Soviets.” In the provinces these emissaries were arrested by the dozen, but Kronstadt replied by sending out more and more of them.

Soon, their efforts were repaid. The sailors of the Black Sea Fleet, who hitherto had supported Kerensky, finally began to doubt the “information from reliable sources” that was denouncing the “counter-revolutionary” role of Kronstadt. To set their minds at ease, they sent a delegation to Kronstadt. Solemnly received by the Soviet, this delegation conferred intimately with the residents of the city, learned their attitude, and uncovered the lies of the press and the authorities. From that moment, a close contact was established between the two fleets.

Furthermore, several units of troops at the front sent delegations to Kronstadt to discover the state of mind of the sailors, and to set things straight if necessary, so greatly had the reputation of Kronstadt been distorted by calumny. One of these delegations, composed of an imposing number of men, formed a regular military expedition. They arrived at Kronstadt in boats filled with weapons (even artillery and machine guns), ready for any eventuality. They were not taking any chances, for, if they were to believe the rumours and the newspaners, they might well expect to be fired upon by the defenders of the “independent republic of Kronstadt”. financed by Germany! They dropped anchor some distance from the shore, and first dispatched to the city

a few small boats with “plenipotentiaries”. Upon landing, these advanced carefully towards the city, like regular reconnaissance patrols in enemy country.

All this ended, as usual, in a solemn reception by the Soviet, and in intimate, passionate, but friendly discussions. The sailors went to visit the boats of the “expedition”, which were brought into the port, and the guests visited the battleships. In the evening, the delegation returned convinced to the front, with cries of “All power to the local Soviets”.

Often these delegations would propose that the sailors should replace their exhausted units at the front. Then the men of Kronstadt firmly explained their own viewpoint. “As long as the land is not given to the peasants and the revolution is not completely victorious,” they said, “the workers have nothing to defend.”

A little before General Kornilov’s march on Petrograd, the reactionaries in their effort to master the political situation, reestablished discipline in some sections of the army, re-instituted the death penalty at the front, and tried to destroy the soldiers’ committees. Kronstadt accordingly renewed its preparations for an armed insurrection.

At about the same time, the Kerensky government under the pretext of reinforcing the Riga front, decided to remove the heavy artillery from Kronstadt and all the forts. The indignation of the sailors was unbounded. They knew perfectly well that this artillery could play no effective part at the front, and they also knew that the German Fleet was preparing to attack Kronstadt. They were getting ready to prevent this, which would have been impossible without artillery. Unable to believe that the members of the government could be so ignorant of the facts, they saw in Kerensky’s decision a desire to disarm Kronstadt on the eve of attack, a direct treason against the revolution. They were completely convinced that the Kerensky government had decided to stifle the revolution by any means possible, not excluding the surrender of Kronstadt and Petrograd to the Germans.

Kronstadt did not hesitate. On the ships, in the forts and workshops, secret meetings were held to elaborate a plan for resistance and revolt. At the same time, dozens of sailors went every day to Petrograd where they toured the factories, workshops and barracks, openly preaching insurrection.

In the face of this fierce opposition, the government reconsidered and yielded. A compromise was negotiated, and only a small detachment went to the front. On the whole, the sailors were pleased with this solution, since, thanks to the vigilance of the officers’ committees, the front was precisely the one place to which they had not succeeded in penetrating. An occasion now presented itself to carry there what was called “the Kronstadt contagion”.

After the Kornilov putsch of August, 1917, in the destruction of which the sailors from Kronstadt especially distinguished themselves, the final distrust of the masses towards them was broken. At the same time, the popularity of Kerensky was diminishing every day. It was beginning to be understood everywhere that Kronstadt had been right to defy the government, to unmask the machinations of the reactionaries and not allow itself to be deceived.

The moral victory of Kronstadt was complete, and from this time onwards many workers’ and peasants’ delegations arrived there, seeking enlightenment on the real situation and asking for advice and suggestions for the future. On leaving, these delegations requested the sailors to send propagandists and literature into their regions. Kronstadt could ask for nothing better, and soon it could be said without exaggeration that there was not a single province, a single district, in which emissaries from Kronstadt had not spent at least a few days, advising direct expropriation of the land, refusal to obey the government, re-election and consolidation of the Soviets, a determined

struggle for peace and a continuation of the revolution.<sup>2</sup> Thus, by their ceaseless activity, the men of Kronstadt instilled a revolutionary spirit into the workers' and peasants' organisations and into the army,<sup>3</sup> while at the same time they took up a vigorous stand against all unauthorised acts, against all deeds of hatred and individual despair.

Everywhere that the revolution was fighting the old society, the men of Kronstadt were in the ranks of the fighters.

Before finishing with the pre-Bolshevik period in Kronstadt, it remains for us to give an idea of the intense constructive work accomplished there in spite of the armed struggles and other urgent tasks. In this field the Kronstadt Soviet created two important organs, the Technical and Military Commission, and the Propaganda Commission.

The Technical and Military Commission comprised 14 members of the Soviet, together with several delegates from the Union of Maritime Transport Workers and from the ships, and forts. In addition, the office of Special Commissar was created at each of the principal forts. These Commissars were charged with maintaining permanent contact between the forts, the Soviet and the Commission, and also with supervising the material condition of the forts and their equipment.

The Commission looked after everything that concerned the defence of Kronstadt and its technical needs. It was responsible, among other things, for the general arming of the workers, for forming them into battalions and giving them military training. It kept daily records of all the fighting units and also supervised the condition of the merchant ships, both cargo and passenger. It directed ship-repair work and was also in charge of the scrap iron with which the vast artillery depot was filled.

The Propaganda Commission was considered extremely important. It carried on a great educational activity, not only in Kronstadt itself, but also in more or less distant localities, whose extent steadily broadened across the country. Every day requests for orators, agitators, lecturers and propagandists came from the various forts, some of them were thirty kilometres away by sea, or from one or another suburb of Petrograd.

The Commission ordered, assembled and distributed all kinds of literature, particularly political and social works (Socialist, Communist and Anarchist) and scientific popularisations, dealing especially with general and rural economics. Each sailor or soldier tried to gather together, with his own money, a little library which he first read carefully himself, and afterwards planned to take back to his "own country", his native village.

The methods employed in the choice and sending out of propagandists are worthy of some attention. Any workshop, military unit or ship could send a popular propagandist to the provinces. Any man who wished to travel in this capacity had to declare his intention to the general assembly of his unit or ship. If there were no objection, the committee of the unit or ship gave him provisional permission. He was then endorsed by the Propaganda Committee and went on to the secretary of the Soviet. If, at the general meeting of the Soviet, his application were supported by those who knew him personally, and if no one opposed him for revolutionary or moral reasons, the Soviet gave him formal and final permission in its own name. Its permit served him as a

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<sup>2</sup> It was in this period that the Right Social-Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks were being forced out of the Soviets, giving way to the Bolsheviks. And it was then that the essential elements of the next (October) revolution were being feverishly forged. Lenin was keeping in touch with this whole situation, and was himself preparing for his hour.

<sup>3</sup> We should add here that at the time [of all this activity] the Baltic Fleet had to sustain several hard battles with the German squadron in order to defend the access to Petrograd in the name of the revolution on the march.

safe-conduct where-ever he went. The money for these missions was supplied from the treasury of the Soviet, which was raised by voluntary levies from the workers' wages.

Almost always, the propagandist took with him products which were made especially by the Kronstadt workers as gifts to the peasants. These workers, particularly those who still took care of peasants 'back home', set up a shop where in their spare time they produced articles of a kind that were necessary in the country — nails, horseshoes, sickles, ploughs, etc. They were helped in these tasks by soldier and sailor specialists. The enterprise took the name of The Kronstadt Workers' Union. It requested all the inhabitants of the city to bring their unuseable scrap, and also obtained it from the Technical Commission.

The emissaries from Kronstadt never forgot to supply themselves with these products to present to the peasants through the local Soviets. Letters of warm gratitude flooded in to the Kronstadt Soviet from peasants who promised, in exchange, to support that city in the struggle for bread and liberty.

Another [interesting constructive] enterprise was a kind of horticultural commune which was set up when the inhabitants of Kronstadt used the empty land between the shores and the city for collective vegetable gardens. Groups of city people, consisting of about 50 persons living in the same district or working in the same shop, undertook to work the land in common. Each of these communities received from the city a plot of land chosen by lot. The community members were helped by specialists, surveyors and agronomists.

All questions of interest to the members of these communities were discussed at meetings of delegates or in general assemblies. A provisioning committee took charge of distributing seeds. Tools were supplied by depots in the city and by the community members themselves. The fertiliser was also supplied by the city.

These kitchen gardens rendered an important service to the inhabitants of Kronstadt, especially during periods of famine, in 1918 and later. The communities [which were formed around them] also served to bring the inhabitants closer together. This free community movement showed great vitality; it still existed in 1921 and remained for a long time the only independent institution which the Bolsheviks could not destroy [in Kronstadt].

All matters concerning the public services in Kronstadt and the internal life of the city were administered by the citizens themselves, through the medium of house committees and militia, and little by little they advanced towards the socialisation of dwellings and of all urban services.

Generally speaking, at Kronstadt and elsewhere in Russia before the enthronement of the Bolsheviks, the inhabitants of a house first organised a number of tenants' meetings. These meetings named a tenants' committee, which consisted of men who were energetic and capable of fulfilling some necessary function. The Committee supervised the upkeep of the house and the welfare of its inhabitants, it designated the day and night janitors, etc. Each House Committee delegated one of its members to the Street Committee, which was in charge of matters that concerned the whole street. Then came the District Committee, the Borough Committee and finally the City Committee, which was concerned with the interests of the whole city and, in a natural and logical manner, carried out whatever centralisation of services was necessary.

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<sup>4</sup> Fromn August to November, 1917, the author of these lines, who was then living in Petrograd, went frequently to Kronstadt, to lecture and to see at first hand the free and intense life of the population. Certain details are taken from the excellent Russian pamphlet written by another militant who lived in Kronstadt and actively participated in all its works — Kronstadt in the Russian Revolution by E. Yartchuk. The pamphlet has not been translated.

The organisation of the militia was similar to that of the Committees: each house had a group of militiamen, drawn from the tenants; there were also street militia, district militia, etc.

All of the public services functioned admirably, for the men in charge of them acted from personal inclination or individual aptitude, and therefore conscientiously and intelligently, fully aware of the importance of their activity.<sup>4</sup> Thus, in making their way towards complete socialisation of dwellings and all urban services, the workers of Kronstadt achieved at the same time a complex of peaceful and creative measures, which pointed towards a fundamental transformation of the very basis of social life.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Naturally, when they achieved power, the Bolsheviks liquidated, little by little, this autonomous administration and replaced it by a mechanical statist organisation controlled by officials.

## Chapter 4. Kronstadt Turns Against the Bolshevik Imposture

We are now approaching the crucial point of the Kronstadt epic: its desperate and heroic struggle, in March, 1921, against the usurpations of the Bolsheviks, and the consequent termination of its independence.

The first dissensions between the men of Kronstadt and the new government took place almost immediately after the October Revolution. The slogan of *All Power to the Local Soviets* meant to Kronstadt the independence of each locality, of each Soviet, of each social organisation in the matters which concerned it alone. It meant the right to take initiatives, to make decisions, and to act without asking permission from the “centre”. According to this interpretation, the “centre” could neither dictate nor impose its will on the local Soviets, since each Soviet, each workers’ and peasants’ organisation, was its own master. Of course, it must co-ordinate its activity with that of other organisations, but on a federal basis. Matters concerning the whole country would be co-ordinated by a general federative centre. Kronstadt therefore supposed that, under the protection of a “proletarian” and “friendly” government, free federations of Soviets and factory committees would progressively create a powerful organised force, capable of defending the conquests of the social revolution and of continuing it.

But the government naturally concerned itself with everything but the fundamental problems – those of helping the workers’ and peasants’ organisations to emancipate themselves fully. It was preoccupied with the Constituent Assembly, with its own installation in office, with its prerogatives, with its relations to the various political parties, with the elaboration of projects for collaboration with the remaining bourgeoisie (“workers’ control of production”), etc. It concerned itself very little with the independence of workers’ organisations. In fact, it gave it no thought at all.

Indeed, the Bolshevik government evidently understood the slogan “power to the Soviets” in a peculiar way. It applied it in reverse. Instead of giving assistance to the working masses and permitting them to conquer and enlarge their own autonomous activity, it began by taking all “power” from them and treating them like subjects. It bent the factories to its will and liberated the workers from the right to make their own decisions; it took arbitrary and coercive measures, without even asking the advice of the workers concerned; it ignored the demands emanating from the workers’ organisations. And, in particular, it increasingly curbed, under various pretexts, the freedom of action of the Soviets and of other workers’ organisations, everywhere imposing its will arbitrarily and even by violence.

[The following example from the history of Kronstadt illustrates both the arbitrary attitude of the government and its incompetence when faced by the real problems of the revolution].

In the beginning of 1918, the working population of Kronstadt, after debating the subject in many meetings, decided to proceed to socialise dwelling places. It was a question, first of all, of obtaining the agreement of the local Soviet, then of creating a competent organisation to

carry out a census and examination of buildings and an equitable redistribution of dwellings, together with their rehabilitation and maintenance and the initiation of repair services and new construction.

A final monster meeting definitely instructed several members of the Soviet — Left Social-Revolutionaries and Anarcho-Syndicalists — to raise the question at the next plenary session. In consequence, a detailed project, drawn up by these delegates, was deposited at the office of the Soviet.

The first article of the project declared: “From henceforward private property in land and buildings is abolished.” Other articles specified: “The management of each building will henceforward be the duty of a House Committee elected by all its tenants ... Important matters concerning a building will be discussed and settled by a general meeting of tenants ... Matters concerning a whole district will be examined by general assemblies of its inhabitants; District Committees shall be appointed by them ... The Borough Committee will be in charge of matters concerning the whole city.”

The Bolshevik members of the Soviet asked that discussion be delayed for a week, on the pretext that the problem was very important and required a thorough examination. When the Soviet agreed to this postponement, they went to Petrograd to get instructions from the “centre”.

At the next session, the Bolsheviks asked for the adjournment of the project under consideration. They declared, in particular, that such an important problem could only be resolved for the whole country, that Lenin was already in the process of preparing a decree on this subject, and that, for the sake of the project itself, the Kronstadt Soviet should wait for instructions from the “centre”.

The Left Social-Revolutionaries, Maximalists and Anarcho-Syndicalists asked for an immediate discussion and carried the vote. In the course of the debate, the extreme Left underlined the necessity of voting immediately after the discussion and of proceeding to the immediate implementation of the project if it were adopted. But the Bolsheviks and the Social-Democrats (Mensheviks), forming a united front, got up and left the hall. Sustained, ironical applause, and cries of “At last they are united!” accompanied their action.

In order to settle the matter, a Maximalist delegate proposed that the Soviet vote on the project, article by article. This would allow the Bolsheviks to return and take part in the voting, and thus erase the false impression left by their withdrawal that they were against the abolition of private property.

This proposal was adopted. Meanwhile, the Bolsheviks realised that they had made a tactical error. They resumed their seats and voted for the first article: “Private property in land and buildings is abolished.” This was a vote of “principle” for them. But when the articles dealing with the means of immediately realising this principle came up for discussion, they again left the hall.

Several Bolsheviks, however, considered it impossible to submit to party discipline in this affair. They remained in their places, took part in the discussion, and voted for the project. They declared that they had a formal mandate from their electors to vote for its immediate realisation. Nevertheless, they were severely censured, and expelled from the party for “Anarcho-Syndicalist deviation.”

The project was adopted. But for a long time afterwards it was the subject of a continued and passionate struggle in the workshops, battalions and ships. Meeting followed meeting. The members of the Soviet were invited to give reports on the details of the discussion and on their position. Certain Bolsheviks opposed to the project were recalled from the Soviet by their electors.

After these occurrences, the Bolsheviks opened a violent campaign against the Anarcho-Syndicalists, and they also tried to sabotage the realisation of the adopted project. Nothing came of their efforts. Soon the committees (house, district, etc.) were appointed and began to function. The project became alive. The principle of “each inhabitant has the right to a decent dwelling” became a reality.

All dwellings were methodically visited, examined and entered in the census by the committee, for the purpose of establishing a more equitable distribution. On the one hand, horrible hovels were discovered in which the unfortunate lived, sometimes several families together. On the other hand, there were comfortable apartments of ten or fifteen rooms which were occupied only by a few persons. For example, the Director of the Engineering School, a bachelor, occupied by himself a luxurious apartment of twenty rooms, and when the commission came to take the census and reduce his “living space” for the benefit of several unfortunate families removed from stinking hovels, he protested hotly and called this act a “downright robbery”.

Soon all those who filled the unhealthy shacks and garrets and the filthy cellars were lodged in somewhat cleaner and more comfortable places. Several hotels for travellers were also established. And each Borough Committee organised a workshop for the repair and improvement of buildings; these shops functioned efficiently.

Later on, the Bolshevik government destroyed this organisation and wiped out its constructive beginnings. The management of buildings passed to a purely bureaucratic institution, the Real Estate and Buildings Centre, which was organised from above and attached to the National Economic Council. This Centre installed in every building, district and borough an official or, to be more accurate, a policeman, whose main function was to supervise activities in the houses, to keep track of the movements of the inhabitants in each district, to report infractions of lodging and visa regulations, to denounce “suspects”, etc.

Several sterile bureaucratic decrees were promulgated, but all the work, all the positive, concrete tasks, were abandoned. The population concerned was eliminated from [participation in control of] the undertaking (as in other fields), and everything fell back into a state of inertia and stagnation. The better buildings were requisitioned for the bureaucratic service of the state, for officials’ apartments etc., and the rest, more or less abandoned to their fate, soon began to deteriorate.

As a result of proceedings of this kind in *every field of life*, the sailors of Kronstadt were not slow to realise that they had been deceived and deluded by the false slogans of the “Proletarian State”, the “Dictatorship of the Proletariat”, etc. They realised that, under a pretence of friendliness, new enemies of the working masses had installed themselves in power.

They did not conceal their disillusionment. A peaceful but firm opposition to the bureaucratic, arbitrary, anti-social and anti-revolutionary acts of the Bolshevik government began to appear in their ranks by the end of 1917, barely two months after the October Revolution.

But the Bolsheviks were watchful, for the government knew perfectly well how matters stood with the militants of Kronstadt, and it could not consider itself secure so long as this citadel of the real revolution continued to exist so close to Petrograd. *It was necessary at all costs to reduce it to impotence and obedience.*

The government therefore elaborated a Machiavellian scheme. Not daring to attack Kronstadt openly, by frontal assault, it began — methodically and slyly — to weaken, impoverish and exhaust it, by means of a series of camouflaged measures aimed at depriving Kronstadt of its best



forces, taking away its more combative elements, exhausting their strength and, in the last resort, annihilating them.

To begin, it exploited more than ever the revolutionary enthusiasm and abilities of the sailors. When, shortly after October, the food situation of the city population became catastrophic, the government asked Kronstadt to form special crews of propagandists and to send them into the provinces, the country districts and the villages to preach to the peasants the ideas of solidarity and revolutionary duty, and, in particular, the necessity for feeding the cities. The revolutionary fame of the men of Kronstadt, said the Bolsheviks, could render immeasurable service to the cause. More easily than anyone else, the sailors could convince the peasants to give up part of their produce to the starving workers.

Kronstadt complied. Numerous formations departed for the depths of the country and carried out the tasks allotted. But nearly all these detachments were scattered in a thousand directions. For various reasons, their members were forced to remain in the interior of the country, and did not return to Kronstadt.

The government also sent constantly to Kronstadt for large detachments to be dispatched wherever the internal situation became uncertain, threatening or dangerous. Kronstadt always responded, and many of its brave militants and fighters never saw their ships or their barracks again.

Kronstadt was also constantly requested to send men to perform functions or occupy posts requiring special abilities, responsibility or courage. Leaders of military formations, commanders of armoured trains, armoured cars and railway stations, specialised workers, mechanics, lathe-workers, gun-mounters, etc., were continually being drawn from among the Kronstadters, who were ready for any sacrifice. When the Kaledin uprising in the South became serious, Kronstadt again sent considerable forces against it, which contributed significantly to the destruction of the enemy and left many of their own men on the battlefield.

All these preliminary measures were finally crowned by a hammer blow which Kronstadt, already seriously weakened, could not resist effectively. When, at the end of February, 1918, the sailors returning from the expedition against Kaledin got off the train at the terminus, from which they could look out over the panorama of the Gulf of Finland under its winter blanket of snow, they were surprised to see that the road across it was black with people. They were sailors from Kronstadt who were going towards Petrograd with their duffle-bags on their backs. Soon those who were returning learned the bitter truth from the mouths of those who were leaving.

Contrary to the resolution adopted by the Pan-Russian Congress of Sailors directly after the October Revolution, which proclaimed, in conformity with the unanimous mandate given the delegates, that the fleet should not be demobilised, but should remain intact as a revolutionary fighting unit, the Council of People's Commissars issued, at the beginning of February, 1918, the famous decree according to which the existing fleet was declared disbanded. A new "Red Fleet" was to be created, on a new basis. Each conscript must henceforth sign an individual pledge that he entered the navy "voluntarily". And — a significant detail — the pay of the sailors was to be made very attractive.

The sailors refused to carry out the decree, and the government replied with an ultimatum: either submit or rations would be withheld within 48 hours. Kronstadt did not feel strong enough to resist at that moment. Raging at heart, cursing the new "revolutionary" power, the sailors packed

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<sup>1</sup> As is well known, the Bolshevik government disarmed the whole population a few months later. Every citizen,

their belongings and left their fortress, carrying a number of machine guns away with them. “We may perhaps need them yet,” they said; “Let the Bolsheviks arm their future mercenaries.”<sup>1</sup>

Later on, a certain number of sailors, returning from the revolutionary fronts for various reasons, came back to Kronstadt and reorganised themselves there. But this was only an insignificant handful. The principal force was scattered all over the immense country.

Kronstadt was not the same city any more. The government had repeated assurances of this fact. For example, during the negotiations with Germany, the Kronstadt Soviet, like the overwhelming majority of other Soviets, voted against making peace with the German generals. At all the meetings and assemblies such a treaty was repudiated. Then the Bolsheviks, after taking certain precautions, annulled the first vote, raised the question a second time, and imposed a peace resolution. Kronstadt yielded.

The peace having been concluded, and the compact revolutionary bloc of Kronstadt, the Black Sea Fleet, etc., having been finally dissolved, the Bolshevik government had a clear field in which to consolidate its dictatorship over the working people. When, in April, 1918, in Moscow and elsewhere, it attacked the Anarchist groups, closed their meeting places, suppressed their papers, and threw their militants into prison, Kronstadt once again bared its claws, but they no longer had the same sharpness. It was now impossible for the sailors to turn their guns against the usurpers, for the latter were no longer within range of them. They were already entrenched, like earlier tyrants, behind the walls of the Kremlin in Moscow. Kronstadt had to confine itself to two resolutions of protest: one was adopted at a monster mass meeting held on Anchor Square, the other by the Soviet.

Immediately a fierce repression was imposed on “the pride and glory of the revolution”. The Bolsheviks forbade the spontaneous calling of meetings. The Soviet was dissolved and replaced by a more docile one. A unit of the Cheka was installed in the city. Communist cells were created everywhere, in the workshops, the regiments and the ships. Everyone was spied upon by informers, and for the slightest criticism of Bolshevik actions the “guilty” were seized and dispatched to Petrograd, where most of them disappeared.

Only once did Kronstadt rise up successfully [against these repressive activities]. The battleship *Petropavlovsk* flatly refused to turn over to the authorities an anarchist sailor named Skurikhin. This time the Bolsheviks did not insist. It would not have been prudent or worth while to provoke an insurrection over a single individual whom in any case they could get later by some other means.

Except for this single jarring incident the Bolshevik government congratulated themselves that the advance guard of the real Revolution, Kronstadt, was virtually powerless, broken under the iron fist of Communist power. Nevertheless, this was only half true.

For months, Kronstadt powerlessly witnessed the usurpations and crimes of the gravediggers of the revolution. Returning from leave, the sailors told about the way in which the “Workers’ Power” treated the workers. In the country it requisitioned produce from the peasants, mercilessly, down to the last grain, the last animal, often even to household effects, thus condemning the cultivators to a famished existence; it did not hesitate to resort to mass arrests and executions of those who were recalcitrant. Around the cities, there were barriers with armed guards who pitilessly confiscated the few miserable bags of flour which the peasants sent in — usually

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whoever and wherever he might be, was summoned to turn in his weapons to the local authorities, under penalty of death.

to their starving relatives — and threw those who resisted into prison; at the same time, they turned a blind eye to the real merchants who passed through with their merchandise destined for speculation, for these knew how to grease the necessary palms.

“The working people are disarmed,” said the returning sailors. “It is clear that the general arming of the workers, and their freedom of speech and action, frightened not only the proven counter-revolutionaries, but also those who have abandoned the true course of the revolution. They created the Red Army, which like all armies, had ended by becoming a blind force in the hands of the party in power. Detached from their roots in the workshops and among their fellow workers, the soldiers were pampered, misled by deceptive slogans, subjected to a brutahsing discipline, and deprived of the means; of acting in an organised way, so that they could easily be manipulated to do whatever those who are in control of them may desire.”

The men of Kronstadt listened, watched and seethed with indignation, but they felt themselves powerless to act. Meanwhile the people were constantly and increasingly fettered, muzzled and subjugated.

Finally, in spite of [all the repressions], the storm burst. It started not in Kronstadt, but in Petrograd. By the end of February, 1921, the situation of the working masses in the cities had become unendurable. The whole of their normal life had disintegrated. The most necessary commodities were lacking. Even bread was rationed and hard to get. For lack of fuel, the houses could no longer be heated. The railways hardly functioned, and many factories closed down, thereby aggravating the situation.

The appeals, questions and protests of the workers accomplished nothing. The Bolshevik government was perfectly aware of the gravity of the situation, and even admitted its inability to remedy it. But it stubbornly refused to alter its policy. It would not even enter into discussion with the dissatisfied workers, and repulsed in advance all suggestions, all collaboration, all initiative. Its only remedy was more requisitioning, more military action, more repressive measures, carried out with the most arbitrary violence.

Serious disturbances finally broke out in Petrograd. Several of the most important factories improvised general assemblies of workers and adopted resolutions hostile to the government, demanding a change of the regime. Proclamations to the same effect appeared in the workshops and on the walls of the city, and the masses stirred confusedly.

Naturally, in this vast popular movement, various elements were present and various viewpoints appeared. Since the freedom of ideas or discussion was not permitted, and since many revolutionaries were in prison, this new ferment was necessarily vague and confused. Because the Revolution had already gone astray, the whole movement was inevitably distorted.

In these conditions, it was natural that certain elements, influenced by anti-revolutionary propaganda — especially that of the moderate Socialists — should propose measures and solutions which would have thrown the revolution into reverse, instead of trying to remove the obstacles so that it could go forward. Thus, there were those who asked for the return to free trading and the calling of a Constituent Assembly.

Nevertheless, three important facts must be borne in mind:

1. The elements in question were far from prevailing in the movement as a whole. They were never the strongest, nor the boldest. Freedom of propaganda for the Left, freedom of action for the masses, could still, with the help of the sincere Bolsheviks, have saved the situation; it could have found a solution and given the revolution a new impulse in the right direction.

2. We must not forget that, from the general point of view, Bolshevism itself represented a *reactionary* system. There were thus two reactionary forces present: one composed of certain anti-Bolshevik elements, which were held in check, and the other, Bolshevism itself, which paralysed and petrified the revolution. The only really revolutionary forces were elsewhere.
3. Of these other elements who represented the true revolutionary forces, Kronstadt was the most important. The men of Kronstadt envisaged a solution which, although hostile to the Bolsheviks, had nothing at all in common with such reactionary ideas as the Constituent Assembly or the return of private capitalism, and the activity carried on by Kronstadt at the very beginning of the movement gives ample proof of this.

In response to certain proclamations and to the general propaganda demanding the calling of the Constituent Assembly, Kronstadt secretly sent delegates to the factories and workshops of Petrograd with the following message to the workers:

“All the revolutionary energy of Kronstadt, its guns and machine-guns, will be resolutely directed against the Constituent Assembly, and against all retreat. But if the workers, having become disillusioned with the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’, take a stand against the new imposters, for free Soviets, for freedom of speech, press, organisation and action for workers and peasants of all ideological tendencies — Anarchist, Left Social-Revolutionary or otherwise — if the workers rise up in a third, genuinely proletarian revolution for the real slogans of October, then Kronstadt will support them with all its strength, unanimously and with the will to conquer or die.”

Spontaneous meetings in all the large factories began on February 22<sup>nd</sup>, and on the 24<sup>th</sup> the disturbances took a more serious turn. That morning the authorities, intent on a “purge”, undertook an examination of the individual work-cards of the workers at the Troubotchny factory, one of the largest in Petrograd. That was the final provocation. The factory stopped working. Several dozen workers went to other factories to call out their personnel and soon the Baltic and Laferme factories, and the Patronny munition workers, joined the strike.

A crowd of two or three thousand excited workers formed in the street and tried to demonstrate. The “Workers’ and Peasants’ Government”, which possessed sufficient special forces of police and soldiers to combat movements of this kind, despatched detachments of students from the Military Academy (officer students called kursanti) to the spot. Collisions took place between these troops and the unarmed crowd. The workers were dispersed, and elsewhere the police and troops prevented several meetings.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> of February, the movement was still growing, and spread to the whole city. The strikers called out the workers of the Admiralty Arsenal and of the port of Galernaia. Masses of workers gathered here and there, and were again dispersed by special formations.

Seeing the disorder increasing, the government alerted the Petrograd Garrison. But this also was in ferment, and several units declared that they would not fight against the workers. They were disarmed, but the government could no longer depend on the garrison. It therefore did without it and brought from the provinces and from certain fronts of the civil war a number of detachments of elite and predominantly Communist troops. On the same day the government

created in Petrograd a Defence Committee under the presidency of Zinovieff, to co-ordinate all action against the movement.

On the 26<sup>th</sup> of February, at the session of the Petrograd Soviet, a notorious Communist named Lachevitch, a member of the above Committee and also of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic, made a report on the situation. He denounced the workers of the Troubotchny works as trouble-makers, describing them as “men who think only of their own personal interests” and as “counter-revolutionaries”. In consequence, the works were closed, and the workers were automatically deprived of their food rations. During the same session, the Commissar of the Baltic Fleet, Kuzmin, mentioned for the first time a certain amount of unrest among the crews of the warships berthed at Kronstadt.

From February 27<sup>th</sup>, a considerable number of proclamations of various kinds were distributed in the streets and posted on the walls of Petrograd. One of the most characteristic said:

“A fundamental change in the policy of the government is required. In the first place, the workers and peasants need liberty. They do not want to live according to the regulations of the Bolsheviks; they want to decide their own destinies for themselves.

“Comrades, maintain revolutionary order! Demand, in an organised and determined way: Liberation of all imprisoned Socialists and non-party workers; Abolition of the state of siege, and freedom of speech, press and assembly for all who work; Free re-election of shop committees and of representatives to the unions and the Soviets.”

The government replied by mass arrests and by the suppression of various workers’ organisations.

On February 28<sup>th</sup>, the Communist military forces, brought from elsewhere, invaded Petrograd. Immediately, a pitiless repression fell upon the workers. Disarmed, they could not resist. In two days, the strikes were broken by force and the workers’ agitation was wiped out “by an iron hand”, as Trotsky put it. But it was precisely on February 28<sup>th</sup> that Kronstadt went into action.

On that February 28<sup>th</sup>, the crew of the battleship Petropavlovsk, who had been for several days in a state of agitation, adopted a resolution which quickly gained the support of another warship, the Sebastopol. The movement extended rapidly to the whole fleet and won over the Red regiments of the garrison. Several delegations of sailors were sent to Petrograd to establish a closer connection with the workers there and to obtain exact information about the situation. This activity of the sailors was entirely peaceful and loyal. It gave moral support to certain of the workers’ demands, which was not at all abnormal in a “Workers’ State” directed by a “proletarian government.”

On March 1<sup>st</sup>, a public meeting took place in Anchor Square. It was officially called by the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Squadrons of the Baltic Fleet, and the announcement appeared in the organ of the Kronstadt Soviet. On the same day, Kalinin, the president of the All-Russian Central Executive, and Kuzmin, the Commissar of the Baltic Fleet, arrived at Kronstadt. Kalinin was received with military honours, music and unfurled banners.

Sixteen thousand sailors, Red soldiers and workers attended the meeting. The chair was taken by the President of the Executive Committee of the Kronstadt Soviet, the Communist Vassilieff. Kalinin and Kuzmin were present.

The delegates who had been sent to Petrograd made their reports. Highly indignant, the meeting expressed its disapproval of the methods employed by the Communists in putting down the

legitimate aspirations of the Petrograd workers. The resolution adopted the previous day by the *Petropavlovsk* was then brought before the assembly. During, the discussion, President Kalinin and Commissar Kuzmin attacked the resolution, the Petrograd strikes and the Kronstadt sailors with extreme violence. But their speeches had no effect. The resolution of the *Petropavlovsk* was put to a vote by a seaman named Petrichenko and was approved unanimously. Commissar Kuzmin noted the event in these words: "The resolution was adopted by the overwhelming majority of the Kronstadt garrison. It was brought up at the general meeting of the city on March 1<sup>st</sup>, in the presence of nearly 16,000 citizens, and unanimously adopted. The President of the Executive Committee of Kronstadt, Vassilieff, and Comrade Kalinin, voted gainst the resolution."

Here is the complete text of this historic document:

*"Resolution of the General Meeting of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Squadrons of the Baltic Fleet, held on March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1921.*

"After having heard the reports of the delegates sent to Petrograd by the general meeting of the crews to examine the situation, the assembly decided that, since it has been established that the present Soviets do not express the will of the workers and peasants, it is necessary:

1. to proceed immediately to the re-election of the Soviets by secret ballot, the electoral campaign among the workers and peasants to be carried on with full freedom of speech and action;
2. to establish freedom of speech and press for all workers and peasants, for the Anarchists and the Left Socialist parties;<sup>2</sup>
3. to accord freedom of assembly to the workers' and peasants' organisations;
4. to convoke, outside of the political parties, a Conference of the workers, Red soldiers and sailors of Petrograd, Kronstadt and the Petrograd province for March 10<sup>th</sup>, 1921, at the latest;
5. to liberate all Socialist political prisoners and also all workers, peasants, Red soldiers and sailors, imprisoned as a result of the workers' and peasants' movements;
6. to elect a commission for the purpose of examining the cases of those who are in prisons or concentration camps;

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<sup>2</sup> It is necessary to know Kronstadt in order to understand the true meaning of this clause. In fact, it has an air of wanting to limit freedom of speech and press, since it only demands them for the extreme Left. The resolution did this only to remove in advance any possibility of misunderstanding the real nature of the movement.

Since the beginning of the revolution, immediately after the very first days when the blood of the too-zealous officers was spilt, Kronstadt established the broadest freedom. The citizens were completely unlimited in the expression of their opinions. Only a few inveterate Tsarists remained in prison, but once the spontaneous rage was over, once reason began to prevail over the instinct of self-preservation, the question of general amnesty was raised in the meetings, so much did the people of Kronstadt hate prisons. Freedom for all prisoners was envisaged, but only in the vicinity of the city; at Kronstadt, reactionary deceptions could have no success, but the sailors did not want to furnish counterrevolutionaries to other localities. The actions of Kerensky provoked new anger and the project was abandoned. But this reversion to ill-temper was the last. From that time, Kronstadt did not know a single case of persecution for ideas. Every thesis could be freely circulated. The tribune of Anchor Square was open to all.

7. to abolish the ‘political offices’, since no political party should have privileges for propagating its ideas or receive money from the State for this purpose, and to replace them with educational and cultural commissions elected in each locality and financed by the government;
8. to abolish immediately all barriers;<sup>3</sup>
9. to make uniform the rations of all workers, except for those who are engaged in occupations dangerous to their health;
10. to abolish the Communist shock-troops in all units of the army and the Communist guards in the factories; in case of need, guard detachments could be supplied in the army by the companies and in the factories by the workers;
11. to give the peasants full freedom of action in regard to their land and also the right to possess cattle, on condition that they do their own work, that is to say, without hiring help;
12. to establish a travelling control commission;
13. to permit the free exercise of handicrafts, provided no hired help is used;
14. we ask all units of the army and the kursanti cadets to join our resolution;
15. we demand that all our resolutions be widely publicised in the press.

This resolution was adopted unanimously by the meeting of the crews of the Squadrons. Two persons abstained.

Signed: Petrichenko, president of the meeting; Perepelkin, secretary.”

It is unfortunate that the translated text does not reflect the resolution’s popular tone, its “rustic” style, its candid air, which are further proofs that the movement was entirely in the hands of the workers themselves, that it expressed precisely their ideas and aspirations, without outside influence or intrigue.

Since the term of the Kronstadt Soviet was about to expire, the meeting decided to call a conference of delegates from the ships, garrison, workshops, unions and various Soviet institutions for March 2<sup>nd</sup>, to discuss the details of new elections. This decision was perfectly in conformity with the Soviet constitution. The conference was officially and regularly announced in the *Izvestia*, the official organ of the Soviet.

On March 2<sup>nd</sup>, more than 300 delegates met in the Hall of Education, the former Engineers’ School. The great majority of them belonged to no political party, and the Communists were in the minority. Nevertheless, according to custom, the reporter on the question: “The duties and tasks of the conference of delegates”, was chosen from among them.

The meeting was opened by the sailor Petrichenko. It elected publicly a board of five members. One of these later declared that the members of the conference were exclusively sailors, Red soldiers, workers and Soviet employees. Naturally, there was not among the delegates a single “officer of the old regime” (an accusation later launched by the Petrograd Communists).

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<sup>3</sup> This refers to the armed detachments around the cities, which were mentioned above. Their official duty was to suppress illicit commerce and confiscate food and other products. The irresponsibility and arbitrariness of these “barriers” had become proverbial in the country. It is significant that the government suppressed them the day before

The business of the meeting was the new elections to the Soviet. It was desired that they be organised on a freer and more equitable basis, taking account of the resolution adopted the day before. A Soviet capable of fulfilling the tasks established therein was desired.

The spirit of the conference was "Soviet" in the full sense of the word. Kronstadt demanded Soviets free from all political influence, Soviets which would truly represent the aspirations of the workers and express their will. This did not prevent the delegates, who were adversaries of the arbitrary regime of bureaucratic Commissars but not of the Soviets, from being loyal, from sympathising with the Communist Party as such, or from desiring a peaceful solution for the urgent problems that existed.

But let us tell the story in the words of the Kronstadters themselves. Here is an account which appeared in the *Izvestia* of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee of Kronstadt, No. 9, March 11, 1921.

#### HOW THE PROVISIONAL REVOLUTIONARY COMMITTEE WAS CREATED

On March 1, at 2 p.m., a meeting of sailors, red soldiers and workers took place on Revolution Square, not arbitrarily but with the authorization of the Executive Committee of the Soviet.

There were 15,000 people at the meeting. It was presided over by Comrade Vassilieff, president of the Executive Committee. Comrade Kalinin, president of the Ail-Russian Executive, and Kuzmin, Commissar of the Baltic Fleet, attended.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the resolution previously adopted by the general meeting of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Squadrons, concerning the current situation and the ways to emerge from the present state of disorganization of the country.

This "resolution" is now known by everyone. It contains nothing which could threaten the power of the Soviets.

On the contrary, it clearly expresses the idea of the real power of the Soviets: the power of the workers and the peasants.

Comrades Kalinin and Kuzmin, who gave speeches, did not want to understand it. But their speeches had no echoes. They were not able to win over the masses, who are tormented to the point of anguish. And the meeting voted unanimously in favor of the resolution of the Squadrons.

The next day (March 2<sup>nd</sup>) with the knowledge and authority of the executive committee and in conformity with instructions published in the *Izvestia*, delegates from the ships, the garrison, the workshops and the unions, two from each organization, met in the Hall of Education (the former Engineers' School), in all more than three hundred persons.

The representatives of the authorities were perturbed. Some even left the city. In these conditions, the crew of the battleship *Petropavlovsk* felt obliged to assume guard of the building and protect the delegates against possible excesses, from whatever source they might come.

The conference was opened by Comrade Petrichenko. After the election of a board of five members, he gave the floor to Comrade Kuzmin, Commissar of the Baltic Fleet. Despite the very clear position taken by the garrison and the workers against the representatives of the Communist power, Comrade Kuzmin refused to recognize it.

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its attack on Kronstadt. In this way it sought to lull and deceive the Petrograd proletariat.



The task of the conference was to find a peaceful solution to the existing situation. In particular, it had to create an organ by which the re-election of the Soviet could be effected on a more equitable basis, as the resolution had proclaimed. This task was all the more urgent since the powers of the preceding Soviet, composed almost entirely of Communists and clearly incapable of solving the absolutely vital problems, had come to the end of its term.

But instead of reassuring the delegates, Comrade Kuzmin, on the contrary antagonized them. He spoke of the equivocal position of Kronstadt, of the Polish danger, of all Europe which was watching us. He maintained that all was peaceful in Petrograd. He emphasized that he was in the hands of the delegates, who could shoot him if they wished. And, in conclusion, he declared: "If the delegates want an open armed conflict, they can have it. For the Communists do not give up power voluntarily. They fight to the finish."

This stupid speech of Comrade Kuzmin did nothing to calm the feelings of the delegates. On the contrary, it increased their irritation. As for the vague and colourless speech of the President of the Executive Committee, Vassilieff, who followed him, it passed unnoticed. The overwhelming majority of the delegates were manifestly hostile to the Communists.

Nevertheless, the delegates did not lose hope of finding some common ground with the representatives of the authorities. The appeal of the president of the conference to get to work and draw up an agenda for the day was unanimously approved ...

The conference did not conceal its disapproval of the Communists. But when the question was raised whether the Communist delegates should remain at the conference to continue the common task with the non-party delegates, the meeting responded affirmatively. In spite of several protests and the proposal of some delegates to arrest the Communists, the delegates [as a whole] did not accept this position, considering that the Communists present were delegates of units and organizations just like the rest.

This fact proved again that the non-party delegates of the workers, as well as the Red soldiers, sailors and workers [of Kronstadt] themselves, did not consider the resolution adopted at the meeting of the day before as necessarily leading to a rupture with the Communists *as a party*. They still hoped to be able to find a common language.

Next at the suggestion of Comrade Petrichenko, the resolution of the preceding day was read. It was adopted by the overwhelming majority of the delegates. Then, at the very moment when the conference seemed ready to begin concrete work, the delegate of the battleship *Sebastopol* requested the floor for an urgent statement. He declared that fifteen truckloads of troops with rifles and machine-guns were on their way to the meeting place. Subsequent investigation revealed that this false news had been spread by the Communists to scuttle the conference. But at the time it was communicated – especially in view of the general tension and the hostile position taken by the representatives of the authorities towards the conference all the circumstances led the delegates to believe it.

Nevertheless, the president's proposal to go on to a discussion of current business, taking the adopted resolution as a point of departure, was accepted. The conference began to discuss measures to be taken to implement the clauses of the resolution effectively. The idea of sending a delegation to Petrograd was voted down since its members would certainly be arrested. After this, several delegates proposed that the board of the conference be constituted a Provisional Revolutionary Committee, and that it be in charge of preparing for the re-election of the Soviet.

At this moment, the president announced that a detachment of two thousand men was on its way to the meeting place. Very upset and excited, the anxious delegates left the Hall of Education.

The session ending by reason of this last communication, the Provisional Revolutionary Committee, which was in charge of maintaining order, installed itself on the battleship *Petropavlovsk* and there established its seat until the day when, thanks to its efforts, order could be assured in the city to the best interests of all the toilers—whether sailors, soldiers or workers.

We should add to this statement several details reported later by one of the members of the Revolutionary Committee. The decision to create this Committee, passed unanimously a few minutes before the closing of the session and under the influence of all the alarming rumours and of the threats of Kuzmin, Kalinin and Vassilieff, specified that “the Board of the conference and President Petrichenko be provisionally in charge of fulfilling the duties of a Revolutionary Committee during the time necessary to create such a committee in a more formal manner.”

A further fact to be emphasised is that soon after the public meeting on March 1<sup>st</sup>, the Communists of Kronstadt began serious preparations for military action against the movement. The local Communist Committee, in particular, undertook to heavily arm the party members. It ordered the Commissar of the fortress to draw upon the arms supply and issue rifles, machine guns and ammunition to the Communist cells. It is beyond doubt that the Communist leaders of Kronstadt would have opened hostilities on March 2<sup>nd</sup>, and prevented the conference of delegates from meeting if an unforeseen circumstance had not thwarted their project.

Out of almost two thousand Communists enrolled at Kronstadt, the great majority were only card carriers who had joined the party for personal reasons and not from conviction. As soon as the resistance began, the mass of the Communists abandoned their leaders and joined the general movement. The chiefs alone, even with the support of a certain number of *kursanti*, stationed at Kronstadt and blindly devoted to the party, could not hope to resist the fleet, the garrison and the whole population. That is why the leaders abandoned the idea of an immediate armed conflict inside Kronstadt. Some of them fled. Others went to the surrounding forts to try and arouse them against the movement. The *kursanti* followed them. They visited one fort after another, but found none of the support they sought. Finally, they went to Red Point (Krasnaia Gorka). It was thus that, on the evening of March 2<sup>nd</sup>, Kronstadt had no other power than that of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee.

On March 3<sup>rd</sup>, the first number of the *Izvestia* (News) of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee appeared. On the front page was a kind of manifesto, which read as follows:

*“To the population of the Fortress and City of Kronstadt.*

“Comrades and citizens, our country is going through a difficult period. For three years already, famine, cold and economic chaos have gripped us in their terrible vice. The Communist Party, which governs the country, has lost contact with the masses and has revealed itself powerless to pull them out of their condition of general collapse. The party has paid no attention to the disturbances which have taken place recently in Petrograd and Moscow and which have demonstrated clearly that it has lost the confidence of the working masses. Moreover, it has paid no attention to the demands presented by the workers. It considers them all to be the snares of the counter-revolution. It is deceiving itself profoundly.

“These disturbances and demands are the voices of the whole people, of all who labour. All the workers, sailors and Red soldiers see clearly today that only common efforts and a common will on the part of the workers can give the country bread,

wood and coal, can clothe and warm the people, can get the Republic out of the impasse in which it finds itself.

“This will of all the workers, soldiers and sailors was clearly manifested at the great meeting of our city on Tuesday, March 1<sup>st</sup>. The meeting voted unanimously for the resolution of the crews of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Squadrons.

“One of the decisions adopted was to proceed immediately to the re-election of the Soviet. To establish more equitable bases for this election, of such a kind that the representation of the workers in the Soviet may be effective, and that the Soviet may be an active and energetic organ, the delegates of all organisations of the navy, the garrison and the workers met on March 2<sup>nd</sup>, at the Hall of Education. This meeting was to draw up a basis for the new elections and then begin a constructive and peaceful task, the work of reorganising the Soviet system.

“But, since, after threatening speeches by the representatives of power, they had reason to fear repression, the delegates decided to create a Provisional Revolutionary Committee and gave it full powers over the administration of the city and the forts. The Provisional Committee has its seat on the battleship *Petropavlovsk*.

“Comrades and Citizens! The Provisional Committee is primarily concerned with preventing bloodshed. It has made every effort to maintain revolutionary order in the city, in the fortress and in the forts.

“Comrades and Citizens do not stop work! Workers, remain at your machines. Sailors and soldiers, do not leave your posts. All employees, all institutions should keep on working.

“The Provisional Revolutionary Committee calls on all the workers’ organisations, all the unions, maritime and otherwise, all the land and sea units, as well as all the citizens individually, to give their support. Its mission is to ensure, in fraternal cooperation with you, the necessary conditions for just and honest elections to the new Soviet. Therefore, comrades, let there be order, calm, composure. Let all perform their honest socialist work for the benefit of the workers.

Kronstadt, March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1921. Signed: Petrichenko, chairman of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee; Toukin, secretary.”

The same issue contained the famous resolution of the Squadrons, and also several administrative notes, including the following: “On March 2<sup>nd</sup>, by 9 p.m., all the Red units of the fortress and the majority of the forts declared their solidarity with the Provisional Revolutionary Committee. All institutions and communication services are guarded by the Committee’s patrols.”

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The Bolsheviks did not lose an instant in preparing an attack on Kronstadt. From the beginning they realised that this movement could result in catastrophe for them. Therefore they decided to extinguish it at any cost, and as quickly as possible, before it could spread.

Simultaneously, they adopted several measures. 1. They hastened to assure their control of the important strategic points around Kronstadt and Petrograd, such as Red Point (Krasnaia Gorka),

Oranienbaum, Lissy Noss, etc. 2. They maintained a state of siege in Petrograd and took extraordinary repressive military measures to safeguard “order”. 3. They made certain concessions — we have mentioned the suppression of the “barriers” around the capital — in order to calm the workers. 4. They proceeded, under Trotsky’s supreme command, to organise rapidly a special army corps to attack Kronstadt. 5. They began a violent campaign of lies and slanders against the men of Kronstadt for the purpose of misleading public opinion and justifying their own actions.

This rabid propaganda began on March 2<sup>nd</sup>. In the second issue of the *Izvestia* of the (Kronstadt) Revolutionary Committee, on March 3<sup>rd</sup>, we find a news item [reproducing a radiogram sent out from Moscow and intercepted by the battleship *Petropavlovsk*. It ran as follows]:

“*Rosta Radio News, Moscow, March 3<sup>rd</sup>*.”

“To all! To all! To all! To arms against the White-guard conspiracy!”

“The mutiny of the ex-general Kozlovsky and the battleship *Petropavlovsk* has been organised by spies of the Entente, as was the case in numerous previous plots. This can be seen by reading the French bourgeois newspaper, *Le Matin*, which, two weeks before Kozlovsky’s revolt, published the following telegram from Helsingfors: ‘It has been learned from Petrograd that following the recent rebellion at Kronstadt, the Bolshevik military authorities have taken steps to isolate Kronstadt and prevent the Kronstadt sailors and soldiers from approaching Petrograd. The provisioning of Kronstadt has been stopped until order is restored.’ It is clear that the secession of Kronstadt was directed by Paris, that the French counter-espionage is mixed up in it. Always the same story! The Social-Revolutionaries, directed by Paris, plot rebellion against the Soviet government, and as soon as their preparations are completed, the real master — a Tsarist general — makes his appearance. The story of Kolchak, who tried to regain power with the help of the Social-Revolutionaries, is repeated again. All the enemies of the workers, from the Tsarist general to the Social-Revolutionaries, try to speculate on hunger and cold. Naturally, this rebellion of the generals and the Social-Revolutionaries will be quickly suppressed and General Kozlovsky and his assistants will meet the same fate as Kolchak.

“But it is beyond doubt that the net of Allied espionage is not thrown over Kronstadt alone. Workers and Red soldiers, break that net! Unmask the spies and provocateurs! You must have composure, self-control, vigilance! Do not forget that the real way to overcome the food and other problems, which are temporary but certainly painful, is by intensive work and good judgment, and not by senseless excesses which can only add to the misery of the workers and the greater joy of their accursed enemies.”

By every means at its disposal—military orders, proclamations, pamphlets, notices, articles in newspapers, radio bulletins, the government spread and imposed these unqualified lies. It must not be forgotten that, all means of propaganda and information being in its hands, no free voice could make the truth known.

In No. 4 of the Kronstadt *Izvestia* (March 6), we read the following:

#### COWARDS AND LIARS

We bring to everyone’s knowledge the contents of a proclamation thrown over Kronstadt from a Communist plane.

The citizens feel nothing but contempt for this slanderous provocation.

The people of Kronstadt know how and by whom the hateful power of the Communists has been overthrown.

They know that the Provisional Revolutionary Committee is headed by elected, devoted militants — the best sons of the people: red soldiers, sailors and workers.

They will not let anyone shackle them, and least of all Tsarist generals or White guards.

“In a few more hours you will have to surrender,” threaten the Communists.

Foul hypocrites, whom do you think you’re fooling?

The Kronstadt garrison never surrendered to Tsarist admirals, and it will not surrender to Bolshevik generals.

You’re cowards! You know our power and our will to triumph or to die proudly and not to run away like your Commissars, their pockets filled with Tsarist bank notes or gold, products of the labor and the blood of the workers.

The same issue of the Izvestia (No. 4) reproduced, for the edification of its readers, the following report broadcast by the Radio Station in Moscow:

#### MOSCOW RADIO

“To the deceived people of Kronstadt.

“Do you see where the rascals have led you? Here is your position. The greedy fangs of former Tsarist generals are already showing themselves behind the Social-Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks. All these Petrickenkos and Toukins are manipulated like puppets by the Tsarist general Kozlovsky, Captain Borkser, Kostromitinoff, Chirmanovsky and other proved White guards. They are duping you! They tell you that you are struggling for democracy, but two days have hardly passed and you see that you are not really fighting for democracy but for Tsarist generals. You have permitted a new Wiren<sup>4</sup> to put a rope around your necks.

“They lie to you that Petrograd is with you, that Siberia and the Ukraine support you. All these are only cynical lies. The last sailor in Petrograd turned his back on you when he learned that Tsarist generals like Kozlovsky were among you. Siberia and the Ukraine firmly defend the Soviet power. Petrograd, the Red city, sneers at the pitiful pretensions of a handful of Social-Revolutionaries and White guardists.

“You are completely surrounded. In a few more hours you will have to surrender. Kronstadt has neither bread nor fuel. If you persist you will be shot like partridges. Naturally, all these generals — Kozlovsky and Borkser—all the wretches like Petrickenko and Toukin, will flee at the last moment to the White guardists in Finland. But you others, simple deceived sailors and Red soldiers, where will you go? If they are promising to provide for you in Finland, they are fooling you again. Don’t you

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<sup>4</sup> Admiral Wiren was commander of Kronstadt at the time of the Revolution, and, as one of the most ferocious Tsarist officers, was shot by the sailors on Feb. 28<sup>th</sup>, 1917.

know that the soldiers of General Wrangel, led away to Constantinople, died like flies of hunger and disease? The same fate awaits you if you don't come to your senses immediately.

“Surrender right away, without losing a moment! Lay down your arms and come over to us! Disarm and arrest the criminal leaders, especially the Tsarist generals! The errors of anyone who surrenders immediately will be forgiven. Surrender immediately! *Petrograd Defence Committee.*”

The same insinuations were made in a radiogram of the Petrograd Soviet; the text is reproduced in the same issue of the *Izvestia*, preceded by the following introduction:

Station T.S.F. of the *Petropavlovsk* has intercepted the following radiogram, which confirms the fact that the Communists are continuing to deceive not only the workers and the red soldiers, but also the members of the Petrograd Soviet.

But they will not succeed in deceiving the Kronstadt garrison or its workers.

Finally, *Izvestia* No. 5 (March 7) communicates a new and very long Moscow radiogram. Before reproducing it, the journal comments on it with a note headed: “They are still lying.” The journal refutes the Bolshevik inventions in the following terms:

We have just learned, according to the information of the Rosta radio, that everyone is in alliance with us—the Allies and the French spies, the White guards and the Tsarist generals, the Mensheviks, the Social-Revolutionaries, the Finnish bankers, in short, the whole world rushes down upon the poor Communists. And we, the Kronstadters, are the only ones who know nothing about it.

This document of Communist stupidity is frankly comical. We reproduce it to provide the people of Kronstadt with a few moments of fun.

Due to its length, we cannot reproduce the radiogram in its entirety. We limit ourselves to citing some typical passages:

“...On March 2<sup>nd</sup>, the Labour and Defence Council ordered: 1. That the former General Kozlovsky and his partisans be declared outlaws; 2. That a state of war be declared in the city and province of Petrograd; 3. That supreme power over the whole district be placed in the hands of the Petrograd Committee ...

“Petrograd is absolutely calm, and even the few factories where certain individuals have recently hurled accusations against the government have understood the provocation; they have realized where the agents of the Allies and the counter-revolution have dragged them ...

“It is at the very moment when the Republican Party in America has just assumed power and shows itself disposed to resume commercial relations with Soviet Russia that the spreading of false rumours and the fomentation of disorders at Kronstadt are organized to impress the new American president and prevent a change of American policy in Russia.

“The conference in London is taking place at the same time. The spreading of such rumours seeks to influence the Turkish delegation and make it subservient to the requirements of the Allies. The revolt of the crew of the *Petropavlovsk* is without any doubt a stage in the great conspiracy to create internal difficulties in Soviet Russia and disturb the international situation. This plan is put into effect in Russia by a Tsarist general and by ex-officers with the support of Mensheviks and Social-Revolutionaries.”

A name continually recurs in all these documents — that of a certain General Kozlovsky, the pretended leader and master of the movement. There was, in fact, at Kronstadt a Tsarist ex-General of the name of Kozlovsky. *It was Trotsky, the great restorer of ex-generals of the Tsar as military specialists, who put him there as an artillery expert.* While this person was in the employ of the Bolsheviks, they closed their eyes to his past. But when Kronstadt revolted, they took advantage of the presence of their “specialist” to create a scapegoat.

In fact, Kozlovsky did not play any part in the events at Kronstadt, nor did his “aides,” who were mentioned by the Bolsheviks-Borkser, Kostromitinoff and Chirmanovsky, one of whom was a simple draughtsman. But the Bolsheviks exploited their names skilfully to denounce the sailors as enemies of the Republic and present their movement as counterrevolutionary. Communist agitators were sent into the mills and factories of Petrograd and Moscow to call upon them to take a stand against Kronstadt, “that nest of the White conspiracy, directed by General Kozlovsky,” and “to associate themselves with the support and defense of the Workers’ and Peasants’ Government against the White guard rebellion at Kronstadt.”

Kozlovsky himself could only shrug his shoulders when he learned of the role which the Bolsheviks made him play in the events. He said later that the Bolshevik commander of the fortress had fled soon after the establishment of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee. According to the Bolshevik rules, it was the artillery chief — General Kozlovsky as it happened — who should have replaced him. But since these rules were no longer in force, the Communist power being replaced by that of the Revolutionary Committee, Kozlovsky refused to accept the post. The Revolutionary Committee therefore designated another specialist, a certain Solovianoff, as commander of the fortress. As for Kozlovsky, he was put in charge of directing the technical services of the artillery. His “aides,” absolutely insignificant persons, also remained entirely outside the movement.

At the same time, by a historical irony, it was an important Tsarist ex-officer, the famous Tuchachevsky (later shot by the order of Stalin) who assumed, at Trotsky’s direction, the command of the forces destined to act against Kronstadt. Furthermore, all the “specialists” and sentinels of Tsarism who had gone over to the service of the Bolsheviks participated in drawing up the plan of the siege and the attack on Kronstadt. As for the men of Kronstadt, who were so slandered by their cynical opponents, they had at their disposal, as technical and military experts, the pallid figure of Kozlovsky and three or four other persons who were absolute nonentities from a political point of view.

The Kronstadt movement broke out spontaneously. If this movement had been the result of a plan conceived and prepared in advance, it would certainly not have occurred at the beginning of March, the least favourable time. A few weeks later, and Kronstadt, freed of ice, would have become an almost impregnable fortress, having at its disposal a powerful fleet, a terrible threat to Petrograd. Supplied from abroad, Kronstadt could not only have held out for a long time, but it

might even have conquered. The greatest opportunity of the Bolshevik government was precisely the spontaneity of the movement and the absence of any premeditation, of any calculation, in the action of the sailors.

There was no “revolt” at Kronstadt, in the true sense of the word. There was a spontaneous and peaceful movement, absolutely legitimate and natural in the given circumstances, which rapidly embraced the whole city, the garrison and the fleet. Frightened for their power, their positions and their privileges, the Bolsheviks forced events and obliged Kronstadt to accept an armed struggle.

Naturally, Kronstadt did its best to reply to the Bolshevik insinuations and slanders. Through its newspaper and its radio stations, the Provisional Revolutionary Committee made known to the labouring masses of Russia and the world the real goals and aspirations of their movement, at the same time refuting the lies of the Communist government. Thus *Izvestia* No. 4, for March 6<sup>th</sup>, reproduced the following radio appeal of the Revolutionary Committee:

To all! To all! To all! Comrades, workers, Red soldiers and sailors!

Here, in Kronstadt, we know how you suffer — you, your wives and your starving children — under the yoke of the Communist dictatorship.

We have overthrown the Communist Soviet. In a few days, the Provisional Revolutionary Committee will proceed to the election of a new Soviet which, freely chosen, will accurately reflect the will of all the working population and the garrison, and not that of a handful of crazy “communists.”

Our cause is just. We are for the power of the Soviets and not that of the parties. We are for the free election of the representatives of the working masses. The false Soviets, monopolized and manipulated by the Communist Party, have always been deaf to our needs and our requests: the only response that we have received has been the assassin’s bullet.

Now, your patience, the patience of the workers, being at an end, they want to stop your mouths with sops. By order of Zinoviev, the barriers are suppressed in Petrograd province, and Moscow allocates ten million gold roubles to buy food and articles of primary necessity abroad. But we know that the proletariat of Petrograd will not let itself be bought with these sops. Over the heads of the Communists, revolutionary Kronstadt extends its hand and offers you its fraternal assistance.

Comrades, not only are they fooling you, but they are impudently distorting the truth, they are resorting to the vilest falsifications. Comrades do not let yourselves be deceived. At Kronstadt, power is exclusively in the hands of the revolutionary sailors, soldiers and workers, and not in those of the “counter-revolutionaries directed by one Koz-lovsky,” as the lying Moscow radio tries to make you believe.

Do not hesitate, comrades! Unite with us! Establish contact with us! Demand that your non-party delegates be authorized to come to Kronstadt. They alone can tell you the truth and unmask the shameful slander about “Finnish bread” and the snares of the allies.

Long live the revolutionary proletariat of the cities and the fields! Long live the power of freely elected Soviets!



In *Izvestia* No. 10, on March 12<sup>th</sup>, the Committee issued the following specific refutation of the story of Kronstadt being dominated by Tsarist generals:

#### OUR GENERALS

The Communists insinuate that White-guard generals and officers, and a priest, are among the members of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee. In order to put an end to these lies, once and for all, we bring to their attention that the Committee is composed of the following fifteen members:

1. Petrichenko, yeoman 1<sup>st</sup> class, on board the *Petropavlovsk*.
2. Yakovenko, telephone operator of the Kronstadt district.
3. Ossossonoff, mechanic on the *Sebastopol*.
4. Arhipoff, quartermaster mechanic.
5. *Perepelkin, mechanic on the Sebastopol.*
6. Patrouchev, quartermaster mechanic on the *Petropavlovsk*.
7. Koupoloff, medical orderly, first class.
8. Verchinin, seaman on the *Sebastopol*.
9. Toukin, electrical worker.
10. Romanenko, guard at the ship-repair shops.
11. Orechin, employee at the 3<sup>rd</sup> technical school.
12. Valk, carpenter.
13. Pavloff, worker in the mine workshop.
14. Baikoff, carter.
15. Kilgast, steersman.

Reproducing the same list on March 14<sup>th</sup> (No. 12), the paper concluded with this ironical remark: "Such are our generals, our Brusiloffs, Kameneffs, etc.<sup>5</sup> The policemen Trotsky and Zinoviev are concealing the truth from you."

In their campaign of slander the Bolsheviki sought not only to distort the spirit and goal of the movement, but also the acts of the men of Kronstadt. Thus they spread the rumour that the Communists in Kronstadt suffered all kinds of violence at the hands of the "mutineers." Repeatedly, Kronstadt reiterated the truth about this matter. In No. 2 of *Iz-vestia*, for example, there is the following note:

The Provisional Revolutionary Committee is anxious to give the lie to the rumours according to which the arrested Communists have been subjected to violence. The arrested Communists are completely safe.

Furthermore, of the several Communists arrested, some have been set free. A representative of the Communist Party will be a member of the commission for investi-

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<sup>5</sup> The Bolsheviki generals Brusiloff, Kameneff and others were former Tsarist generals.

gating the reasons for the arrests. The Communist comrades Ilin, Kabanoff and Pervouchin have applied to the Revolutionary Committee and have been authorized to visit the prisoners confined on the Petropavlovsk. These comrades confirm the above and sign their names. Signed: Ilin, Kabanoff, Pervouchin. Signed, for a fair copy: N. Arhipoff, member of the Revolutionary Committee. Signed, for the secretary: P. Bogdanoff.

The same issue also published, over the signature of the above Communists, an “Appeal of the Provisional Board of the Kronstadt Section of the Communist Party.” For comprehensible reasons, the terms of this “Appeal” addressed to the Communists are prudent and vague. Nevertheless, it includes the following significant passage:

Do not give any credence to the false rumours which maintain that responsible Communists have been shot, and that the Communists intend to rebel at Kronstadt with arms in hand. These are lies propagated with the intention of provoking bloodshed. The Provisional Board of the Communist Party recognises the necessity of new elections for the Soviet and it requests the members of the party to remain at their posts and put no obstacles in the way of the measures of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee. Provisional Board of the Kronstadt Section of the Communist Party: Signed — J. Ilin, A. Kabanoff, F. Pervouchin.

Various answers were given in brief notes, which appeared from time to time under the title: *Their Lies*.

In *Izvestia* No. 7 (March 9), we read:

#### THEIR LIES

The commander of the army which is operating against Kronstadt has just communicated the following report to a writer in *The Red Commander*:

“We are informed that the civil population of Kronstadt is receiving hardly any provisions. The sharpshooters’ regiment in the Kronstadt garrison refuses to join the mutineers and has resisted an attempt to disarm them. The principal leaders of the rebellion are getting ready to flee to Finland. A non-party sailor fleeing from Kronstadt states that at the meeting of the sailors at Kronstadt on March 4<sup>th</sup>, the floor was taken by General Kozlovsky. In his speech, he demanded strong power and decisive action against the partisans of the Soviets.

“At Kronstadt, morale is low. The population is depressed. It is waiting impatiently for the end of the rebellion and asks that the White guard leaders be turned over to the Soviet government.”

That is what the Communists are telling about the events; such are the means to which they have recourse in order to sully our movement in the eyes of the labouring people.

In Number 12 (March 14):

## THEIR LIES

We reproduce verbatim the notes which have appeared in the March 11<sup>th</sup> issue of the Petrograd *Pravda*:

“*Armed struggle at Kronstadt.* The following communication was received yesterday at 8 p.m. by the Defence Committee from Comrade Tukhachevsky, Commander of the Army at present at Oranienbaum: Heavy firing has been heard at Kronstadt – rifle shots and machine-gun fire. Through field glasses, troops could be seen attacking, in dispersed ranks, near the mine workshop situated to the north east of the Constants fort. It is supposed that the object of the attack was either the Constantin fort or detachments revolting against the White guards and entrenched in the vicinity of the mine workshop.

“*A Fire at Kronstadt.* At the moment when we were taking Fort N., a great fire was observed at Kronstadt. A thick cloud of smoke enveloped the city.

“*More on the Inspirers and Leaders of the Rebellion.* A refugee who left Kronstadt on the night of March 7<sup>th</sup> has made the following statement on the spirit and the attitude of the White guard officers: They are very jovial. They are not at all worried about the bloodshed they have provoked. They dream of the pleasures which await them when they take Petrograd. ‘Once Petrograd is in our hands, there will be at least half a pood of gold apiece. And if we lose, we can save ourselves by going to Finland where we will be received with open arms.’ That is what these gentlemen declare. They feel themselves complete masters of the situation. And in fact they are. Their attitude towards the sailors does not differ in the least from that of the old Tsarist days. ‘These are real leaders, not like the Communists,’ the sailors say of them. They only lack the gold epaulettes.

“We make it known to the White guard officers that they should not count too heavily on flight to Finland, and that they will receive not gold, but a nice portion of lead.”

In addition to the above, the *Red Journal* reports: “Two sailors coming from Reval state that 150 Bolsheviks have been killed in Kronstadt.” That is how history is written. And that is how the Communists try to hide the truth from the people by means of lies and slanders.

In Number 13 (March 15):

## THEIR LIES

We reproduce the following from the *Red Journal*:

“Oranienbaum, March 11<sup>th</sup>. It has been confirmed that at Kronstadt the sailors have revolted against the mutineers.

“Oranienbaum, March 12<sup>th</sup>. Yesterday, men were seen sneaking over the ice from Kronstadt towards the Finnish coast. Likewise, men were seen coming from Finland towards Kronstadt. This proves that contact exists between Kronstadt and Finland.

“Oranienbaum, March 12<sup>th</sup>. The Red pilots who flew over Kronstadt yesterday report that they saw hardly anyone in the streets. All guards and observers are missing. No further contact with Finland was observed.

“Oranienbaum, March 11<sup>th</sup>. The refugees from Kronstadt report that the morale of the sailors is very low. The leaders of the mutiny have lost all confidence in the sailors, so much so that the latter are no longer admitted into the artillery. This is manned by the officers, who hold the real power. The sailors are almost entirely eliminated from it.

“*Firing from Kronstadt.* According to information received today, intense firing took place at Kronstadt. Rifle and machine-gun fire was heard. Apparently a revolt has broken out.”

While dishonestly accusing the people of Kronstadt of excesses and violence, the Bolsheviks themselves behaved in an absolutely dishonourable way.

“Three days ago,” we read in an editorial of *Izvestia* No. 3, March 5<sup>th</sup>, “Kronstadt got rid of the monstrous power of the Communists, as the city got rid of the Tsar and his generals four years ago. For three days, the citizens of Kronstadt have breathed freely, delivered from the dictatorship of the party.

“The Communist leaders of Kronstadt fled shamefully like guilty urchins. They feared for their skins. They supposed that the Provisional Revolutionary Committee would have recourse to the methods of the Cheka and put them to death. Vain fears! The Provisional Revolutionary Committee does not exact vengeance. It does not threaten anyone.

“All the Communists of Kronstadt are free. No danger threatens them. Only those who tried to flee and fell into the hands of our patrols have been arrested. But even these are safe, secure from the eventual vengeance of the people who might try to make them pay for the ‘Red Terror.’ The families of the Communists are safe from any attack as are all the citizens.

“In view of this, what is the attitude of the Communists? In the leaflet which they dropped from an aeroplane yesterday, it says that many persons have been arrested in Petrograd, people having no connection with the events at Kronstadt. Worse than that, even their families were thrown into prison.

“ ‘The Defence Committee,’ says the leaflet, ‘declares that all these prisoners are held as hostages for the comrades arrested by the mutineers at Kronstadt, particularly for the Commissar of the Baltic Fleet, N. Kuzmin, the President of the Kronstadt Soviet, Comrade Vassilieff, and several others. The hostages will pay with their lives for the slightest injury suffered by our arrested comrades.’

“That is how the Defence Committee ends its proclamation. It is the rage of the impotent. The torturing of innocent families adds no new laurels to the fame of the Communist comrades. And, in any case, it will not be by such methods that they can regain the power which the sailors, Red soldiers and workers of Kronstadt have taken from them.”

Kronstadt replied to the statements of the Communists with the following radiogram, which was reproduced in *Izvestia* No. 5, on March 7<sup>th</sup>:

“In the name of the Kronstadt garrison, the Provisional Revolutionary Committee demands that the families of the workers, sailors and Red soldiers held as hostages by the Petrograd Soviet be set free within 24 hours.

“The Kronstadt garrison declares that the Communists in Kronstadt enjoy complete freedom and that their families are safe from any danger. The example of the Petrograd Soviet will not be followed here, because we consider such methods as the holding of hostages to be most vile and most despicable, even when provoked by the rage of despair. History knows no like ignominy.

“Petrichenko, President of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee; Kilgast, secretary.”

The Defence Committee was ruthless in Petrograd, which was inundated with troops brought in from the provinces, and subjugated to a reign of terror under the guise of “the state of seige.” The Committee took systematic measures to “clean up” the city. Many workers, soldiers and sailors suspected of sympathy with Kronstadt were imprisoned. All the sailors of Petrograd, and various regiments of the army, considered “politically unreliable,” were sent to distant regions.

Directed by its President, Zinovieff, the Committee assumed complete control of the city and province of Petrograd. The whole northern district was declared in a state of war, and all meetings were forbidden. Extraordinary precautions were taken to protect the government institutions, and machine guns were placed in the Astoria Hotel, occupied by Zinovieff and other high Bolshevik functionaries.

A great nervousness reigned in the city. New strikes broke out and persistent rumours were spread regarding workers’ uprisings in Moscow and peasant revolts in the East and in Siberia. The population, which could have no confidence in the press, listened avidly to the most extreme rumours, even when they were manifestly false. All eyes were on Kronstadt, in the expectation of important happenings.

Meanwhile, notices posted on the walls ordered the strikers back to their employment, prohibited the suspension of work, and forbade the population from meeting in the streets. “In the event of a gathering,” they read, “the troops will use arms, and in case of resistance the order is to shoot on the spot.”

Petrograd was powerless to act. Subjugated to the most disgraceful terror, obliged to keep silent, the capital put all its hopes in Kronstadt.

From the first days of the movement, Kronstadt undertook the task of internal organization. It was a vast and urgent task, for many problems had to be dealt with at once.

The Provisional Revolutionary Committee, whose seat was first on board the *Petropavlovsk*, soon moved to the People’s House, in the centre of Kronstadt, so that, in the words of *Izvestia*, it would be “in closer contact with the population.” Moreover, its membership, which was only five at the beginning, was considered insufficient to deal with all the needs of the hour, and it was soon increased to fifteen. Of the first activities of the enlarged Committee at its meeting on the 4<sup>th</sup> March, *Izvestia* published the following report:

“The meeting proceeded to the business of the day. It was disclosed that the city and the garrison were adequately supplied with food and fuel.

“The question of arming the workers was then taken up. It was decided that all the workers, without exception, should be armed and put in charge of guarding the interior of the city, since the sailors and soldiers wished to take their places in the combat units. This decision was received with enthusiastic approval ...

“It was then decided to re-elect, within three days, the administrative commissions of all the unions and also of the Council of Unions. The latter would become the principal organ of the workers and would be in permanent contact with the Provisional Revolutionary Committee.

“After this, the sailors who had been able to escape, with much risk, from Petrograd, Peterhof and Oranienbaum gave reports on the situation there. They stated that the population and workers of all these localities were kept by the Communists in complete ignorance of what was happening in Kronstadt. Rumours were being spread everywhere that the White Guards and generals were active at Kronstadt. This communication aroused general laughter.”

But the Revolutionary Committee and the various other organizations that were created at this time were not the only channels of action. The whole population became intensely animated and participated with new energy in the work of reconstruction. The revolutionary enthusiasm equalled that of the October days. For the first time since the Communist Party had taken over the Revolution, Kronstadt felt free. A new spirit of solidarity and fraternity reunited the sailors, the soldiers of the garrison, the workers and all other elements in a common effort for the common cause. Even the Communists were affected by the contagion of this fraternity of the whole city, and participated in the preparations for the election of the Kronstadt Soviet.

The pages of *Izvestia* give abundant proof of this general enthusiasm, which re-appeared once the masses felt they had regained, in the free Soviets, the true road to emancipation and the hope of achieving the real revolution. The paper abounded in notices, resolutions and appeals of all sorts, from individual citizens and from various groups and organizations, in which full rein was given to this enthusiasm, to the feeling of solidarity and devotion, to the desire to act usefully and take part in the common task.

The principle of “equal rights for all, privileges for none” was established and rigorously maintained. Food rations were equalized. The sailors, who under the Bolsheviks had received a much larger ration, decided not to accept any more than what was given to the workers and the citizens. Special rations were only given to the sick and to children.

We have just said that the general excitement affected the Communists. In fact, it reversed the opinions of many of them. The pages of *Izvestia* contained many declarations from Communist groups and organizations in Kronstadt which condemned the attitude of the central government and supported the line of conduct and the measures taken by the Provisional Revolutionary Committee. But even stronger evidence than that was given of a change in Communist attitudes within the city. A very large number of Kronstadt Communists publicly announced their departure from the party. In several issues of *Izvestia*, hundreds of names of Communists were published whose consciences forbade them to stay in the same party as the hangman Trotsky, as several put it. The resignations from the party soon became so numerous that the paper, for lack of space, had to stop announcing them and declared that it could mention them only in groups and then only when space permitted. One got the impression of a general exodus.

Several letters taken at random from a great number give an adequate impression of this sudden and significant change.

I realize that the policy of the Communist Party has brought the country to an impossible impasse. The party has become bureaucratic. It has learned nothing and wants to learn nothing. It refuses to listen to the voice of the masses and tries to impose its own will on them. (Think of the 115 million peasants!) It will not understand that only freedom of speech and the possibility for the masses to participate in the reconstruction of the country with the aid of modified electoral procedures can awaken the people from their lethargy.

I refuse henceforth to consider myself a member of the Communist Party. I entirely approve of the resolution adopted at the meeting of all the people on March 1<sup>st</sup>, and consequently I place all my abilities and energy at the disposal of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee. I request that this declaration be published in the paper.

Herman Kanaiev, officer of the Red Army son of an exile of the trial of the 193. (*Izvestia* No. 3, March 5<sup>th</sup>)

\* \* \*

Comrade Communists of the rank and file! Look around and you will see that we are stuck fast in a terrible morass. We have been led there by a handful of "Communist" bureaucrats who, under the disguise of Communists, have occupied the warmest nests in our Republic.

As a Communist, I beseech you to get rid of these false "Communists" who are pushing you towards fratricide. It is thanks to them that we others, rank and file Communists, who are not responsible for anything, must undergo the reproaches of our comrades, the non-party workers and peasants.

I am alarmed at the existing situation. Is it possible that the blood of our brothers will be spilt for the interests of these "Communist" bureaucrats? Comrades, come to your senses! Do not let yourselves be used by these bureaucrats who provoke and push you into the butchery. Show them the door. A real Communist should not impose his ideas, but march with the whole working mass, in the same ranks as they.

Rojkali, member of the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik) (*Izvestia* No. 7, March 9<sup>th</sup>)

\* \* \*

Seeing that in reply to a proposal of the Kronstadt comrades to send a delegation to Petrograd, Trotsky and the Communist chiefs have sent over the first shells and have spilled blood, I request that I no longer be considered a member of the Communist Party. The speeches of Communist orators turned my head, but the acts of the Communist bureaucrats have turned it back again.

I thank the Communist bureaucrats for having shown their true face and for having thus permitted me to see my error. I was a blind instrument in their hands.

Andre Bratachev, ex-member of the Communist Party No. 537,575 (*Izvestia* No. 7, March 9<sup>th</sup>)

\* \* \*

Considering that the present terrible situation is the result of the acts of an insolent handful of Communists solidly installed at the head of the party, and in view of the fact that I joined the party under pressure, as a rank-and-file militant, I observe with horror the fruit of their activities. Only the workers and peasants can save the country, which has been brought to ruin, but the Communist party which is in power has completely deceived them. For this reason I am leaving the party and giving my strength to the defence of the working masses.

L. Koroleff, Commander of the 5<sup>th</sup> Batt., 4<sup>th</sup> Division (*Izvestia* No. 7, March 9<sup>th</sup>)

\* \* \*

Comrades, and my dear pupils of the industrial, military and naval schools! I have lived nearly thirty years with a deep love for the people. To the best of my ability I have brought light and knowledge to all who wanted to learn. The 1917 Revolution gave me new enthusiasm. My activity increased. I worked harder than ever to serve my ideal. The Communist slogan, "Everything for the people" inspired me by its nobility and beauty, and in February 1920 I became an applicant for membership in the Communist Party. But the first shot fired against the peaceful people, against my dear children, of whom there are 7,000 in Kronstadt, has made me tremble with horror to think that I might be considered an accomplice in the shedding of these innocents' blood. I know that I cannot any longer believe in or propagate an idea that has been dishonoured by criminal action. Therefore, from the first shot I ceased to consider myself a member of the Communist Party.

Maria Nikolaievna Chatel, teacher. (*Izvestia* No. 8, March 10<sup>th</sup>)

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Since, in reply to the proposition of the Kronstadt comrades to send delegates to Petrograd, Trotsky sent an aeroplane loaded with bombs which were dropped on innocent women and children, since, moreover, they are shooting honest workers everywhere, we rank-and-file Communists of the electrical crew of the Third Region, profoundly indignant at the actions of Trotsky and his agents and at their behaving like wild beasts, are leaving the Communist Party and joining all the honest workers in the common struggle for the workers' emancipation. We request that we be considered out of the party.

(17 signatures follow — *Izvestia* No. 8, March 10<sup>th</sup>)

\* \* \*

For three years I have worked at Kronstadt as an instructor in the primary school and also in the army and naval units. I have always honestly marched with the workers of free Kronstadt giving them all my powers in the field of public education. The great enthusiasm for culture professed by the Communists, the class struggle of the



workers against the exploiters, and the perspectives of Soviet construction, drew me into the ranks of the Communist Party. I became an applicant for membership on February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1920. Since my application I have observed many serious faults in the party hierarchy. I have come to the conclusion that these faults pollute the beautiful idea of Communism. The more serious faults, which have impressed the masses very unfavourably, are: bureaucracy, the rupture between the party and the masses, the party's dictatorial procedures in relation to the latter, the great number of careerists, etc. All these faults widen the bottomless abyss between the masses and the party, transforming the latter into an organ powerless to struggle against the country's internal downfall.

The present events have uncovered the most horrible evils in the regime. When the people of Kronstadt, which has several thousand inhabitants, presented their entirely just demands to the "defenders of the interests of the workers," the bureaucratized hierarchy of the Communist Party rejected them, and, instead of reaching a free and fraternal agreement with the Kronstadt workers, opened a fratricidal fire against the workers, sailors and Red soldiers of the revolutionary city. And this was the last straw — the dropping of bombs by aeroplanes on defenceless women and children added a fine laurel to the Communist Party's crown.

Not wanting to share responsibility for the barbarous acts of the Communists, and disapproving of the tactics of their hierarchy, which has resulted in bloodshed and the extreme suffering of the masses, I declare openly that I no longer consider myself an applicant for Communist Party membership and entirely accept the slogan of the Kronstadt workers: "All power to the Soviets and not to the parties."

T. Denisoff, instructor at the Second Primary School (*Izvestia* No. 10, March 12<sup>th</sup>)

\* \* \*

Without violence or bloodshed, the power of the Communist Party, which had lost the confidence of the masses, passed at Kronstadt to the hands of the revolutionary workers. Nevertheless, the central Government blockaded Kronstadt. It spread lying proclamations and radio messages, trying to impose its power by hunger, cold and treason.

We consider such tactics treason to the basic principles of the Social Revolution: "All power to the workers." By this treason, the Communists in power have taken the side of the enemies of the workers. For us there is now only one choice, to remain at our posts and struggle relentlessly against all those who try to impose their power on the working masses by violence, treason and provocation. We are therefore breaking off all relations with the party.

Miloradovitch, Bezsonoff, Markoff, ex-members of the Communist Party (*Izvestia* No. 10, March 12<sup>th</sup>)

\* \* \*

Revolted by the behaviour of the great lord Trotsky, who did not hesitate to stain his hands with the blood of his comrade workers, I consider it my moral duty to leave the party and publish my declaration.

V.Grabedeff, candidate for party membership, President of the Building Workers' Union (*Izvestia* No. 10, March 12<sup>th</sup>)

Finally, we reproduce some instructive excerpts drawn from declarations of the same type. These excerpts give a very clear idea of the spirit and the attitudes which prevailed everywhere:

We, the undersigned ... were members of the Communist Party, because we considered it an emanation of the will of the working masses. But in reality it has shown itself to be the hangman of workers and peasants...

(*Izvestia* No. 5, March 7)

\* \* \*

We, candidates to the Communist Party ... unanimously declare our solidarity, not with the authorities, but entirely with the just cause of the workers ...

(*Izvestia* No. 7, March 9)

\* \* \*

The parties have been preoccupied with politics. But when the Civil War was over, people wanted the party to turn to economic life and to make headway in the reconstruction of the country's ruined economy.

The peasant does not need Commissars to understand that he must give bread to the city; and the worker, in turn, will do all he can to furnish the peasant with everything the peasant needs for his work.

(*Izvestia* No. 11, March 13)

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#### PRISONERS' RESOLUTION

On March 14<sup>th</sup>, the general assembly of kursanti, officers and Red soldiers, numbering 240, who had been taken prisoner and interned in the Riding School, adopted the following resolution:

"On March 8<sup>th</sup>, we, kursanti, officers and Red soldiers of Moscow and Petrograd, received the order to attack the city of Kronstadt. We were told that the White Guards had started a mutiny. When, without using our arms, we approached the outskirts of the city and made contact with the advance guard of the sailors and workers, we realized that no White Guard mutiny existed at Kronstadt, but, on the contrary, that the sailors and workers had overthrown the absolutist power of the Commissars. Soon, we went over voluntarily to the side of the people of Kronstadt, and now we request the Revolutionary Committee to place us in combat units, for we want to fight beside the real defenders of the workers and peasants, both of Kronstadt and of all Russia.

"We consider that the Provisional Revolutionary Committee has taken the correct course for the emancipation of all the workers, and that only the idea of 'All power

to the Soviets and not to the parties' can complete the work that has been so well begun."

(*Izvestia* No. 14, March 16<sup>th</sup>)

\* \* \*

We, soldiers of the Red Army from the fort Krasnoarmeietz, are body and soul with the Revolutionary Committee. We will defend the Committee, the workers and the peasants to the end. No one can believe the lies in the Communist proclamations which have been dropped by aeroplane. We have neither generals nor masters here. Kronstadt has always been the city of the workers and peasants, and it will continue to be so.

The Communists say that we are misled by spies. This is a barefaced lie. We have always defended the liberties conquered by the revolution, and we will always defend them. If anyone wants to convince themselves of this, let him send a delegation to us. As for the generals, they are in the service of the Communists.

At the present moment, when the fate of the country is in doubt, we who have taken power into our hands and have given supreme command to the Revolutionary Committee declare to the whole garrison, and to all the workers that we are ready to die for the liberty of the working people. Freed from the Communist yoke and from the terror of the past years, we prefer to die rather than retreat a single step.

Detachment of Fort Krasnoarmeietz (*Izvestia* No. 5, March 7<sup>th</sup>)

A passionate love for a free Russia and an unlimited faith in the "true Soviets" inspired Kronstadt. To the end, the Kronstadtzi hoped to be supported by Petrograd first of all and then by the whole of Russia, and to be able thus to achieve the complete liberation of the country. The following manifesto was typical of their attitude:

"Comrades, sailors, workers and Red soldiers of the city of Kron-stadt!

"We, the garrison of fort Totleben, send you our fraternal greetings at this grim and tragic hour of our glorious struggle against the hated yoke of the Communists. All of us are ready, as one man, to die for the emancipation of our suffering brothers, the peasants and workers of all Russia, chained again in hateful slavery to violence and deception. We hope that soon, by determination, we shall be able to break the circle of enemies around the fortress into a thousand pieces and carry the real truth and real freedom across our land."

This note appeared in the last number of the Kronstadt *Izvestia* (No. 14), on March 16<sup>th</sup>, 1921. The enemy was at the gates of Kronstadt. Petrograd and the rest of the country, terrified by a formidable massing of military and police forces, was manifestly impotent to break the vice. Very little hope remained for the heroic handful of defenders in the fortress, attacked by a huge army of kursanti, blindly devoted to the government. Yet, carried away by their great ideal, by the purity of their motives, by their fervent faith in imminent liberation, the men of Kronstadt continued to hope and to fight the unequal battle.

They had not wanted an armed struggle. They had sought to resolve the conflict by peaceful and fraternal means, by free re-election of the Soviets, by an understanding with the Communists, by persuasion and free action among the working masses. The fratricidal struggle was imposed on them, but as events unfolded they became more and more determined to fight to the end for their just and noble cause.

A significant aspect of their attitude was the way in which they regarded the question of help in their action. They received offers from various sources, notably from the Right Social-Revolutionaries. But they refused all aid coming from that direction. As for the leftist groups, they only accepted their aid when it was offered in a spirit of freedom and sincerity, in devotion and fraternity and when it had no political ties. They welcomed the collaboration of friends, but they accepted no pressure, no "dictation."<sup>6</sup>

Fourteen numbers of the *Izvestia* of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee appeared during the revolt, from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> of March. The noble, burning aspirations of the rebels for a new and truly free life for Kronstadt and for all Russia, their sublime devotion and their firm resolve to defend themselves "to the last drop of blood" in the fight that was imposed upon them, all these essential qualities were faithfully reflected in a series of articles in their paper which explained their position, formulated their objectives, sought to convince the blind and the misled, and replied as we have already seen, to the slanders and the hostile acts of the Communists.

We have run through these historic pages, which now are almost entirely unknown. They should be read and re-read by the workers of all countries, in order to put them on their guard against the fundamental errors which lost the Russian Revolution of 1917 and which threaten in advance the Revolution that may come in other countries—T.e. action under the aegis of political parties; the reconstruction of political power; the installation of a new government; the organization of a centralized state, under new slogans empty of real content, such as "Dictatorship of the Proletariat," "Proletarian Government," "Workers' and Peasants' State," etc. These newspapers, like the epic of Kronstadt itself, prove conclusively that what belongs really to *the workers and peasants can be neither governmental nor statist*, and that what is *governmental and statist* can belong *neither to the workers nor the peasants*.

The first issue of the Kronstadt *Izvestia* (March 3, 1921) contains, in addition to information and administrative notes, the Manifesto "To the Population of the Fortress and of the City of Kronstadt," and the famous sailors' "Resolution," which we have already cited.

The second issue (of March 4), which contains the Moscow radiogram (cited earlier) also contains the following significant appeal:

*To the Population of the City of Kronstadt*

Citizens, Kronstadt is beginning a hard fight for freedom. At any moment, we can expect a Communist offensive for the purpose of retaking Kronstadt and reimposing on us their power, which has led to famine, cold and economic breakdown.

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<sup>6</sup> One of the delegations sent by the Revolutionary Committee to Petrograd had as its aim the bringing to Kronstadt of two Anarchists who were intimately known there: Comrade Yartchuk (author of a well-known book) and myself. The Provisional Revolutionary Committee wanted us to come and help them in (their task. They did not yet know in Kronstadt that we were both imprisoned by the Bolsheviks. This tact, slight as it is, is another proof of the independence and the revolutionary tendency of Kronstadt. A counter-revolutionary movement would never seek the collaboration of Anarchists. Moreover, the president of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee, Petrichenko, was himself an Anarchist sympathiser.

All of us, to the last man, will defend the liberty we have won, with force and determination. We will resist the plan to subjugate Kronstadt, and if the Communists try to do it by force of arms, we will reply with a worthy resistance.

The Provisional Committee calls upon the population not to be disturbed if they hear firing. Calm and composure will bring us victory.

The Provisional Revolutionary Committee

We have already quoted everything of interest in No. 3 (of March 5), except for the usual notes, declarations and information. We can nevertheless add the following paragraph:

Complete order reigns in Kronstadt. All institutions are functioning normally. The streets are full of people. Not a shot has been fired for three days.

No. 4 (of March 6<sup>th</sup>), in addition to the material cited earlier, contains the following editorial:

The calloused hands of the sailors and workers of Kronstadt have seized the rudder from the hands of the Communists and have taken possession of the helm. The Soviet ship will be sailed safely and competently to Petrograd, from which this power of the workers' hands shall spread throughout unhappy Russia.

But comrades, take care! Double your watches, for the course is full of reefs. A careless turn of the rudder and your ship, with its precious mission of social reconstruction, may run on to a rock.

Comrades, look to the rudder — your enemies are already trying to seize it! A single error and they will succeed, and the Soviet ship will founder to the triumphant laughter of the Tsarist lackeys and the agents of the bourgeoisie.

Comrades, at this moment you are rejoicing in a great and peaceful victory over the dictatorship of the Communists. But your enemies also are rejoicing. You and they are joyful for opposite reasons. You are filled with a burning desire to re-establish the real power of the Soviets, with the noble hope of seeing the worker work freely and the peasant enjoy the right of disposing of the products of his labour on his own land. They dream of re-establishing the knout of Tsarism and the privileges of the generals.

Your interests are different. They are not your comrades. You have had to get rid of the Communist power to begin a creative task of peaceful reconstruction. They want to maintain this power so that the workers and peasants may be their slaves again. You seek liberty. They want to enslave you.

The editorial in No. 6 (March 7):

“Field-marshal” Trotsky threatens free and revolutionary Kronstadt which has revolted against the absolutism of the Communist commissars. The workers who have overthrown the shameful yoke of the dictatorship of the Communist Party are threat-

ened by this new kind of Trepoff<sup>7</sup> with military defeat. He promises to bomb the peaceful population of Kronstadt. He repeats the order of the original Trepoff, "Do not economize on bullets." He will have to find plenty for the revolutionary sailors, workers and Red soldiers.

For him, the dictator of Soviet Russia which has been violated by the Communists, the fate of the working masses means nothing. The important thing is that power should remain in the hands of his party.

He has the insolence to speak in the name of Soviet Russia. He promises pardon! He, the bloody Trotsky, leader of the Communist cossacks who are pitilessly shedding torrents of blood for the benefit of party absolutism, he, the stifler of all free spirit, dares to use this language to the people of Kronstadt, who boldly and firmly uphold the red flag!

The Communists hope to re-establish their absolutism at the price of the blood of the workers and the suffering of their imprisoned families. They want to compel the rebel sailors, workers and Red soldiers to stick out their necks again. They dream of installing their evil policy, which has hurled all of labouring Russia into the pit of disorder, famine and poverty.

Enough of this! The workers will not be fooled any longer! Communists, your hopes are vain and your threats have no effect. The last phase of the Workers' Revolution is on the march. It will sweep the im-posters and slanderers from the country, from the Soviets soiled with their works. And as for your Pardon, Mr. Trotsky, we do not need it!

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#### *We do not Exact Vengeance*

The oppression of the working masses by the Communist dictatorship has given rise to a perfectly natural indignation and resentment among the population. As a consequence of this, several Communists have been boycotted or dismissed. This should not happen again. We do not seek vengeance; we defend our interests as workers. We must act with composure, and only eliminate those who, by sabotage or by a campaign of slander, prevent the restoration of the power and rights of the workers.

\* \* \*

#### *We and They*

Not knowing how to preserve the power that is escaping them, the Communists are employing the vilest provocations. Their unclean press has mobilized all its forces to stir up the masses and present the Kron-stadt movement as a White-guard conspiracy. At this moment, their clique of infamous scoundrels has launched the slogan: "Kronstadt has sold out to Finland." Their newspapers vomit fire and poison. Having

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<sup>7</sup> Trepoff was one of the most vicious generals of Tsar Nicholas II, noted for his famous order to the troops during the disturbances of 1905: "Do not economize on bullets."

failed in the task of convincing the proletariat that Kronstadt is in the hands of the counter-revolutionaries, they now try to play on national sentiments.

The whole country knows already from our radio messages the reasons why the garrison and the workers of Kronstadt are fighting. But the Communists seek to distort the meaning of the events, hoping thus to deceive our brothers in Petrograd.

Petrograd is closely surrounded by the bayonets of the *kursanti* and the “guards” of the party. The Maliuta Skouratoff<sup>8</sup> — Trotsky — does not let the non-party workers and Red soldiers come to Kronstadt. He is afraid that they will learn the truth and that the truth will immediately sweep the Communists away. For, once the eyes of the working masses are opened, their calloused hands will take power.

This is the reason why the Petrograd Soviet has not replied to a radio message requesting that they send really impartial comrades to Kronstadt. Fearing for their skins, the Communist chiefs stifle the truth and pile lie on lie. “The White guards are at work at Kronstadt.” “The Finns have already organized an army to take possession of Petrograd with the help of the Kronstadt rebels,” etc.

We have only one thing to reply to all this. “All Power to the Soviets.” Take off your hands, your hands red with the blood of the martyrs of liberty who struggled against the White Guards, the landlords and the bourgeoisie.

Finally, the same issue contains a virtual “profession of faith”: the program and testament the Kronstadt workers bequeathed to the working masses of future revolutions. Their aspirations and their hopes are firmly and lucidly expressed in this document:

#### *The Goals for Which We Fight*

In making the October Revolution, the working class hoped to obtain its emancipation. But it resulted in a worse slavery for human individuality. The power of the police monarchy passed into the hands of the usurpers — the Communists—who, instead of giving freedom to the people, gave them the fear of the Cheka’s jails, whose horrors far surpass the methods of the Tsarist police.

After long years of fighting and suffering, the Soviet Russian worker has only obtained impertinent orders, bayonet thrusts and the whistling bullets of the Cheka Cossacks. In fact, the Communist power has substituted for the glorious emblem of the workers, the hammer and sickle, another symbol — the bayonet and the barred window, which has permitted the new bureaucracy, the Communist functionaries and commissars, to procure for themselves a tranquil and carefree existence.

But most debased and criminal of all is the spiritual slavery established by the Communists. They put their hands on the thoughts and moral life of the workers, compelling everyone to think only according to their formulae. With the aid of state unions, they have chained the workers to the machines, and transformed work into a new slavery instead of making it pleasant. To the protests of the peasants, which

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<sup>8</sup> Maliuta Skouratoff was the commander of the Guards of Tsar Ivan the Terrible, during the fifteenth century, whose name has been handed down from generation to generation as a symbol of human ferocity.

have gone as far as spontaneous revolts, to the demands of the workers, compelled by the very conditions of their life to resort to strikes, they reply with mass shootings and a ferocity that the Tsarist generals might have envied.

The workers' Russia, the first to raise the red flag of the emancipation of labor, is drowned in the blood of the martyrs for the greater glory of the Communist rule. With it are drowned all the great and beautiful promises and possibilities of the proletarian revolution.

It has been becoming more and more clear, and now it is evident, that the Communist Party is not, as it pretends to be, the defender of the workers. The interests of the working masses are foreign to it. After obtaining power, the Communists have only one concern – not to lose it. For that end they consider any means are justified: defamation, deception, violence, assassination, vengeance on the families of rebels.

But the patience of the martyred workers is exhausted. The country is here and there illuminated by the fire of rebellion, of the struggle against oppression and violence. Workers' strikes are increasing. The Bolshevik bloodhounds are watchful; they are taking steps to prevent and stifle the inevitable third revolution. But in spite of everything it has come. It has been achieved by the labouring masses themselves. The generals of Communism will soon see that it is the people who have arisen, convinced of their treason to the ideas of the revolution. Fearing for their skins, and knowing that there is nowhere to which they can escape from the rage of the workers, the Communists try to terrorize the rebels, with the help of the cossacks, with prison, executions and other atrocities. Under the yoke of the Communist dictatorship, life itself has become worse than death.

The working people in revolt have realized that in the struggle against the Communists and against the restoration of the regime of serfdom they cannot stop half-way. They have to go on to the end. The Communists pretend to make concessions. They have removed the barriers in the province of Petrograd. They have allotted ten million gold roubles to buy products abroad. But no one is fooled by that. The iron fist of the master, the dictator, is hidden behind this sop, the hand of the master who, once calm is restored will make them pay dearly for these concessions.

No, there is no stopping half-way. We must conquer or die. Red Kronstadt, terror of the counter-revolutionists of the Left as well as the Right, has set the example. It is here that the great new impulse of the revolution has been achieved. Here has been raised the flag of revolt against the tyranny of the last three years, against the oppression of Communist autocracy, which has outdone all the centuries of the monarchist yoke. It is here in Kronstadt there have been laid the foundations of the Third Revolution, which will break the last chains of the workers and lay open the new highway to socialist construction.

This new revolution will succour the working masses of the East and the West, for it will set an example of a new socialist construction opposed to the mechanical and governmental Communist method. The working masses beyond our frontier will then be convinced that all that is being done here at present in the name of the workers and peasants is not socialism.



The first step in this direction has been taken without firing a shot, without spilling a drop of blood. The workers have no need of blood. They will only spill it in cases of legitimate defence. In spite of all the revolting acts of the Communists, we are sufficiently in control of our natures to confine ourselves to isolating them from social life in order to prevent them from damaging the revolutionary work with their false and malevolent agitation.

The workers and peasants are going forward irresistibly. They leave behind them the Constituent Assembly and the bourgeois regime, they leave behind them the dictatorship of the Communist Party with its Cheka and state-capitalism which tightens the noose around the necks of the workers and threatens to strangle them.

The changes that have just taken place finally offer the working masses the possibility of ensuring freely elected Soviets with no violent coercion by a party. This change also permits them to reorganize the state unions into free associations of workers, peasants and intellectuals. The police machine of the Communist autocracy is finally broken.

We cite two short articles from No. 7 (March 9). The first is a polemic:

*Listen, Trotsky!*

In their radio broadcasts, the Communists have dumped tons of filth on the instigators of the Third Revolution, who defend the real Soviet power against the usurpation and despotism of the commissars.

We have never concealed this fact from the population of Kronstadt. We have always made these slanderous attacks public in our *Iz-vestia*. For we have nothing to fear. The citizens know how the revolt happened and by whom it was made. The workers and Red soldiers know that there are neither generals nor White Guards in the garrison.

For its part, the Provisional Revolutionary Committee has sent a radio message to Petrograd demanding the release of hostages held by the Communists in their crowded prisons (workers, sailors and their families) and also the release of political prisoners.

A second broadcast proposed the sending to Kronstadt of nonparty delegates who, having seen on the spot what was happening here, could tell the truth to the working masses of Petrograd. What have the Communists done? They have concealed this radio message from the workers and Red soldiers. Several units of "Field Marshal" Trotsky's troops have come over to our side and brought us newspapers from Petrograd. In these papers there is not a single word about our radio message.

However, they will not get away with it for long, these tricksters who play with marked cards and cry out that they have no secrets from the people, not even diplomatic secrets. Listen, Trotsky, as long as you succeed in escaping the judgment of the people, you can shoot innocent persons in batches. But you cannot shoot the truth. It will finally make its way, and then you and your cossacks will have to meet the bill.

The second article is constructive, and was published in order to initiate a discussion about the question of the unions:

*The Reorganization of the Unions*

Under the dictatorship of the Communists, the duties of the unions and their administrative commissions have been reduced to a minimum. During the four years of the revolutionary syndicalist movement in “socialist” Russia, our unions have had no chance of becoming class organs. This has not been their fault. It was, in fact, the consequence of the policy of the ruling party, seeking to educate the masses by the centralist “communist” method.

In the last analysis, the work of the unions was reduced to keeping records and absolutely useless correspondence, the purpose of which was to establish the number of members in this or that union and to determine the speciality of each member, his situation in relationship to the party, etc. As for economic activity of a co-operative nature, as for cultural education of the worker members of the unions, nothing was done.

This is entirely understandable. For, if the unions were given the right to a considerable independent activity, the whole centralist system of construction undertaken by the Communists would inevitably have collapsed, which would have led to a demonstration of the uselessness of commissars and “political sections.”

It was these failings that detached the workers from the unions, finally transforming the latter into nests of policemen which prevented all true union activity by the working class.

Once the dictatorship of the Communist Party is overthrown, the role of the unions should change radically. They and their re-elected administrative commissions should fulfil the great and urgent task of educating the masses for an economic and cultural renovation of the country. They should bring a new purifying spirit to this activity. They should become real representatives of the interests of the people.

The Soviet Socialist Republic cannot be strong unless its administration be exercised by the working classes, with the help of renovated unions. To work, comrade workers! Let us build new unions, free from all imposition. There lies our strength.

*Izvestia* No. 8 (March 10) was devoted mainly to military events: the attack on Kronstadt by the Communists and its defense.

No. 9 (March 11) contains a powerful “Appeal to the Workers and Peasants,” of which we cite some essential passages:

Kronstadt has begun a heroic struggle against the hateful power of the Communists and for the emancipation of the workers and peasants ... All that is happening now was prepared by the Communists themselves, by their bloody and ruinous work, which has lasted for three years. The letters we receive from the country are full of complaints and curses in regard to the Communists. Our comrades returning from leave, burning with rage and indignation, have told us of the horrors perpetrated

by the Bolsheviks throughout the country. Moreover, we ourselves have seen, heard and felt all that goes on around us. An immense, heartrending cry of distress comes to us from the fields and cities of mighty Russia. It fills our hearts with indignation and arms our hands.

We do not want to return to the past. We are not servants of the bourgeoisie or mercenaries of the Allies. We are for the power of all the workers, but not for the unlimited and tyrannical power of any single party. Neither Kolchak, nor Denikin, nor Yudenitch is operating at Kronstadt. Kronstadt is in the hands of the workers. The good sense and the conscience of the simple sailors, soldiers and workers of Kronstadt have finally found words and the course which will permit us to get out of the impasse in which we are at present ...

In the beginning we wanted to settle everything peacefully. But the Communists did not wish to yield. More than Nicholas II, they clung to power, ready to drown the whole country in blood so that they could rule as autocrats. And that is why Trotsky, the evil genius of Russia, now launches our brothers against us. Hundreds of their bodies already cover the ice around the fortress. For four days the battle has raged, the cannons have roared, the blood of brothers has been spilt ... For four days the heroes of Kronstadt have victoriously repelled all the attacks of the enemy. Like a hawk, Trotsky swoops over our city. But Kronstadt will hold out forever. We are all ready to die rather than capitulate ...

Comrade workers, Kronstadt fights for you, for the starving, for those who are frozen by the cold, for those who are in rags and without shelter. As long as the Bolsheviks remain in power, there cannot be a better life.

You are supporting all this. In the name of what? Only so that the Communists may live in ease and the commissars get fat? You still have confidence in them? In telling the Petrograd Soviet that the government had appropriated millions of gold roubles to buy various products, Zino-viev calculated that each worker would get fifty roubles' worth. That, comrade workers, is the price per head for which the Bolshevik clique hopes to buy you ...

Comrade peasants, it is you that the Bolshevik power has deceived and despoiled the most. Where is the land that you had taken from the landlords, after dreaming of it for centuries? It is in the hands of the Communists or exploited by the Sovkhoz. And as for you, all you can do is to look at it and lick your lips. They have taken from you everything they could carry off. You are brought to complete ruin by pillage. You are exhausted by Bolshevik serfdom. They have compelled you docilely to do the will of your new masters, to starve yourselves, to seal your mouths, to leave yourselves in the most squalid poverty.

Comrades, the people of Kronstadt have raised the flag of revolt, in the hopes that tens of millions of workers and peasants would respond to their appeal. The dawn that has just broken at Kronstadt must be converted into a bright sun over all Russia. The explosion that has just taken place in Kronstadt must revive all Russia, and first of all Petrograd. Our enemies have filled the prisons with workers, but many who are

sincere and courageous are still at liberty. Comrades! Arise for the struggle against the absolutism of the Communists.

The same issue contains the following note:

*Their Eyes are Opened*

The Provisional Revolutionary Committee and the editors of *Iz-vestia* are submerged by an avalanche of declarations by Communists who are leaving their party? ... What is the meaning of this frantic flight? Is it fear of vengeance from the working people who have taken power from the Bolsheviki? No, a thousand times no!

Someone, when a working woman came to make such a declaration to us, talked of "These runaways." "We are not running away," she indignantly retorted. "Our eyes have been opened."

The blood of the workers, which has reddened the ice of the Gulf of Finland for the benefit of the fools defending their power, this blood has opened the people's eyes. All those who still retain a grain of honesty are frantically leaving the gang of demagogues. No one remains in that gang but the dishonest and the criminal — the commissars of all grades, the Chekists, and the bigwigs fattened at the expense of the starving workers and peasants, their pockets filled with gold after having robbed the palaces, the museums and everything else that the people conquered with their blood.

All these rascals still have hopes. In vain! The people, who have overthrown the yoke of Tsarism and its police, will also get rid of the chains of Communist serfdom. The eyes of the working people are opened.

*Izvestia* No. 10 (March 12) does not contain anything more salient than the material already cited. We should nevertheless point out the following few lines from an article headed "*The Stages of the Revolution*":

A new — communist — slavery has taken root. The peasant has been transformed into a serf in the "soviet" economy. The worker is becoming a simple wage-worker in the State factories. The stratum of intellectual workers has been almost completely exterminated. Those who wanted to protest were thrown into the jails of the Cheka. And those who continued to act were simply lined up against the wall. Russia in its entirety has been transformed into an immense prison.

No. 11 (March 13) is devoted mainly to military events (and also contains various declarations and appeals similar to those already cited).

In No. 12 (March 14) we find the following curious article:

*One Must Howl with the Wolves!*

At a time of the struggle of the workers for their rights, which have been trampled under foot, one might expect that Lenin would not be a hypocrite and would speak the truth. In their minds, the workers and peasants separated Lenin from Trotsky

and Zinoviev. They did not believe a single word of the latter. But as for Lenin, their confidence in him was not yet lost.

Yet on March 8<sup>th</sup>, when the Tenth Congress of the Russian Communist Party began, Lenin repeated there all the lies about Kronstadt in revolt. He declared that the slogan of the movement was “for the Soviets but against the dictatorship of the Bolsheviks,” but he did not hesitate to bring in the “White generals and the petit-bourgeois Anarchist elements.”

Thus, by speaking such filth, Lenin involved himself. He let out the admission that the basis of the movement was the struggle for the power of the Soviets against the party dictatorship. But, troubled, he added: “This is another kind of counter-revolution. It is extremely dangerous, however insignificant at first sight may seem the corrections which they think our policy needs.”

There is reason for him to be troubled. The blow struck by revolutionary Kronstadt is severe, and the leaders of the party feel that the end of their autocracy is near. The great distress of Lenin is manifest throughout his speech on Kronstadt. The word “danger” is constantly recurring. For example, he says: “We must have an end to this petit-bourgeois danger, which is very perilous for us, since instead of uniting the proletariat it disunites them. We need the maximum of unity.” Yes, the chief of the Communists has to tremble and make an appeal for a “Maximum of unity.” For the dictatorship of the Communists and also the party itself reveal a serious cleavage.

Was it indeed possible for Lenin to speak the truth? Recently, at a Communist discussion on the unions, he said: “All this bores me to death. I have had enough of it. Even apart from my illness I would be happy to throw it all up and flee, no matter where.” But his partners will not let him flee. He is their prisoner. He must utter slanders, just as they do.

At the same time, the whole policy of the party is impeded by the action of Kronstadt, for Kronstadt demands, not “freedom of trade,” but real Soviet power.

The same issue contains the following tirade against Zinoviev:

#### *Vain Hopes*

In the Petrograd *Pravda* for March 11<sup>th</sup> we read a letter from Zinoviev to the non-party comrades. This impudent camp-follower says with regret that Communist workers have become increasingly rare in the factories of Petrograd. And he concludes\* that “the Communists must at all costs draw the honest non-party working men and women into the Soviet cause.”

That the number of Communists in the factories should have fallen very low is only natural. Everybody is leaving the traitors’ party. It is also natural that the Chekists should be trying to domesticate the nonparty workers by all means — especially by trying to drag them into the swamp of collaboration with the Communists.

“We are therefore beginning, in an orderly, methodical way,” writes this *provocateur* (Zinoviev), “to draw the non-party workers systematically into our work.” But what

honest worker would join this gang of thieves, commissars and Chekists? The workers know very well that these policemen are attempting to stifle the complaints of the labouring masses and put their vigilance to sleep with the help of certain advances and concessions, so that later they can better crush them in the vice. The workers see how their non-party comrades are treated at this moment by the Communists at Kronstadt.

“Lately,” whines Zinoviev, “we have even had a great misunderstanding with the Baltic factory. But if this works realizes the plan that has been laid down and thus sets an example for others, many of its workers’ errors will be pardoned.”

In this the *provocateur* has betrayed himself, for only a few days ago the Communists assured the Kronstadt workers, over the radio, that all was well in Petrograd, and that the Baltic works was running normally. And now, in a few words, appears “a great misunderstanding” and an invitation to “set an example” for the other factories. Is something going on at the other factories as well? Was Zinoviev fooling us then, or is he fooling us now?

To gain the goodwill of the Baltic workers, the Communists promise them all the good things of this world. “We will put workers in the posts which at the moment are most important—food, supply, fuel, control of institutions, etc. We will give the non-party workers the means of taking a most active part, through the intermediary of their delegates, in the buying of products abroad with gold so as to enable the Petrograd workers to pass through this difficult period. We will start an energetic campaign against bureaucratism in our institutions. We may reprimand and criticize each other, but in basic issues we will always end by reaching an understanding.” In this manner Zinoviev sings tenderly and sweetly today. He speaks to the workers in honeyed words to put them to sleep and to distract their attention from the cannon shots fired at their Kronstadt brothers.

Why have the Communists never spoken like this until now? Why have they never before done anything like this in the course of their nearly four years of ruling? It is all very simple. They could not achieve [what they are promising] before and they cannot achieve it now. We know the value of their promises and even of the scraps of paper which they call contracts.

No, the worker will not sell his liberty and the blood of his brothers for all the gold in the world. Therefore let Zinoviev abandon the empty project of “understanding.” Now that their brothers of Kronstadt have risen to defend real freedom, the workers have only a single reply to give to the Communists. Provocateurs and Hangmen, relinquish your power immediately, while it is still possible for you to escape! Do not lull yourselves with your own lies.

The same issue contains an Appeal from the Provisional Revolutionary Committee, from which we cite the following passage:

When it seized power, the Communist Party promised you well-being.

But what do we see?

Three years ago we were told: “You can recall your representatives and re-elect your Soviets whenever you want.”

But precisely when we in Kronstadt wanted- to re-elect Soviets which would be free from the pressure of the Party, the new Trepoff Trotsky-gave the order: “Do not economize on bullets!”

What treason!

We also asked that the workers of Petrograd be allowed to send us a delegation so that they could see who our generals are and who leads the movement.

This delegation failed to come. The Communists are afraid that a delegation will learn the truth and will communicate it to you.

The next to last issue of the rebels’ *Izvestia*, No. 13 (March 15) contains the following editorial:

*The Old Firm of Lenin, Trotsky and Co.*

It has worked well — the old firm of Lenin, Trotsky and Co. The criminal absolutist policy of the Communist Party in power has led Russia to the pit of poverty and ruin.

After that, it should be time to retreat. But alas, the tears and blood shed by the workers seem still to be insufficient. At the very moment of the historical struggle which is boldly undertaken by revolutionary Kronstadt for the rights of the working people, who are scorned and trampled on by the Communists, the flock of crows has decided to hold its Tenth Party Congress. It is plotting the means for continuing its fratricidal work with even greater success.

Their [the Communists’] effrontery attains perfection. They speak very tranquilly of “commercial concessions,” and Lenin, with all the simplicity in the world, declares: “We are beginning to undertake the principle of concessions. The success of this enterprise does not depend on us. But we must do our best.” And with that he admits that the Bolsheviki have put Russia into a pretty mess, for he continues: “We cannot reconstruct the country without making use of foreign techniques if we want to catch up economically with other countries. Circumstances have forced us to buy abroad not only machines, but also coal, which is plentiful at home. We will still have to make new sacrifices to keep consumer goods flowing and also to obtain the necessary supplies for the agrarian economy.”

Where then are the famous economic achievements in the name of which they have turned the worker into a factory slave and the peasant into a serf of the sovkhoz?

But this is not all? ... “If we succeed in reconstructing a great rural economy and a big industry,” Lenin continues, “this will only be done by imposing new sacrifices on all the producers, with nothing in return.” Such is the “well-being” for which the chief of the Bolsheviki would have everybody hope who is willing docilely to wear the yoke of Communist absolutism. He was brutally right, that peasant who declared at the Eighth Congress of the Soviets: “Everything is going splendidly ... Only, if the land is ours, the bread is yours; if the water is ours, the fish are yours; if the forests are ours, the wood is yours...”

Lenin promises “to accord some favours to the small landowners, and to enlarge somewhat the areas of free economy.” Like the good old master, he is proposing a few favours in order later on to crush the necks of the workers still harder in the vice of Party dictatorship. It can be seen easily in this admission: “Certainly we cannot dispense with compulsion, for the country is exhausted and sunk in a terrible poverty.”

... It is thus that Lenin conceives the task of construction: commercial concessions at the top level, and taxes below.

The same issue contains the following instructive summary:

*The Benefits of the “Commune “*

“Comrades, we are going to build a new and beautiful life,” thus spoke and wrote the Communists. “We are going to destroy the world of violence and build a new socialist world filled with beauty.” Thus they sang to the people. Let us see what the reality is.

All the best houses, all the best apartments are requisitioned for the offices of Communist institutions. Thus only the bureaucrats find themselves living in a comfortable, agreeable and spacious manner. The number of habitable lodgings has diminished, and the workers have remained where they were before. They live crowded together in worse conditions than ever.

For the houses, not being kept in repair, are dilapidated. The heating is out of order. Broken windowpanes are not replaced. Roofs are full of holes which let the water in. Fences are falling down. Half the chimneys are broken. The toilets do not work and their contents flow all over the apartments, forcing citizens to relieve themselves in the yard or at a neighbour’s house. The staircases are unlit and full of rubbish. The yards are piled with excrement, since the slit trenches, the privies, the drains and the sewers are neither cleaned nor emptied. The streets are filthy. The sidewalks are never repaired and they are uneven and slippery. It is dangerous to walk in the streets.

To obtain lodging one must have influence at a housing bureau. Without that nothing can be done; only the favourites have decent apartments.

As for food, it is even worse. Irresponsible and ignorant officials let tons of produce spoil. The potatoes which are distributed are always frozen. In spring and summer the meat is always rotten. At one time we would hardly feed pigs with what the citizens now get from the “builders of the beautiful new life.” “The honest Soviet fish,” the herring, has saved the situation for a long time now, but even that is getting scarce. The Soviet shops are worse than the old factory shops of unhappy memory, where the bosses kept all kinds of junk and the worker-slaves could say nothing about it.

In order to destroy family life, our rulers have invented collective restaurants. What is the result? The food is still inedible. The produce is stolen in various ways before it even reaches the citizens, who get only the leavings. The nourishment of the children



is a little better, but still very inadequate. Milk especially is lacking. The Communists have requisitioned all the dairy cows from the peasants for their own sovkhoz [state farms]. Moreover, half of these animals die before reaching their destinations, and the milk of the surviving cows goes first to the rulers and then to the functionaries. Only what is left after that goes to the children.

But the hardest things to obtain are clothing and shoes. One wears, or exchanges, second-hand suits. Hardly anything is distributed. For example, one of the unions is now distributing buttons — a button and a half per person. Is this not laughable? As for shoes, they are unprocurable.

The road to the Communist paradise is beautiful. But can one traverse it barefooted? There are plenty of cracks through which everything necessary flows. The clientele of the so-called “co-operatives” and the rulers possess everything. They have their own restaurants and special rations as well. They also have at their disposal the “Goods Bureau,” which distributes products according to the wishes of the commissars.

We have finally realized that this “Commune” has sapped and completely demoralized productive work. All desire to work, all interest in work has disappeared. Shoemakers, tailors, plumbers, etc., have all quit and dispersed. They are serving as guards, messengers, etc. Such is the paradise which the Bolsheviks have tried to build.

In place of the old regime, a new regime of despotism, insolence, favouritism, theft and speculation has been established, a terrible regime in which one must hold out his hand to the authorities for every piece of bread, for every button, a regime in which one does not belong to himself, where one cannot dispose of his own labour, a regime of slavery and degradation.

The 14<sup>th</sup> and last issue (March 16, 1921) is devoted primarily to the battle, which became increasingly desperate. We cite the following historical article, which completes the previous one:

#### *So-Called Socialism*

In making the October Revolution, the sailors and Red soldiers, the workers and peasants, spilled their blood for the power of the Soviets, for the building of a workers' republic.

The Communist Party paid close attention to the aspirations of the masses. Having inscribed on its banners attractive slogans which aroused the enthusiasm of the workers, it swept them into the struggle and promised them that it would lead them into the beautiful kingdom of socialism which only the Bolsheviks knew how to build.

Naturally, an infinite joy took possession of the workers and peasants. “At last, the slavery we endured under the yoke of landlords and capitalists is going to become a myth,” they thought. It seemed as if the time of free labour in the fields, factories and workshops had come. It seemed as if power were going to pass into the hands of the workers.

By skilful propaganda, the children of the working class were drawn into the ranks of the party, where they were subjected to a rigorous discipline. Then, feeling themselves strong enough, the Communists progressively eliminated from power first the socialists of other tendencies, then they pushed workers and peasants out of many state posts, while continuing to govern in their name.

In this way the Communists have brought in the rule of the commissars, with all the despotism of personal power. Against all reason and contrary to the will of the workers, they then began stubbornly to build a state socialism with slaves, instead of building a society based on free labour.

When industry was completely demoralized, in spite of so-called “workers’ control,” the Bolsheviks established the nationalization of works and factories. From a slave of the capitalist the worker was transformed into a slave of state enterprises. Soon this no longer sufficed, and they planned the application of the Taylor system.

The whole mass of the peasants were declared enemies of the people and identified with the “kulaks.” Very enterprisingly the Communists then set about ruining the peasants and substituting Soviet exploitation, that is to say, establishing the estates of the new agrarian profiteer, the State. That is what the peasants have obtained from the Socialism of the Bolsheviks, instead of free labour on the liberated land for which they had hoped. In exchange for bread and livestock, almost entirely requisitioned, they obtained the raids of the Cheka and mass shootings. A fine system of exchange in a workers’ state — lead and bayonets for bread!

The life of the citizen became monotonous and banal to the point of death, regulated according to the rules of the authorities. Instead of a life animated by free labour and the free development of the individual, an unprecedented and incredible slavery was born. All independent thought, all just criticism of the acts of the criminal rulers became crimes, punished by prison and often by death. Indeed, the death penalty, that disgrace to humanity, was extended in the “socialist fatherland.”

Such is the beautiful kingdom of socialism to which the dictatorship of the Communist party has brought us. We have received State Socialism with Soviets of functionaries who vote docilely what the authorities and their infallible commissars dictate to them. The slogan, “He who does not work shall not eat,” has been modified under this beautiful “Soviet” regime to “Everything for the Commissars.” And as for the workers, peasants and intellectual workers, they have just to carry out their tasks in a prison.

This has become insupportable. Revolutionary Kronstadt has been the first to break the chains and bars of the prison. It fights for the true Soviet republic of the workers in which the producer himself will be owner of the products of his labour and can dispose of them as he wishes.

To finish this documentation, we should point out that most of the issues of the rebels’ *Izvestia* contained headlines which clearly expressed their demands and their feelings. We cite a few examples.

**ALL POWER TO THE SOVIETS AND NOT TO THE PARTIES!**

THE POWER OF THE SOVIETS WILL LIBERATE THE WORKERS OF THE COUNTRYSIDE FROM THE COMMUNIST YOKE.

LENIN SAYS: "COMMUNISM MEANS THE POWER OF THE SOVIETS PLUS ELECTRIFICATION," BUT THE PEOPLE HAVE LEARNED THAT BOLSHEVIK COMMUNISM MEANS THE ABSOLUTISM OF THE COMMISSARS PLUS THE FIRING SQUAD.

THE SOVIETS, AND NOT THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY, ARE THE BULWARK OF THE WORKERS.

LONG LIVE RED KRONSTADT WITH THE POWER OF THE FREE SOVIETS!

## Chapter 5. Last Act: The End of Independence

It remains for us to discuss the last act of the tragedy — the attack on Kronstadt, the heroic defence of the city, and its eventual fall.

In *Izvestia* No. 5, for the 7<sup>th</sup> March, we find details of negotiations that had been set on foot concerning the sending of a delegation from Petrograd to Kronstadt to obtain information:

“The Provisional Revolutionary Committee,” reports *Izvestia*, “has received from Petrograd the following radiogram: ‘Inform Petrograd by radio if we can send to Kronstadt from Petrograd some delegates of the Soviet, chosen from the non-party members, and also some party members, to find out what is happening.’”

“The Provisional Revolutionary Committee replied immediately by radio: ‘Radiogram to the Petrograd Soviet: Having received the radio message of the Petrograd Soviet, asking “if we can send from Petrograd to Kronstadt some delegates chosen from the non-party members and also some party members, to find out what is happening,” we inform you that we have no confidence in the independence of your non-party members, and propose that you elect, in the presence of a delegation of ours, non-party delegates from the factories, the Red army units and the sailors. You can add 15% of Communists. It is desirable to have a reply indicating the date for sending the representatives from Kronstadt to Petrograd and the delegates from Petrograd to Kronstadt by March 6<sup>th</sup> at 18.00 hours. In case it is impossible to reply by this time, we request that you indicate your date and the reasons for the delay. Means of return should be assured to the Kronstadt delegates.

The Provisional Revolutionary Committee.”

In spite of these negotiations, persistent rumours were spreading in Petrograd that the government was preparing for military operations against Kronstadt. But the population did not believe it. It seemed too criminal, too incredible.

The Petrograd workers knew nothing of what was happening in Kronstadt. The only information was that given by the Communist press, and its bulletins always spoke of the “Tsarist general Kozlovsky who has organised the counter-revolutionary rebellion at Kronstadt”. The population waited anxiously for the session called by the Petrograd Soviet which would decide what attitude to adopt. The Soviet met on March 4<sup>th</sup>. Only the members who were summoned could attend this meeting, and they were mainly Communists.

Here are the terms in which the Anarchist Alexander Berkman, who was allowed to attend this meeting, described it in his excellent study of the Kronstadt revolt, a study which was based on the same authentic sources as we have used in our own account.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Namely, the *Izvestia* of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee, Soviet documents and selected eyewitnesses. So far as I know, his study first appeared in English in the form of a leaflet. Later it was reproduced in the Anarchist

“As President of the Petrograd Soviet, Zinoviev declared the session open and delivered a long speech on the situation at Kronstadt. I admit that I went to this meeting disposed rather in favour of Zinoviev’s point of view; the assembly was called together by reason of ‘indications’ of an attempted counter-revolution at Kronstadt. But Zinoviev’s speech sufficed to convince me that the Communist accusations against the sailors were pure invention, without the slightest shadow of truth. I had heard Zinoviev speak on various occasions; once his premises were accepted, he had the gift of being convincing. But at this meeting his attitude, his arguments, his tone, his manner — all reflected the falseness of his assertions, his insincerity. The protest of his conscience was obvious to me.

“The only ‘piece of evidence’ against Kronstadt was the famous resolution of March 1<sup>st</sup>. Its demands were just and even moderate. The fatal step was decided on the basis of this document, and of the vehement, almost hysterical, denunciation of the sailors by Kalinin. The resolution against Kronstadt, prepared in advance and presented by Yevdokimoff — Zinoviev’s right-hand man — was accepted. The delegates were over-excited by an excess of intolerance and a kind of bloodthirsty ferocity. The adoption of the bellicose resolution took place in a great tumult and in the midst of protests by several delegates from the Petrograd factories and by representatives of the sailors. The resolution declared Kronstadt guilty of counter-revolutionary sedition; it demanded its immediate surrender. This amounted to a declaration of war.

“Many of the Communists themselves refused to believe that the said resolution would be carried out. It seemed monstrous to attack by armed force ‘the pride and glory of the Russian Revolution’, to use the description that Trotsky had once bestowed on the Kronstadt sailors. Among their intimate friends, many of the sensible Communists talked of leaving the party if such a bloody act were performed.”

On the following day, March 5<sup>th</sup>, Trotsky published his ultimatum to Kronstadt. It was transmitted to the population of Kronstadt by radio, and appeared in the same issue of *Izvestia*, on March 7<sup>th</sup>, as the two radiograms regarding the sending of delegations. Naturally, all negotiations on the latter subject were immediately broken off.

Here is the text of Trotsky’s ultimatum:

“The Workers’ and Peasants’ Government has decreed that Kronstadt and the rebelling ships shall submit immediately to the authority of the Soviet Republic. I order, in consequence, that all who have raised their hands against the Socialist Fatherland lay down their arms without delay. Recalcitrants should be disarmed and brought to the Soviet authorities. The Commissars and the other representatives of the government who have been arrested must be set free on the spot. Only those who surrender unconditionally can expect mercy from the Soviet Republic.

“I simultaneously give the order to prepare for the suppression of the rebellion and the subjugation of the sailors by armed force. All responsibility for injuries that the peaceful population may suffer rests entirely on the heads of the White-guard muti-

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review *Timon* during the civil war in Spain, and finally the French Anarchist paper, *Le Libertaire* published it in several consecutive numbers in January, 1939.

neers. This warning is final. Signed: Trotsky, President of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic. Kameneff, Commander-in-Chief.”

This ultimatum was followed by an order from Trotsky containing the historic threat: “I will shoot you like partridges.”

Several Anarchists who were still at liberty in Petrograd made a last effort to persuade the Bolsheviks to renounce the attack on Kronstadt. They considered it their duty to the Revolution to make this final effort to prevent the imminent massacre of the revolutionary elite of Russia, the sailors and workers of Kronstadt. On March 5<sup>th</sup>, they sent a protest<sup>2</sup> to the Defence Committee, emphasising the peaceful intentions and just demands of Kronstadt, recalling to the Communists the heroic revolutionary role of the sailors, and proposing a method for resolving the conflict in a way worthy of comrades and revolutionaries. Here is the document in question:

“To the Petrograd Labour and Defence Committee, to President Zinovieff:

“To keep silent now is impossible and even criminal. The events which have just occurred oblige us as Anarchists to speak frankly and to set forth precisely our attitude towards the present situation.

“The spirit of discontent and unrest among the workers and sailors is the result of facts which require the most serious attention. Cold and hunger have given rise to discontent, the absence of the least possibility of discussion and criticism has forced the workers and sailors to declare their grievances formally. -

“The White-guardist bands would like to and could exploit this discontent for their own interests. Hiding behind the sailors, they call for the Constituent Assembly, free trading and other similar advantages. We Anarchists have long exposed the fundamental error in these demands, and we declare before everyone that we will fight, arms in hand, against any counter-revolutionary attempt, together with all the friends of the Social Revolution, and at the side of the Bolsheviks.

“We are of the opinion that the conflict between the Soviet government and the workers and sailors should be liquidated, not by arms, but by means of a revolutionary, fraternal agreement in a spirit of comradeship. For the Soviet government to have recourse to bloodshed in the present situation will neither intimidate nor pacify the workers; on the contrary, it will only serve to increase the crisis and reinforce the work of the Allies and the counter-revolutionaries.

“What is more important, the use of force by the Workers’ and Peasants’ Government against workers and peasants will provoke a disastrous repercussion on the

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<sup>2</sup> Lest the reader be surprised to see Anarchists still at liberty in Petrograd in 1921, we must remark that the signers of the paper in question were not considered dangerous by the Bolsheviks. A. Berkman and E. Goldman did not engage in militant activity in Russia; Perkus and Petrovsky were the kind of Anarchists called “Soviet” (pro-Bolshevik). Later, Berkman and Goldman were nevertheless expelled; the fate of Perkus and Petrovsky is unknown to us. In any case, the last vestiges of the Anarchist movement disappeared during 1921.

As for the document itself, the reader will notice that it was necessarily conceived in fairly conciliatory, vague and even ambiguous terms. The authors nourished a naive and vain hope of reasoning with the Bolsheviks and inducing them to act “in a spirit of comradeship”. But the Bolsheviks were not comrades, and they felt that the least concession in their conflict with Kronstadt would let loose a general movement against their dictatorship. For them it was a

international revolutionary movement. It will result in incalculable injury to the Social Revolution. Comrade Bolsheviks, reflect before it is too late! You are about to take a decisive step.

“We submit to you the following proposal: to elect a commission of five members including Anarchists. This commission will go to Kronstadt to resolve the conflict by peaceful means. In the present situation, it is the most radical solution. It will have international revolutionary importance.

“Signed: Alexander Berkman, Emma Goldman, Perkus, Petrovsky.  
Petrograd, March 5, 1921.”

In his account of the sending of the letter, Berkman records that: “Zinoviev was informed that the document was going to be submitted to the Defence Committee. He sent a personal representative to fetch it. I do not know if this appeal was discussed by the Committee. What is certain is that they did nothing about it-”

On March 6<sup>th</sup>, Trotsky completed the preparations for the attack. The most loyal divisions were brought from all the fronts, the regiments of kursanti, the detachments of the Cheka, and the military units composed of Communists were concentrated in the forts of Sestroretsk, Lissy Noss and Krasnaia Gorka. as well as in nearby fortified positions. The best military technicians were sent to the theatre of operations to work out the plans for the blockade and attack on Kronstadt. Tuchachevsky was designated commander-in-chief of the troops.

On March 7<sup>th</sup>, at 6.45 p.m. the batteries of Sestroretsk, Lissy Noss and Krasnaia Gorka began to bombard Kronstadt. An avalanche of shells, bombs and also arrogant proclamations, dropped from aeroplanes, fell on the city. Repeatedly “the flock of crows” installed at Krasnaia Gorka – Trotsky, Tuchachevsky, Dybenko and others – gave orders to take the besieged fortress by a crushing assault. These attempts were in vain. The most furious attacks were repulsed by the valiant defenders. The bombardment did not create the slightest panic in the city. On the contrary, it increased the anger of the population and strengthened its will to resist to the end.

On March 8<sup>th</sup>, the sixth number of *Izvestia* reported the new situation for the first time. It carried the headline: *Trotsky's First Shot is a Communist Distress Signal*, and beneath this published its first communique, which ran as follows:

At 6:45 p.m. the Communist batteries at Sestroretsk and at Lissy Noss first opened fire on the Kronstadt forts. The forts replied to the challenge and soon reduced the batteries to silence. Then Krasnaia Gorka opened fire. It received a worthy response from the battleship Sebastopol. Intermittent gunfire continues. On our side two Red soldiers have been wounded and sent to the hospital. No material damage.

Kronstadt, March 7<sup>th</sup>, 1921

This communique was followed by the note which we reproduce below:

*The first shot*

They have begun to bombard Kronstadt. We are ready! Let us try the strength of our forces.

They are in haste to act. They understand that, in spite of all the lies of the Communists, the Russian workers are beginning to recognize the greatness of the work of liberation begun by revolutionary Kronstadt after three years of slavery.

The hangmen are uneasy. Soviet Russia, victim of their terrible madness, is escaping from their prison. And, at the same stroke, they are forced to renounce their domination over the working people.

The Communist government is sending up a distress signal. The eight days of the existence of free Kronstadt proves their impotence. A little longer, and the worthy response of our glorious ships and forts will sink the ship of the Soviet pirates, forced to accept battle with revolutionary Kronstadt which carries the banner of "Power to the Soviets and not to the Parties."

This was followed by an appeal:

*Let the World Know!*

The Provisional Revolutionary Committee has sent out the following radiogram today:

"To all-to all-to all —

"The first cannon shot has just been fired. 'Field Marshal' Trotsky, stained with the blood of the workers, was the first to fire on revolutionary Kronstadt, which has risen against the Communist autocracy to re-establish the true power of the Soviets.

"Without spilling a single drop of blood, we-Red soldiers, sailors and workers of Kronstadt — freed ourselves from the Communist yoke. We spared the lives of those of their party who were among us. They now want to impose their power on us again, by the threat of cannons.

"Not desiring any bloodshed, we requested that non-party delegates from the Petrograd proletariat be sent here so that they can assure themselves that Kronstadt fights for Soviet power. But the Communists conceal our request from the Petrograd workers and open fire — the habitual response of the pretended workers' and peasants' government to the requests of the labouring masses.

"If the workers of the whole world only knew that we, defenders of the power of the Soviets, were guarding the conquests of the social revolution! We will conquer or die amid the ruins of Kronstadt, fighting for the just cause of the working masses.

"The workers of the whole world will be our judges. The blood of the innocent will fall upon the heads of the Communists, crazy fools who are drunk with power;

"Long live the power of the Soviets.

*The Provisional Revolutionary Committee.* "

We can add a moving detail: March 7<sup>th</sup> was Labor Day in Soviet Russia. Kronstadt, besieged and attacked, did not forget this. Under continual fire, the sailors broadcast their congratulations to the workers of the world. This message was reproduced in the same issue:



*Kronstadt Is Liberated  
To The Workers of the World*

This day is a universal holiday: Labor Day. We of Kronstadt-in the noise of cannons and exploding shells shot by the Communists, the enemies of working people — send our fraternal greetings to the workers of the world: Greetings from Red Kronstadt, revolutionary and free ... We want you to achieve your emancipation soon, free from all forms of violence and oppression.

Long Live the Free Revolutionary Workers! Long Live the World Social Revolution!  
*The Provisional Revolutionary Committee.*

The same issue contained the following statement:

*Kronstadt is Calm*

Yesterday, March 7<sup>th</sup>, the enemies of the workers, the Communists, opened fire on Kronstadt. The population received the bombardment valiantly. It was soon apparent that the working people of the city were in perfect agreement with their Provisional Revolutionary Committee.

Despite the opening of hostilities, the Committee considered it unnecessary to declare a state of siege. In fact, what had they to fear? Surely not their own Red soldiers, nor their sailors, nor their workers or intellectuals.

On the other hand, in Petrograd, by reason of the state of siege that has been proclaimed, no one is permitted to go out alone until 7 a.m. That is understandable. The rulers have to fear their own working people.

The first attacks on Kronstadt were conducted simultaneously from north and south by the elite of the Communist troops, dressed in white garments which camouflaged them among the snow that covered the ice-bound Gulf-of Finland. These first attempts to take the fortress by assault resulted in a terrible, insane loss of life. The sailors deeply deplored this, and in moving terms appealed to their duped brothers in arms who believed Kronstadt counter-revolutionary. Addressing itself to the Red soldiers who fought for the Communists, *Izvestia* said on March 10<sup>th</sup> (Issue No. 8):

We do not want to spill the blood of our brothers and we are holding our fire to the minimum they allow. We must defend the just cause of the workers and for this reason we feel ourselves forced to fire on our brothers, sent to certain death by the Communists who have created a life of privilege at the expense of the people.

Unfortunately for you, our brothers, a terrible blizzard was blowing when the attack was made, and everything was wrapped in the shadows of a dark night. In spite of this, the Communist hangmen ordered you on to the ice and threatened you from behind with the machine guns of the rearguard, manned by their Communist formations.

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matter of life and death.

Many of you perished that night on the vast frozen expanse of the Gulf of Finland, and when the dawn came, after the storm had died down, only the miserable remnants of your detachments, exhausted, hungry, almost unable to walk, crept towards us in their white shrouds.

You were a thousand in the dawn, but in the course of the day one could no longer count you. With your blood you have paid for this adventure. After your rout, Trotsky has gone to Petrograd to seek new victims for the slaughter: the blood of our peasants and workers is cheap to him.”

Kronstadt lived in the firm belief that the Petrograd proletariat would come to its aid. But the workers of the capital were terrorised and Kronstadt was blockaded and isolated, so that no help was possible.

The Kronstadt garrison was composed of some 14,000 men, of whom about 10,000 were sailors. This garrison had to defend a vast front and many forts and batteries, scattered about the Gulf. The continual attacks of the endlessly reinforced Bolsheviks, the lack of food, the long, cold nights, all contributed to diminish the vitality of Kronstadt. Yet the sailors had heroic perseverance, hoping to the last moment that their noble example would be followed by the country. But the struggle was too unequal. The Bolshevik soldiers surrendered by thousands, others drowned by the hundred under the ice which had been weakened and filled with cracks and holes owing to the thaw, or had been broken by shellfire. But these losses did not diminish in the least the intensity of the attacks; fresh reinforcements were constantly arriving.

What could the city do, alone, against this rising tide? It exerted itself to hold on. It hoped stubbornly for an imminent general revolt of the workers and Red soldiers of Petrograd and Moscow, a revolt that would be the beginning of the third Revolution. And it fought heroically, night and day, on a front which steadily contracted. But neither revolt nor aid appeared. Each day Kronstadt’s resistance grew weaker and the attackers gained advantage after advantage.

Furthermore, Kronstadt had not been planned to sustain an attack from the rear, although, among other lies, the Communists had spread the slanderous rumour that the revolutionary sailors wanted to bombard Petrograd. In fact, the famous fortress had been built for the single purpose of defending the capital from an attack by sea. The builders had not specifically reinforced the rear part of Kronstadt, and it was precisely on this point that the Bolsheviks pressed their attacks nearly every night.

During the whole day of March 10<sup>th</sup>, the Communist artillery incessantly shelled the whole island from south to north. On the night of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>, the Communists attacked from the south, again using white “shrouds” (on March 11<sup>th</sup> “a thick fog prevented firing” said a communique in *Izvestia*). In this attack, hundreds of *kursanti* were once more sacrificed.

In the following days, the fight became increasingly uneven. The defenders were exhausted by fatigue and privations. They were now fighting on the immediate outskirts of the city. The communiqués on the fighting, published daily by the Revolutionary Committee, became more and more tragic. The number of victims increased rapidly.

Finally, on March 16<sup>th</sup>, feeling the climax approaching, the Bolsheviks made a thunderous, concentrated attack, preceded by furious artillery preparation. They had to make an end, cost what it may. Every hour of continued resistance, every shot fired by Kronstadt was a defiance of the Communists and could arouse millions of men against them at any moment. Already they felt increasingly isolated. Already Trotsky was forced to send into action detachments of Chinese and

Bashkirs. It was necessary to wipe out Kronstadt without delay, or else Kronstadt would cause the Bolshevik power to fall apart.

From early morning, the heavy guns of Krasnaia Gorka rained ceaseless shells upon the city, causing fire and destruction. Aeroplanes dropped bombs, one of which destroyed the hospital despite its visible Red Cross signs. This furious bombardment was followed by a general assault from the south and east.

The plan of attack, as Dybenko, ex-Commissar of the Baltic Fleet and future dictator of Kronstadt, later recorded, was prepared in the minutest detail according to the directions of the commander-in-chief, Tuchachevsky, and the staff of the Army of the South. The attack on the forts began at daybreak. "The white shrouds and the valour of the *kursanti*," wrote Dybenko, "made it possible to advance in columns."

Nevertheless, the enemy was repelled at several points, after bitter machine-gun fighting. Amid the noise of the battle under the walls of the city, the sailors manoeuvred skillfully, rushing to the most threatened points, giving orders, shouting appeals. A genuine fanaticism of bravery took possession of the defenders. No one thought of danger or death. "Comrades," came the cry, "arm the last workers' detachments quickly! Let everyone who is able to bear arms help." And the last detachments were formed, armed, and came in haste to take part in the battle.

The women of the people also gave proof of their courage and activity as, disdainful of danger, they advanced far outside the city to carry ammunition. They gathered in the wounded from all sides and bore them under intense fire to the hospital, where they organised first aid.

By the evening of March 16<sup>th</sup>, the battle still remained undecided, and the militiamen still rode through the streets on horseback and called upon the non-combatants to take refuge in safe places. But several forts had been taken, and during the night the Communists who were at liberty inside the city succeeded in indicating to the attackers that Kronstadt's weakest point was the Petrograd gate. By 7 a.m. on March 17<sup>th</sup>, the Bolsheviks forced it after a supreme assault, and advanced fighting into the centre of the city, the famous Anchor Square.

Still the sailors did not give in. They continued to fight "like lions", defending each district, each street, each house. It was only with heavy sacrifice that the Red soldiers were able to secure a firm foothold in several sections. The members of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee still went from one threatened area to another, manoeuvring the combatants, organising the defence. The print-shop still continued to compose No. 15 of *Izvestia* which never appeared.

During the whole day of the 17<sup>th</sup>, they fought inside the city. The sailors knew that no quarter would be given them, and they preferred to die fighting rather than be basely assassinated in the cellars of the Cheka. It was a brutal slaughter, a butchery. Many Communists of the city, whose lives had been spared by the sailors, betrayed them, armed themselves, and attacked them from the rear. The Commissar of the Baltic Fleet, Kuzmin, and the President of the Kronstadt Soviet, Vassilieff, freed from prison by the Communists, took part in the liquidation of the revolt.

The desperate struggle of the sailors and soldiers of Kronstadt continued well into the night [of the 17<sup>th</sup> March]. The city which, during the fifteen days of the fight, had done no harm to the Communists within it, now became a vast theatre of shootings, savage executions, regular assassinations in batches. Escaping from the butchery, certain detachments retreated towards Finland. In the early morning of March 18<sup>th</sup>, they (the Communists) were still fighting — or rather chasing the rebels — in certain sections of the city.

Two projects of the revolutionists remained uncompleted. In the first place, the sailors had decided to blow up at the last minute the two great battleships which were the first to raise the

banner of the Third Revolution — the *Petropavlovsk* and the *Sebastopol*. But when they tried to carry out this project, they found that the electric wires had been cut. Secondly, nearly the whole population of Kronstadt had decided to leave the city in order to let the Communists have it “dead and empty”. The total absence of means of transport prevented the execution of this plan.

Appointed Commissar of Kronstadt, Dybenko was given full power to “clean up the rebel city”. This meant an orgy of massacre. The victims of the Cheka were innumerable, and they were executed *en masse* during the days that followed the fall of the fortress.

During the ensuing weeks the gaols of Kronstadt were filled with hundreds of prisoners from Kronstadt. Each night, little groups of prisoners were taken out and shot by order of the Cheka. Thus died Perepelkin, a member of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee of Kronstadt. Another member of the Committee, Verchinin, was treacherously arrested by the Bolsheviks at the beginning of the revolt. Here are the words in which *Izvestia* described the episode in Number 7, of March 9<sup>th</sup>, under the title *Abuse of the White Flag*.

“Yesterday, March 8<sup>th</sup>, some Red soldiers came out of Oranienbaum and towards Kronstadt carrying a white flag. Two of our comrades went out unarmed on horseback to meet the bearers of the flag of truce. One of our men approached the enemy group; the other stopped some distance away. Hardly had our comrades spoken a few words to them when the Communists threw themselves upon him, dragged him from his horse, and carried him off. The second comrade was able to return to Kronstadt.”

The emissary of Kronstadt who was carried off in this way was Verchinin. Naturally, nothing more was ever heard of him. The fate of the other members of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee is unknown to us.

In the prisons, in the concentration camps, in the polar regions of Archangel, in the distant deserts of Turkestan, the men of Kronstadt who rebelled against the Bolshevik absolutism for really free Soviets endured, for long years, a miserable existence, and slowly died. There are probably no more of them still alive today.

Some time after the revolt, the Bolshevik government proclaimed a general amnesty for those rebels who, having escaped during the repression were abroad or in hiding in the country, if they spontaneously gave themselves up to the authorities. All those who were naive enough to believe in this “amnesty” were arrested on the spot and shared the fate of their comrades in arms. This ignoble ambush — among so many others — constitutes one of the most disgraceful pages in the true history of Bolshevism.

Lenin understood nothing — or rather, did not want to understand anything — about the Kronstadt movement. The essential thing for him and his party was to *maintain themselves in power at all costs*. The victory over the rebels reassured him momentarily. But he was afraid for the future. He admitted that the guns of Kronstadt obliged the party “to reflect and review its position.”

Did he revise it in the direction clearly indicated by the workers’ disturbances and by the rebellion? Not at all. The fundamental lesson that emerged from these events was the need for the Party to revise the principle of dictatorship, and the necessity for the working people and the country as a whole of free elections to the Soviets.

The Bolsheviks were perfectly aware that the least concession in this direction would be a decisive blow at their power. And for them it was necessary, above all, to conserve that power whole. As Marxists, authoritarians and statist, the Bolsheviks could not permit any freedom

or independent action of the masses. They had no confidence in the free masses. They were convinced that the fall of their dictatorship would mean the destruction of all the work that had been done, and the endangering of the Revolution, which they confused with themselves. At the same time, they were convinced that in preserving their dictatorship — the “levers of control” — they could “retreat strategically”, and even renounce temporarily their whole economic policy, without fundamentally compromising the goals of the revolution. At worst, they told themselves, the achievement of these goals would be retarded. Their thoughts therefore concentrated solely on this question: “What must be done to preserve our dominion intact?”

To yield temporarily in the economic field, to grant concessions in all fields, except that of “power” — that was their first solution. Their only “compromise” was to throw a bone to the population to appease their discontent; they had to give a little satisfaction, if only in appearance.

To determine the necessary concessions, to fix the limits of their “retreat”, was their second preoccupation. They finally established the extent of these concessions, and then, by one of the most curious of historical ironies, Lenin and his party applied exactly the programme which they had falsely attributed to the men of Kronstadt and for which they claimed to have fought them and spilled so much blood.

Lenin proclaimed the famous “New Economic Policy” (the NEP). This granted the population a certain “economic freedom”, i.e. a degree of freedom of private commerce and industrial activity. Thus the true meaning of the “freedom” demanded by the Kronstadt rebels was completely distorted. Instead of the free creative and constructive activity of the labouring masses, an activity which would have allowed the march towards their complete emancipation to continue and accelerate, which was what Kronstadt demanded, [the New Economic Policy] was “freedom” for certain individuals to trade and do business, to get rich. It was at this time that there appeared for a while the Soviet nouveaux riches, the “nepmen” (men of the NEP).

The Communists in Russia and abroad regarded and explained the NEP as a “strategic retreat”, which permitted the dictatorship that was indispensable for the party a breathing space to fortify the positions that had been disturbed by the events of March, a kind of “economic respite” analogous to the “military respite” at the time of Brest-Litovsk.

In fact, the NEP was nothing but a halt, not in order to be able to advance better later on [in a revolutionary direction], but, on the contrary, to be better able to return to the point of departure, to the same ferocious party dictatorship, the same unrestricted statism, the same domination and exploitation of the labouring masses by the new capitalist state. The Bolsheviks retreated so as to be better able to return to the road of totalitarian state capitalism, with a greater guarantee against an eventual repetition of Kronstadt.

During the period of retreat, this nascent capitalist state erected its “Maginot line” against this danger. It employed the several years of the NEP to increase its material and military forces, to create quietly its administrative, bureaucratic and police “apparatus,” neo-bourgeois in character, to be able to feel strong enough to crush everyone in its “iron fist” and transform the whole country into a totalitarian barracks and prison.

If one wishes to speak of a strategic retreat in this sense, that is what took place. Soon after Lenin’s death (in 1924) and the accession — after some struggles within the party — of Stalin, the New Economic Policy was suppressed, the “nepmen” were arrested, deported or shot, their goods were confiscated, and the State, completely armed and armoured, bureaucratized and capitalised, supported by its “apparatus” and by a strong socially privileged and well-fed class, resolutely established its complete omnipotence. But it is obvious that all these exigencies had nothing in

common with the Social Revolution, or with the aspirations of the working masses, or with their real emancipation.

The Bolshevik government did not confine itself to an internal NEP. By a further historical irony, at the very moment when the Bolsheviks were falsely accusing the men of Kronstadt of being “lackeys of the Allies” and of “making deals with the capitalists”, they themselves were carrying out precisely this task. Following Lenin’s directives, they set out on the route of concessions to foreign capitalists and alliances with them. During the very days when they were shooting the Kronstadt sailors and when heaps of corpses still covered the ice of the Gulf of Finland, they agreed to several important contracts with industrialists of various countries, catering to the wishes of high finance, of the large-scale capitalism of the Allies, of Polish imperialism.

They signed the Anglo-Russian commercial treaty, which opened the doors of the country to English capital. They signed the peace of Riga, by virtue of which twelve million individuals were thrown into the hands of reactionary Poland. By means of alliances, they helped the Young Turkish imperialism to strangle the revolutionary movement in the Caucasus. And they prepared to enter into business relations with the bourgeoisie of all countries, seeking support from this quarter.

We have said elsewhere: “In strangling the Revolution, the (Communist) power was forced to secure for itself, more and more openly and firmly, the aid and support of reactionary and bourgeois elements ... Feeling the ground slipping from under their feet and detaching them more and more from the masses, breaking their last contacts with the Revolution and giving free play to a whole privileged class of big and small dictators, sycophants, flatterers, opportunists and parasites, but impotent to create anything that was really revolutionary and positive since they had rejected and destroyed the new forces, the authorities found themselves obliged, in order to consolidate themselves, to turn to the *old* forces. It is their company which they seek more and more frequently and freely. It is from them that they solicit agreements, alliances and unions. It is to them that they yield positions, not having any other way of assuring their own existence. Having lost the friendship of the masses, they seek friendship elsewhere. They think they can sustain themselves with the help of these new friends, whom they hope to betray one day for their own advantage. Meanwhile, they become enmeshed, every day more deeply, in an anti-revolutionary and anti-social action.”

Kronstadt fell and State Socialism triumphed. It is still triumphant today. But the implacable logic of events leads it infallibly to disaster. For its triumph bore within itself the seed of its final destruction. It exposed more and more the real character of the Communist dictatorship. More and more, the Communists, caught by the logic of events, showed that they were prepared to sacrifice the goal, to renounce all their principles, to deal with anyone, so as to preserve their domination and their privileges.

Kronstadt was the first entirely independent attempt of the people to liberate itself from all yokes and achieve the Social Revolution, an attempt made directly, resolutely, and boldly by the working masses themselves without political shepherds, without leaders or tutors. It was the first step towards the third and social revolution.

Kronstadt fell. But it had accomplished a task and that was the important thing. In the complex and shadowy labyrinth which opens out to the masses in revolt, Kronstadt is a bright beacon that lights up the right road. It matters little that in the circumstances in which they found themselves the rebels still spoke of power (the power of the Soviets) instead of getting rid of the word and the idea altogether and speaking instead of co-ordination, organisation, administration. It was a

last tribute paid to the past. Once full freedom of discussion, organisation and action have been completely won by the working masses themselves, once the true road of independent popular activity is found, the rest will come automatically and inevitably.

It matters little that the fog is still thick and hides the beacon and the way it lights. Once lit, that light will never go out. And the day is coming — perhaps it is not far off — when millions of human beings will see it shine.

## **Part II. Ukraine (1918–1921)**



# Chapter 1. Mass Movement in the Ukraine

This chapter puts me in a quandary.

If I devoted a hundred or so pages to the Kronstadt movement, a proper treatment of the events in the Ukraine would require at least five times as much space, in view of their scope, their duration, and above all their revolutionary and moral importance. But this is impossible.

Besides, my documentation on this movement is limited to the outstanding work of Peter Arshinov: *History of the Makhnovist Movement*.<sup>1</sup> And in my present circumstances I cannot complete Arshinov's work. On the other hand, filling pages with documents that have already been published — even if we take into account their specific character and the bibliographical rarity of the work — seems exaggerated.

I can obviously enrich the study with two important elements: (1) certain facts set forth in volumes II and III of the Memoirs of Nestor Makhno, initiator and military leader of the movement, which have been published only in Russian (in 1936 and 1937); (2) certain personal experiences of my own, since I took part in this movement on two occasions, at the end of 1919 and at the end of 1920, for about six months.

As for the Memoirs of Makhno: the death of their author ended the work at its very beginnings (Makhno died in Paris in 1935). The three volumes which have been published (the first in Russian and in French, long before the following two) only treat the period 1917–1918; they stop *precisely on the threshold of the real movement, of the most characteristic and important events (1919–1921)*.

The account of my own personal experiences would be extremely useful if it could be inserted into a general and complete history. Detached from this whole, they do not have the same importance.

Nevertheless, it is impossible not to speak of the mass movement in the Ukraine, especially if one studies the Russian revolution from the perspective which I have in mind.

This movement played an *exceptionally important* role in the Revolution: even more important than that of Kronstadt. This importance is due to its extent, its duration, its *essentially popular character*, its clear-cut ideological standpoint, and finally the tasks it set out to accomplish.

For reasons that the reader of this book will easily understand, all the available literature, of whatever type, makes absolutely no mention of this movement. Or if it does, it does so in a few lines and solely with a view to slandering it.

In the last analysis, the Ukrainian epic has until today remained almost completely unknown. And yet, among the elements of the “Unknown Revolution,” it is certainly the most remarkable.

In fact, even the work of Arshinov, nearly 400 pages long, is only a *summary*. If the Ukrainian movement were treated as it deserves, it would fill several volumes. The movement's *documents*,

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Arshinov. Russian anarchist, member of the Moscow Federation, took part in the movement in the Ukraine during most of its duration. [Arshinov's *Istoriya Makhnovskogo Dvizheniya* was first published in Berlin in 1923. The English translation of the *History of the Makhnovist Movement* is published by Black & Red and Solidarity. Detroit and Chicago, 1974. Voline's page citations refer to the French edition: P. Archinolf. *L'Histoire du Mouvement Makhnoviste*, Paris: LibrairieInternationale, 1924]

which are of enormous historical value, would alone fill hundreds of pages. Peter Arshinov was only able to reproduce a very small number of them.

A work of this magnitude will have to be undertaken by future historians who have all the required sources at their disposal. Our present task is to shed as much light as possible on this movement.

All these contradictory considerations finally led me to make the following decision:

1. To urge every serious and genuinely interested reader to read the basic work of Peter Arshinov. This book cannot easily be found, having been published in 1924 by a small libertarian bookshop. But the reader will not regret the time he spends looking for it in bookshops, along the quais of Paris, or in large libraries.
2. To communicate to the reader the *most important* aspects of the movement, by drawing heavily from Peter Arshinov's documentation.
3. To complete the exposition with certain details drawn from N. Makhno's memoirs.
4. To complete it with personal experiences, with my personal impressions and evaluations.

The name Ukraine (or Little Russia) designates a vast region of south-western Russia whose area is about 450,000 square kilometers (nearly four-fifths the size of France) and which contains about thirty million inhabitants. It includes the departments, or "governments," of Kiev, Tchernigov, Poltava, Kharkov, Ekaterinoslav, Kherson and Tauride. The latter lies at the entrance to the Crimea, from which it is separated by a part of the Black Sea, by the Perekop Isthmus and by the straits of the Sea of Azov.

Without getting involved in a detailed account of the Ukraine, I will briefly mention several characteristic features of the country which the reader should know in order to be able to understand the events which were unfolded there between 1917 and 1921.

It is one of the wealthiest agricultural regions in the world. The rich and fertile black soil yields incomparable crops. Once the Ukraine was called "the granary of Europe," for it was a very important source of wheat and other agricultural products for several European countries. Besides grain, Ukraine is rich in vegetables and fruits, in fertile steppes, and pastures, in forests and waterways, and finally, in its eastern part, in the coal of the Don Basin.

By reason of its exceptional richness, and also because of its geographical location, the Ukraine has at all times been a particularly tempting prize for neighboring and even distant countries. For centuries the Ukrainian population, ethnographically mixed but very much united in its firm desire to safeguard its liberty and independence, experienced wars and struggles against the Turks, the Poles and the Germans, and particularly against its powerful immediate neighbour, the Great Russia of the Tsars. Finally, it was incorporated partly by conquest and partly voluntarily (since it felt an imperative need to be effectively protected by a single and powerful neighbour against the various competitors for its wealth), into the immense Russian Empire.

However, the ethnic composition of the Ukrainian population, their peculiarities of character, temperament and mentality, their traditional contacts — through warfare, commerce, etc. — with the western world, together with certain geographical and topographical features of their region, resulted in the maintenance under the Tsars of a fairly marked difference between the situation of Great Russia and that of the Ukraine.

Certain parts of the Ukraine never allowed themselves to be wholly subjugated, as had happened in Great Russia. Their population always preserved a spirit of independence, of resistance, of popular rebellion. Relatively cultivated and refined, individualistic and capable of taking the initiative without flinching, jealous of his independence, warlike by tradition, ready to defend himself and accustomed, for centuries, to feel free and his own master, the Ukrainian was in general never subjugated to that total slavery — not only of the body but also of the spirit — which characterised the population of the rest of Russia.

This applied particularly to the inhabitants of certain sections of the Ukraine, who had even obtained a sort of tacit *habeas corpus*, and lived in freedom, since their country was relatively inaccessible to the armed forces of the Tsars, rather like the *maquis* of Corsica.

On the islands of the lower Dnieper — in the famous Zaporozhie district — men in love with liberty had organised themselves, from the 14<sup>th</sup> century, in exclusively masculine camps, and struggled for centuries against the attempts at enslavement by various neighbouring countries, including Great Russia.<sup>2</sup> Finally, this warrior population had to submit to the Russian State. But the tradition of the *volnitza* (free life) was perpetuated in the Ukraine and could never be stifled. No matter how great were the efforts of the Tsars since Catherine II to wipe from the spirit of the Ukrainian people all trace of the traditions of the Zaporozh Republic, this heritage of past centuries (14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup>) remained.

Serfdom, pitiless in Great Russia, had a somewhat more “liberal” appearance in the Ukraine, by reason of the constant resistance of the peasants. Thousands of them escaped from lords who were too brutal, fled to the bush and took refuge in the *volnitza*.

In Great Russia itself, all those who did not want to be serfs any longer, those who wanted more liberty, those who loved the independent life, those who had difficulties with the police or fell under the knout of the Imperial laws fled to the steppes, the forests and other inaccessible regions of the Ukraine, and there began a new life. Thus for centuries, the Ukraine was the promised land of fugitives of every kind. The proximity of the sea and the ports of Taganrog, Berdiansk, Kherson, Nikolaiev and Odessa, the nearness of the Caucasus and Crimea, regions distant from the centres and full of hiding places — increased the possibilities for strong and enterprising individuals to lead a free, unsubjugated life, breaking with existing society. Some of these men later provided a nucleus for those vagabonds (*bossiaki*) who were so masterfully depicted by Maxim Gorki.

Thus the whole atmosphere of the Ukraine was very different from that of Great Russia, and down to our own time, the peasants of the Ukraine have preserved a particular love for freedom, which has manifested itself in the stubborn resistance to all powers that have sought to subjugate them.

In view of these facts the reader will understand why the dictatorship and statism of the Bolsheviks encountered a much more determined and prolonged resistance in the Ukraine than in Great Russia. Other factors favoured this attitude:

1. The organised forces of the Communist Party were weak in the Ukraine, in comparison with those in Great Russia. The influence of the Bolsheviks over the peasants and workers there was always insignificant.

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<sup>2</sup> One of the great Russian writers, N. Gogol (1809–52), has painted an admirable picture of the life and customs of the Zaporozhie in his magnificent novel *Taras Bulba*.

2. For this and other reasons, the October Revolution took effect there much later; it began at the end of November 1917 and was still going on in January 1918. It was first the local nationalist bourgeoisie — the *Petluristi*, or partisans of the “democrat” Petlura — who retained power in the Ukraine, paralleling the power of Kerensky in Great Russia. The Bolsheviks fought this power more on military than on revolutionary grounds.
3. The unpopularity and the impotence of the Communist Party meant that the taking of power by the Soviets was carried on quite differently than in Great Russia.

In the Ukraine, the Soviets were in a much more real sense meetings of *workers' and peasants' delegates*. Not being dominated by a political party — for the Mensheviks, likewise, did not play a significant role in the Ukraine — these Soviets had no means for subordinating the masses. Hence, the workers in the factories, and the peasants in the villages felt themselves to be a genuine force. In their revolutionary struggles, they were not accustomed to yield the initiative to anyone, or to have by their side a constant and inflexible tutor like the Communist Party in Great Russia. Because of this, a much greater freedom of spirit, of thought and action took root. It inevitably manifested itself in the mass revolutionary movements.

All these factors made themselves felt from the beginning. While in Great Russia the revolution was brought into the orbit of the Communist state quickly and without difficulty, this process of statification and dictatorship met with considerable obstacles in the Ukraine. The Bolshevik “Soviet apparatus” was installed primarily by military force.

An autonomous movement of the masses, especially the peasant masses, entirely neglected by the political parties, developed parallel to the process of statification. This independent movement had already appeared under the “democratic republic” of Petlura. It developed slowly, feeling its way, but it seems to have existed from the first days of February 1917. It was a spontaneous movement which was groping for the overthrow of the serf economy and the creation of a revolutionary system based on the common ownership of the means of production and the principle of exploiting the land by the masses themselves.

In the name of these principles, the workers in many places drove out the proprietors of factories and put the management of production under the control of their class organisations: the new unions, factory committees, etc. The peasants took possession of the land of the gentry and the *kulaks* (rich peasants), and, by reserving the use of it strictly for the workers themselves, outlined a new system of agrarian economy. Naturally, this process spread very slowly, in a disorganised and spontaneous manner. These were the first clumsy steps towards a larger, more conscious, and better organised future activity. But the masses intuitively felt that the road along which they were travelling was the right one.

“This practice of direct revolutionary action by the workers and peasants,” says Peter Archinov, “developed in the Ukraine almost unobstructed during the whole first year of the Revolution, thus creating a precise and wholesome line of revolutionary conduct for the masses. Each time some political group or other, having taken power, tried to break this line of revolutionary conduct on the part of the workers, the latter began a revolutionary opposition and struggled in one way or another against these attempts.

“Thus, the revolutionary movement of the workers towards social independence which had begun in the first days of the revolution, did not weaken, no matter what

power was established in the Ukraine. It was not even extinguished by the Bolsheviks, who, after the October uprising, tried to introduce their authoritarian statist system into the country.

“What was especially characteristic about this movement was its desire to attain the real goals of the working class in the revolution, its will to conquer labour’s complete independence, and finally its defiance of the non-labouring social groups.

“Despite all the sophisms of the Communist Party, seeking to prove that it was the brain of the working class and that its power was that of the workers, every worker or peasant who had retained his class spirit or instinct was more and more aware that in fact the party was turning the workers of the cities and the countryside away from their own revolutionary tasks; that power had them under its control, that the very fact of a statist organisation was a usurpation of their right to independence and to the free disposition of their labour.

The aspiration to independence, to complete autonomy, became the basis of the movement born in the depths of the masses. In all kinds of ways their thoughts were constantly rooted in this idea. The statist action of the Communist Party pitilessly stifled these aspirations. But it was precisely this action of a presumptuous party, intolerant of any objection, that clarified the minds of the workers and drove them to resist.

“In the beginning, this movement confined itself to ignoring the new power and performing spontaneous acts whereby the peasants took possession of the lands and goods of the landlords. They found their own ways and means.”

(Peter Archinov: *The History of the Makhnovist Movement*, pp 70–72)

The brutal occupation of the Ukraine by the Austro-German troops after the peace of Brest-Litovsk, with all its terrible consequences for the working people, created new conditions- in the country and hastened the development of this movement of the masses. Here, I will take the liberty of quoting almost an entire chapter from Peter Archinov’s work. A better exposition of the events which followed the peace of Brest-Litovsk cannot be given. Let us recall that the principal clause of the peace treaty gave the Germans free access to the Ukraine, from which the Bolsheviks retired.

Archinov’s account is rapid, substantial and penetrating. I need not improve or add anything. It is absolutely correct factually, and each detail is important if the reader wishes to understand subsequent events.

“The Brest-Litovsk treaty concluded by the Bolsheviks with the Imperial German government opened wide the doors of the Ukraine to the Austro-Germans. They entered it as masters. They did not confine themselves to military action, but became involved in the economic and political life of the country. Their purpose was to appropriate its products.

“To accomplish this easily and completely, they re-established the power of the nobles and the landed gentry who had been overthrown by the people, and installed the autocratic government of the Hetman Skoropadsky.

“Their troops were systematically misled by their officers, who represented the situation in Russia and the Ukraine as an orgy of blind, savage forces, destroying order in the country and terrorising the honest working people. By this process, they provoked in the soldiers a hostility towards the rebel peasants and workers, thus helping the action (an action of absolute heartless, common robbery) of the Austro-German armies.

“The economic pillage of the Ukraine by the Austro-Germans with the connivance and help of the Skoropadsky government was colossal and horrifying. They carried off everything — wheat, livestock, poultry, eggs, raw materials, etc. — all in such quantities that the means of transportation was not sufficient. As it was brought to the immense depots which were given over to the loot, the Austrians and the Germans hastened to take away as much as possible, loading one train after another. Hundreds, even thousands, of trains carried everything off. When the peasants resisted this pillage, and tried to retain the fruits of their labour, floggings, reprisals, and shootings resulted.

“In addition to the violence of the invaders and their cynical military brigandage, the occupation of the Ukraine by the Austro-Germans was accompanied by a fierce reaction on the part of the gentry. The Hetman’s regime meant the annihilation of all the revolutionary conquests of the workers, a complete return to the past.

“It was therefore natural that this new condition strongly accelerated the march of the movements previously begun, under Petlura and the Bolsheviks. Everywhere, primarily in the villages, insurrectionary acts started to occur against the gentry and the Austro-Germans. It was thus that began the vast movement of the Ukrainian peasants, which was later given the name of the Revolutionary Insurrection.

“The origin of this insurrection is often seen as merely the result of the Austro-German occupation, and the regime of the Hetman. This explanation is insufficient and inaccurate. The insurrection had its roots in the total situation and in the fundamental nature of the Russian Revolution. It was an attempt by the workers to lead the Revolution to its natural conclusion: the true and complete emancipation and supremacy of labour. The Austro-German invasion and the agrarian reaction only accelerated the process.

“The movement rapidly took on vast proportions. Everywhere the peasants took a stand against the gentry, assassinated them or drove them away, took over their land and their goods, and paid no attention to the invaders.

“The Hetman and the German authorities responded by implacable reprisals. The peasants in the rebellious villages were flogged and shot en masse, while all their goods were burned. Hundreds of villages suffered, in a short space of time, a terrible punishment from the military and landed castes. This occurred in June, July and August, 1918.

“Then the peasants persevering in their revolt, organised as guerillas and started hedge warfare. As if by order of invisible organisations, they formed in a number of places, almost simultaneously, a multitude of partisan detachments, acting militarily and always by surprise against the nobles, their guards and the representatives of

power. As a rule, these detachments consisting of twenty, fifty or a hundred well armed horsemen, would appear suddenly where they were least expected, attack a nobleman or the [Hetman's] National Guard, massacre all the enemies of the peasants and disappear as quickly as they had come. Every lord who persecuted the peasants, and all of his faithful servants, were noted by the partisans and were in continual danger of being liquidated. Every guard, every German officer was condemned to almost certain death. These exploits, occurring daily in all parts of the country, cut out the heart of the agrarian counter-revolution, undermined it, and prepared the way for the triumph of the peasants.

“It must be noted that, like the vast and spontaneous peasant insurrections, which arose without any preparation, these organised guerilla actions were always performed by the peasants themselves with no help or direction from any political organisation. Their methods of acting made it necessary for them to look after the needs of the movement themselves, and to direct it and lead it to victory. During their whole fight against the Hetman and the noblemen, even at its most difficult moments, the peasants remained alone facing their vicious, well-armed and organised enemies. This fact had a great influence on the very character of the whole revolutionary insurrection. Everywhere that it remained to the end a ‘class action’, without falling under the influence of political parties or nationalist elements, it retained intact not only the imprint of its origin in the very depths of the peasant mass, but also a second fundamental trait – the perfect consciousness which all these peasants possessed, of being their own guides and the animators of their own movement. The partisans especially were permeated with this idea. They were proud of this special quality of their movement and felt themselves capable of fulfilling their mission.

“The savage reprisals of the counter-revolution did not stop the movement; on the contrary, they provided it with a motive for enlarging and extending. The peasants became increasingly united among themselves, driven by the very force of events to a general plan of revolutionary action.

“To be sure, the peasants of the whole Ukraine were never organised into a single force acting under a single leadership. From the point of view of revolutionary spirit they were all united, but in practice, they were mainly organised locally, by regions, the small detachments of partisans, isolated from one another, uniting to form larger and more powerful units. In so far as the insurrections became more frequent and the reprisals more ferocious and organised, these unions became an urgent necessity.

“In the south of the Ukraine, it was the region of Gulai-Polya which took the initiative in unification. There, it took place not only for reasons of defence, but also and primarily for the purpose of the complete destruction of the agrarian counter-revolution.”

This latter goal, more important and decisive in character, imposed on the movement towards unification of the peasant masses a larger task; that of incorporating in the movement revolutionary elements from other regions, and developing, with the participation of all the revolutionary peasants, if possible, a great organised force capable of fighting reaction as a whole and victoriously defending the freedom and territory of the people in revolt.

The most important role in this work of unification and in the general development of the revolutionary insurrection in the southern Ukraine was performed by the detachment of partisans guided by a peasant native to the region: Nestor Makhno. That is why the movement is known as the “Makhnovist movement.”

“From the first days of the movement,” says Peter Archinov, “up to its culminating point when the peasants vanquished the gentry, Makhno played a preponderant and central role, to such an extent that the whole insurgent region and the most heroic moments of the struggle are linked to his name. When, later on, the insurrection had triumphed completely over the Skoropadsky counter-revolution, but the region was threatened anew by Denikin, Makhno became the rallying point for millions of peasants, in the struggle against the latter.”

It should be emphasised that only the southern part of the Ukraine was involved in this vast operation. “For,” as Archinov continues, “it was not everywhere that the insurrection retained its consciousness, its revolutionary essence and its loyalty to the interests of the working class. While in the southern Ukraine the insurgents, increasingly conscious of their role and their historic mission, raised the black flag of anarchism and set forth on the anti-authoritarian road of the free organisation of the workers, in the west and north-western regions of the country, they gradually slipped, after the overthrow of the Hetman, under the influence of foreign elements; enemies of their class, notably the national-democrats (the *petlurivtzi*, partisans of Petlura). For more than two years a party of the insurgents in the western Ukraine supported the latter, which, under the nationalist banner, pursued the interests of the liberal bourgeoisie. Thus, the insurgent peasants of the governments of Kiev, Volhyny, Podoly and a part of Poltava, while having common origins with the rest of the insurgents, were unable, subsequently, to discover among themselves either the consciousness of their historic mission or the ability to organise, and they fell under the rod of the enemies of the world of labour, becoming blind instruments in their hands.

“The insurrection in the south had an entirely different significance and took on a different aspect. It separated itself strictly from the non-labouring elements of society, it quickly and resolutely got rid of the national, religious, political and other prejudices of the regime of oppression and slavery; it based itself on the real aspirations of the proletarian class of the city and the country and carried on a bitter warfare, in the name of these aspirations, against the many enemies of Labour.”

We have already mentioned more than once the name of Nestor Makhno, a Ukrainian peasant who played a vast and exceptional part in the great peasant insurrection of the southern Ukraine, which all the existing literature on the Russian Revolution, except a few libertarian works, passes over in silence — or merely mentions in a few defamatory lines. As for Makhno himself, the animator and military guide of that insurrection, if they deign to mention him at all, it is only to bestow on him such titles as “bandit”, “assassin”, “robber”, “pogromist”, etc. Always they obstinately drag him in the mud, slander him, abhor him. At best, these unscrupulous authors, without bothering to examine the facts or to separate them from fables, spread absurd and unutterably stupid legends about the life and acts of this libertarian militant.<sup>3</sup>

[This situation] compels us to record briefly the authentic biography of Makhno up to the time of Skoropadsky’s overthrow. It is indispensable to know the personality of Makhno to understand the course of events.

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<sup>3</sup> See for example, certain “works” of Joseph Kessel.



“Makhno” says Peter Archinov, “was born on October 27, 1889, and was brought up by his mother in the village of Gulai- Polya, in the district of Alexandrovsk, department of Ekaterinoslav. He was the son of a poor peasant family. He was only ten months old when his father died, leaving him and his four little brothers in the care of their mother.

“Because of the extreme poverty of the family, he worked from the age of seven as a herd-boy, tending the cows and sheep of the peasants of his village. At eight, he entered the local school, which he attended in winter, always serving as herd-boy in summer.

“At twelve, he left school and his family to take a job. He worked as a farm boy on the estates of nobles and [the farms of] rich German peasants (Kulaks) whose colonies were numerous in the Ukraine. Already at this period, by the age of fourteen or fifteen, he felt a strong hatred towards the exploiters and dreamed of the way he could some day ‘get even with them’, both for himself and for others. Until the age of sixteen, however, he had no contact with the political world. His social and revolutionary concepts formed and took place spontaneously, in a very narrow circle of peasants, proletarians like himself.<sup>4</sup>

“The revolution of 1905 made him break immediately out of his small circle, and threw him into the great torrent of revolutionary events and actions. He was then seventeen. He was full of revolutionary enthusiasm and ready to do anything in the struggle for the liberation of the workers. After having made several contacts with political organisations, he decided to enter the ranks of the Anarcho-Communists and from that moment became an indefatigable militant. He carried on a great deal of activity and took part in [some of] the most dangerous acts of the struggle for liberty.

“In 1908, he fell into the hands of the Tsarist authorities, who condemned him to be hanged for Anarchist associations and for participating in terrorist acts. Because of his youth, the death penalty was commuted to life imprisonment at hard labour. He served his sentence in the Butyrki central prison of Moscow. Although prison life was without hope and very difficult for him to bear, Makhno used it in order to educate himself.<sup>5</sup> He showed great perseverance, and learned grammar, mathematics, literature, the history of culture and political economy. In fact, prison was the sole school in which Makhno acquired that historical and political knowledge which was a great help to him in his subsequent revolutionary activity. Life, action, deeds were the other schools in which he learned to know and understand men and social events.

“It was in prison, while he was still young, that Makhno endangered his health. Stubborn and unable to accept that complete extinction of personality that those condemned to forced labour underwent, he was always insubordinate to the prison authorities, and was continually in solitary confinement where, because of the cold and

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<sup>4</sup> All the versions of his life which pretend that Makhno was a schoolteacher, and developed under the influence of an Anarchist intellectual, are false, as are many others.

<sup>5</sup> It was in prison that Makhno made the acquaintance of Peter Archinov, condemned like himself to hard labour for being an Anarchist. Archinov, who was relatively well educated, helped him in his studies.

damp, he contracted pulmonary tuberculosis. During the nine years of his detention he was frequently in irons for 'bad behaviour', until he was finally released, with all the other political prisoners, by the proletarian insurrection in Moscow on March 1, 1917.

"He soon returned to Gulai-Polya where the peasant masses showed profound sympathy for him. In the whole village, he was the only political prisoner who was returned to his family by the Revolution, and for that reason he became the object of spontaneous respect and confidence for the peasants. He was no longer an inexperienced young man, but a tested militant, with a powerful will and definite ideas about the social conflict.

"At Gulai-Polya, he immediately threw himself into the revolutionary task, first seeking to organise the peasants of his village and its surroundings. He founded a farm-workers' union; he organised a free commune and a local peasants' Soviet. The problem that concerned him most was that of uniting and organising the peasants into a powerful and firm alliance so that they would be able once and for all to drive out the landed gentry and the political rulers, and to manage their own lives. It was to this end that he guided the organisational work of the peasants, both as a propagandist and as a man of action. He sought to unite them in a revolutionary way, turning to account the flagrant deception, injustice and oppression of which they were victims.

"During the period of the Kerensky government and in the October days of 1917, he was President of the Regional Peasants' Union, of the Agricultural Commission, the Union of Metal and Carpentry Workers and, finally, President of the Peasants' and Workers' Soviet of Gulai-Polya. It was in this last capacity that, in August 1917, he assembled all the landed gentry of the region, and made them give him all the documents relating to lands and buildings. He proceeded to take an exact inventory of all this property, and then made a report on it, first at a session of the local Soviet, then at the district congress of Soviets, and finally at the regional congress of Soviets. He proceeded to equalise the rights of the landed gentry and the rich peasants (*kulaks*) with those of the poor peasant labourers in regard to the use of the land. Following his proposal, the congress decided to let the landlords and *kulaks* have a share of land (as well as tools and livestock) equal to that of the labourers. Several peasant congresses in the governments of Ekaterinoslav, Tauride, Poltava, Kharkov and elsewhere followed the example of the Gulai-Polya region and adopted the same measure.

"During the time Makhno became, in his region, the soul of the peasants' movement which was taking over the lands and goods of the gentry and even, if necessary, executing certain recalcitrant landlords. He thus made himself the mortal enemy of the rich and of the local bourgeois groups."

At the time of the occupation of the Ukraine by the Austro-Germans, a secret revolutionary committee came into immediate existence, and gave Makhno the task of creating fighting units of peasants and workers to struggle against the invaders and the native rulers.

'He did what he could,' Archinov records, "but was forced to retreat with his partisans from the cities of Taganrog, Rostov and Tsaritsin, righting every step of the way. The local bourgeoisie,

who had been strengthened by the military support of the Austro-Germans, put a price on his head, and he had to hide for some time. In revenge, the Ukrainian and German military authorities burned his mother's house and shot his elder brother Emelian, who was a crippled war veteran.

"In June, 1918, Makhno went to Moscow to consult several old Anarchist militants on methods and directions to follow in his revolutionary libertarian work among the peasants of the Ukraine. But the Anarchists whom he met were at this time indecisive and passive in their attitude,<sup>6</sup> and he obtained no satisfactory suggestions or advice."

It is worth mentioning that during his brief stay in Moscow Makhno had a conversation with the old Anarchist theoretician, Peter Kropotkin, and another with Lenin. He gave a detailed account of them — especially of his conversation with Lenin — in his memoirs. He said that he greatly appreciated certain of Kropotkin's suggestions. As for his interview with Lenin, it dealt with four points, namely: the mentality of the Ukrainian peasants, the immediate prospects for the country, the necessity for the Bolsheviks of creating a regular army (the Red Army), and the discord between the Bolsheviks and the Anarchists. The conversation, while of some interest, was too short and superficial to have any real importance. We should mention that the Bolsheviks gave Makhno a certain amount of help in the precautions he took in crossing the Ukrainian frontier and getting home with the least possible risk.

Makhno considered the peasant mass to be a particularly potent historical force. "For a long time," continues Archinov, "he considered the idea of how to organise the vast peasant masses, in order to bring out the revolutionary energy that had been accumulated in them for centuries and to hurl this formidable power against the existing regime of oppression. He felt that the moment had arrived to put this idea into execution."

Therefore, after a brief stay in Moscow, he returned to the Ukraine in July, 1918, seeking to get back to his own Gulai-Polya region.

"The trip was accomplished," says Archinov, "with great difficulty, and very secretly, so as not to fall into the hands of the Hetman's authorities. Once Makhno was almost killed; he was arrested by an Austro-German detachment and was unfortunately carrying libertarian pamphlets at the time. A rich Jew from Gulai-Polya, who had known Makhno personally for a long time, succeeded in saving him by paying a considerable sum of money for his liberation.

"On his way back, the Communists proposed to Makhno that he should select a certain region of the Ukraine and carry on secret revolutionary work there in their name. Naturally, he refused even to discuss this offer; the tasks he had set himself to accomplish had nothing in common with that of the Bolsheviks."

Back in Gulai-Polya, Makhno came to the decision to die or obtain victory for the peasants, and in no event to leave the region. The news of his return spread rapidly from village to village. He did not delay starting his mission openly among the great masses of peasants, speaking at improvised meetings, writing and distributing letters and tracts. By pen and mouth, he called on the peasants for a decisive struggle against the power of Skoropadsky and the landlords. He declared tirelessly that the workers should now take their fates into their own hands and not let

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<sup>6</sup> This was right after the brutal repression [of the Anarchists] in April, 1918. In his conversation with Makhno, Lenin made a brief reference to this event, pretending that the Moscow Anarchists "were harbouring bandits from all over the place". Makhno asked Lenin if he had definite proof. After an evasive reply by Lenin — he invoked the competence of the Cheka — the conversation was broken off by the introduction of another subject by a Bolshevik [who was present]. Thus Makhno never got the matter cleared up.

their freedom to act be taken from them. His stirring appeal was heard, in a few weeks, by many villages and whole districts, preparing the masses for the great events of the future.

Besides his appeals, Makhno proceeded immediately to direct action. His first concern was to form a revolutionary military unit, sufficiently strong to guarantee freedom of propaganda and action in the villages and towns and at the same time to begin guerilla operations. This unit was quickly organised, for among the villages there were marvellously combative elements, ready for action. They only lacked a good organiser. Makhno was the man.

His first unit undertook two urgent tasks, namely, pursuing energetically the work of propaganda and organisation among the peasants and carrying on a stubborn armed struggle against all their enemies. The guiding principle of this merciless struggle was as follows. No lord who persecuted the peasants, no policeman of the Hetman, no Russian or German officer who was an implacable enemy of the peasants, deserved any pity; he must be destroyed. All who participated in the oppression of the poor peasants and workers, all who sought to suppress their rights, to exploit their labour, should be executed.

Within two or three weeks, the unit had already become the terror, not only of the local bourgeoisie, but also of the Austro-German authorities. Makhno's field of revolutionary military action was wide – it extended from Lozovaia to Berdiansk, Mariupol and Taganrog, and from Lugansk to Ekaterinoslav, Alexandrovsk and Melitopol.

Rapidity of movement was his special tactic. Thanks to it and also to the size of the region, he could always appear suddenly where he was least expected. In a short time he enveloped within a circle of iron and fire the whole region in which the local bourgeoisie were re-establishing their power. All those who, during the past two or three months, had succeeded in settling back into their old estates, all those who enslaved the peasants, stole their lands and enjoyed the fruits of their labour, all those who ruled over them as masters, found themselves suddenly under the merciless hand of Makhno and his partisans.

Swift as the wind, intrepid, pitiless towards their enemies, they fell thunderously on some estate, massacred all the sworn enemies of the peasants and disappeared as rapidly as they had come. The next day, Makhno would be more than 100 kilometres away, would appear in some town, massacre the “national guard” (*varta*), officers and noblemen, and vanish before the German troops (despite the fact that they were all prepared for him) had time to realise what had happened. The next day he would be 100 kilometres away, taking action against a detachment of Hungarians who were taking reprisals, or hanging some guards of the *varta*.

Both the *varta* and the Austro-German authorities were alarmed [by Makhno's activities], and several units were sent to capture him. It was in vain. Excellent horsemen since childhood, his partisans could not be caught, for in a day they could cover distances that were impossible for regular cavalry.

Often, as though to mock his enemies, Makhno would suddenly appear in the very centre of Gulai-Polya, or in Polugai, where many Austro-German troops were always stationed, or in some other place where troops were concentrated, killing the officers who fell into his hands and escaping, safe and sound and without leaving the slightest indication of the route he was taking. Or else, when it seemed to his pursuers that they had at last found a fresh trail, when they were expecting to overtake and capture him in a town that had been pointed out to them by some peasant, he himself, in the uniform of the *varta*, would penetrate, along with a small number of his partisans, into the very midst of the enemy, learning their plans and preparations. Then he

would set out with a detachment of the guard “in pursuit of Makhno”, and would exterminate them on the way.

The whole peasant population gave the partisans devoted, active and skilful support. Everywhere along their routes they were sure of finding, whenever they needed it, a safe lodging, food, horses, even arms. Often the peasants would hide them in their homes at the risk of their own lives. Many times, the inhabitants of some village put the pursuing troops on to a false trail, while Makhno himself and his horsemen were right in the village, or were going in the opposite direction to that which had been pointed out to the pursuers.

Many villages were pitilessly punished for their attitude towards the insurgents, all the men being atrociously beaten with ramrods and some of the more strongly suspected peasants being shot on the spot. Some villages were even burned down in revenge. But nothing could reduce the fierce resistance of the working people to the invaders and their agents, the landed nobility and the counter-revolutionaries.

The partisans held to the following general rule in regard to the Austrian, German and Hungarian troops they encountered: they would kill the officers and set the captured soldiers free. They would suggest that the latter should return to their own countries, tell what the Ukrainian peasants were doing, and work for the Social Revolution. Libertarian literature and sometimes money were distributed among them. Only soldiers known to have been guilty of acts of violence against the peasants were executed. This way of treating the captured Austrian, German and Hungarian soldiers had a certain revolutionary influence upon them.

During this first period of his insurrectionary activity, Makhno was not only the organiser and guide of the peasants, but also a redoubtable avenger of the oppressed people. [Through his initiative] hundreds of nests of the nobility were destroyed, thousands of oppressors and active enemies of the people were mercilessly wiped out.

His bold and resolute method of acting, the rapidity of his appearances and disappearances, the precision of his blows and the manifest impossibility of capturing him, dead or alive, soon made his name famous in the region. It was a name that made the bourgeoisie and the authorities tremble with terror and hatred. On the other hand, among the working people, it gave rise to feelings of deep satisfaction, pride and hope. To them, Makhno had already become a legendary figure.

And in Makhno’s character and his actions there were in fact qualities worthy of legend: his extraordinary boldness, his stubborn will, his resourcefulness in all circumstances and, finally, the delightful humour that frequently accompanied his actions — all these qualities impressed the people.

But these were not all the important qualities in Makhno’s personality. The warlike spirit that was shown in his insurrectionary undertakings of this early period of his activity, was only the first manifestation of an enormous talent as a warrior and organiser, only later revealed in its full scope. Not merely a remarkable military guide and organiser, but also a good agitator, Makhno constantly increased the number of meetings that took place in the region where he operated. He made reports on the tasks of the moment, on the Social Revolution, on the free and independent communal life for the workers that was the final goal of the insurrection. He also published pamphlets to this effect, as well as appeals to the peasants and workers, the Austrian and German soldiers, the Don and Kuban cossacks, etc.

“Conquer or die — such is the dilemma which faces the Ukrainian peasants and workers at this historic moment. But we cannot all die, for we are innumerable — we are mankind! Therefore

we will conquer ... But we will not conquer in order to repeat the errors of the past years, that of putting our fate into the hands of new masters. We will conquer in order to take our destinies into our own hands, to conduct our lives according to our own will and our own conception of the truth." Thus, in the words of one of his first appeals, Makhno spoke to the vast masses of the Russian peasants.

## Chapter 2. Formation of the Makhnovist Insurrectionary Army

Soon Makhno became the rallying point for all the insurgents [in his region]. In every village, the peasants created secret local groups. They rallied to Makhno, supported him in all his undertakings, followed his advice and suggestions. Many detachments of partisans — those already in existence as well as newly formed ones — joined his groups seeking co-ordinated action. The need for unity and activity on a general scale was recognised by all the revolutionary partisans. And all were of the opinion that this unity would best be achieved under Makhno's direction. Such was also the opinion of several large bands of insurgents who until then had been independent of one another. Notable among these were the large band commanded by Kurilenko (who operated in the Berdiansk region), that commanded by Stchouss (in the Dibrivka region), and that of Petrenko-Platonov (in the Grichino region). They all spontaneously joined Makhno. In this way the unification of the detached units of partisans in the southern Ukraine into a single insurrectionary army under Makhno's supreme command came about naturally, through the force of events and the will of the masses.

The vast and irrepressible peasant insurrection finally succeeded in completely disorganising the occupation troops and the Hetman's police. The counter-revolution, supported by foreign bayonets, steadily lost ground. The end of the war and the political turmoil that followed in Germany and Austria gave it the *coup de grace*. At the end of 1918, the German and Austrian troops left the country. The Hetman and the landlords fled once again, this time never to return.

From this moment, three very different basic forces were active in the Ukraine: Petlurism, Bolshevism and Makhnovism. We have spoken enough about Bolshevism for the reader to recognise, without difficulty and without our having to explain them, its goals and tactics in the Ukraine. And we have just given an adequate explanation of the independent peasant movement called Makhnovism.

It remains for us to describe briefly the essential nature and the activity of the Petlurist movement. From the first days of the Revolution of February, 1917, the Ukrainian liberal bourgeoisie, fearing the "excesses" of the "Muscovite" revolution and seeking to avoid them in their own country, came out in favour of the national independence of the Ukraine. Once Tsarism was overthrown, they could try to achieve this with some hope of success, since all of the Left Russian political parties had solemnly proclaimed the right of the peoples to do in full liberty whatever they wished with their own lives.

Supported by several other strata of the Ukrainian population, such as the rich peasants (*kulaks*), the liberal intellectuals, etc., the bourgeoisie created a vast autonomist, nationalist and separatist movement, which envisaged complete detachment from the "Pan-Russian" State. Realising, however, that the movement could not hope for substantial and lasting success unless it developed a popular armed force on which it could depend in case of need, the guides of the movement, Simon Petlura and others, turned their attention to the mass of Ukrainian soldiers at

the front and behind the lines. They proceeded to organise them, on a national basis, into special Ukrainian regiments.

In May 1917, the leaders of the movement organised a military congress which elected a general military committee, to direct the movement. Later this committee was enlarged and named the Rada (Council, in Ukrainian). In November 1917, at the Pan-Ukrainian congress, this became the Central *Rada*, a kind of parliament of the new Ukrainian Democratic Republic. Finally, a month later, the Central *Rada* solemnly proclaimed the independence of this Republic.

This event was a serious blow to Bolshevism, which had just taken power in Great Russia, and naturally wanted to establish itself in the Ukraine, despite the “rights of the peoples”. Therefore, the Bolsheviks, in all haste, sent their troops into that region. A furious struggle took place between them and Petlura’s detachments, around Kiev, the Ukrainian capital. On January 25<sup>th</sup>, 1918, the Bolsheviks took the city, installed their government, and soon began to extend their power throughout the Ukraine.

They only succeeded partially. The Petlura government, the politicians of the separatist movement, and their troops, retired into the western part of the country where they dug in and protested against the occupation of the Ukraine by the Bolsheviks. It is probable that a little later the latter would have set forth to extinguish the autonomist movement. But the immediate situation prevented this. In March and April, 1918, they retreated into Great Russia, giving way to the Austro-German army of occupation in conformity to the clauses of the Brest-Litovsk treaty.

Soon, preceding the Austro-Germans, the Petlurists re-entered Kiev. Their government proclaimed the new National Ukrainian Republic. This also only lasted for a few weeks. It was much more to the advantage of the Austro-Germans to come to terms with the old lords and masters of the Ukraine than with the Petlurists. With the support of their military forces, the Germans unceremoniously deposed the republican government and replaced it with the absolute authority of their regent: the Hetman Skoropadsky. Petlura himself was imprisoned for some time and had to disappear temporarily from the political arena.

But the disintegration of the Hetman’s regime was not long in coming. The immense peasant insurrection soon began to deliver powerful blows at him. Recognising Skoropadsky’s weakness, the *Petlurovtzi* went energetically to work. Circumstances favoured them. The peasants being in revolt, hundreds of thousands of insurgents were only waiting for an appeal to march against the Hetman’s government. Since they possessed sufficient means to assemble, organise and arm a part of these forces, the *Petlurovtzi* advanced and took several large cities and districts almost without resistance. They subjected the provinces thus conquered to a new kind of power: the “Directorate”, with Petlura at its head. Thus they quickly extended their power over a good part of the Ukraine, taking advantage of the absence of other aspirants, especially the Bolsheviks.

In December 1918, Skoropadsky fled and Petlura’s “Directorate” solemnly entered Kiev. This event excited great enthusiasm in the country, while the *Petlurovtzi* did everything they could to magnify their success, and posed as national heroes.

In a short time, their power again extended over the major part of the Ukraine. It was only in the south, in the region of the Makhnovist peasants’ movement, that they encountered serious resistance. There they had no success; on the contrary, they experienced several serious reverses.

Nevertheless, in all the great cities of the country the Petlurists triumphed, and this time the domination of the autonomist bourgeoisie seemed assured. But this success was illusory. The new power had hardly had time to install itself when it began to disintegrate. Millions of peasants



and workers who, at the moment of the overthrow of the Hetman, were within the orbit of the *Petlurovtzi* were soon disillusioned and began to leave Petlura's ranks *en masse*.

“They sought another vehicle for their interests and aspirations. The major part dispersed into the cities and villages and there adopted a hostile attitude toward the new power. Others joined the insurrectionary bands of the Makhnovists. The *Petlurovtzi* were thus as soon disarmed as they had been armed by the march of events. Their idea of bourgeois autonomy, bourgeois national unity, could only last for a few hours among the revolutionary people. The burning breath of the popular revolution reduced this false idea to ashes and left its supporters in complete impotence. At the same time, military Bolshevism was rapidly approaching, from the north, expert in methods of class agitation and firmly resolved to take power in the Ukraine. Just one month after the entry of Petlura's Directorate into Kiev, the Bolshevik troops entered in their turn. From there, the Communists' power was extended over the greater part of the Ukraine.” (P. Archinov, *op. cit.*, p. 106.)

Thus, soon after the fall of the Hetman and the departure of the Austro-Germans, the Moscow government hastened to reinstate in the Ukraine its authority, its functionaries, its cadres of militants and especially its troops and police.

But in the western and southern parts it was soon halted, on the one hand by the nationalist elements of Petlura, who had retired there once more, and on the other, by the authentic independent movement of the peasant masses, guided by Makhno. Petlura, chased from the heart of the country, did not consider himself beaten; having retired into the region least accessible to the Bolsheviks, he tried to resist — wherever he could — both them and Makhno's “peasant bands”. As for the independent peasant movement, it was soon obliged to face not only Petlura's bourgeoisie (before going into action, subsequently, against the monarchist attempts of Denikin and Wrangel) but also the usurpations of the Bolsheviks. Thus, the situation in the Ukraine became more complicated than ever. Each of the three forces present had to fight the other two: the Bolsheviks against Petlura; Petlura, against the Bolsheviks and Makhno; Makhno against Petlura and the Bolsheviks. Later, this confusion was further complicated by the appearance of a fourth element, the intervention of nationalist and monarchist Russian generals seeking to re-establish the old Russian Empire in its historical integrity and on its absolute basis. From that moment (summer, 1919) each of the four forces carried on a bitter struggle against the other three.

We must add that in these chaotic circumstances the Ukraine became a free field for the exploits and audacious sorties of real gangs of armed bandits, composed of elements dislocated by the aftermath of war and the Revolution and living by pure brigandage. Such bands overran the country in all directions; they had hideouts in every corner; they operated almost without interference in the central Ukraine.<sup>1</sup>

It is easy to imagine the fantastic chaos in which the country was plunged and the improbable combinations which were formed, broken, and reformed during the three years of fighting (from the end of 1918 to 1921) until Bolshevism finally prevailed over the others.

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<sup>1</sup> Much later, the Bolsheviks, using their habitual method of slander, tried to identify the independent peasant movement and Makhno personally with these counter-revolutionary bandit elements. From what has been said, the reader should already be able to recognise the facts, and the difference between the men and the myths.

We must add, and emphasise, with Archinov, that the whole activity of the Bolsheviks in the Ukraine was pure usurpation, imposed by force of arms, a usurpation that they did not even try to conceal.

Installing their government first at Kharkov, then at Kiev, they sent their troops through the regions already liberated from the power of the Hetman and created the organs of Communist power by military force.

“When the Bolsheviks occupied some place by main force, and had driven out Petlura’s partisans, as well as in places where the region was free and the workers their own masters, the Communist Power was established by military order. The workers’ and peasants’ councils (Soviets) which had supposedly created this power appeared later, the deed having been accomplished and the power already consolidated. Before the Soviets, there were ‘revolutionary committees’ and before the ‘committees’ there were simply the military divisions.” (P. Archinov, *op. cit.*, p. 129).

We have seen that, because of many special circumstances, the *social revolution* began in the Ukraine, not through the seizure of power by a political party of the extreme Left, but, without any question of power, through an immense spontaneous revolt of the peasants against their new oppressors.

In the beginning, this revolt was like a tempest. With exasperated fury, the peasant masses devoted themselves to the violent destruction of all that they hated, all that had oppressed them for centuries. At this time no positive element appeared in the work of destruction. But little by little, events developed, the movement of the revolutionary peasants became organised and unified, and realised ever more precisely its fundamental constructive tasks.

Since we can only summarise events and must leave out many details, we will set forth immediately the *essential characteristics of the Makhnovist movement*, characteristics which manifested themselves increasingly during the events that followed the collapse of the Hetman’s regime and the end of the German occupation.

These characteristics of the movement can be divided into two different groups: the virtues and merits, on the one hand, and the weakness and mistakes, on the other, for the Makhnovist movement was not irreproachable, and some of its failings allowed the Bolsheviks to slander and defame it.

The advantages of the movement were:

1. Its complete independence of all tutelage, of any party, of politics in any form and from any source — the really libertarian spirit of the movement. This fundamental and highly important quality was due (a) to the initial spontaneity of the peasant insurrection; (b) to the personal influence of the libertarian Makhno; (c) to the activity of other libertarian elements in the region (Makhno being himself absorbed by the task of fighting did his best to attract other libertarians who were able to work in complete freedom); (d) to the lessons taught by the experiences of the insurgents in their day-to-day contacts with political parties. This libertarian tendency of the movement manifested itself in a deep-rooted defiance of the non-working or privileged elements, in a refusal of dictatorship over the people by any organisation, and in the idea of a free and complete self-administration by the workers themselves of their local affairs.

2. The free, federative (and hence more solid) co-ordination of all the forces of the movement into a vast, freely organised and disciplined social movement.
3. The healthy and advanced ideological influence which the movement exercised over a wide section of the country, containing some seven million inhabitants.
4. The incomparable fighting valour of the revolutionary peasant army, an army which, despite its perpetual lack of weapons and ammunition, despite the constant and shameful betrayals which it suffered, despite other terrible difficulties, was able to resist for nearly four years all the usurpations and all the forces of oppression [active in the Ukraine].
5. The organisational and strategic and military genius, as well as the other exceptional qualities of that guide of the fighting nucleus of the movement, the anarchist Nestor Makhno.
6. The rapidity with which the peasant masses and the insurgents, despite extremely unfavourable circumstances, became acquainted with libertarian ideas and sought to apply them.
7. Certain positive achievements which the movement made, in so far as circumstances permitted, in economics and in the field of social and revolutionary militancy.

The disadvantages of the movement were:

1. The almost continual necessity of fighting and defending itself against all kinds of enemies, without being able to concentrate on peaceful and truly positive works.
2. The continued existence of an army within the movement. For an army, of whatever kind it may be, always and inevitably ends by being affected by certain serious faults, by a special kind of evil mentality.
3. The insufficiency of libertarian intellectual forces within the movement.
4. Certain personal defects of Makhno. Outside of his organisational and military genius, his libertarian ardour and his other remarkable military qualities, Makhno possessed serious weaknesses of character and education. In certain respects, he was not equal to his task. These weaknesses — we will have occasion to return to them — diminished the scope and the moral significance of the movement.
5. A certain casualness, a lack of necessary distrust, towards the Communists.
6. The absence of a vigorous organised workers' movement, which could support that of the peasant insurgents.
7. The constant shortage of arms and ammunition. The Makhnovists nearly always had to arm themselves with weapons captured in combat from their enemies.

But let us return to the events, for throughout the account that follows we will have occasion to observe both the merits and defects of the movement sufficiently to be able to judge it as a whole.

In October 1918, Makhno's detachments, united into a revolutionary army of partisans, began a general attack on the Hetman Skoropadsky's forces. In November, the German and Austrian troops were completely disoriented both by the events on the western front, and by those inside the country they were occupying. Makhno took advantage of this state of affairs. In certain places, he treated with these troops, obtained their neutrality and even managed to disarm them without difficulty, thus gaining possession of their arms and ammunition. Elsewhere, he defeated them in battle. For example, after a bitter fight of three days, he occupied the whole of Gulai-Polya.

Everywhere the end of the Hetman's regime was expected. The Ukrainian troops and the Hetman's guard (*varta*) were nearly all dispersed before the extraordinary growth of the insurrectionary movement. The young peasants flowed *en masse* into Makhno's army, which was unable to arm all these volunteers and had to turn most of them away. Nevertheless, the Makhnovist insurgent army [was already able to equip] several regiments of infantry and cavalry, while it also had a little artillery and many machine-guns.

Soon it had become master of a very large region, which was liberated of all power. But the Hetman still held Kiev. Makhno therefore set out for the north. He occupied the important railroad stations at Tchaplino, Grichino and Sinelnikova, and the city of Pavlograd. He then turned west, in the direction of Ekaterinoslav.

There he encountered the organised and completely equipped forces of Petlura. At this period, the *petlurovtzi* considered the Makhnovist movement an important episode in the Ukrainian revolution. Not knowing it well, they hoped to attract these "bands of rebels" into their sphere of influence and place them under their own control. Very amicably, they addressed to Makhno a series of political questions: What was his opinion of the Petlurist movement and Petlura's government? How did he conceive the future political structure of the Ukraine? Would he not find it desirable and useful to work in common for the creation of an independent Ukraine?

The Makhnovists' reply was to the point. They declared, that in their opinion *Petlurovtchina* was a bourgeois nationalist movement whose road was entirely different from that of the revolutionary peasants, that the Ukraine should be organised on a basis of free labour and the independence of the peasants and workers, that they did not accept union with anyone, and that nothing but struggle was possible between *Makhnovitchina*, the movement of the workers, and the *Petlurovtchina*, the movement of the bourgeoisie.

The events which followed this "exchange of views" illustrate the kind of tangle that was common in the struggles of the Ukraine. Makhno's army stopped at Nijne-Dnieprovsk, a suburb of Ekaterinoslav and prepared to attack the city. There was also a Bolshevik committee there, who possessed a few troops, but not enough for action. Makhno being known in the region as a valiant revolutionist and a very gifted military guide, this "Committee" offered him the command of the party's workers' detachments. Makhno accepted.

As he often did, he had recourse to a ruse, which was full of risk but promised a great deal if it should succeed. He loaded a train with his troops and sent it from Nijne-Dnieprovsk right into the railway station of Ekaterinoslav. As he knew, such trains brought the working people from the suburbs into Ekaterinoslav, and usually they passed through without obstacle or inspection. If, by chance, the ruse had been discovered before the train stopped, the whole troop would have been taken prisoner. But it went through unhindered and stopped in the station. • In an instant the Makhnovists occupied the station and its surroundings. A fierce battle broke out in the city. The Petlurists were defeated. They beat a retreat and abandoned Ekaterinoslav. They were not

pursued, for Makhno contented himself, for the moment, with taking possession of the town and reorganising his forces.

A few days later, the Petlurists counterattacked with reinforcements, beat Makhno's army and regained the city. But they in turn did not feel strong enough to pursue the Makhnovists. The Insurrectionary Army retreated again into the Sinelnikovo region, where it dug in and established a front between itself and the Petlurists on the north-west frontier of the insurgent region.

Petlura's troops, composed chiefly of insurgent peasants, or conscripts, rapidly disintegrated upon contact with the Makhnovists, and soon this front melted away without a battle. Later, Ekaterinoslav was occupied by the Bolsheviks who, for the moment, did not risk going beyond the city. Makhno did not feel that his forces were sufficient to hold both Ekaterinoslav and the vast liberated region. He decided to leave the city to the Bolsheviks and only ensure control of the frontiers of his region. Thus, to the south and east of Ekaterinoslav, a vast area of several thousand square kilometres was free from all authority and all troops. At Ekaterinoslav the Bolsheviks ruled, and to the west the Petlurists dominated the country.

The Makhnovist peasants took advantage of the freedom and relative peacefulness of their region — which unfortunately was of short duration — to accomplish certain positive tasks.

For some six months, from December 1918 to June 1919, the peasants of Gulai-Polya lived without any political power. Not only did they not break the social bonds between them, but, quite to the contrary, they created new forms of social organisation: free workers' communes and Soviets.

Later on, the Makhnovists formulated their social ideas — and particularly their conception of the Soviets — in a pamphlet entitled "General Theses of the Revolutionary Insurgents (Makhnovists) concerning the Free Workers' Soviet." According to the insurgents, the Soviets should be absolutely independent of all political parties; they should be part of a general economic system based on social equality, their members should be real workers, should serve the interests of the working masses and obey only their will, and their initiators should not exercise any power.

As for the communes, in several places attempts were made to organise social life on a communal, just and equalitarian basis, and the very peasants who showed themselves hostile to the official communes [of the Bolsheviks] proceeded enthusiastically to set up free communes.

The first commune, called "Rosa Luxemburg", was organised near the town of Prokovskoie. At first it only contained a few dozen members, but later the number exceeded three hundred. This commune was created by the poorest peasants of the locality. In consecrating it to the memory of Rosa Luxemburg, they gave witness to their impartiality and nobility of sentiment. They had known for some time that Rosa Luxemburg was a martyr of the revolutionary struggle in Germany. The basic principles of the commune did not correspond at all to the doctrines for which Rosa Luxemburg had struggled. But the peasants justly wanted to honour a victim of the social struggle. This commune was based on the non-authoritarian principle. It accomplished very good results and ultimately exercised a great influence over the peasants of the neighbourhood.<sup>2</sup>

Seven kilometres from Gulai-Polya another commune was established, which was simply called "Commune No. 1 of the Gulai-Polya Peasants." It was also the work of poor peasants. Twenty kilometres away were communes Nos. 2 and 3. There were also some in other places.

All these communes were created freely, by a spontaneous impulse of the peasants themselves, with the help of a few good organisers, for the purpose of providing the necessities of life for the

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<sup>2</sup> It was destroyed on June 9 and 10, 1919, by the Bolsheviks during their general campaign against the Makhno-

working people. They had no resemblance to the artificial and so-called “exemplary communes” which were run very inefficiently by the Communist authorities, where there were usually assembled ill-assorted elements, who had been gathered together at random, and were incapable of doing serious work. These so-called “communes” of the Bolsheviks did nothing but waste grain and ruin the land. Subsidised by the State, that is by the government, they lived off the labour of the people while pretending to teach them to work.

The communes [at Gulai-Polya] with which we are here concerned were real working communes. They gathered authentic peasants, accustomed from infancy to hard work. They were based on real material mutual aid and on the principle of equality. Everyone — men, women and children — had to work, each to the extent of his ability. The organising functions were confided to comrades who could fulfil them adequately. Their task accomplished, these comrades rejoined the common work side by side with the other members of the commune. These, sound, serious principles were due to the fact that the communes arose from the workers themselves and their development followed a natural course.

The Makhnovist partisans never exerted any pressure on the peasants, confining themselves to propagating the idea of free communes. The latter were formed on the initiative of the poor peasants themselves.

It is interesting and significant to observe that the ideas and activities of the Makhnovist peasants were similar in all respects to those of the Kronstadt rebels in 1921. This proves that when the labouring masses have the opportunity of thinking, seeking and acting freely, they gradually find the same course, whatever the place, the surroundings, or even — we might add — the time, as one can see by examining previous revolutions. Independent of all other reasoning, this should lead us to believe that, on the whole, this course is the *right, just and true course for the workers*. To be sure, for many reasons, the labouring masses have up to the present never been able to keep to this course. But the possibility of not abandoning it, or following it to the end, is only a question of time and development.

The constructive activity of the peasants was not confined to these experiments in free communism. Tasks that were much vaster and more important were not slow in presenting themselves. It was necessary to find a common practical solution for various problems which concerned the whole region, and for this it was indispensable to establish general institutions, first embracing a district, later a department, and finally the whole region.

The peasants did not fail. They had recourse to periodic congresses of peasants, workers and partisans. During the period that the region remained free, there were three such regional congresses. They permitted the peasants to strengthen their contacts, to orient themselves more certainly in the complex circumstances of the moment, and to determine clearly the economic, social and other tasks that had to be done.

The First Regional Congress took place on January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1919, in the town of Greater Mikhailovka. It was primarily concerned with the danger of the reactionary movements of Petlura and Denikin. The Petlurists were in the process of reorganising their forces in the west of the country for a new offensive. As for Denikin, his preparations for civil war disturbed the peasants and partisans still more. The congress formulated measures for resistance to the two forces. Moreover, patrol action, increasingly important, was already occurring nearly every day on the southeastern border of the region.

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vist region.

The Second Congress met three weeks later, on February 12, 1919, at Gulai-Polya. Unfortunately, the imminent danger of an offensive by Denikin against the free region prevented the congress from devoting itself to the problems, however important, of peaceful construction. The sessions were entirely occupied by questions of defence and fighting against the new invaders.

The insurrectionary army of the *Makhnovtzi* numbered at this moment around 20,000 volunteer fighters. But many of them were worn out by fatigue, having had to fight incessantly on the frontier against Denikin's advance guard and other attempts at penetration. Moreover, Denikin's troops were rapidly growing stronger.

After long and passionate debates, the congress resolved to call all the inhabitants of the region to a *general voluntary and equalitarian mobilisation*. By "voluntary mobilisation" it meant that while this appeal, sanctioned by the moral authority of the congress, emphasised the need for fresh troops in the insurrectionary army, no one was compelled to enlist: the appeal was directed to everyone's conscience and good will. By "equalitarian mobilisation" it meant that in filling out the army, attention would be given to the personal situation of each volunteer, so that the weight of the mobilisation would be distributed and supported by the population as equally and justly as possible.

As a kind of general directing body for the fight against Petlura and Denikin, to maintain and support, during the fighting, the economic and social relations among the workers themselves and also between them and the partisans, to take care of the needs for information and control, finally to put into practice the various measures which were adopted by the congress and which might be taken up by succeeding conferences, this Second Congress established a regional Revolutionary Military Council (Soviet) of peasants, workers and partisans.

This council embraced the whole free region. It was supposed to carry out all the economic, political, social and military decisions made at the congress. It was thus, in a certain sense, the supreme executive of the whole movement. *But it was not at all an authoritarian organ*. Only strictly executive functions were assigned to it. It confined itself to carrying out the instructions and decisions of the congress. At any moment, it could be dissolved by the congress and cease to exist.

Once the resolutions of this Second Congress were made known to the peasants of the region, each new town and village began to send to Gulai-Polya, en masse, new volunteers desiring to go to the front against Denikin. The number of these new fighters was enormous and surpassed all expectations. If it had been possible to arm and train all of them, the tragic events which followed would never have occurred. Moreover, the whole Russian Revolution might have been switched to a new course. The "miracle" which the libertarians had hoped for might have happened.

Unfortunately, arms were scarce in the region. That is why they did not succeed in forming new detachments at the opportune moment. They had to turn away ninety per cent, of the volunteers who came to enlist. This had unavoidable consequences for the region during Denikin's general offensive in June 1919.

## Chapter 3. Denikin's Offensives and Final Defeat

"The Statists," as Archinov says with good reason, "fear the free people. They maintain that without authority the latter would lose the anchor of sociability, that they would disperse and return to the savage state. These are certainly absurd ideas, held by idlers, lovers of authority and the labour of others, or by the blind thinkers of bourgeois society."

Already, the mortal enemy of the world of labour and its freedom — authority — was pressing closely on the region [of the Ukraine]. It threatened from two sides at once. From the southeast the army of General Denikin was coming up. From the north the army of the Communist state was descending. Denikin arrived first

From the first days after the fall of the Hetman Skoropadsky, several counter-revolutionary detachments commanded by General Chkouro, operating as patrols, had infiltrated into the Ukraine along the Don and Kuban rivers and had approached Polugui and Gulai-Polya. This was the first threat of the new counter-revolution against the liberated region.

Naturally, the Makhnovist insurgent army moved to this side. Its infantry and cavalry were well organised and commanded, fairly well armed and full of ardour and enthusiasm. The infantry, indeed, were equipped in a very unusual and original way. They moved like cavalry with the aid of horses, not on horseback but in light carriages with springs, called tatchanka in the southern Ukraine. Travelling at a fast trot, the same speed as the cavalry, these infantry could easily move from sixty to seventy kilometres a day, and even, if necessary, ninety to a hundred. As for the Makhnovist cavalry, it was certainly among the best in the world. Its attacks were furious and irresistible.

It must not be forgotten that many of these revolutionary peasants had fought in the 1914 war, and thus were trained and proven fighting men. This was of great importance, for it permitted the peasant population to relieve, to some extent, the fatigue of the Makhnovist fighters. In fact, at certain specially exposed sections of the front, a few hundred peasants from the neighbourhood would regularly replace the exhausted fighters. The latter turned over their arms to them and went home. After two or three weeks of rest, they returned to resume their place at the front.

We should add that the peasants also assumed responsibility, from the beginning, for regularly supplying the Insurrectionary Army with food and fodder. A central provisioning section was organised at Gulai-Polya. Supplies were brought there from every direction to be sent to the front.

Denikin did not at all anticipate the stubborn resistance of the Makhnovists. Moreover, he counted on an imminent struggle between Petlura's Directorate and the Bolsheviks. He hoped to take advantage of this state of affairs to beat both easily and establish his front — at least for the start — beyond the northern limits of the province of Ekaterinoslav. But he unexpectedly encountered the excellent and tenacious Insurrectionary Army.

After the first battles, Denikin's detachments had to beat a retreat in the direction of the Don and the Sea of Azov. In a short space of time, all the territory from Polugui to the sea was liberated. The Makhnovist partisans occupied several important railway stations and cities, such as



Berdiansk and Mariupol. It was from this moment — January 1919- — that the first front against Denikin was firmly established. It was later extended for more than 100 kilometres to the east and north-east of Mariupol.

Naturally, Denikin did not give up. He continued and intensified his attacks and infiltrations. For six months, the Makhnovists held back this counter-revolutionary flood. The fighting was stubborn and fierce, for General Chkouro also had excellent cavalry. Moreover, he used the partisans' tactics; his detachments would penetrate deep into the rear of the Makhnovist army, then spread out rapidly, destroying, burning and massacring all they could reach; then they would disappear like magic, and appear suddenly in another place to commit the same destruction.

It was exclusively the labouring people who suffered from these incursions. They [the Denikinists] took revenge for the help the peasants gave to the Insurrectionary Army, and for their hostility towards the Denikinists. They hoped thus to provoke a reaction against the Revolution. The Jewish population, which had lived for a very long time in special colonies of the Azov region, also suffered from these raids. The Denikinists massacred the Jews on every visit, thus seeking to provoke a popular anti-Jewish movement which would have facilitated their task.

However, despite their well-trained and well-armed troops, despite their furious attacks, the Denikinists could not subdue the insurrectionary troops, full of revolutionary ardour and quite as skilful at guerilla warfare. On the contrary during the six months of furious fighting, General Chkouro more than once received such blows from the Makhnovist regiments that only precipitous retreats of from eighty to one hundred and twenty kilometres saved him from complete disaster. During this period, the Makhnovists advanced at least five or six times almost to the walls of Taganrog. At this moment, only the lack of men and weapons prevented Makhno from destroying Denikin's counter-revolution.

The hatred and fury of the Denikinist officers towards the Makhnovists reached incredible heights. They submitted their prisoners to refined tortures. Often they mangled them by exploding shells. And several cases are known — they were mentioned, with full details, in the insurgent press — where prisoners were roasted alive on sheets of red hot iron.

In the course of the fighting, Makhno's military talent was revealed in a striking manner. His reputation as a remarkable war leader was recognised even by his enemies, the Denikinists. But this did not prevent General Denikin from offering half a million roubles to whomever killed or captured Makhno.

During this whole period, the relations between the Makhnovists and the Bolsheviks remained distant but amicable. One fact emphasised this. In January 1919 the Makhnovists, having thrown back the Denikinists towards the Sea of Azov after a hard fight, captured a hundred carloads of wheat from them. The first thought of Makhno and the staff of the Insurrectionary Army was to send this booty to the starving workers of Moscow and Petrograd. This idea was enthusiastically accepted by the mass of the insurgents. The hundred carloads of wheat were delivered to Moscow and Petrograd accompanied by a Makhnovist delegation which was very warmly received by the Moscow Soviet.

The Bolsheviks appeared in the region of the Makhnovist movement much later than Denikin. The insurgents had already been fighting the latter for several months; they had driven him out of their region and established their line of defence to the east of Mariupol when the first Bolshevik divisions, coming from the north and commanded by Dybenko, arrived without interference at Sinefnikovo.

At this point Makhno himself, like the whole insurrectionary movement, was essentially unknown to the Bolsheviks. Until then he had been spoken of in the Communist press as a bold insurgent of great promise. His fight with Skoropadsky, then with Petlura and Denikin, brought him the goodwill of the Bolshevik leaders who, naturally enough, hoped to incorporate his army into theirs. So they sang Makhno's praises in advance, and devoted whole columns in their newspapers to him, without having made his acquaintance.

"The first meeting between the Bolshevik fighters and Makhno's men took place in March, 1919, under the same auspices of praise and goodwill," Peter Archinov records. "Makhno was immediately invited to join the Red Army with all his detachments in order to provide a united front for the purpose of defeating Denikin. The political and ideological differences between the Bolsheviks and the Makhnovist peasants were not considered an obstacle to a union on the basis of a common cause. The Bolsheviks let it be understood that the special characteristics of the Insurrectionary Army would not be violated.

"Makhno and his staff were perfectly aware that the arrival of Communist authority was a new threat to the liberty of the region; they saw it as a probable omen of civil war of a new kind. But neither they nor the army nor the Regional Soviet wanted this war, which might well have a fatal effect on the whole Ukrainian revolution. They did not lose sight of the open and well-organised counter-revolution which was approaching from the Don and the Kuban, and with which there was only one possible relationship — that of armed conflict.

"This danger increased from day to day. The insurgents retained some hope that the struggle with the Bolsheviks could be confined to the realm of ideas. In this event, they could feel perfectly secure about their region, for the vigour of the libertarian theory, together with the revolutionary common sense of the peasants and their defiance of elements foreign to their free movement were the best guarantee of the region's freedom.

"According to the general opinion of the guides of the insurrection, it was necessary for the movement to concentrate all forces against the monarchist reaction and not be concerned with ideological disagreements with the Bolsheviks until that was liquidated. It was in this context that the union between the Makhnovists and the Red Army took place."

Here are the essential clauses of the agreement [that was entered into by the two armies], "i. The Insurrectionary Army will retain its internal organisation intact, ii. It will receive Political Commissars appointed by the Communist authorities, iii. It will only be subordinated to the Red supreme command in strictly military matters, iv. it cannot be removed from the front against Denikin.<sup>1</sup> v. It will receive munitions and supplies equal to those of the Red Army. vi. It will retain its name of Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army and its black flags" (the black flag is the Anarchist flag).

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<sup>1</sup> This clause was a precaution on the part of the Makhnovists. They feared in fact, that under some pretext or another the Red command would send the Insurrectionary Army to some other front, so that they could establish the

We should specify that at the same time Makhno's army was baptised the "Third Brigade". Later it became the "First Revolutionary Insurrectionary Division", and still later it became independent again and adopted the definite name of "Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army of the Ukraine (Makhnovist)."

The most important point for the Makhnovist army was naturally the retention of its internal organisation. It was thus not an act of "organic" incorporation into the Red Army that took place, but only a pact of close co-operation.

Here I will pause to discuss some of the features of this internal organisation of the Insurrectionary Army. This organisation was based on three fundamental principles: 1. Voluntary enlistment; 2. Eligibility of all for command posts; 3. Freely accepted discipline.

Voluntary Enlistment meant that the army was composed only of revolutionary fighters who entered it of their own free will.

Eligibility for Command Posts meant that the commanders of all the units of the army, including the staff, as well as all the men who held other important positions in the army, were either elected or accepted without reservation (if they happened to be appointed in urgent situations by the commander himself) by the insurgents of the unit in question or by the whole army.

Freely Accepted Discipline was achieved in the following way. All the rules of discipline were drawn up by commissions of insurgents, then approved by general assemblies of the various units. Once approved, they had to be rigorously observed on the individual responsibility of each insurgent and each commander.

The alliance between the Bolsheviks and the Insurrectionary Army was strictly military. All political questions were voluntarily excluded. This left the working people of the region free to follow, despite the alliance, the same course of economic and social evolution, or rather, revolution, that they had been pursuing, the absolutely free and independent activity of workers who accepted no power.

We shall see presently that this was the sole cause of the break between the Bolsheviks and the partisans, of the vile and cynical accusations levelled by the former against the latter, and of the armed aggression of the Communists against the free region.

Since the creation of the Regional Soviet in February, 1919, the working people [of the Makhnovist areas] considered themselves united and organised, and this feeling of solidarity induced the peasants to deal with other concrete problems of great urgency. They began by organising everywhere free local Soviets. In the circumstances of the time, this task was accomplished slowly, but the peasants held consistently to the idea, feeling that it was the only sound basis on which a really free community could be constructed.

Soon the problem of direct and solid union between the peasants and the urban workers arose. In the opinion of the former, such a union should be established directly with the workers' enterprises and organisations, outside of political parties, of the organs of the state or intermediary functionaries. They felt intuitively that this was indispensable for the consolidation and subsequent development of the Revolution. At the same time, they were perfectly aware that its accomplishment would inevitably provoke a struggle with the state and government party, the Communists, who would certainly not renounce their hold over the masses without a struggle. However, the peasants did not feel that this danger was too serious, for they considered that once

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Bolshevik power in the region without interference. As the reader will see presently, this fear was fully justified by subsequent events.

they and the workers were united they could easily defy any political power that tried to subdue them. In any event, the free and direct union of the peasants and workers seemed the only natural and fruitful way of finally achieving a true and emancipatory revolution and of eliminating all those elements that might impede, deform or stifle it. It was in this context that the problem of union with the city workers was raised and discussed, until it finally became an objective of the whole insurrectionary region.

It goes without saying that with such an attitude on the part of the people and with plans of this kind being made, the political parties, and especially the Communists, could have no success in the Makhnovist area. When these parties appeared there with statist programmes and plans of organisation, they were received coldly, indifferently, sometimes even hostilely. Often their militants and agents were criticised openly as people who came uninvited to meddle in other people's affairs. The Communist authorities who infiltrated into all parts of the region and who posed as masters were made to understand clearly that they were considered intruders and imposters.

At first the Bolsheviks hoped to overcome this passive resistance by absorbing the Makhnovist army into the ranks of the Red Army and then having their hands free to reduce the population to obedience. They soon learned that this hope was in vain. The peasants of the region did not want to have anything to do with Bolshevik government agents. They ignored and boycotted them; sometimes they even maltreated them. In certain places the armed peasants drove out of their villages the "Extraordinary Commissions" (Cheka), and at Gulai-Polya the Communists never even dared to establish such an institution. In other places, the attempts to implant Communist administration resulted in bloody collisions between the population and the authorities, whose situation became very difficult. As for the Makhnovist army, it was intractable.

It was [when they realised the true nature of the situation] that the Bolsheviks began an organised and methodical fight against Makhnovism, both as an idea and as a social movement. As usual, the press started the campaign. When the order was given, it began to criticise the insurrectionary movement, treating it more and more as a movement of rich peasants (kulaks), describing its ideas and slogans as counter-revolutionary, and condemning its activities as harmful to the Revolution. Direct threats addressed to the guides of the movement appeared in the papers as well as in the speeches and orders of the central authorities.

Soon the region was practically blockaded. In certain places, the Communist authorities established road barriers, and soon all the revolutionary militants going to Gulai-Polya or returning from it were arrested on the way; often they disappeared. In addition, the supplies of ammunition for the Insurrectionary Army were considerably reduced.

It was under the shadow of these new complications and threats that the Third Regional Congress of Peasants, Workers and Partisans met at Gulai-Polya on April 10<sup>th</sup>, 1919.

Its purpose was to fix precisely the immediate tasks ahead, and to consider the perspectives of revolutionary life in the region. The delegates of 72 districts, representing more than two million people, took part in the work of the congress. I regret that I have no transcript of the proceedings, for from this one would have been able to see clearly with what warmth and at the same time with what wisdom and clarity the people sought their own course in the Revolution and their own popular forms for the new life.

It was towards the end of this Third Congress that the drama which had been anticipated for some time began. A telegram from Dybenko, commander of the Bolshevik forces, arrived at the meeting place of the congress. It brutally declared the congress "counter-revolutionary" and its

organisers “outlaws”. This was the first direct assault of the Bolsheviks on the freedom of the region, and it was at the same time a declaration of war against the Insurrectionary Army.

The congress understood perfectly its full significance. It voted immediately an indignant protest against the telegram, which was printed straight away and distributed among the peasants and workers.

Several days later, the Revolutionary Military Council drew up and sent to the Communist authorities, in the person of Dybenko, a detailed reply in which they emphasised the true part played by the region in the Revolution, and unmasked those who were really responsible for dragging it in a reactionary direction. This reply is lengthy, but we are taking the liberty of reproducing it in full, since it indicates admirably the respective positions of the two parties:

“ ‘Comrade’ Dybenko declares that the congress called at Gulai-Polya for the 10<sup>th</sup> April is counter-revolutionary, and puts its organisers outside the law. According to him, the severest repression should strike them. We quote his telegram verbatim: ‘Novo-Alexeivka, No. 283, 10<sup>th</sup> April, at 2.45 p.m. Forward to Comrade Father Makhno,<sup>1</sup> General Staff of the Alexandrovsk Division ... Any congress called in the name of the Revolutionary Military General Staff, which is now dissolved by my order, shall be considered manifestly counter-revolutionary, and its organisers will expose themselves to the severest repressive measures, to the extent of their being declared outlaws.<sup>2</sup> order that steps be taken immediately so that such steps may not be necessary. Signed: Dybenko, Division Commander.’

“Before declaring the congress counter-revolutionary, ‘Comrade’ Dybenko has not even taken the trouble to find out by whom and for what purpose this congress was called. Thus he says that it was called by the ‘dissolved’ Revolutionary Staff of Gulai-Polya, whereas in reality it was called by the executive committee of the Military Revolutionary Council.

“Consequently, having called the congress, the members of the Council do not know whether they have been declared outlaws, or whether the congress is considered counter-revolutionary by ‘Comrade’ Dybenko. If this is the case, permit us to explain to Your Excellency by whom and for what purpose this congress – in your opinion counter-revolutionary – was called. And then it might not seem so terrible as you represent it.

“As has already been said, it was called by the executive committee of the Military Revolutionary Council of the Gulai-Polya region, at Gulai-Polya itself. It was the Third Regional Congress called for the purpose of determining the future free conduct of the Military Revolutionary Council (you will see, ‘Comrade’ Dybenko, that three of these ‘counter-revolutionary’ congresses have taken place). ,

“A question now arises – where does the Military Revolutionary Council come from, and for what purpose was it created? If you do not already know that, ‘Comrade’ Dybenko, we are going to tell you. The Regional Military Revolutionary Council was formed following a resolution of the Second Congress which took place at Gulai-Polya on February 12<sup>th</sup> of this year (you see that it was a long time ago – you were not even here yet). The Council was created to organise the fighting men and proceed to a voluntary mobilisation, for the region was surrounded by Whites and the insurrectionary detachments composed of the first volunteers did not suffice to hold a very extended front.

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<sup>2</sup> The nickname “Father Makhno” was given after the unification of the movement. The term “Father” (Batko) is frequently added to a name in the Ukraine, when a person is old or respected. It does not have any authoritarian significance.

“There were no Soviet troops in our region at that time. Furthermore, the population did not count very much on their intervention, considering that the defence of its region was its own duty. It is for this purpose that the Revolutionary Council was created. It was composed, following the resolution of the Second Congress, of a delegate from each district; in all, there were 32 members, each representing the districts of the departments of Ekaterinoslav and Tauride.

“We will give you later some more details of the Revolutionary Military Council. For the moment, the question arises: where did the Second Regional Congress come from? Who called it? Who authorised it? Were those who called it outlawed? And, if not, why not? The Second Regional Congress was in fact called at Gulai-Polya by an initiating group composed of five persons elected by the first Congress. This Second Congress took place on February 12<sup>th</sup>. And, to our great astonishment, the persons who called it were not outlawed. For, you see, there were not yet [in the region] any of those ‘heroes’ who dare to suppress the rights of the people, rights conquered with their own blood.

“Thus a new question arises. Where did the First Congress come from? Who called it, etc.? ‘Comrade’ Dybenko, you are still, it seems, rather new in the revolutionary movement of the Ukraine, and we shall have to tell you about its very beginnings. That is what we are going to do. And after learning these facts, you will perhaps shift your sights a little.

“The First Regional Congress took place on January 23<sup>rd</sup> of this year in the insurrectionary camp at Great Mikhailovka. It was composed of delegates from the districts situated near the Denikin front. The Soviet troops were then far away, very far away. Our region was isolated from the whole world, on the one side by the Denikinists and on the other by the Petlurists. There were only the insurrectionary detachments with Father Makhno and Stchouss at their head, and these returned blow for blow with both the enemy armies. The organisations and social institutions in the various towns and villages did not at that time always bear the same names. In one town there was a Soviet, in another a Popular Office, in a third a Revolutionary Military Staff, in a fourth a Provincial Office, and so forth. But the spirit was equally revolutionary everywhere.

“The First Congress was organised to consolidate the front and create a certain uniformity of organisation and action in the whole region. No one called it — it met spontaneously, by the wish and with the approval of the people. At this Congress, the proposal was made to rescue from the Petlurist army our brothers who had been mobilised by force. To this end, a delegation composed of five persons was elected. It was given the task of presenting itself to Father Makhno’s staff and to other staffs if need be, and of entering the army of the Ukrainian Directorate (Petlurist) in order to explain to our brothers that they had been fooled and that they should leave that army. In addition, the delegation was instructed, upon its return, to call a second, larger Congress, for the purpose of organising the whole region delivered from the counter-revolutionary bands and of creating a more powerful defence front.

“The delegates, on returning from their mission, therefore called the Second Regional Congress, outside of any ‘party’ or any ‘power’ or any ‘law’. For you, ‘Comrade’ Dybenko, and the other lovers of laws like you, were then far away! And since the heroic guides of the insurgent movement did not want power over the people who had just broken with their own hands the chains of slavery, the Congress was not proclaimed counter-revolutionary and those who called it were not declared outlaws.

“Let us return to the Regional Council. At the time of the creation of the Revolutionary Military Council in the Gulai-Polya region, the Soviet Power appeared in our area. Following the resolution passed by the Second Congress, the Regional Council did not drop its work on the

appearance of the Soviet authorities. It had to carry out the instructions of the Congress. The Council was not an organ of command but an executive. It thus continued to work to the best of its ability and has always followed the revolutionary course in its work.

“Little by little, the Soviet authorities began to erect obstacles to the activity of the Council. The Commissars and other high functionaries of the Soviet government began to treat the Council as ‘counter-revolutionary’. It was then that the members of the Council decided to call a third Regional Congress on April 10<sup>th</sup> at Gulai-Polya to determine the future conduct of the Council or to liquidate it if the Congress considered this necessary. And so the congress took place.

“They were not counter-revolutionaries who came to it, but men who were the first to raise the standard of the insurrection and the social revolution. They came to it to help co-ordinate the general fight of the region against all oppressors. The representatives of the seventy-two districts as well as those of several insurgent units participated in the Congress. All of them found that the Military Revolutionary Council was necessary; they even enlarged its executive committee and instructed the latter to carry out a voluntary and equalitarian mobilisation of the region.

“This Congress was somewhat astonished to receive ‘Comrade’ Dybenko’s telegram declaring it ‘counter-revolutionary’, inasmuch as this region was the first to raise the standard of insurrection. That is why the Congress voted a lively protest against this telegram.

“Such are the facts, which should enlighten you, ‘Comrade’ Dybenko. Think! Have you the right — you alone — to declare counter-revolutionary a population of a million workers, a population which by itself, with its own calloused hands, threw off the chains of slavery and which is now in the process of building its own life according to its own will. No! If you are really a revolutionist, you will come to help it in its fight against the oppressors and in its work of building a new, free life.

“Can there exist laws made by people calling themselves revolutionists, which permit them to outlaw a whole people who are more revolutionary than they are themselves? For the executive committee of the Council represents the whole mass of the people.

“Is it permissible, is it admissible that they should come and establish laws of violence to subjugate a people who have just overthrown all lawmakers and all laws?

“Does there exist a law according to which a ‘revolutionary’ has the right to apply the most severe penalties to a revolutionary mass, of which he calls himself the defender, simply because this mass has taken, without waiting for his permission, the good things which the revolutionist has promised them: freedom and equality?

“Should the mass of revolutionary people perhaps be silent when the ‘revolutionist’ takes away the freedom which they have just conquered?

“Do the laws of the Revolution order them to shoot a delegate because he believes he ought to carry out the mandate given him by the revolutionary mass which elected him?

“Whose interest should the revolution defend? Those of the party, or those of the people who set the revolution in motion with their blood?

“The Revolutionary Military Council of the Gulai-Polya region holds itself above all pressure, all influence of the parties; it only recognises the people who elected it. Its duty is to accomplish what the people have instructed it to do, and to create no obstacles to any Left Socialist party in the propagation of ideas. Consequently, if one day the Bolshevik idea succeeds among the workers, the Revolutionary Military Council — the ‘manifestly counter-revolutionary’ organisation — will be necessarily replaced by another organisation — ‘more revolutionary’ and Bolshevik. But meanwhile, do not interfere with us, do not try to stifle us.

“If you and your like continue, ‘Comrade’ Dybenko, to carry on the same policy as before, if you believe it good and conscientious, then carry your dirty little business to its conclusion. Declare all the organisers of the Regional Congresses called when you and your party were at Kursk outlaws. Proclaim counterrevolutionary all those who first raised the standard of the insurrection, of the Social Revolution in the Ukraine, and who thus acted without waiting for your permission, without following your programme to the letter. Also declare all those who sent their delegates to the ‘counter-revolutionary’ congresses outlaws. Finally, outlaw all the vanished comrades who, without your permission, took part in the insurrectionary movements for the emancipation of the workers. Proclaim forever illegal and counter-revolutionary any Congress called without your permission. But know that truth will end by conquering force. Despite your threats, the Council did not relinquish its duties, because it has not the right to, and because it has no right to usurp the rights of the people.

*The Revolutionary Military Council of the Gulai-Polya region.*

Signed: Tchernoknijny, president; Kogan, vice-president; Kardbet, secretary; Koval, Petrenko, Dotzenko and other members of the council.”

The reply of the Council maddened the Bolshevik authorities. It proved to them that they had to abandon all hopes of peacefully subjugating the Ukraine to their dictatorship. And from this point on the Bolsheviks planned *an armed attack on the region*.

The newspaper campaign against *Makhnovitchina* redoubled in intensity. The worst vices, the most abominable crimes were imputed to the movement. The Red troops, the Communist Youth and the Soviet population in general were systematically aroused against the “Anarcho-bandits” and the *kulaks* in revolt. As earlier in Moscow and later in the Kronstadt revolt, Trotsky personally led a violent campaign against the free region. Having arrived in the Ukraine to take the forthcoming offensive in hand, he published a series of offensive articles, the most violent of which appeared in No. 51 of his paper *On the Road* under the title *Makhnovitchina*. According to Trotsky, the insurrectionary movement was only a camouflaged revolt of the rich peasants (*kulaks*) seeking to establish power in the region. All the talk of the Makhnovists and the Anarchists about the free workers’ commune was merely a tactic of war, according to Trotsky. In reality, the Makhnovists and the Anarchists hoped to establish in the Ukraine their own “Anarchist Power” which would amount, in the last analysis, to “that of the rich peasants”.

This was the same Trotsky who, a little later, made his famous pronouncement that it was necessary, before anything else, to get rid of Makhnovism. “It would be better”, he explained, “to yield the whole Ukraine to Denikin, a frank counter-revolutionary, who could be easily compromised later by means of class propaganda, while the *Makhnovitchina* developed in the depths of the masses and aroused the masses themselves against us.”

He made this proposal at the meetings of the commanders and the military leaders. And he thus proved, on one hand, that he was perfectly aware of the popular revolutionary nature of the Makhnovist movement and, on the other, that he was not at all aware of the real character of Denikin’s movement.

At the same time, the Bolsheviks undertook a series of reconnoitering expeditions and investigations inside the region. High functionaries and rank-and-file militants — Kamenev, Anto-noff-Ovselenko and others — visited Makhno and, in an apparently friendly way, made inquiries and criticisms; sometimes, however, they went as far as insinuations and even undisguised threats.



The *putsch* of the Tsarist ex-officer Grigoriev — we will not discuss it in detail, although it presents a certain interest — which was liquidated by the Makhnovists in collaboration with the Bolsheviks, halted this campaign for a while. But it was soon resumed in all its vigour.

In May, 1919, the Bolsheviks tried to assassinate Makhno. The plot was foiled by Makhno himself, thanks to his usual strategy and also to a fortunate accident. Another accident and the promptness of his reaction permitted him to get his hands on the organisers of the plot. They were executed.

More than once, moreover, Makhno was warned by comrades employed in the Bolshevik institutions not to go to either Ekaterinoslav, Kharkov or anywhere else if he were called, since any official summons would be a trap where death would await him.

But the worst thing was that just at the moment when the “White danger” became serious, Denikin having received considerable reinforcements, precisely in the Makhnovist sector, through the arrival of a large body of Caucasians, the Bolsheviks completely stopped supplying the insurgents with munitions. All requests, all warnings, all protests were in vain. The Bolsheviks were firmly determined to blockade the Makhnovist sector in order to destroy, before anything else, the armed strength of the region. Their plan was very simple: to let Denikin wipe out the Makhnovists while preparing to throw out the former, subsequently, with their own forces.

As will be seen, they were seriously mistaken in their calculations, for they were not at all aware of Denikin’s real strength or of his long-range plans. He was raising important contingents in the Caucasus, in the Don region, and in the Kuban, with the aim of a general campaign against the Revolution. Thrown back against the sea a few months previously, by the Makhnovist insurgents, Denikin undertook with great energy and care, the reorganising, arming and preparation of his troops. Before anything else, he had to destroy the Makhnovist army for the insurgents of Gulai-Polya constituted a permanent danger to his left wing. The Bolsheviks did not know anything about all this — or rather, they did not want to know anything about it, being preoccupied with the struggle against Makhnovism.

At the end of May, 1919, having completed his preparations, Denikin started his second campaign whose scope and vigour surprised not only the Bolsheviks but even the Makhnovists. Thus, at the beginning of the month of June, the free region and the whole Ukraine was threatened on two sides at once; on the south-west by the powerful offensive of Denikin; from the north by the hostile attitude of the Bolsheviks, who, without the slightest doubt, were going to let Denikin wipe out the Makhnovists and were even going to make the job easier for him.

It was in these troubled conditions that the Revolutionary Military Council of Gulai-Polya, in view of the gravity of the situation, decided to call an extraordinary congress of peasants, workers, partisans, and Red soldiers of a number of regions in the departments of Ekaterinoslav, Kharkov, Kherson, Tauride and the Donetz basin.

This Fourth Regional Congress — dramatic in its very preparations — was called for June 15<sup>th</sup>. It was primarily to examine the general situation and means for averting the mortal danger hanging over the country both because of Denikin’s advance and the inability of the Soviet authorities to realise what they were up against.

The Congress also had to consider the problem of the rationing of food among the population of the region, and, finally, that of local self-administration in general.

Here is the text of the call to this Congress which was issued by the Revolutionary Military Council to the workers of the Ukraine:

“Convocation of the Fourth Extraordinary Congress of Workers’, Peasants’ and Artisans’ Delegates (Telegram No. 416).

“To all the Executive Committees of the districts, cantons, communes and villages of the departments of Ekaterinoslav, Taurid and neighbouring regions; to all the units of the 1<sup>st</sup> Insurrectionary Division of the Ukraine, known as Father Makhno’s; to all the troops of the Red Army located in the same region!

“In its session of May 30, the Executive Committee of the Revolutionary Military Council, after having examined the situation at the front created by the offensive of the White bands and also the situation in general – political and economic – of the Soviet power, reached the conclusion that only the working masses themselves could find a solution. That is why the Executive Committee of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Gulai-Polya region has decided to call an extraordinary Congress for June 15 at Gulai-Polya.

“Method of election: 1. The peasants and workers will send a delegate for each 3,000 toilers; 2. The insurgents and Red soldiers will delegate a representative from each unit of troops; 3. The staffs: that of Father Makhno’s division, two delegates; the brigades, one delegate from each brigade staff; 4. The executive committees of the districts – those which recognise the Soviet as a base – will send one delegate for each organisation.

“Remarks: a. the elections of delegates of workers will take place at general assemblies of the villages, cantons, factories and workshops; b. the special meetings of the Soviets or the committees of the various units will not send delegates; c. since the Revolutionary Military Council does not have the necessary means, the delegates should be provided with food and money.

“Agenda: a. report of the Executive Committee of the Revolutionary Military Council and reports of the delegates; b. the existing situation; c. the role, tasks and aims of the Gulai-Polya region; d. reorganisation of the Revolutionary Military Council of the region; e. military organisation of the region; f. the problem of food supply; g. the agrarian problem; h. financial questions; i. union of the working peasants and the workers; j. public security; k. exercise of justice in the region; l. new business.

Done at Gulai-Polya, May 31, 1919.”

As soon as this call was sent out, the Bolsheviks decided to attack the region of Gulai-Polya. While the insurgent troops were marching to their death, resisting the furious assault of Denikin’s Cossacks, the Bolshevik regiments invaded the insurgent region from the north, striking the Makhnovists in the rear. Invading the villages, the Bolsheviks seized the militants and executed them on the spot; they destroyed the free communes and other local organisations.

It was Trotsky personally who ordered the attack. Could he tolerate an independent region a few steps away from “his State”? Could he repress his anger and hatred when he heard the frank language of a population which lived freely and which, in their newspapers, spoke of him without fear or respect, as a simple State functionary; he, the great Trotsky, the superman as his acolytes in France and elsewhere still call him?

This man of limited qualities, but of immeasurable pride and malevolence, this good orator and polemicist, who had become — thanks to the miscarriage of the Revolution — the “infallible” military dictator of an immense country, this “demigod”, could he tolerate as neighbours a free people, influenced and helped by the “Anarcho-bandits” whom he considered and treated as his personal enemies?

Yet any statesman, any Socialist pontiff, even if less pretentious and spiteful, would have acted as he did. We must not forget that he worked in perfect agreement with Lenin.

Unlimited pride and seething rage show in every line of the many orders that he issued against the Makhnovitchina. Here, first of all, is his famous Order No. 1824, which he issued in response to the call of the Revolutionary Military Council of Gulai-Polya.

“Order No. 1824 of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic. Kharkov, June 4, 1919.

“To all Military Commissars. To all the Executive Commissars. To all the Executive Committees of the districts of Alexandrovsk, Mariupol, Berdiansk, Bakhmut, Pavlograd and Kherson.

“The Executive Committee of Gulai-Polya, with the collaboration of the staff of Makhno’s brigade, is trying to call, for the 15<sup>th</sup> of this month, a congress of Soviets, and insurgents of the districts of Alexandrovsk, Mariupol, Bakhmut, Berdiansk, Melitopol and Pavlograd. This Congress is squarely directed against the Soviet Power in the Ukraine, and against the organisation of the southern front where Makhno’s brigade is stationed.

“This Congress can have no result other than the exciting of some new, disgraceful revolt like that of Grigoriev, and the opening of the front to the Whites, before whom Makhno’s brigade can only retreat incessantly, on account of the incompetence, criminal designs and treason of its leaders.

1. By the present order, this Congress is forbidden. In no case shall it take place.
2. All the peasant and working-class population shall be warned, orally and in writing, that participation in the said Congress shall be considered an act of high treason against the Soviet Republic and the front.
3. All the delegates to the said Congress shall be arrested immediately and brought before the Revolutionary Military Tribunal of the 14<sup>th</sup> (formerly 2<sup>nd</sup>) Army of the Ukraine.
4. The persons who spread the call of Makhno and the executive committee of Gulai-Polya shall likewise be arrested.
5. The present order shall have the force of law as soon as it is telegraphed. It should be widely diffused, displayed in all public places and sent to the representatives of the Soviet authorities, to the commanders and commissars of the military units.

Signed: Trotsky, President of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic; Vatzetis, Commander in Chief; Araloff, member of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic; Kochkareff, Military Commissar of the Kharkov region.”

“This document is truly classic,” says Archinov. “Whoever studies the Russian Revolution should learn it by heart. It represents such a crying usurpation of the rights of the workers that it is pointless to insist further on this subject.”

“*Can there exist laws made by people calling themselves revolutionists, which permit them to outlaw a whole people who are more revolutionary than they are themselves?*” Such was one of the questions asked by the revolutionary peasants, two months previously, in their famous reply to Dybenko. Article 2 of Trotsky’s Order replies clearly that such laws can exist and that Order No. 1824 is the proof of it.

“*Does there exist a law*” asked the revolutionists of Gulai-Polya in the same document, “*according to which a ‘revolutionist’ has the right to impose the most severe penalties on the revolutionary mass of which he calls himself the defender, only because this mass has taken, without waiting for his permission, the good things that this revolutionist has promised them: Freedom and Equality?*” The same article 2 replies in the affirmative. The entire peasant and labouring population are declared guilty of high treason if they dare to participate in their own free congress.

“*Do the laws of the Revolution order the shooting of a delegate because he believes he ought to carry out the mandate given him by the revolutionary mass who elected him?*” Trotsky’s order (Articles 3 and 4) declares that not only delegates carrying out their mandates, but even those who have not yet begun to carry them out, should be arrested and “brought before the Revolutionary Military Tribunal,” which we must emphasise was tantamount to a death sentence. Several young revolutionary peasants, Kostin, Polonin, Dobrolubov and others were brought before the military tribunal and shot, on the charge of having *discussed* the call of the Revolutionary Military Council of Gulai-Polya.

It is said that in posing their questions to Dybenko, the insurgents foresaw Trotsky’s order No. 1824. Even if this were not the case, they showed great perspicacity in framing them.

Trotsky considered Makhno personally responsible for all that happened at Gulai-Poiya. He did not even take the trouble to find out that Congress was called neither by the “stall of Makhno’s brigade” nor the executive committee of Gulai-Polya, but by an organ perfectly independent of the two: the Revolutionary Military Council of the region.

It is significant that in this order Trotsky already harped on the “treachery of the Makhnovist leaders” whom he accused of “retreating incessantly before the Whites.” He forgot to add that he himself had ordered on the very eve of Denikin’s advance that no more munitions be supplied to Makhno’s brigade. This was a tactic. It was also a signal. A few days later, Trotsky and the whole Communist press expatiated on the pretended “opening of the front” to Denikin’s troops. And Order No. 1824 was followed by numerous others in which Trotsky commanded the army and the Red authorities to destroy Makhnovism by every method and at its very source. Moreover, he gave secret orders to capture at any cost not only Makhno and the members of his staff, but even the peaceful militants who were only carrying on purely educational activity in the movement. The instructions were to bring them all before the Council of War and execute them.

Trotsky knew that the front against Denikin had been formed only because of the efforts and sacrifices of the insurgent peasants themselves. This front arose at a particularly stirring moment of their revolt — when the region was free from all forms of authority. It was established in the south-east, as the sentinel for the freedom they had won. For more than six months, the revolutionary insurgents maintained an unbreakable barrier to the most vigorous assaults of the monarchist counter-revolution. They sacrificed several thousand men there. They placed all their resources at the disposal of the cause and prepared to defend their freedom to the end.

Yes, Trotsky knew all that. But he needed a formal justification for his campaign against the revolutionary people of the Ukraine. And it was with monstrous cynicism, with unimaginable insolence and hypocrisy that he let this front collapse, depriving it of arms and ammunition, taking away all means of organisation, so as to be able to accuse the insurgents of having betrayed the revolution and opened the way for Denikin's troops.<sup>3</sup>

The Fourth Regional Congress, projected for June 15<sup>th</sup>, could not take place. Well before that, the Bolsheviks and the Denikinists were already active in the region.

In the areas where they were already established, or in neighbouring districts which they invaded, the Bolsheviks set about carrying out Trotsky's orders. At Alexandrovsk, for instance, all the workers' meetings planned for the purpose of discussing the call of the Council and the agenda of the Congress were forbidden under pain of death. Those which were organised in ignorance of the order were dispersed by armed force. In other cities and towns, the Bolsheviks acted in the same way. As for the peasants in the villages, they were treated with still less ceremony; in many places militants, and even peasants "suspected of acting in favour of the insurgents and the Congress" were seized and executed after a semblance of a trial. Many peasants carrying the call were arrested, "tried" and shot, before they could even find out about Order No. 1824.

Neither Makhno himself nor his staff received any communication about this order. The Bolsheviks wanted to avoid alarming them too soon, in the hope of catching them by surprise, and it was only by chance that they heard of the order, three days after its publication. Makhno reacted immediately. He sent a telegram to the Bolshevik authorities in which he declared that he wanted, by reason of the situation that existed, to give up his post as commander. They sent him no answer.

We have now reached the first of a series of exceptionally dramatic turns in the Makhnovist epic, a turn which subjected Makhno himself, the commanders of the various units of his army, the insurgents as a whole, and even the whole population of the free region, to a very severe test. If this situation was resolved to everybody's credit, it was largely due to the exceptional qualities, the extreme valour and the remarkable self-discipline of all who participated in it.

Some days before the publication of Trotsky's order No. 1824, Makhno discovered that the Bolsheviks had weakened the front in the Grichino sector and that they were thus offering Denikin's troops free access by the north-east flank into the Gulai-Polya region. He informed the staff and the Council directly.

In fact, hordes of Cossacks had over-run the region, not through the Insurrectionary front, but to its left, where the Red troops were stationed. The situation became tragic. The Makhnovist army, which held the front on the Mariupol-Kuteinikovo-Taganrog line, was bypassed by Denikin's troops which, in enormous masses, invaded the very heart of the region.

Since the month of April, the peasants of the whole country had vainly sent great numbers of volunteers to Gulai-Polya. There was nothing with which to arm them, since, as we have seen, the Bolsheviks, contrary to their promises and the agreement they concluded, had cut off all supplies to the insurgents and thus sabotaged the defence of the region. With rage in their hearts, the

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<sup>3</sup> Later, in Spain (1936-9) the Communists employed the same tactics. A case is known to me in all its details. Below Teruel, a Communist brigade held the front against Franco, alongside an Anarchist brigade of about 1,500 men. To permit the destruction of the latter, the Communists withdrew secretly and voluntarily during the night. The next morning, the Fascists advanced into the breach and encircled the Anarchist brigade. Of the 1,500 men, only 500 were able to escape, beating a passage through with grenades and revolvers. The other 1,000 fighters were massacred. The next day the Communists accused the Anarchists of treachery and of opening the front to Franco!

Makhnovist staff were obliged to send the volunteers home. The advance of the Denikinists was the inevitable result.

“In a single day,” Archinov records, “the peasants of Gulai-Polya formed a regiment to try and save their village. They armed themselves with axes, picks, old carbines, shot guns, and set out to meet the Whites, seeking to dampen their spirits. About 15 kilometres from Gulai-Polya, near the village of Sviatodukhova, they encountered a considerable number of Don and Kuban Cossacks. The Gulai-Polyans engaged in a heroic and murderous battle with them, and were nearly all killed, including their commander, B. Veretelnikoff, a worker from the Putilov Works in Petrograd, who had originally come from Gulai-Polya. Then a regular avalanche of Cossacks fell upon Gulai-Polya, and occupied it on June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1919. Makhno, with his staff and a detachment of troops, with only one battery, retreated to the railway station, situated about seven kilometres from the village, but in the evening he was forced to abandon the station as well. Having regrouped during the night all the forces he could still muster, Makhno vigorously counter-attacked next morning, and succeeded in dislodging the enemy from Gulai-Polya. But he only remained master of the village a short while, and Denikinist reserves coming to the rescue of their forces, obliged him to abandon it completely.”

Although in this way they had opened the front to the Whites and given confidential orders directed against the Makhnovists, the Bolsheviks continued to feign friendship towards the insurgents, as though nothing in the situation had changed. This was a manoeuvre to capture the guides of the movement, and especially Makhno. On June 7<sup>th</sup>, two days after sending the local authorities the telegram containing Order No. 1824, the Bolshevik supreme commander sent Makhno an armoured train, bade him resist “to the end”, and promised him other reinforcements. In fact, two days later, several detachments of Red Army troops arrived at the station of Gaichur, near Tchaplino, twenty kilometres from Gulai-Polya.

The commander-in-chief, Voroshilov (the future People’s Commissar for War), the Commissar of the Armies, Mejlauk, and other high Communist functionaries arrived with these detachments. Close contact was established, in appearance, between the Red command and that of the insurgents. A kind of joint staff was created, and Mejlauk and Voroshilov invited Makhno to move on to their armoured train, in order, they said, to direct operations jointly.

All this was only a cynical comedy. At that very moment Voroshilov had in his pocket an order signed by Trotsky, commanding him to capture Makhno and all the other responsible leaders of the movement, to disarm the insurgent troops and to shoot without quarter all those who attempted the least resistance. Voroshilov was only awaiting a propitious moment to carry out this order.

Faithful friends warned Makhno in time of the danger which he was running personally and which threatened his whole army and the revolutionary movement. His situation became increasingly difficult. On the one hand, he wanted to avert at all costs the bloody struggle [between the Makhnovists and the Bolsheviks] which it appeared would develop in the face of the enemy. But, on the other hand, he could not sacrifice without a struggle his comrades, his armed forces and his whole cause.

He found a satisfactory solution. Weighing everything, he came to two important decisions. 1. He resolved to abandon, for the moment, the post of commander of the Insurrectionary Army. 2.

He decided to ask all the units of his army to remain where they were and accept — temporarily — the Red command, while they waited for the propitious moment to resume the struggle for emancipation.

Two days later, with extraordinary coolness and skill, he carried out this double manoeuvre. He quietly left Voroshilov and Mejlauk, and declared to his staff that, for the time being, his work as a simple fighter in the ranks would be more useful. To the Soviet High Command he sent the following statement:

“To the Staff of the 14<sup>th</sup> Army, Voroshilov to Trotsky, President of the Revolutionary Military Council, Kharkov, to Lenin and Kemenev, Moscow.

“As a result of Order No. 1824 of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic, I sent the staff of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, and Trotsky, a telegram requesting that I be relieved of the post I now occupy. I repeat my request. Here are the reasons which I believe should justify it. Although I have made war, with the insurgents, against the White bands of Denikin, preaching nothing to the people other than the love of freedom and free action, the whole official Soviet press, as well as that of the Communist-Bolshevik Party, has spread rumours about me which are unworthy of a revolutionist. They wish to make me seem a bandit, an accomplice of Grigoriev, a conspirator against the Soviet Republic for the purpose of re-establishing capitalism. Thus, in an article entitled Makhnovism (On the Road, No. 51), Trotsky poses the question: ‘Against whom did the Makhnovist insurgents arise?’ and all through his article he occupies himself with demonstrating that Makhnovism is nothing but a battle front against the power of the Soviets. He does not say a word about the real front against the Whites, more than a hundred kilometres long, where the insurgents have been suffering enormous losses for the last six months.

“Order No. 1824 calls me ‘a conspirator against the Soviet Republic’ and the ‘organiser of a rebellion like Grigoriev.’ I consider it an inviolable right of the workers and peasants — a right conquered by the Revolution — to call Congresses on their own account to discuss their affairs. That is why the prohibition by the central authorities of the calling of such Congresses, and the declaration proclaiming them illegal (Order 1824) represent a direct and insolent violation of the rights of the working masses.

“I understand perfectly the attitude of the central authorities with regard to me. I am absolutely convinced that these authorities consider the Insurrectionary movement incompatible with their Statist activity. At the same time, they believe that this movement is closely tied to me personally and they honour me with all the resentment and hatred they feel for the whole Insurrectionary movement. Nothing could demonstrate this better than the article by Trotsky mentioned above, in which, deliberately accumulating lies and slanders, he gives evidence of personal animosity towards me.

“This hostile attitude — which now becomes aggressive — of the central authorities towards the Insurrectionary movement leads unavoidably to the creation of a special internal front, on both sides of which are the working masses who have faith in the Revolution. I consider this eventuality an immense, unpardonable crime against the workers, and I believe it my duty to do what I can to avert it.

“The most effective means of preventing the central authorities from committing this crime is, in my opinion, evident. I must leave the post I occupy. I presume that, having done this, I and the revolutionary insurgents will cease to be suspected of engaging in anti-Soviet conspiracies by the central authorities, and the latter will come to consider the insurrection in the Ukraine an important phenomenon, a living, active manifestation of the social revolution of the masses, and not a hostile movement with which they can only have, as they have shown up to now, relations of mistrust and deception going as far as unworthily bargaining for every case of munitions and even sometimes sabotaging supplies, which has cost the insurgents innumerable losses in men and territory won by the Revolution, losses which would easily have been avoided if the central authorities had adopted another attitude.

“I request that someone come to take over my post.

Gaichur Station, June 9<sup>th</sup>, 1919. Signed: Batko Makhno.”

On receipt of Makhno’s statement, the Bolsheviks, supposing him still at Gaichur, sent men with orders not to take over his post, but to seize him. At the same moment, they treacherously captured the chief of staff of the Insurrectionary Army, Oseroff, the staff members Mikhaleff-Pavlenko and Burbyga, and several members of the Revolutionary Military Council. All these men were put to death on the spot. This was the signal for many other executions of Makhnovists who had fallen into the hands of the Bolsheviks.

But Makhno himself escaped. Having adroitly disengaged himself from the tentacles with which the Bolsheviks enveloped Gaichur, he arrived unexpectedly among his troops at Alexandrovsk. He knew from the friends who had warned him of his predicament that the Bolsheviks, believing him to be at Gaichur, had named his successor at Alexandrovsk.

There, without losing an instant, he officially turned over the affairs of the division and his command to this new chief, who, having just been assigned, had not yet received any orders concerning Makhno personally. “He did this,” says Archinov, “because he desired to leave his post openly and honestly, so that the Bolsheviks could have no pretext for accusing him of anything with regard to the affairs of the division he commanded. He wished to play prudently.”

After this transfer of command, he addressed to the Insurrectionary Army an explanatory proclamation in which he described the new situation. He declared that he had to leave his post of commander *for the time being*, and called on the insurgents to fight with the same energy against Denikin’s troops, without being disturbed by the fact that they would temporarily be under the command of the Bolshevik staff.

The insurgents understood. Nearly all their units remained where they were, declaring that they recognised the Red commander and accepted their incorporation into the Bolshevik army.

The Bolsheviks believed they had triumphed. But they did not know that at the same time — in agreement with Makhno — several of the more devoted regimental commanders of the insurgents had met secretly and taken a solemn oath to wait for the propitious moment to return again under Makhno’s command, so long as this act did not put the external front in danger. No word of this decision leaked out

After doing all this, Makhno, accompanied by a small detachment of cavalry, disappeared. Meanwhile the insurgent regiments, transformed into Red units and remaining under their regular commanders — Kalachnikoff, Kurilenko, Budanoff, Klein, Dermendji and others — continued to hold off Denikin’s troops, preventing them from taking Alexandrovsk and Ekaterinoslav.



As we have said, the Bolshevik leaders were not aware of the true proportions of Denikin's undertaking. Only a few days before the fall of Ekaterinoslav and Kharkov, Trotsky declared that Denikin did not represent a serious threat, and that the Ukraine was not at all in danger. He had to change his views the next day, when he realised that Kharkov was seriously threatened. It was high time [that he should come to his senses]. Ekaterinoslav succumbed at the end of June, and Kharkov fell into Denikin's hands two weeks later.

The Bolshevik authorities did not try to regain the offensive or even to organise a defence; they were only concerned with evacuating the Ukraine. Nearly all the Red troops were involved in this operation; they retreated to the north, taking with them as many men and as much rolling stock as possible. Clearly, they were abandoning the Ukraine to its fate; they were delivering it whole to the reactionaries.

It was now that Makhno considered that the opportune moment had come to regain the initiative in the struggle and to act again as guide to an independent revolutionary force. This time, he was obliged to act against both Denikin and the Bolsheviks.

The insurgent detachments who had remained provisionally under Bolshevik command received the instruction they had been patiently awaiting, to remove their Bolshevik superiors, leave the Red Army, and regroup themselves under Makhno's command. Yet even before they could carry out this instruction and rejoin their guide, a new insurrectionary army had formed around Makhno.

The new situation recalled the events following the Austro-German invasion. As we have said, the attitude of the Denikinists and their masters, the former lords who returned with the army, was insolent and brutal in the extreme towards the working population. As soon as they were re-established, these gentlemen set about restoring the feudal absolutist regime. A pitiless "White terror" of terrible reprisals descended on the villages and cities of the Ukraine.

The reply was not long in coming. In great numbers the peasants fled from the reaction and sought out Makhno, whom they naturally considered the man capable of taking up the struggle against the new oppressors.

In less than two weeks, a new army was formed under his direction. The arms they possessed were inadequate, but at this moment the "basic" regiments which had left the Red Army began to arrive. They appeared one after another, not only full of vigour, enthusiasm and fighting spirit, but also well supplied with arms and ammunition. For in leaving the Red Army they had carried off all the arms they could get hold of. The retreating Bolshevik command, which was taken unawares and feared mutiny among its own troops could not oppose this audacious act. [In addition to the returning Anarchist battalions], several Red regiments made common cause with the Makhnovists and enlarged the ranks of the Insurrectionary Army.

With these new troops, Makhno first attempted to halt [the advance of] Denikin's divisions. He retreated step by step, seeking to orient himself in his new surroundings and to take advantage of the first favourable opportunity to resume the offensive. But the Denikinists were on their guard. They had not forgotten the losses and defeats which the Makhnovists had caused them during the preceding winter. Their command assigned a whole army corps — several regiments of cavalry, infantry and artillery — to fight the insurgents.

While retreating slowly before the superior forces of the enemy, the Insurrectionary Army gradually took on a strange appearance. Irritated by the revival of stubborn resistance on the part of the Makhnovists — a resistance that impeded and seriously delayed his advance — Denikin not only made war on the army as such, but also on the whole peasant population. In addition to the

usual persecutions and beatings, the villages he occupied were burnt and wrecked. The greater part of the peasants' dwellings were looted and then destroyed. Hundreds of peasants were shot. The women were maltreated, and nearly all the Jewish women, who were fairly numerous in the Ukrainian villages, were raped, notably at Gulai-Polya.

This kind of warfare obliged the inhabitants of the villages threatened by the approach of the Denikinists to abandon their hearths and flee. Thus the Makhnovist army was joined and followed in its retreat by thousands of peasant families in flight from their homes with their livestock and belongings. It was a veritable migration. An enormous mass of men, women and children trailed after the army in its slow retreat towards the west, a retreat which gradually extended over hundreds of kilometres.

Arriving at Makhno's army at the beginning of its withdrawal, I saw this picturesque "kingdom on wheels", as it was later called, and followed its fantastic movements. The summer of 1919 was exceptionally dry in the Ukraine. Over the dusty roads and the neighbouring fields this human sea moved slowly, with thousands of cattle, with wagons of every kind, with its own food supply, administration and health service. It became a virtual supply-train for the army.

But the army did not allow its movements to be influenced by this mass of fugitives. It kept strictly to its course, except for the units which went off to protect the main body; the cavalry, in particular, were almost always away fighting.

The infantry, when it was not fighting, led the march of the army. [As I have already said], it was carried in tatchankas. Each of these vehicles, which were drawn by two horses, carried the driver on the front seat and two soldiers behind them. In some sections a machine gun was installed on the seat between them. The artillery brought up the rear. A huge black flag floated over the first carriage. The slogans "Liberty or Death" and "The Land to the Peasants, the Factories to the Workers" were embroidered in silver on its two sides.

Despite the circumstances under which they lived, despite the constant danger and the almost daily combats, all these people were full of spirit and courage. Each of them felt responsible for all, and all for each. Every now and then a popular or a revolutionary song would ring out from some part of the line, and soon it would be taken up by thousands of voices. Arriving at a village, this mass of fugitives would camp until the order came to take the road again. Then, without waiting, they would resume the march, always towards the west, always to the echo of battles that took place all around them.

In the course of this retreat, which lasted for four months, thousands of these refugees left the army, set out on their own and dispersed over the entire Ukraine. Most of them lost their homes and possessions for ever. Some, indeed, managed to establish new homes, but many lost their lives, through exhaustion, sickness, or falling into the hands of the Whites.

At first the insurgent army tried to dig in on the Dnieper near the city of Alexandrovsk. For some time it remained master of the famous Kitchkass bridge (one of the most important in Russia). But it was soon overwhelmed by the greatly superior numbers of the enemy, and had to abandon the river, retreating first towards Dolinskaia, and later towards the city of Elizabethgrad.

Meanwhile, the few Red troops who remained here and there in the Ukraine and in the Crimea were completely demoralised by the attitude of the Bolshevik command, and lost all military significance. They considered the flight of the Communist authorities from the Ukraine to be a defection from the revolutionary cause. For these men, who were stagnating in inactivity and doubt, Makhno was the only revolutionary hope in the country. Finally, in July, nearly all the Red regiments in the Crimea mutinied, deposed their commanders and set out to join Makhno's

army. This action was deliberately prepared and carried out by Makhno-vists who had remained provisionally in the ranks of the Red army and now departed, taking with them nearly all the Bolshevik troops. By forced march, carrying their former commanders with them as prisoners, and bearing a large quantity of arms and ammunition, these numerous and fresh regiments, who were well organised and full of enthusiasm after their revolt, advanced in search of Makhno. Their defection was a blow to the Bolsheviks, for it reduced to almost nothing their forces in the Ukraine.

The meeting took place at the beginning of August, at Dobrovelitchkovka, an important village in the department of Kherson. Makhno's army, as a result of this action, became powerful again. From now on it was possible to envisage military action on a large scale. It was even possible to look towards victory.

Soon afterwards Makhno halted his retreat. He did so primarily in order to regroup his forces, for which volunteers were coming from all sides. Having set pickets all around the occupied territory, which lay between Pomostchnaia, Elizabethgrad and Voznessensk — he proceeded to a complete reorganisation of his army: It now numbered about 20,000 combatants. They were divided into four brigades of infantry and cavalry, a division of artillery and a regiment of machine-guns.

The cavalry, which was commanded by Stchuss, numbered between two and three thousand sabres. The machine-gun regiment had about five hundred guns. The artillery was adequate. A squadron of 150 to 200 horsemen was formed into a special unit which would always accompany Makhno in his travels, his raids and various other military actions.

Once the regrouping was completed, Makhno began a vigorous offensive against Denikin's troops. The fighting was extremely fierce, and the Denikinist army was repeatedly thrown back many kilometres to the east. But very soon the Makhnovists began to run out of ammunition, so that two attacks out of three were only to capture supplies. Moreover, Denikin sent great numbers of fresh reserves into battle. He wanted to wipe out the Insurrectionary Army at all costs, so as to be able to march on Moscow in complete security. As a further complication of their misfortunes, the Makhnovists had to face at the same time some Bolshevik troops who were coming up from Odessa and the Crimea, forcing a passage across the Ukraine to the north.

Finally the situation became untenable and Makhno was forced to abandon the Pomostchnaia-Elizabethgrad-Voznessensk region and retreat towards the west. Thus began his famous withdrawal over a line of more than six hundred kilometres, into the territory of the department of Kiev, a withdrawal which lasted almost two months, from August to the end of September, 1919.

Denikin's manifest plan was to encircle the Makhnovist army and to annihilate it. He sent against it several of his best regiments, some of which were composed entirely of young officers who particularly hated the "mujik rabble". Among them, the 1<sup>st</sup> Simferopol and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Labinsky regiments had distinguished themselves everywhere by their bravery, their combativeness and their furious energy.

Fierce fighting, of an unprecedented violence, took place almost every day; in fact, it was an uninterrupted battle which lasted for two months, and in which both sides fought exceptionally hard.

I was with Makhno's army during this whole retreat (five comrades, including Archinov and myself, constituting the Commission for Propaganda and Education) and I recall this long series of days as if it were an interminable nightmare.

Those summer nights, which only lasted a few hours, hardly allowing a brief rest to the men and horses, vanishing suddenly with the first glimmer of daylight, the rattle of machine guns, the explosion of shells and the gallop of horses! It was the Denikinists who, attacking from all sides, sought once again to enclose the insurgents in a vice of iron and fire.

Every day they began this manoeuvre again, pressing Makhno's troops always closer together, drawing their circle always tighter, leaving the insurgents less and less space in which to move.

Every day savage combats, going as far as atrocious hand-to-hand fighting, took place on the front and on the flanks of the Makhnovist army, and did not end until nightfall. And every night the army found itself forced to retreat, barely escaping through an increasingly narrow passage, so as not to let the Denikinist vice close on it completely. And at sunrise, it had once more to face the implacable enemy which again sought to encircle it.

The insurgents lacked clothing, shoes and sometimes also food. Through torrid heat, under a leaden sky, and a hail of bullets and shells, they went further and further away from their own country toward an unknown destination and fate.

At the end of the month of August, Denikin's army corps, which already weighed so heavily on Makhno, was reinforced by new troops from near Odessa and Voznessensk, Denikin, who with the bulk of his forces was already marching on Orel (not far from Moscow), driving back the Red Army, wanted to get rid of the Makhnovists as quickly as possible. For as long as they existed in his rear, he could not feel secure.

The situation got worse and worse every day. But Makhno did not despair. For the moment, he imperturbably continued his skilful retreat. And the fighting men, animated by their ideal, conscious of their task, knowing that they fought for their own cause, every day accomplished veritable miracles of courage and resistance.

It was finally decided to abandon the vicinity of the railroads by which the retreat had up to then been carried out. [Before doing this the insurgents] blew up the armoured trains recently sent to the Denikinists, one of which, the more powerful, was the famous "Invincible".

The retreat continued by country roads, from village to village, and became more and more difficult for the panting, exhausted fugitives. Yet not for an instant did the insurgents lose courage. They all retained hope of triumphing over the enemy. They all valiantly endured the rigours of the situation. With inexhaustible patience, their will stretched to the limit, they rallied under the continued and terrible fire of the enemy around their beloved guide and comrade, [Makhno].

And as for him, on his feet day and night, scarcely interrupting his main activity by a few hours sleep, covered with dust and sweat, but indefatigable, constantly surveying the front, keeping an eye on everything, encouraging the fighters, and often throwing himself furiously into the battle, he thought only of the moment when, taking advantage of some mistake on the enemy's part, he could strike a decisive blow against them.

He watched with a piercing eye all the movements, all the acts of the Denikinists. He incessantly sent out reconnaissance patrols in every direction. Exact reports were brought to him at every hour. For he knew only too well that the slightest error of command on his part could be fatal to the entire army and hence to his whole cause. He also knew that the more Denikin's troops advanced to the north, the more vulnerable they became in their rear, by reason of the great extension of the front. He took stock of this circumstance and awaited his hour.

Towards mid-September the Insurrectionary Army reached the city of Uman in the department of Kiev. They found it in the hands of the Petlurists. Petlura was in a state of war with Denikin. In

his march on Moscow, the latter was neglecting the western Ukraine, expecting to take it easily after the defeat of the Bolsheviks.

What would be the attitude of the Petlurists towards the Makhnovists? And how should the latter act? Should they attack the Petlurists? Should they ask for free passage across their territory and through the city, without which it was impossible to continue the retreat? Should they propose that they fight the Denikinists side by side with the Makhnovists? Or should they simply propose that the Petlurists remain neutral and take the best possible advantage of the situation later on? Everything considered, the last solution seemed the most sensible.

We should mention that the Insurrectionary Army had about 8,000 wounded. In the circumstances these men were deprived of all medical aid. Moreover, they comprised an enormous train in the rear of the army, which seriously hindered its movements and its military operations. The staff intended to ask the Uman authorities to take at least the most seriously wounded into the city hospitals for treatment.

By a fortunate coincidence, at the very moment when these problems were being discussed in the insurgent camp, a Petlurist delegation arrived and declared that, since they were at war with Denikin, they desired to avoid the formation of a new front by opening hostilities with the Makhnovists. This corresponded perfectly with the latter's desires, and a pact was concluded between the two parties, according to which they agreed to maintain a strict military neutrality towards each other. Furthermore, the Petlurists consented to take the wounded Makhnovists into their hospitals.

The pact stipulated that this strictly military neutrality, which applied only to the immediate situation, did not impose on either party any political or ideological restrictions. Since I was a participant in the parleys, I expressly emphasise the importance of this clause. The Makhnovists knew that the mass of the Petlurists had a great deal of sympathy for them and would listen to their propaganda. It was therefore a question of having the freedom to carry it on without interference, and the Makhnovists published a pamphlet entitled *Who is Petlura?*, in which the latter was unmasked as a defender of the privileged classes and an enemy of the workers.

As for the Petlurist authorities, while they were resolute enemies of the Makhnovists, they had many reasons for preserving an attitude of extreme prudence towards them. Nevertheless, the insurgents knew that the Petlurist "neutrality" was purely superficial, and that the latter might very well unite secretly with the Denikinists to wipe out the Makhnovists. It was, however, a question of the Insurrectionary Army gaining a few days' respite, of getting rid of their wounded, of averting an immediate attack from the rear, in order not to be caught unawares in a trap. All these goals were attained. But, on the other hand, the suspicions of the Makhnovists soon received striking confirmation.

According to the "neutrality" pact, the Insurrectionary Army had the right to occupy a territory of ten square kilometres near the village of Tekutchka in the vicinity of Uman. Petlura's forces were dispersed to the north and west, Denikin's to the east and south, around Golta. But a few days after the conclusion of the pact the Makhnovists were informed by sympathisers that parleys were being held between the Petlurists and the Denikinists to work out a plan for co-operating to surround and exterminate the Insurrectionary Army. And indeed, a few days later, on the night of September 24<sup>th</sup>, the Makhnovist scouts reported that four or five Denikinist regiments were in their rear in the west. They could only have got there by passing through the territory occupied by the Petlurists, with the help or at least the acquiescence of the latter. On the evening of September 25<sup>th</sup>, the Makhnovists were completely surrounded by Denikin's troops. The bulk of his forces

remained concentrated to the east, but a strong barrier was established behind the Makhnovists\* and the city of Uman was in the hands of the Denikinists, who were already seeking out and killing the wounded who had been distributed among the hospitals and in private homes.

An order issued by the Denikinist command, which found its way to the Makhnovist staff, read as follows: "Makhno's bands are surrounded. They are completely demoralised, disorganised, starving and without ammunition. I order that they be attacked and destroyed within three days." It bore the signature of General Slastchoff, commander-in-chief of the Denikinist forces in the Ukraine (he later went over to the Bolsheviks).

All retreat was now impossible for the insurgent troops, and the moment for the decisive battle had come. The fate of the whole Insurrectionary Army, the whole movement, the whole cause depended on this supreme battle.

And at this moment Makhno declared with the greatest simplicity that the retreat up to that day had only been a forced strategy, that the real war was about to begin, not later than the next day, September 26<sup>th</sup>. He made all the necessary preparations for this last fight, and immediately commenced his first manoeuvres.

On the evening of September 25<sup>th</sup>, the Makhnovists, who up to then had been marching west, suddenly changed direction and began moving east, towards the bulk of the Denikinist army. The first encounter occurred late in the evening, near the village of Krutenkoi. The Makhnovist First Brigade attacked Denikin's advance guard there, the latter retreated to take up better positions and draw the enemy after them towards the bulk of the army. But the Makhnovists did not pursue them.

As Makhno had hoped, this manoeuvre fooled the enemy, who considered the attack a reconnaissance or a diversion, and gained the impression that the march of the insurgents still lay towards the west. He made ready to get behind them at Uman and to wipe them out in the trap that had been prepared. He did not for an instant expect that the Insurrectionary Army would dare to attack his main force, and he did not prepare for the possibility of a frontal attack.

But this was precisely Makhno's plan. His reasoning was very simple. To break through the enemy lines represented the only chance of safety for the army, and it was therefore necessary to try it, to throw themselves against Denikin's forces to the east, in the hope of wiping them out. The manoeuvre of the day before had been merely to distract the enemy.

In the middle of the night of September 26<sup>th</sup>, all the Makhnovist forces started marching east. The main enemy forces were concentrated near the village of Peregonovska, which was occupied by the Makhnovists. (Here is Peter Archinov's description of the battle which now took place):

"The fighting started between 3 and 4 a.m. It kept mounting in intensity, and reached its peak by 8 a.m., in a regular hurricane of machine-gun fire on both sides. Makhno himself, with his cavalry escort, had disappeared at nightfall, seeking to turn the enemy's flank. During the whole battle that ensued there was no further news of him.

"By 9 o'clock the outnumbered and exhausted Makhnovists began to lose ground. Already they were fighting on the outskirts of the village, and from all sides the enemy reinforcements that were coming up brought new bursts of fire to bear upon them. They retreated slowly, and the staff of the Insurrectionary Army, as well as everyone in the village who could handle a carbine, armed themselves and joined in the fighting.

“This was the critical moment. It seemed that the battle, and with it the whole cause of the insurgents, was lost. The order was given for everyone, even the women, to be ready to fire on the enemy in the village streets. All prepared for the supreme hour of the battle and of their lives.

“But suddenly the machine-gun fire of the enemy, and their frantic cheers, began to grow weaker and then to recede into the distance. The defenders of the village realised that the enemy was retreating and that the battle was now taking place some distance away. It was Makhno who, appearing unexpectedly, at the very moment when his troops were driven back and were preparing to fight in the streets of Peregonovska, had decided the fate of the battle. Covered with dust and fatigued from his exertions, he reached the enemy flank through a deep ravine. Without a cry, but with a burning resolve fixed on his features, he threw himself on the Denikinists at full gallop, followed by his escort, and broke into their ranks.

“All exhaustion, all discouragement, disappeared like magic from the Makhnovists. ‘Batko is here! Batko is playing with his sabre!’ could be heard everywhere. And with redoubled energy they all pushed forward, following their beloved guide who seemed doomed to death. A hand-to-hand combat of incredible ferocity, a ‘hacking’, as the Makhnovists called it, followed.

“However valorous the 1<sup>st</sup> Officers’ Regiment of Simferopol may have been, they were thrown into retreat, at first slowly and in an orderly manner, trying to halt the impetus of the Makhnovists, and then in ever greater precipitation and disorder. They ended by fleeing for their lives. The other regiments, seized by panic, followed them, and finally all of Denikin’s troops were routed, leaving their arms and trying to save themselves by swimming the River Siniukha, about fifteen kilometres from Peregonovska. They still hoped to be able to dig in on the opposite bank.

“But Makhno hastened to take advantage of the situation, which he understood perfectly. He sent his cavalry and artillery at full speed in pursuit of the retreating enemy, and himself went at the head of the best mounted regiment by a short cut which would enable him to catch the fugitives from behind. It was a trip of about twelve or fifteen kilometres.

“At the very moment when Denikin’s troops reached the river, they were overtaken by the Makhnovist cavalry, and hundreds of them perished there. Most of them, however, had time to cross to the other bank, but there Makhno himself was awaiting them. The Denikinist staff, and a reserve regiment which was with it, were surprised and taken prisoner. Many officers hanged themselves with their leather belts from

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<sup>4</sup> At nightfall I myself went slowly on horseback and a little to the rear of my comrades over this Calvary of the Denikinist regiments. I shall never forget the fantastic spectacle of those hundreds of human bodies, savagely cut down in their prime, lying under the starry sky, isolated or piled in heaps along the road, and in infinitely strange and varied positions, undressed to their underwear or even naked, covered with dust and blood, but themselves bloodless and greenish in the starlight. Many of them lacked arms, others were horribly mutilated, some had no heads, some were split into two almost separate halves by terrible sabre blows. From time to time, I got down from my horse, bent anxiously over these mute and immobile bodies, which were already stiff, as if I hoped to penetrate an impossible mystery. “This is what all of us would now be if they had won,” I thought. “Is it Fate? Luck? Justice?” The next day the local peasants buried all this debris in a vast common grave beside the road.

the trees in a nearby wood in order to avoid falling into the hands of the Makhnovists. Only an insignificant part of these troops who had raged for months in the stubborn pursuit of Makhno managed to save themselves. The 1<sup>st</sup> Simferopol Regiment of officers and several other were entirely cut down by insurgent sabres. The route of their retreat was strewn with corpses for a distance of two or three kilometres.<sup>4</sup>

And, however horrible this spectacle was to some, it was only the natural outcome of the duel between Denikin's army and the Makhnovists. During the whole pursuit, the former had no thought except to exterminate the insurgents. The slightest error on Makhno's part would inevitably have meant the same fate for the Insurrectionary Army. Even the women who supported that army or fought alongside their men would not have been spared. The Makhnovists were experienced enough to know that." (Op. cit., pp. 229–232).

Once Denikin's main force had been wiped out, the Makhnovists lost no time and, following three routes at once, they set off towards the Dnieper and their own country. This return was accomplished at a wild pace. The day after the defeat of Denikin's troops, Makhno was already more than a hundred kilometres from the battlefield. Accompanied by his escort, he moved forty kilometres ahead of the bulk of the army. A day later, and the Makhnovists were masters of Dolinskaia, Krivoi-Rog and Nikopol. The next day the Kitchkass Bridge was taken at full speed and the city of Alexandrovsk fell into the hands of the insurgents.

In their furious advance it seemed as though they were entering the enchanted kingdom of a Sleeping Beauty. No-one had yet heard of the events at Uman. No-one knew the fate of the Makhnovists. The Denikinists had taken no precautions for defence, they were plunged in the lethargy that is customary in the depths of rear echelons. Like spring lightning the Makhnovists struck their enemies. After Alexandrovsk, it was the turn of Pologai, then Gulai-Polya, Berdiansk, Mariupol. At the end of ten days, the whole of Central Ukraine was free of troops and authorities.

But it was not only a matter of troops and authorities. Like a gigantic broom, passing through cities, towns, villages and hamlets, the Insurrectionary Army swept away every vestige of exploitation and servitude. The returned gentry, who did not expect anything of the kind, the rich peasants (*kulaks*), the big industrialists, the police, the priests, the Denikinist mayors, the officers lying in ambush — all these were swept out of the victorious path of *Makhnovitchina*. The prisons, the police stations and posts, all these symbols of the people's servitude were destroyed, and all those who were known to be active enemies of the peasants and workers were condemned to death. Everywhere the big landowners and the *kulaks* perished in great numbers. This fact suffices to give the lie to the myth spread by the Bolsheviks about the so-called "*kulak*" character of the Makhnovist movement.

In this connection a typical episode which I witnessed comes to my memory. On their return, several Makhnovist regiments took a fairly important village. They halted to let the men and horses rest and recuperate. Our Propaganda Commission, which arrived with them, was accommodated by a peasant family who lived in the village square, just opposite the church.

We had hardly entered when we heard movement and shouting outside. Going out, we saw a crowd of peasants who were explaining something to the Makhnovist partisans. "Yes, indeed, Comrades, the swine drew up a list of all the names, forty of them, and sent it to the authorities. All these men were shot ..."



We learnt that they meant the village priest. According to the peasants, he had denounced a number of the inhabitants to the Denikinist authorities as suspects or sympathisers with Makhnovism. A rapid investigation which some of the insurgents carried out on the spot demonstrated that the peasants were telling the truth.

They decided to go to the priest's house, but the peasants said that it was locked and he was not there. Some thought that the pope had fled, and others believed he was hiding in the church itself. A crowd of peasants and insurgents went there. The door was closed and a great locked padlock hung outside.

"Look," cried some, "he cannot be there if the door is locked on the outside." But others who were better informed said that the pope, not having time to flee, had induced his sacristan to lock him in the church to make it appear that he had fled. In order to make sure, some of the insurgents broke open the lock with blows of their rifle butts, and entered the church. They explored the interior thoroughly, and found no-one. But they did discover a chamber pot that had been used and a supply of food.

They were now sure that the pope was hiding in the church. Having heard the crowd enter, he had climbed into the tower, hoping that his pursuers, not finding him below, would give up looking. The belfry was reached by a narrow wooden staircase, and the insurgents rushed up it with angry cries and a great clatter of sabres and guns.

Those who were watching from the square suddenly saw the tall figure of a man in a black cassock, gesturing and crying desperately, and clearly very much afraid, appear from under the roof of the bell-tower. He was young, and his long, straw-coloured hair floated out in the wind. His face was contorted with terror, and he stretched out his arms towards the square and cried plaintively: "Little brothers! Little brothers! I have done nothing, I have done nothing. Have pity, little brothers!"

But already vigorous arms were seizing him from behind and dragging him down by the tail of his cassock. They pushed him out of the church and across the square into the courtyard of our host. Many peasants and insurgents entered. Others remained in the square, in front of the open gate.

Immediately an improvised people's trial was organised. Our Commission was not part of it, but we remained as witnesses. We let the people do it themselves. "Well," they shouted to the priest, "What do you have to say? You'll have to pay now. Make your farewells, and say your prayers if you wish!"

"My little brothers, my little brothers," he repeated, trembling all over. "I am innocent, I am innocent, I have done nothing, little brothers."

"What do you mean, you have done nothing?" shouted several voices. "Didn't you denounce young Ivan, and Paul, and Serge the hunchback, and others as well? Wasn't it you who drew up the list? Do you want us to take you to the cemetery and show you the graves of your victims? Or to go and search for the papers in the police station? We might still find the list in your handwriting."

The pope fell on his knees and continually repeated, with haggard eyes and his body dripping with sweat: "Little brothers, pardon me, pity me, I have done nothing." A young woman who belonged to our commission happened to be near him. Still on his knees, he seized the hem of her skirt, brought it to his lips, and begged: "My little sister, protect me. I am innocent. Save me, little sister!"

“What do you want me to do?” she asked him. “If you are innocent, defend yourself. These men are no wild animals. If you are really innocent, they will not harm you. But if you are guilty, what can I do?”

An insurgent on horseback entered the courtyard, pushing his way through the crowd. Informed of what was happening, he stopped behind the pope, and from his horse, began furiously whipping the unfortunate’s back. At each blow of the whip he repeated: “That is for having fooled the people! That is for having fooled the people!” The crowd watched him impassively.

“Enough, Comrade,” I said softly. “After all he was not a torturer.”

“Oh yes,” they cried ironically around me, “they never tortured anyone, did they?”

Another insurgent advanced. He shook the pope roughly. “Well, get up! Enough of this comedy! Stand up!”

The accused did not cry out any more. Very pale, hardly conscious of what was happening, he stood up. His gaze was lost in the distance, and he moved his lips without speaking.

The insurgent signalled to several comrades, who immediately surrounded the pope. “Comrades,” he cried to the peasants, “you all say that this man, a proved counter-revolutionist, has drawn up and sent to the White authorities a list of ‘suspects’ and that as a consequence of this denunciation several peasants were arrested and executed. Is that right?”

“Yes, that is the truth!” roared the crowd. “He had forty of us assassinated. The whole village knows it.”

And again they mentioned the names of the victims and called upon definite witnesses. Several relatives of the executed men came to confirm the facts. The authorities themselves had spoken to them of the list drawn up by the priest in explanation of their actions.

The priest said no more. “Are there any peasants here to defend this man?” asked the insurgent. “Does anyone doubt his guilt?” No one moved.

Then the insurgent seized the pope. Brutally he took off his cassock. “What fine cloth!” he said. “With this, we can make a beautiful black flag. Our’s is all worn out.”

Then he said to the pope. “Now get on your knees and say your prayers without turning round.”

The condemned man did so. He went down on his knees, and with folded hands began to murmur. “Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come ...” Two insurgents came up behind him. They drew their revolvers, aimed and fired several bullets into his back. The shots rang out, dry and implacable. The body fell over. It was finished. The crowd disbanded slowly talking about the event.

Makhno told of several other dramatic episodes in which he had taken part during his thunderous return. Toward evening, accompanied by several horsemen, all dressed like Denikinist officers, he would present himself to some big nobleman, known to be a fierce reactionary, an admirer of Denikin, and an executioner of the peasants.

The apparent officers, returning from a mission, wished to rest a bit, to pass the night on the estate and leave again next morning. Naturally, they were received enthusiastically. “Messieurs the officers” could take their ease. The estate was well guarded by a detachment of Denikinists. They had nothing to fear.

A feast would be organised in honour of the visitors. The officer of the guard and several faithful friends would attend. Delicious foods, rare wines and fine liqueurs would be served. Tongues would be loosened. Everyone would talk effusively, cursing the “Makhnovist bandits” and all the rebels, wishing for their speedy and complete suppression, drinking the health of Denikin and

the White Army. Sometimes the over-trusting noble would show his guests his magnificent arms depot, ready for every eventuality.

Towards the end of the feast, Makhno would brutally reveal his identity and an indescribable scene of surprise, terror and confusion would follow. "The property is surrounded by Makhnovists, the guard is disarmed. You must pay."

Neither cries, nor supplications, nor attempts to flee would have any effect. The lord, his friends and faithful agents, the officers of the guard, would be executed on the spot. The soldiers of the guard would be thoroughly questioned and treated accordingly. The episode over, they would carry off the arms and go on to another nest of feudalism.

The occupation of the central Ukraine by the Makhnovists was a mortal danger to Denikin's whole counter-revolutionary campaign. In fact, it was between Volnovakha and Mariupol that the supply base of his army was located and immense stores of munitions were accumulated in all the cities of this region. To be sure, all these supplies did not fall immediately into the hands of the Makhnovists; around Volnovakha, for example, the battle between them and Denikin's numerous reserves raged for five days. But, since all the railroads of the region were in the insurgents' hands, not a shell could get out, and no war material could reach Denikin's troops, either in the north or elsewhere.

As at Volnovakha, several other groups of Denikinist reserves in various places fought the Makhnovists but soon they were all conquered and annihilated. Then the flood of *Makhnovitchina* rolled towards the bottom of the Donetsk basin and the north. In October the insurgents took the city of Ekaterinoslav.

Denikin was forced to abandon his march on Moscow. In haste, he sent his best troops to the Gulai-Polya front. But he was too late. The fire was raging throughout the whole country from the shores of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov to Kharkov and Poltava. Thanks to reinforcements, especially a great number of armoured cars and the excellent cavalry commanded by Mamontov and Chkouro, the Whites succeeded for the moment in making the Makhnovists retreat from Mariupol, Berdiansk and Gulai-Polya, the Makhnovists at the same time took Sinelnikovo, Pavlograd, Ekaterinoslav and other cities and localities; so that Denikin could not gain any advantage from his few purely local successes.

In the course of October and November, Denikin's main forces, descending from the north, carried on a furious fight with Makhno. At the end of November, the Makhnovists, half of whom, more-over, were stricken by a terrible epidemic of typhus, were forced to abandon Ekaterinoslav and regroup again in the south. But Denikin could no longer consolidate himself. The Makhnovists continued to harrass him in every direction. Moreover, the Red Army, coming down from the north on his tracks, was constantly jostling him. His army was on the point of collapse. Soon the best elements of his troops — the Caucasians — refused to continue fighting against Makhno. They abandoned their positions — the command could not stop them — and set out for their own country. This was the beginning of the complete downfall of the Denikinist army.

It is necessary to emphasise here the historic fact that the honour of having annihilated the Denikinist counter-revolution in the autumn of 1919, belongs entirely to the Makhnovist Insurrectionary Army. If the insurgents had not won the decisive victory of Peregonovka, and had not continued to sap the bases in Denikin's rear, destroying his supply service for artillery, food and ammunition, the Whites would probably have entered Moscow in December 1919 at the latest.

Having learned of the retreat of Denikin's best troops, the Bolsheviks, who at first were surprised and only later found out the real reason for this about-face (the defeat at Peregonovka

and its consequences) quickly recognised the advantages which they could gain from it. They attacked Denikin near Orel and precipitated his general retreat. But this battle, as well as several others between the retreating Whites and the Reds who were pursuing them, had a distinctly secondary importance. The resistance on the part of the Whites was only to protect their retreat and the evacuation of munitions and supplies. Along the whole length of the route from Orel, through Kursk and to the shores of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, the Red Army advanced almost without resistance. Its entry into the Ukraine and the regions of the Caucasus, on the tracks of the retreating Whites was effected exactly the same way as, a year earlier, the fall of the Hetman Skoropadsky cleared the way for the Bolshevik advance.

It was the Makhnovists who bore the brunt of the White army's retreat from the north. Until its final collapse, it gave much trouble to the Insurrectionary Army. The Bolsheviks, saved indirectly by the revolutionary partisans, returned to the Ukraine to harvest the laurels they had not won.

## Chapter 4. The Makhnovists in the Liberated Regions

The permanent armed struggle, the life of a “kingdom on wheels” which denied the population of the Makhnovist region any kind of stability, also denied them, inevitably, the possibility of extensive positive and constructive activity. Nevertheless, whenever it was possible, the movement gave evidence of great organic vitality and the working masses demonstrated a remarkable creative will and capacity.

Let us give a few examples. We have spoken, more than once, of the Makhnovist press. Despite the various obstacles and difficulties of the time, the Makhnovists, who remained in direct contact with the Anarchist “Nabat” Federation, continued to publish leaflets, newspapers, etc. They even found time to produce a sizeable booklet, under the title *General Theses of the Revolutionary (Makhnovist) Insurgents Concerning the Free Soviets*.

The newspaper *Road to Freedom* which sometimes appeared daily and sometimes weekly, was primarily devoted to the popular and concrete exposition of libertarian ideas. *Nabat*, concerned more with theory and doctrine, appeared every week. We should also mention *The Makhnovist Voice*, a newspaper which dealt primarily with the interests, problems and tasks of the Makhnovist movement and its army.

As for *General Theses*, this pamphlet summarised the Makhnovist’s views on the burning problems of the hour: the economic organisation of the region and the free Soviets; the social basis of the society that was to be built, the problem of defence, the exercise of justice, etc.

A question frequently asked is: How did the Makhnovists behave in the cities and towns that they took in the course of the struggle? In what way did they organise the civil population? In what way did they organise the life of the conquered cities, i.e. administration, production, trade, municipal services, etc.?

Since a great many myths and slanders have circulated on this subject, it is necessary to expose them and establish the truth. And since I was with the Makhnovist army at the very time when, after the battle of Peregonovka, they took several important cities, such as Alexandrovsk, Ekaterinoslav and others, I can give the reader a first-hand and accurate account.

The first concern of the Makhnovists, as soon as they entered some city as conquerors, was to remove the dangerous misunderstanding that they were a new power, a new political party, a kind of dictatorship. They immediately posted on the walls large notices in which they said approximately the following to the population:

“To all the workers of the city and its environs!

“Workers, your city is for the present occupied by the Revolutionary Insurrectionary (Makhnovist) Army. This army does not serve any political party, any power, any dictatorship. On the contrary, it seeks to free the region of all political power, of all

dictatorship. It strives to protect the freedom of action, the free life of the workers, against all exploitation and domination.

“The Makhnovist Army does not therefore represent any authority. It will not subject anyone to any obligation whatsoever. Its role is confined to defending the freedom of the workers. The freedom of the peasants and the workers belongs to themselves, and should not suffer any restriction.

“It is up to the workers and peasants themselves to act, to organise themselves, to reach mutual understanding in all fields of their lives, in so far as they desire it, and in whatever way they may think right.

“They must, therefore, know right away, that the Makhnovist Army will not impose on them, will not dictate to them, will not order them to do anything. The Makhnovists can only help them, by giving them opinions or advice, by putting at their disposal the intellectual, military and other forces that they need. But they cannot, and, in any case, will not govern them or prescribe for them in any way.”<sup>1</sup>

Nearly always these notices ended with an invitation to the working population of the city and its environs to attend a big meeting where the Makhnovist comrades would set forth their views in a more detailed manner, and give, if necessary, some practical advice for beginning to organise the life of the region on a basis of freedom and economic equality, without authority and without the exploitation of man by man.

When, for some reason, such an invitation could not appear on the same notice, it was made a little later, by means of a small special notice.

Usually, although at first a little surprised by this absolutely new way of acting, the population quickly got used to the situation, and set about the task of free organisation with great enthusiasm and success.

It goes without saying that in the meantime, reassured about the attitude of the “military force”, the city simply resumed its normal appearance and its usual way of life; the shops reopened, work started again where it was possible, the various administrations resumed their functions, the markets were held. Thus, in an atmosphere of peace and freedom, the workers prepared for positive activity to replace the old worn-out system in a methodical manner.

In each liberated region, the Makhnovists were the only organisation with enough forces to be able to impose their will on the enemy. But they never used these forces for the purpose of domination or even for any political influence. They never used them against their purely political or ideological opponents. The military opponents, the conspirators against the freedom of action of the workers, the police, the prisons, these were the elements against which the efforts of the Makhnovist army were directed.

As for free ideological activity, exchange of ideas, discussion, propaganda and the freedom of organisations and associations of a non-authoritarian nature, the Makhnovists guaranteed, everywhere and integrally, the revolutionary principles of freedom of speech, press, conscience, assembly, and political, ideological or other association. In all the cities and towns that were

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<sup>1</sup> In certain cities the Makhnovists appointed a “commander”; his function consisted only of serving as a contact man between the troops and the population, to make certain measures dictated by military necessity, which might have certain repercussions on the life of the inhabitants, and which the military command felt it opportune to take. These commanders had no authority over the population and did not interfere in any way with their civil life.

occupied, they began by lifting all the prohibitions and repealing all the restrictions imposed on the organs of the press and on political organisations by whatever power.

At Berdiansk, the prison was dynamited, in the presence of an enormous crowd, which took an active part in its destruction. At Alexandrovsk, Krivoi-Rog, Ekaterinoslav and elsewhere, the prisons were demolished or burned. Everywhere the workers cheered this act.

Complete freedom of speech, press, assembly and association of any kind and for everyone was immediately proclaimed. Here is the authentic text of the *Declaration* in which the Makhnovists made known this proposition in the localities they occupied.

“I. All Socialist<sup>2</sup> political parties, organisations and tendencies have the right to propagate their ideas, theories, views and opinions freely, both orally and in writing. No restriction of Socialist freedom of speech and press will be allowed, and no persecution may take place in this domain.

“Remark: — Military communiques may not be printed unless they are supplied by the management of the central organ of the revolutionary insurgents, the *Road to Freedom*.

“II. In allowing all political parties and organisations full and complete freedom to propagate their ideas, the Makhnovist Insurgent Army wishes to inform all the parties that any attempt to prepare, organise and impose a *political authority* on the working masses will not be permitted by the revolutionary insurgents, such an act having nothing in common with freedom of ideas and propaganda.

Ekaterinoslav, November 5<sup>th</sup>, 1919.

Revolutionary Military Council of the Makhnovist Insurgent Army.”

In the course of the whole Russian Revolution, the period of the *Makhnovtchina* in the Ukraine was the only one in which the true freedom of the working masses found full expression. While the region remained free, the workers of the cities and districts occupied by the Makhnovists could say and do, for the first time, anything they wanted and as they wanted. And furthermore, they at last had the opportunity to organise their life and work themselves, according to their own judgment, according to their own feelings of justice and truth.

During the few weeks that the Makhnovists spent at Ekaterinoslav, five or six newspapers of various political orientations appeared with full freedom — the Right Social-Revolutionary paper *Narodovlastie* (The People’s Power), the Left Social-Revolutionary *Znamia Vostania* (The Standard of Revolt), the Bolshevik *Star*, and others. To tell the truth, the Bolsheviks had less right to freedom of press and association, because they had destroyed, everywhere that they could, the freedom of press and association for the working class, and also because their organisation at Ekaterinoslav had taken a direct part in the criminal invasion of the Gulai-Polya region in June

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<sup>2</sup> They spoke here of Socialist parties and other organisations not because they wanted to keep these rights from the non-Socialists, but only because in the midst of a popular revolution the rightist elements were not active. There was not even any question of them. It was natural that the bourgeoisie would not dare, in the circumstances, to publish its press, and that the printing workers, masters of the printing houses, would flatly refuse to print it. It was therefore not worth speaking of it. The logical accent fell on “all” and not on “Socialist”. If, nevertheless, the reactionaries succeeded in printing and publishing their works, no one was disturbed by it. For, in the new situation, this did not represent any danger.

1919 and it would have been only justice to inflict a severe punishment on them. But, in order not to injure the great principles of freedom of speech and assembly, they were not disturbed and could enjoy, along with all the other political tendencies, all the rights inscribed on the banner of the social revolution.

The only restriction that the Makhnovists considered necessary to impose on the Bolsheviks, the Social-Revolutionaries and other statists was the prohibition against the formation of those Jacobin “revolutionary committees” which sought to impose a dictatorship on the people. Several occurrences proved that this measure was not unjustified.

As soon as the Makhnovist troops took Alexandrovsk and Ekaterinoslav, the local Bolsheviks, coming out of their hiding places, hastened to organise this kind of committee (the “Rev-Coms”) seeking to establish their political power and govern the population. At Alexandrovsk, the members of such a committee went so far as to propose to Makhno a “division of spheres of action”, leaving him the military power and reserving for the committee full freedom of action and all political and civil authority. Makhno advised them to “go and take up some honest trade”, instead of seeking to impose their will on the labouring population. A similar incident occurred at Ekaterinoslav.

This attitude of the Makhnovists was just and logical. Precisely because they wanted to insure and defend full freedom of speech, press, organisation, etc., they could without any hesitation take any measure against those formations which sought to stifle this freedom, to suppress other organisations and impose their will and dictatorial authority on the working masses.

And the Makhnovists did not hesitate to do so. At Alexandrovsk, Makhno threatened to arrest and shoot all the members of the “Rev-Com” if they made the least attempt of this nature. He acted in the same way at Ekaterinoslav. And when, in November 1919, the commander of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Insurrectionary (Makhnovist) Regiment, Polonsky, who had Communist leanings, was convicted of having participated in this kind of action, he was executed along with his accomplices.

At the end of the month, the Makhnovists were forced to leave Ekaterinoslav. But they had time to demonstrate to the working masses that true freedom resided in the hands of the workers themselves, and that it began to radiate and develop as soon as the libertarian spirit and true equality of rights were established among them.

Alexandrovsk and the surrounding region were the first places in which the Makhnovists remained for a fairly long time. Immediately, they invited the working population to participate in a general conference of the workers of the city.

The conference began with a detailed report by the Makhnovists on the military situation in the district. Then it proposed that the workers organise the life of the liberated region themselves, that is to say reconstruct their organisation that had been destroyed by the reaction; get the factories and shops back into production as soon as possible, organise Consumers’ Co-operatives, get together right away with the peasants of the surrounding countryside and establish direct and regular relations between the workers’ and peasants’ organisations for the purpose of exchanging products, etc.

The workers enthusiastically acclaimed all these ideas. But, at first, they hesitated to carry them out, troubled by their novelty, and moreover, uncertain because of the nearness of the front. They feared the return of the Whites — or the Reds — in the near future. As always, the instability of the situation prevented positive work.

Nevertheless, matters did not rest there. A few days later, a second conference took place. The problems of organising life according to the principles of self-administration by the workers were



examined and discussed with animation. Finally the conference reached the crucial point — the precise way to go about it, the first step to take.

The proposition was made to form a Commission of Initiative, composed of delegates of several active labour unions. The conference would give this Commission the task of working out a project for immediate action. Several members of the railway-men's and the shoemakers' unions declared that they were ready to organise immediately this Commission of Initiative which would proceed to create the indispensable workers' organs, to reactivate, as quickly as possible, the economic and social life of the region. The Commission went energetically to work. Soon the railway workers got the trains running again, several factories reopened their doors, several unions were re-established, etc.

While waiting for more fundamental reforms, it was decided that the money in use — a kind of paper money of various issues — would continue to serve as a means of exchange. But this problem was of secondary importance, since for some time the population had been using other methods of exchange.

Shortly after the workers' meetings, a big regional congress of workers was called at Alexandrovsk for October 20<sup>th</sup>, 1919. This congress deserves particular attention, since it was very exceptional in the way it was organised, in its procedures and in its accomplishments. I was an active participant and can give a detailed account

In taking the initiative of calling a regional workers' congress, the Makhnovists had assumed a very delicate task. They hoped to give an important impetus to the activity of the population, which was necessary, praiseworthy and understandable. But on the other hand, they had to avoid imposing themselves on the congress and the population, they had to avoid the appearance of dictating.

It was important, above all, that this congress should be different from those called by the authorities of a political party (or a dominant caste), who would submit to the congress ready-made resolutions, destined to be adopted docilely, after a semblance of discussion, and imposed on the so-called delegates, under threat of the repression of all eventual opposition. Moreover, the Makhnovists had a number of questions concerning the Insurrectionary Army to submit to the congress. The fate of the army and the whole task it had undertaken depended on the way the congress answered these questions. But, even in this special field, the Makhnovists tried to avoid any kind of pressure on the delegates.

To avoid all pitfalls, the following was decided:

1. No "electoral campaign" would take place. The Makhnovists confined themselves to notifying the villages, organisations, etc. that they should elect and send a delegate or delegates, to a workers' congress at Alexandrovsk on October 20<sup>th</sup>. Thus the population could designate and instruct their delegates in complete freedom.
2. At the opening of the congress, a representative of the Makhnovists would explain to the delegates that the congress had been called, this time by the Makhnovists themselves, since problems concerning the Insurrectionary Army as such were the main questions to be discussed; that, at the same time, the congress certainly had to settle problems concerning the life of the population; that in both cases, its deliberations and decisions would be absolutely free from all pressure, and the delegates would not be exposed to any danger, whatever their attitude might be; and, finally, that this congress should be considered an extraordinary one, and that the workers of the region should subsequently call, on their own initiative, their own congress, which they should carry on as they wished, to settle the problems of their lives.
3. Directly after the opening, the delegates should themselves elect the board of

the congress, and modify to suit themselves the agenda which was proposed to them — and not imposed on them — by the Makhnovists.

Two or three days before the congress, I experienced a curious episode. One evening, a very young man presented himself to me. He identified himself as Comrade Lubim, a member of the local committee of the Left Social Revolutionary party. I immediately noticed his overwrought condition, and, in great excitement, he went to the point that had led him to come to me without any preliminaries.

“Comrade V.,” he cried, pacing up and down in the little hotel room in which we were, “Excuse my crudeness, but the danger is immense. You are certainly not aware of it. And there is not a minute to lose. Very well, you are Anarchists, therefore Utopians, and therefore naive. But you can’t carry your naivete to the point of stupidity. You haven’t even the right to do it, since it isn’t only a question of yourselves, but of other people and of a whole cause.”

I confessed that I did not understand a word of his tirade.

“Now then,” he continued, more and more excited, “you call a congress of peasants and workers. This congress will have enormous importance. But you are such babies! in your ineffable naivete, what do you do? You send out little slips of paper on which is scrawled that a congress will take place! That is all. It’s frightening, it’s crazy. No explanation, no propaganda, no electoral campaign, no list of candidates, nothing, nothing! I beg you, Comrade V., open your eyes a little! In your situation, you have to be a little realistic, after all! Do something, while there is still time. Send agitators, present candidates to the voters. Give us time to make a little campaign. For what would you say if the population — who are mainly peasants — send you reactionary delegates who demand the calling of the Constituent Assembly, or even the restoration of the monarchy? The people are seriously influenced by the counter-revolution. And what would you do if the majority of the delegates are counter-revolutionary and sabotage your congress. Act, therefore, before it is too late! Postpone the congress a little while and take some steps.”

I understood. As a member of a political party, Lubim saw things in that way.

“Listen, Lubim,” I said to him, “If, in the existing conditions, in the midst of a popular revolution, and after everything that has happened, the working masses send counter-revolutionaries and monarchists to their own congress, then the whole of my life’s work will have been a profound error, and I shall have only one thing to do — to blow out my brains with that revolver you see on my desk.”

“We must talk seriously,” he interrupted, “and not dramatise ...”

“I assure you, Comrade Lubim, that I am talking very seriously. We will change nothing in our procedure, and if the congress is counter-revolutionary, I will kill myself. I could not survive such a terrible disillusionment. And now, please take note of one basic fact. It is not I who am calling the congress, nor was it I who decided how to call it. All that is the work of a group of comrades. I have no power to alter anything.”

“Yes, I know, but you have great influence. You could propose a change. They would listen to you.”

“I have no desire to propose it, Lubim, since we are all in agreement.”

The conversation ended, and Lubim, unconsolated, left me.

On October 20<sup>th</sup>, 1919, more than two hundred delegates, peasants and workers, met in the congress hall. Beside the delegates, several places were reserved for representatives of the right-wing Socialist Parties — Social-Revolutionaries and Menshe-viks — and those of the Left-Social-

Revolutionaries. They all attended the congress with a consultative voice. Among the Left-Social-Revolutionaries I saw Comrade Lubim.

What struck me especially on that first day of the congress was a coldness or rather a mistrust which nearly all the delegates seemed to manifest. We learned later that they expected a congress like so many others; they expected to see on the platform men with revolvers in their belts who would manoeuvre the delegates and make them vote for resolutions which had been prepared in advance. The meeting was frozen, and it took some time to thaw it.

I had the job of opening the congress, and I gave the delegates the agreed explanations and declared that they should first elect an executive committee and then consider the agenda proposed by the Makhnovists.

The members of the congress wished me to preside over their meetings. I consulted my comrades and then agreed. But I declared to the delegates that my role would be strictly limited to the technical conduct of the congress, that is, to following the agenda that was adopted, to recognising the speakers, giving them the floor, facilitating the order of business, etc., and that the delegates should deliberate and reach their decisions in complete freedom, without fearing any pressure or manoeuvring from me.

Immediately a right-wing Socialist asked for the floor. He delivered a violent attack on the organisers of the congress. "Comrade delegates," he said, "we Socialists consider it our duty to warn you that a disgraceful comedy is being acted here. They are not imposing anything on you, they say! Yet already they have very adroitly imposed an Anarchist chairman on you, and you will continue to be manoeuvred by these people."

Makhno, who had arrived a few minutes earlier to wish the congress good luck and excuse himself for having to leave for the front, took the floor and replied sharply to the Socialist speaker. He reminded the delegates of the complete freedom of their election, and, accusing the Socialists of being the faithful defenders of the bourgeoisie, he advised their representatives not to disturb the work of the congress by political interventions. "You are not delegates," he ended, "Therefore, if the congress does not please you, you are free to leave."

Nobody opposed this, and four or five Socialists demonstratively left the hall, protesting vehemently at such an "expulsion". Nobody seemed to regret their departure. On the contrary, the meeting seemed satisfied and a little less frigid than before.

After this interruption, one of the delegates got up to speak. "Comrades," he said, "before passing to the agenda, I would like to submit a preliminary question which, in my opinion, is of great importance. Just now, a word was mentioned here — the bourgeoisie. Clearly, the bourgeoisie is being attacked as if we knew perfectly what it is, and as if everyone were in agreement about it. But this seems to me a great error. The term *bourgeoisie* is not clear to everybody. And I am of the opinion that because of its importance it would be useful, before we set to work, to define it precisely and know what exactly we mean by it."

Despite the orator's skill (I felt that notwithstanding his simple peasant costume he was not a real peasant), the gist of his speech demonstrated clearly that we had among us a defender of the bourgeoisie and that his intention was to sound out the congress and if possible to undermine the spirit of the delegates. He certainly expected to be supported — consciously or ingenuously — by an appreciable number of delegates. If he had succeeded, the congress would have been in danger of falling into ridiculous confusion, and its work might have been seriously disturbed.

The moment was tense. I had, as I had just explained to the congress — no right to impose myself and eliminate by some simple device the delegate's unfortunate proposal. It was up to

the congress, to the other delegates, to decide the question in complete freedom. Their mentality was not yet evident. All of them were unknowns, and obviously very distrustful unknowns at that. Deciding to let the incident take its course, I asked myself what was going to happen. And Lubim's apprehensions occurred to me.

As all these thoughts passed rapidly through my mind, the delegate finished his speech and sat down. For a moment, I saw distinctly, the gathering was puzzled. Then, quite suddenly and almost as if it had been arranged in advance, delegates began to call out from all over the hall.

"Hey, what kind of a bird is this delegate? Where does he come from? Who sent him? If he doesn't know what the bourgeoisie is after everything that has happened, they made a queer choice in sending him here! Tell us old boy, haven't you found out yet what the bourgeoisie is? Well, you must have a thick skull. You'd better go home and find out, or else keep quiet and don't take us for idiots."

"We have other things to do than waste time splitting hairs," cried other delegates. "There are questions to settle which are important for the whole region. And for more than an hour we have been fooling around instead of working. It's beginning to look like sabotage. Let's get to work."

"Yes, yes, enough fooling, let's get down to work," came the shouts from all sides.

The pro-bourgeois delegate swallowed it all without a word. He had made a mistake. He was completely silent for the rest of the conference, which lasted nearly a week, and during that whole time, he remained isolated from the other delegates.

While the delegates were thus berating their unfortunate colleague, I looked at Lubim. He seemed surprised and pleased. However, the preliminary incidents were not yet finished, for the storm had hardly died down over the last interruption when Lubim himself leaped to the platform.

"Comrades," he began, "excuse my intervention. It will be brief. I make it in the name of the local committee of the Left Social-Revolutionary Party. This time it is a really important question. According to our chairman's declaration, he doesn't want to preside effectively. And you must be aware that he is not in fact fulfilling the real function of chairman of the congress. Comrades, we Left Social-Revolutionaries find that very bad and fear it will be harmful. It means that your congress has to work without a head, without direction. Comrades, have you ever seen an organism without a head? No, comrades, that is not possible. It would mean disorder and chaos. We have had enough of that already. No, it is impossible to work usefully, fruitfully and unconfusedly under these conditions. You need a head, for the congress, you need a real chairman, a real head."

As Lubim delivered his diatribe in a rather tragic and imploring tone, his intervention sounded more and more ridiculous with each repetition of the word "head". But, since my method of procedure had not yet proved itself, I wondered if the delegates might not be impressed by Lubim's ideas.

"We have had enough of those heads," came shouted from all over the hall. "Always heads and more heads! Let us try and do without them for once. Let us try to work really freely. Comrade V. has explained that he will help the congress technically. That is enough. It is up to us to observe our own discipline, to work well and keep our eyes open. We don't want any more of these 'heads' who lead us like puppets and who call that 'work and discipline'."

Lubim could do nothing but sit down. This was the last incident. I set about reading the agenda and the congress began its work. Archinov was quite correct when he said that in its discipline, in the orderliness of its work, in the prodigious enthusiasm that animated the delegates, in its se-

rious and concentrated character, in the importance of its decisions and in the results it achieved, this congress was exceptional.

The work was accomplished rapidly, and in perfect order, with remarkable unanimity, intimacy and ardour. By the end of the third day, all signs of distrust had disappeared. The delegates were thoroughly inspired by the freedom of their activity and the importance of their task. They consecrated themselves to it without reservations. They were convinced that they were working on their own and for their own cause.

There were no grand speeches or grandiose resolutions. The work assumed a practical and down-to-earth character. When a rather complicated problem needed reducing to simple terms, or when the delegates wanted clarification before they began their work, they asked to be presented with a detailed report, and I or some other qualified comrade would give an explanation. After a short discussion, the delegates would then set about working for definite results. Once agreed on the basic principles of a question, they usually created a special commission, which would draw up a very thoughtful project and arrive at practical solutions instead of composing literary resolutions. In this way a number of immediate and concrete questions, of great interest to the life of the region or the defence of its freedom, were eagerly discussed and worked over in their smallest detail by the committees and the delegates.

In my capacity of Technical Chairman, as I was called, I had only to supervise the order of business, formulate and announce the results of each completed task, call upon the delegates to consider and adopt certain rules of procedure, etc. The most important thing was that the congress functioned under the auspices of absolute and genuine freedom. No influence from above, no element of constraint, was felt.

The idea of free Soviets, genuinely functioning in the interests of the working population; the question of direct relations between peasants and city workers, based on mutual exchange of the products of their labour; the launching of a libertarian and egalitarian social organisation in the cities and the country; all these questions were seriously and closely studied by the delegates themselves, with the assistance and co-operation of qualified comrades.

Among other things, the congress resolved numerous problems concerning the Insurrectionary Army, its organisation and reinforcement. It was decided that the whole male population, up to the age of 48, would go to serve in this army. In keeping with the spirit of the congress, this enrolment would be voluntary, but as general and numerous as possible, in view of the extremely dangerous and precarious situation in which the region found itself.

The congress also decided that the supplying of the army would be done primarily by free gifts from the peasants, in addition to the spoils of victory and requisitions from the privileged groups. The size of these gifts would be carefully established, according to the size of each family.

As for the purely "political" questions, the congress decided that the workers, doing without any authority, would organise their economic, political and administrative life for themselves, by means of their own abilities, and through their own direct organs, united on a federative basis. Archinov tells us that:

"The peasants, among whom there were old and even ancient men, said that this was the first congress where they felt not only perfectly free and their own masters, but also real brothers, and that they would never forget it. And, indeed, it is hardly likely that anyone who took part in that congress could ever forget it. For many, if not for all, it remained engraved for ever on their memories as a beautiful dream of the life

in which true liberty would bring men together, giving them the opportunity to live united at heart, joined by a feeling of love and brotherhood.

“And when they left, the peasants emphasised the necessity of putting the decisions of the congress into practice. The delegates took away with them copies of the resolutions in order to make them known all over the countryside. It is certain that at the end of three or four weeks the results of the congress would have been known all over the district and that the next congress, called on the initiative of the peasants and workers themselves, would not have failed to attract the interest and active participation of great masses of workers.

“Unfortunately, the true freedom of the labouring masses is continually being destroyed by its worst enemy, Power. The delegates had hardly time to return to their homes, when many of the villages were again occupied by Denikin’s troops, coming by forced marches from the northern front. To be sure, this time the invasion was only of short duration; it was the death agony of a dying enemy. But it halted the constructive work of the peasants at the most vital moment, and since another authority equally hostile to the ideas of freedom for the masses (Bolshevism) was approaching from the north, this invasion did irreparable harm to the workers’ cause; not only was it impossible to assemble a new congress, but even the decisions of the first could not be put into practice.” (Op. cit., pp. 242–4)

I cannot pass over in silence certain episodes which marked the last phase of the congress. A short while before its termination, when I announced the classic “general questions”, several delegates undertook and carried out a delicate task which gave another proof of the complete independence of the congress and of the enthusiasm to which it gave rise, as well as the moral influence it exercised in the course of its labours.

“Comrades,” said a delegate who took the floor at this moment, “before ending our work and dispersing, several delegates have decided to bring to the knowledge of the congress some painful and regrettable facts which in our opinion should receive the attention of the members. It has come to our ears that the many sick and wounded of the Insurrectionary Army are very badly cared for because of the lack of medicine, medical help, etc. To make sure, we ourselves visited the hospitals and other places where these unfortunate men have been placed. Comrades, what we have just seen is very sad. Not only are the sick and wounded deprived of all medical care, but they are not even humanely lodged or fed. The greater part are sleeping any old way, even on the ground, without mattresses, pillows or covers. It seems that there is not even enough straw in the city to soften the hardness of the ground a little. Many of these poor men die only because of lack of care. Nobody looks after them. We understand very well that, in the difficult conditions which exist, the staff of our army has not the time to supervise this need. Comrade Makhno also is absorbed by the immediate problems of the front. All the more reason, Comrades, why the congress should take’ over. These sick and wounded are our comrades, our brothers, our sons. They are suffering for the cause of us all. I am sure that with a little goodwill we can at least find some straw to ease their sufferings. Comrades, I propose to the congress that it immediately name a commission which will concern itself energetically with this matter and do everything in its power to organise this service. It should also get in touch with all the doctors and druggists in the city, and request their aid and assistance.”

Not only was the proposition adopted by the whole congress, but fifteen delegates volunteered to form a commission to attend to the matter. These delegates, who at first had expected to return to their homes in a day or two after a sham congress, did not hesitate to sacrifice their own interests and delay their return in order to serve the comrades in distress. They had to remain several days in Alexandrovsk and accomplished their task successfully. They found the straw, and managed to organise a free-lance medical service.

[After this matter had been quickly settled] another delegate claimed the floor. "Comrades," he declared, "I want to speak to you about another matter that is equally disturbing. We have learned that a certain amount of friction has occurred between the civil population and the services of the Insurrectionary Army. In particular, it has been reported to us that in the Army there exists a counter-espionage service which engages in arbitrary and uncontrolled actions — of which some are very serious, rather like the Bolshevik Cheka. Searches, arrests, even torture and executions are reported. We do not know if these rumours are true, but some complaints we have heard certainly seemed serious. It would seriously prejudice and even endanger our whole cause. We do not want to interfere in purely military matters, but we have a duty to oppose abuses and excesses if they really exist, for they will turn the population against our movement. Since it enjoys the confidence and general esteem of the population, the congress has a duty to make a basic enquiry on this point, to find out the truth, to take steps where they are needed and to reassure the people. It is our congress, emanating from the living interests of the workers, which at this moment is the supreme institution of the region. It is above everything else, for it represents the workers themselves. I therefore propose that it immediately create a commission in charge of investigating these stories and acting in accordance [with its findings]."

Immediately a commission of several delegates was constituted for this purpose. Such an initiative on the part of workers' delegates would not have been possible under the Bolshevik regime. It was by activity of this kind that the congress gave a preview of the way in which a society should function from the beginning if it is based on a desire for progress and self-realisation.

We should add that the events that followed did not permit this commission to complete its work to the end. The incessant fighting, the movements of the army, the urgent tasks which absorbed all its services, prevented it.

A final incident remains to be told. Yet another delegate rose to his feet. "Comrades," he said, "since the congress is acting against certain defects and weaknesses, let me mention another regrettable incident. It is not very important, but all the same it merits our attention because of the sad state of mind of which it gives evidence. All of you must have read the notices posted on the walls of our city several days ago, bearing the signature of Comrade Klein, military commander of Alexandrovsky. In this notice, Commander Klein calls on the population to abstain from drinking alcoholic beverages to excess, and especially not to go out in the street drunk. That is very fair and good. The form of the notice is not at all insulting or gross, it is not insolent or authoritarian, and one can only congratulate Comrade Klein on it. Only, comrades, not later than the day before yesterday, a popular evening party took place here with music, dancing and other distractions, in this very building where the congress is sitting. Not only insurgents, but also citizens and citizenesses attended it. I hasten to say to you that there is absolutely nothing reprehensible about that. The young people amused themselves and relaxed. That is entirely human and natural. But there was also a great deal of drinking at this party. Many insurgents and citizens got blind drunk. To see for yourselves you have only to look at the number of empty bottles piled up in the passage. (Laughter). Wait, comrades, the principal object of my intervention is not that. One

amuses oneself, one drinks, one gets drunk. That isn't so bad. But what is more serious is the fact that one of those who got as drunk as a pig was our Comrade Klein, one of the commanders of the army, military commander of the city and the signatory of the excellent notice against drunkenness! Comrades, he was so drunk that he couldn't walk and had to be put in a carriage and taken home in the early morning. And, on the way, he behaved scandalously, cursing and so forth. So, comrades, a question arises: in drawing up and signing his notice did Comrade Klein believe that he himself was above the rest of the citizens, exempt from the good conduct that he preaches for others'? Should he not, on the contrary, be the first to set a good example? In my opinion, he has committed a fault so serious that it should not be disregarded."

While Klein's conduct was really fairly harmless, and the delegates considered the incident as rather comic, it aroused a certain amount of feeling. The annoyance at Klein was general, for his behaviour might be the expression of a culpable state of mind, that of a "chief" who considered himself above the "mass" and believed that he could do anything.

"Klein must be called right away!" someone proposed. "Let him come and explain himself before the congress!" Directly, three or four delegates were sent after Klein, with the mission of bringing him back. A half hour later, the delegates returned with him.

I was very curious to see what his attitude would be. Klein was one of the best commanders of the Insurrectionary Army. Young, courageous, very energetic and combative — physically a big, well-built fellow, with a hard appearance and warlike gestures — he always threw himself into the hottest part of the battle and feared nothing and nobody. He had been wounded many times. Well liked, as much by his colleagues as by the ordinary soldiers, he was one of those who had thrown over the Bolsheviks and brought Makhno several regiments of the Red Army. The son of a peasant family of German origin, if I am not mistaken, he was rough and uncouth in manner.

He knew that in any circumstances, he would be vigorously supported and defended by his colleagues — the other commanders and Makhno himself. Would he have enough knowledge to realise that a congress of working people was above him and above the army and Makhno? Would he understand that the workers and their congress were the masters: that the army, Makhno, etc. were only the servants of the common cause, bound to be held accountable at all times by the workers and their organs? Such were the questions that preoccupied me while the congress awaited the return of the mission.

Such a conception was entirely new. The Bolsheviks had done everything to wipe it out of the spirit of the masses. It would be something to see, for example, if a workers' congress called a commissar or a commander of the Red Army to order! Of course, that is absolutely inconceivable. But even supposing that somehow a workers' congress dared to do it, with what indignation, with what self-possession would this commissar or commander denounce the congress, while playing with his weapons on the platform and singing his own praises: "What!" he would shout, "you, a simple collection of workers, have the nerve to call to account a commissar, a practical leader, with exploits, wounds, citations to his credit, an esteemed, celebrated, decorated leader? You have no such right! I am only responsible to my superiors. If you have anything to reproach me for, address yourselves to them."

Would not Klein be tempted to use similar language? Would he sincerely understand an entirely different situation and an entirely different psychological attitude?

Smartly clad in his uniform and well armed, Klein mounted the platform. He had a rather surprised air, and it seemed to me that he was uneasy.



“Comrade Klein,” the questioning delegate asked him, “you are the military commander of our city?”

“Yes.”

“You are the one who drew up and had posted the notice against the abuse of beverages and drunkenness in public places?” “Yes, comrade, it was I.”

“Tell me, Comrade Klein, as a citizen of our city, and its military commander, do you consider yourself morally obliged to obey your own recommendations or do you believe yourself outside of or above this notice?”

Visibly uneasy and confused, Klein took a few steps to the edge of the platform and said very sincerely in an uncertain voice.

“Comrades, I was wrong. I know it. I made a mistake in getting disgracefully drunk the other day. But, listen to me a little and try to understand. I am a fighting man, a man of the front, a soldier. I am no bureaucrat. I don’t know why in spite of my protests they landed me with this job of commander of the city. As commander I don’t have a bloody thing to do, except stay all day at a desk and sign papers. That isn’t for me! I need action, the open air, the front, companions. I am bored to death here. And that’s why I got drunk the other evening. Comrades, I would like to make up for my mistake. For that, you have only to ask that I be sent back to the front. There, I can give real service. But here, at this cursed post of commander, I can’t promise you anything. Let them find another man for my place, a man who can do this job. Forgive me, comrades, and have me sent to the front.”

The delegates asked him to go out for a few minutes. He obeyed docilely. They deliberated on his case. It was evident that his conduct was not due to the mentality of a vainglorious, overbearing leader. That was all they wanted to know. The congress very clearly recognised his sincerity and his reasons. They called him back to tell him that, taking account of his explanation, they would not hold his mistake against him and would do what was necessary to have him sent back to the front. He thanked the delegates and left very simply, as he had come. The delegates intervened in his favour, and a few days later he returned to the front. ,

To some readers, these episodes may seem trivial and insignificant, and not worth so many pages. I would venture to say that from a revolutionary standpoint, I consider them infinitely more important, more suggestive, and more useful in their slightest details than all the speeches of Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin, delivered before, during and after the revolution.

[And I would like to] relate one more little episode – a personal one – which took place outside the congress itself. As I was leaving, I met Lubim, who was smiling radiantly. “You cannot imagine,” he told me, “why I am so pleased. You must have seen how busy I was during the congress. Do you know what I did? I have specialised in the formation of scouting units and special detachments. This very question came up on the agenda. Well, for two days, I worked with the committee of delegates in charge of studying it, and finding a practical solution. I gave them a lot of help. They thanked me for my work. And I have really done something good and necessary. I know that is going to help the cause, and I am very pleased.”

“Lubim,” I said to him, “tell me sincerely: in the course of this good and necessary work, did you think for a single instant of your political role? Did you recall your position as a member of a political party? Did you think of being responsible before your party? Was not your useful work, in fact, an apolitical task, concrete and precise, a work of collaboration and co-operation, and not that of a ‘head’, of a ‘direction that imposes itself, of governmental action?”

Lubim looked at me pensively.

“The congress was very fine, very successful, I admit it,” he said.

“There, Lubim,” I concluded, “reflect well upon it. You really played your part and did a good job at the moment when you left your political activity! And very simply helped your colleagues as a comrade who knew about the task. You should realise that that is the whole secret of the success of the congress. And that is also the whole secret of the success of the revolution. It is like this that all revolutions should act, both on a local level and on a vaster scale. When the revolutionists and the masses have learned that, the real victory of the revolution is assured.”

I never saw Lubim again. I do not know what became of him. If he is alive, I do not know what he thinks to-day. But I hope these lines may come to his eyes, and that he remembers.

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A few days after the end of the Alexandrovsk congress, the Makhnovists finally took Ekaterinoslav. But they could not organise — or even try to organise — anything positive there. Denikin's troops, who were driven out of the city, managed to dig in nearby, on the left bank of the Dnieper. Despite their efforts, the Makhnovists could not dislodge them. Daily, for a whole month, the Denikinists bombarded the city, which was within the range of the batteries on their numerous armoured trains. Each time the Cultural Commission of the Insurrectionary Army managed to call a meeting of the city's workers, the Denikinists, who were well-informed, fired great numbers of shells, especially on the places where the sessions were to be held. No serious work, no systematic organisation was possible. It was only possible to hold a few meetings in the suburbs.

“One of the favourite arguments of the Bolsheviks against the Makhnovists is the claim that the insurgents did nothing, while they were masters of Ekaterinoslav, to achieve a constructive organisation of the life of that city. In saying this, the Bolsheviks hide from the masses two circumstances of capital importance. In the first place, the Makhnovists were never the representatives of a party or of any authority. At Ekaterinoslav, they acted as a revolutionary military detachment, mounting guard for the freedom of the city. In this capacity, it was not at all their job to try and achieve a constructive programme for the revolution. This task could only be carried out by the workers of the place. The Makhnovist army could, at most, help them with its opinions and advice, with its spirit of initiative and its organisational ability, and it did this as much as possible. In particular, the Bolsheviks say nothing of the exceptional situation in which the city was at that moment. During the whole time that the Makhnovists remained there, it was not only in a state of siege, but actually under bombardment. Not an hour passed without shells bursting. It was this situation that prevented the workers, and not the Makhnovist army, from setting about on the spot to organise life according to the principles of free action.

“As for the fable according to which the Makhnovists declared to the railway workers who came to them for help that they did not need railroads since the Steppes and their good horses were perfectly sufficient, this gross invention was started by Denikin's newspapers in October, 1919, and from that source the Bolsheviks took it to serve their own ends.” (Peter Archinov, *Op. cit.*, p. 246).

This fable was added to the other myths and calumnies spread by the Bolsheviks for the purpose of compromising the Makhnovist movement in the eyes of the workers.

At the end of November, a terrible epidemic, which was spreading all over Russia, attacked the Insurrectionary Army. At least half the men were sick, and the death rate was high. This was the principal reason why the Makhnovists were obliged to abandon Ekaterinoslav when the city was attacked, towards the end of November, by Denikin's main forces, who were beating a retreat towards the Crimea with the Bolsheviks in pursuit.

Having left Ekaterinoslav, the Insurrectionary Army regrouped in the region between the cities of Melitopol, Nicopol and Alexan-drovsk. It was in the last city that the Makhnovist staff was overtaken, at the end of December, 1919, by the high command of several divisions of the Red Army who were in pursuit of Denikin. For some time already, the Makhnovists had been expecting this event, and, envisaging in the new circumstances a fraternal meeting rather than a collision, they had taken no precautions.

The meeting was exactly like several others that had preceded it. Friendly, and even cordial, in appearance, it might nevertheless conceal storms and surprises — and we waited for this to happen. Without any doubt, the Bolsheviks remembered with rancour and bitterness the blow given them recently by the Makhnovist troops which had left their army and taken with them several Red regiments. Without the slightest doubt, also, they could not long tolerate the presence at their side of a free army or of the independent movement of a whole region that did not recognise their authority. Sooner or later, conflict was inevitable, and it was clear that the Bolsheviks would not hesitate to attack at the first opportunity. As for the Makhnovists, they were more or less aware of this situation, and, while they were ready to reconcile all their differences peacefully and fraternally, they could not help feeling mistrustful.

However, the soldiers of the two armies greeted each other fraternally and a meeting took place at which the combatants shook hands and declared that they would fight together against the common enemies — capitalism and counter-revolution. Some units of the Red Army even showed a desire to go over to the Makhnovist ranks.

Eight days later the storm broke. The "Commander of the Insurrectionary Army" — Makhno — received an order from the Revolutionary Military Council of the 14<sup>th</sup> Corps of the Red Army to move the Insurrectionary Army to the Polish front.

Everyone understood immediately that this was the first step in a new attack on the Makhnovists. In itself, the order to leave for the Polish front was nonsensical for a number of reasons. In the first place, the Insurrectionary Army was subordinate neither to the 14<sup>th</sup> Corps nor to any other unit of the Red Army. The Red commander had no authority to give orders to the Insurrectionary Army, which alone had supported the whole weight of the fight against Denikin. Furthermore, even if this departure had been fraternally envisaged, it was materially impossible to carry it out, since half the men, as well as nearly all the commanders and staff, and Makhno himself, were sick. Finally, the fighting qualities and revolutionary usefulness of the Insurrectionary Army were certainly much greater on their own ground, in the Ukraine, than on the Polish front, where this army, in unfamiliar surroundings and unknown [to the local population], would be obliged to fight for goals it did not understand. It was [with these arguments] that the Makhnovists replied to the Red commander's order, and flatly refused to carry it out.

But on both sides it was perfectly understood that the proposition, like the reply, was pure diplomacy. Everybody knew what was really involved. To send the Insurrectionary Army to the Polish front meant to cut off the main nerve-centre of the revolutionary movement in the Ukraine.

That is just what the Bolsheviks wanted; they hoped to be the absolute masters of the region. If the Insurrectionary Army submitted, they would attain their objective. In case of refusal, they had prepared a thrust which (they hoped) would accomplish the same result. The Makhnovists knew this, and got ready to parry the blow.

The response to the Makhnovist refusal was not long in coming. But the Insurrectionary Army acted first, and thus averted immediate bloodshed. At the same time as they sent their reply to the Red headquarters, they addressed an appeal to the soldiers of the Red Army, calling on them not to be the dupes of the provocative manoeuvres of their leaders. Having done this, they broke camp, and set out for Gulai-Polya, which had just been evacuated by the Whites and was under no authority whatever. They arrived without accident, and for the moment the Red Army did not oppose their move. Only a few unimportant detachments and some isolated individuals who remained in the rear of the bulk of the troops were taken prisoner by the Bolsheviks. But two weeks later, in mid-January, 1920, the Bolsheviks declared Makhno and the members of his army outlaws for their refusal to go to the Polish front.

The third act of the drama began. It lasted for nine months, and it was marked by a violent struggle between the Makhnovists and the Communist authorities. We shall not go into details, but will confine ourselves to saying that on both sides it was a merciless struggle. In order to avert eventual fraternisation between the soldiers of the Red Army and the Makhnovists, the Bolshevik commander sent against the latter a division of Lettish sharpshooters and some Chinese detachments, that is to say, units whose members had not the slightest idea of the true meaning of the Russian Revolution and were content blindly to obey the orders of their leaders. On the Bolshevik side, the struggle was conducted with incredible deceit and savagery.

Since the Red troops were ten times more numerous, Makhno's detachment and Makhno himself, by manoeuvring very skilfully and with the aid of the population, kept constantly out of their reach. At the same time, the Bolshevik High Command deliberately avoided open fighting with the Insurrectionary Army. It preferred another kind of war. By means of numerous reconnaissances, the Red Army found out the villages and localities where Makhnovist detachments were weak or non-existent. They then attacked these defenceless communities and occupied them almost without fighting. Thus the Bolsheviks were able to establish themselves solidly in several places, and thus to stop the free development of the region.

Everywhere that they did establish themselves, they made war, not on the Insurrectionary Army, but on the peasant population in general. Mass arrests and executions soon began, and the Denikinist repression paled beside that of the Bolsheviks. In speaking of the fight against the insurgents, the Communist press of the time would cite the number of Makhnovists defeated, captured or shot. But it always neglected to mention that it was usually a question, not of military insurgents, but of simple villagers, convicted or merely suspected of some sympathy for the Makhnovists. The arrival of the Red Army in a village meant the immediate arrest of many peasants who were later imprisoned and for the most part shot, either as Makhnovist insurgents or as "hostages". The village of Gulai-Polya passed many times from one side to the other. Naturally, it suffered greatly from the repeated invasions of the Bolsheviks, and every survivor in the village could tell of frightful cases of Communist repression. According to the most moderate estimates, more than 20,000 peasants and workers were shot or seriously injured by the Soviet authorities in the Ukraine at that time. Nearly as many were imprisoned or deported to Siberia or elsewhere.

Makhno himself, sick and often unconscious, more than once barely escaped falling into the hands of the enemy who were in search of him. He owed his safety — and also his cure — to the

sublime devotion of the peasants who would sometimes sacrifice themselves to gain time for the sick man to be moved to a safer place.

Naturally, the Makhnovists could not remain indifferent to such a monstrous distortion of the Revolution. To the Bolshevik terror they replied with blows no less severe, and used against their enemies all the guerilla methods they had formerly employed in their struggle against the Hetman Skoropadsky. When they captured Red prisoners, they disarmed the soldiers and set them free, knowing that they had been sent into battle under compulsion. Those of the soldiers who wished to join them were received fraternally. But as for the chiefs, the Commissars and the representatives of the Communist Party, they were generally put to the sword, unless for some good reason the private soldiers asked that they should be spared. Let us not forget that all Makhnovists, whoever they were, were invariably shot on the spot if they fell into the hands of the Bolsheviks.

The Soviet authorities and their agents often depicted the Makhnovists as common assassins without pity, as bandits without faith or law. They published long lists of soldiers of the Red Army and members of the Communist Party put to death by these "criminals". But they were always silent about the essential fact that these victims fell during combats started or provoked by the Communists themselves.

One of the greatest annoyances of the Bolshevik government was the knowledge that Makhno was alive but that they were unable to capture him. They were sure that to suppress him would be the equivalent of liquidating the movement. Therefore, throughout the summer of 1920, they fomented continual attempts to assassinate Makhno, none of which succeeded.

"All through the year of 1920 and even later," says Archinov, "the Soviet authorities carried on the fight against the Makhnovists, pretending to be fighting banditry. They engaged in intense agitation to persuade the country of this, using their press and all their means of propaganda to uphold the slander both within and outside Russia.

"At the same time, numerous divisions of sharpshooters and cavalry were sent against the insurgents, for the purpose of destroying the movement and pushing its members towards the gulf of real banditry. The Makhnovist prisoners were pitilessly put to death, their families — fathers, mothers, wives, relatives — were tortured and killed, their property was pillaged or confiscated, their houses were destroyed. All this was practised on a large scale.

"A superhuman will and heroic efforts were needed by the vast masses of insurgents, in the face of all these horrors committed daily by the authorities, to retain intact their rigorously revolutionary position and not to fall, in exasperation, into the abyss of banditry. But the masses never lost their courage, they never lowered their revolutionary banner, but remained to the end faithful to their task.

"For those who saw it during this hard and painful period, this spectacle was a genuine miracle, demonstrating how deep was the faith in the revolution of these working masses, how strong their devotion to the cause whose ideas had won them over."

(Op. cit., pp. 273–4).

At the end of the summer of 1920, the Makhnovists had to carry on the struggle, not merely against detachments of the Red Army, but against the whole Bolshevik system, against all its

governmental forces in Russia and the Ukraine. Each day this struggle intensified and widened. In these conditions, the insurrectionary troops were sometimes obliged — so as to avoid encountering an enemy of too superior numbers — to leave their base and make forced marches of a thousand kilometres or more. Sometimes they had to retreat to the Donetsk basin, sometimes to the departments of Kharkov and Poltava.

These involuntary wanderings were put to considerable use by the insurgents for propaganda purposes, and every village in which they halted for a day or two became a vast Makhnovist auditorium.

It should be added that the exceptionally difficult situation of the Insurrectionary Army did not prevent it from taking care of the perfection of its own organisation. After the defeat of Denikin and the return of the insurgents to their own region, a Council of Revolutionary (Makhnovist) Insurgents was created. It consisted of delegates from all units of the army and it functioned fairly regularly. It was concerned with questions which did not involve strictly military operations.

During the summer of 1920, when the army found itself in particularly unstable and painful circumstances, such an institution became too cumbersome and was incapable of functioning satisfactorily. It was replaced by a smaller council, consisting of seven members, elected or ratified by the mass of the insurgents. This council was divided into three sections — military affairs and operations, organisation and general control, education, propaganda and culture.

## Chapter 5. Wrangel's Offensive and Defeat

Now opens the fourth act [of our drama], that of Wrangel's expedition. The Tsarist ex-officer, Baron Wrangel, replaced Denikin at the head of the White movement. In the same areas — Crimea, the Caucasus, the Don and Kuban regions — he attempted to reassemble and reorganise the remnants of Denikin's troops. He was successful, and reinforced his basic troops with several successive drafts [on the population]. Since the disastrous policy of the Bolsheviks had turned increasingly wide sections of society against them, he finally succeeded in setting up a well-organised and completely loyal army.

By the spring of 1920, Wrangel began seriously to harass the Bolsheviks, and, since he was more ingenious and artful than his predecessor, he soon became dangerous. By the middle of the summer, it was evident that he was beginning to gain the upper hand. He pushed on slowly but surely, and soon his advance constituted a grave threat to the whole Donetz basin. Since the Bolsheviks were deeply involved, and undergoing reverses on the Polish front, the whole revolution was again in danger.

As at the time of Denikin's offensive, the Makhnovists decided to fight Wrangel to the full extent of their strength and ability. But each time the Red troops struck them from behind, and they had to abandon the firing line and retreat. At the same time, the Soviet authorities did not stop slandering and smearing the Makhnovists. Thus, for example, while continuing to treat them as "bandits" and "defenders of the kulaks", they spread the false news of an alliance between Makhno and Wrangel, and the representative of the Kharkov government did not hesitate to declare, at the plenary session of the Ekaterinoslav Soviet, that the authorities had written proof of this alliance. All these procedures were, to them, "tactics in the political struggle."

The Makhnovists could not remain indifferent to Wrangel's more and more menacing advance. They felt that it was important to fight him without delay, without allowing him time to consolidate and extend his conquests. But what was to be done about the Communists? In the first place, they prevented the Makhnovists from acting. In the second, their dictatorship was as evil and as hostile to the workers' liberty as Wrangel's.

After having examined the problem from all sides, the Insurgent Council and the staff of the army decided that, despite everything else, Wrangel represented the Enemy No. 1 in relation to the Revolution, and that it was necessary to try and come to an understanding with the Bolsheviks. The question was then brought before the mass of the insurgents, and the latter decided at a huge meeting that the destruction of Wrangel might have important consequences. The assembly agreed with the opinion of the Council and the staff. It was decided to propose to the Communists that hostilities between them and the Makhnovists be suspended in order that together they might wipe out Wrangel.

In July and August, dispatches to this effect were sent to Moscow and Kharkov, in the name of the Council and the Commander of the Insurrectionary Army. They received no reply. The Communists continued their war against the Makhnovists, making war on them and slandering them.

In September, Ekaterinoslav had to be abandoned by the Communists, and almost without resistance, Wrangel took Berdiansk, Alexandrovsk, Gulai-Polya and Sinelnikovo. It was only then that a plenipotentiary delegation from the Central Committee of the Communist Party, with a certain Ivanov at its head, came to Starobelsk (in the Kharkov region), where the Makhnovists were then encamped, to begin negotiations on the subject of combined action against Wrangel. These negotiations took place on the spot. They resulted in a preliminary military and political agreement between the Makhnovists and the Soviet authorities. The clauses of this preliminary agreement were to be sent to Kharkov to be officially ratified. For this purpose, and also to maintain subsequent contact with the Bolshevik staff Budanoff and Popoff left for Kharkov.

Between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> December, 1920, the clauses of the agreement were put into final form and adopted by the two contracting parties. In spite of our desire for brevity, this historic document should be quoted in its entirety, for its contents are very revealing, while the events that followed the conclusion of the pact cannot be understood or fully appreciated unless one knows all the details of the agreement.

*“Preliminary Political and Military Agreement between the Soviet Government of the Ukraine and the Revolutionary Insurrectionary (Makhnovist) Army of the Ukraine.*

“Part I – Political Agreement.

1. Immediate release of all Makhnovists and Anarchists imprisoned or in exile in the territories of the Soviet Republics; cessation of all persecutions of Makhnovists or Anarchists (only those who carry on armed conflict against the Soviet Government are not covered by this clause).
2. Complete freedom for all Makhnovists and Anarchists of all forms of public expression and propaganda for their principles and ideas, by speech and the press, with the exception of anything that might call for the violent overthrow of the Soviet Power, and on condition that the requirements of the military censorship be respected. For all kinds of publications, the Makhnovists and Anarchists, as revolutionary organisations recognised by the Soviet Government, may make use of the technical apparatus of the Soviet state, while naturally submitting to the technical rules for publications.
3. Free participation in elections to the Soviets; and the right of Makhnovists and Anarchists to be elected thereto. Free participation in the organisation of the forthcoming Fifth Pan-Ukrainian Congress of Soviets, which shall take place next December.

*Signed* (By mandate of the Soviet Government of the Ukrainian SSR): Yakol-eff. Plenipotentiaries of the Council and the Commander of the Revolutionary Insurrectionary (Makhnovist) Army of the Ukraine: Kurilenko, Popoff.

“Part II – Military Agreement.

4. The Revolutionary Insurrectionary (Makhnovist) Army of the Ukraine will join the armed forces of the Republic as a partisan army, subordinate, in regard to operations, to the supreme command of the Red Army. It will retain its established internal structure, and does not have to adopt the bases and principles of the regular Red Army.



5. While crossing Soviet territory, at the front, or going between fronts, the Insurrectionary Army will accept into its ranks neither detachments of nor deserters from the Red Army.

Remarks:

- a. The units of the Red Army, as well as isolated Red soldiers, who have met and joined the Insurrectionary Army behind the Wrangel front, shall re-enter the ranks of the Red Army when they again make contact with it.
  - b. The Makhnovist partisans behind the Wrangel front, as well as all men at present in the Insurrectionary Army, will remain there, even if they were previously mobilised by the Red Army.
6. For the purpose of destroying the common enemy – the White Army – the Revolutionary Insurrectionary (Makhnovist) Army of the Ukraine will inform the working masses that collaborate with it of the agreement that has been concluded, it will call upon the people to cease all action hostile to the Soviet power; for its part, the Soviet power will immediately publish the clauses of the agreement.
  7. The families of combatants in the Insurrectionary (Makhnovist) Army living in the territories of the Soviet Republic shall enjoy the same rights as those of soldiers of the Red Army and for this purpose shall be supplied by the Soviet government of the Ukraine with the necessary documents.

*Signed:* Commander of the Southern Front: Frunze; Members of the Revolutionary Council of the Southern Front: Bela Kun, Gussev; Plenipotentiary Delegates of the Council and Commander of the Makhnovist Insurrectionary Army: Kurilenko, Popoff.”

In addition to the above mentioned three clauses of the political agreement, the representatives of the Council and Commander of the Makhnovist Army submitted to the Soviet Government a fourth special clause as follows:

*“Fourth Clause of the political agreement.*

“One of the essential principles of the Makhnovist movement being the struggle for self-administration of the workers, the Insurrectionary Army believes it should insist on the following fourth point: ‘In the region where the Makhnovist Army is operating, the worker and peasant population will create its own free institutions for economic and political self-administration; these institutions will be autonomous and joined federatively – by means of agreements – with the governmental organs of the Soviet Republics.’”

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In practice it was a question of reserving for the Makhnovist insurgents two or three departments of the Ukraine in which they could carry out their social experiments in complete freedom,

while maintaining federative connection with the USSR. Although this special clause did not constitute part of the signed agreement, the Makhnovists naturally attached very great importance to it.<sup>1</sup>

We urge the reader to examine closely the text of this agreement. It clearly distinguishes the two opposed tendencies: the one, statist and defending the usual privileges and prerogatives of authority; the other, popular and revolutionary, defending the usual demands of the subjugated masses. It is extremely significant that the first part of the agreement – which contains the political clauses and demands the natural rights of the workers – contains only Makhnovist theses. In this matter, the Soviet authorities had the classic attitude of all tyrannies: they sought to limit the demands formulated by the Makhnovists, bargained on all points, did everything possible to reduce the rights of the working people, rights which were inalienable from and indispensable for their real freedom.

Under various pretexts, the Soviet authorities delayed for a long time publishing this agreement. The Makhnovists felt that sign augured little good, and aware of the lack of sincerity of the Soviet authorities, they declared firmly that as long as the Agreement was not published, the Insurrectionary Army could not act according to its clauses. It was only after this direct pressure that the Soviet government finally decided to publish the text of the agreement. But they did not do the whole thing at once. They first published part II (the military agreement); then, after an interval, part I (the political agreement). The real meaning of the pact was thereby obscured. The greater proportion of the readers did not understand it precisely, which was what the Bolsheviks wanted. As for the special political clause (No. 4), the Ukrainian authorities separated it from the agreement, pretending that they had to confer with Moscow on this subject. Between October 15<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>, the Makhnovist army set out to attack Wrangel. The battle front extended from Sinelnikovo to Alexandrovsk-Pologui-Berdiansk. The direction (of the attack) was towards Perekop.<sup>2</sup>

In the first battles, between Perekop and the city of Orekov, an important group of Wrangel's troops, commanded by General Drozdoff, was beaten and 4,000 soldiers taken prisoner.<sup>3</sup> Three weeks later, the region was liberated from Wrangel's troops. They withdrew towards the Crimea, and at the beginning of November, the Makhnovists, together with the Red Army, were already before Perekop.

A few days later, with the Red Army blocking Perekop, a part of the Makhnovist troops, following the orders of the staff, went thirty kilometres to the left of the isthmus and set out over the ice of the Sivach Strait, which at this time was frozen. The cavalry, commanded by Martchenko (an anarchist peasant, originally from Gulai-Polya) marched at the head, followed by a machine-gun regiment commanded by Kojin (a revolutionary peasant and a very brave commander). The crossing was made under violent and continuous fire from the enemy, which cost many lives. But the boldness and perseverance of the attackers finally broke the resistance of Wrangel's troops,

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<sup>1</sup> It is significant that after the conclusion of the pact with the Makhnovists, the Bolsheviks felt obliged to declare, through the Central Commissariat for War, that Makhno had never dealt with Wrangel, that the statements spread about were an error based on false information, etc. These declarations were published by the Central Commissariat for War under the title Makhno and Wrangel in the Proletarian and other Kharkov papers around October 20<sup>th</sup>, 1920.

<sup>2</sup> Perekop is a very narrow and hilly isthmus which connects the near-island of Crimea with the mainland.

<sup>3</sup> This was the moment that Makhno demanded, by telegram, the immediate release of Tchubenko and myself – I had been imprisoned at the end of December 1919. At this time the Bolsheviks praised to me the fighting qualities of the Makhnovist army.

who took flight. Then another Makhnovist army, the Crimean, under the command of Simon Karetnik (another anarchist peasant from Gulai-Polya) moved to the right towards Simferopol, which was taken by storm on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> of November. At the same time, the Red Army forced Perekop.

It is incontestable that, having entered the Crimea by [crossing the Strait of] Sivach, the Makhnovists contributed greatly to the taking of the Perekop Isthmus, hitherto reputed impregnable, by forcing Wrangel to retreat into the interior of the Crimea in order to avoid being surrounded in the gorges of Perekop. Wrangel's adventure was over. The remnants of his troops embarked in all haste from the southern shore of the Crimea and left for abroad.

We have mentioned that, with the abandonment of Ekaterinoslav and the second conflict with the Bolsheviks, followed by Wrangel's expedition, events of a military nature once again prevented all creative activity on the part of the labouring masses of the insurgent region. An exception can, however, be made of the village of Gulai-Polya.

We should here note that, while considered a village, Gulai-Polya is really a city and even a fairly large city. To be sure, at the time we are considering, its population was composed almost entirely of peasants, but it numbered from 20,000 to 30,000 inhabitants. The village had several primary schools and two high schools. Its life was active, and the mentality of its population was very advanced. A number of intellectuals — teachers, professors and others — had been established there for some time.

Although, during the bitter struggle against Denikin, the Bolsheviks and Wrangel, Gulai-Polya changed hands many times, and although the Soviet government, despite the agreement, maintained a semi-blockade of the region and did as much as it could to prevent the free activity of the workers, the active core of the Makhnovists residing at Gulai-Polya carried on very energetic constructive work, with the help and enthusiastic support of the whole population.

First of all, they were concerned with the organisation of a free local workers' Soviet. This Soviet was to lay the foundations of the new economic and social life of the region, a life based on the principles of liberty and equality, free from all political authority. To this end the inhabitants of Gulai-Polya organised several preliminary meetings and ended by creating a Soviet which functioned for a few weeks. It was later destroyed by the Bolsheviks. At the same time, the Insurgents' Council drew up and published the Fundamental Laws of the Free Soviet.

They also devoted themselves actively to academic instruction and public education. This work was very urgent since the repeated armed invasions had involved terrible repercussions in the field of education. The teachers, having received no remuneration for a long time, had dispersed, and the school buildings were abandoned. In so far as circumstances permitted, the Makhnovists and the whole population of Gulai-Polya undertook the task of rebuilding the educational system.

What deserve special attention are the leading ideas on which the initiators based this work. [They were as follows]:

1. The workers themselves should supervise the process of educating the younger generation of workers.
2. The school should not merely be a source of indispensable knowledge, but also a means of developing conscious and free men, capable of struggling for a truly human society, and of living and acting in accordance therewith.

3. To fulfil these two conditions, the school should be independent and therefore separate from the Church and the State.
4. The teaching of the youth should be the work of those with the ability, aptitude, knowledge and other qualities necessary for this purpose. Naturally, it should be placed under the effective and vigilant control of the workers.

At Gulai-Polya there were some intellectuals who were supporters of the principles of the Free School of Francisco Ferrer.<sup>4</sup> Under their guidance, a lively movement developed and rapidly began to sketch out a widespread educational enterprise. The peasants and workers undertook the maintenance of the necessary teaching personnel for all the schools of the village and its environs, and a mixed commission, composed of peasants, workers and teachers, was created in order to take charge of providing for all the needs, economic as well as pedagogical, of the academic life. This commission drew up, in record time, a plan for free education, inspired by the ideas of Francisco Ferrer. At the same time, special courses for adults were organised and classes in “political” or rather social and ideological subjects began to function.

Soon many persons who had previously abandoned their activity as teachers and even left Gulai-Polya, became aware of the revival and returned to their posts, while a number of specialists, who lived elsewhere, came to the village to take part in the movement. In this way the work of education was restarted on a new basis. We should also mention the resumption of theatrical performances which were inspired by the new ideas and accomplished some very interesting results.

All this creative spirit of the masses was brutally destroyed by a new and furious Bolshevik attack, which was unleashed over the whole Ukraine on November 26<sup>th</sup>, 1920.

After all that had happened, no one among the Makhnovists believed in the revolutionary integrity of the Bolsheviks. They knew that only the danger of Wrangel’s offensive had forced the latter to deal with Makhno. And they were certain to find some pretext for a new campaign against the *Makhnovitchina*. No one believed in either the solidity or the continuation of the agreement. But in general the Makhnovists supposed that, the alliance would last for three or four months, and they hoped to take advantage of this lapse of time to carry on energetic propaganda in favour of the Makhnovist and libertarian ideas and movements. This hope was illusory.

The way in which the Bolshevik government had applied the clauses of the agreement was already significant and suspicious. It was evident that they had no idea of fulfilling the treaty honestly or effectively. They released only a trifling number of imprisoned Makhnovists and Anarchists, and they continued to prevent, by all possible methods, the ideological activity of the libertarian militants.

Absorbed by their military tasks, the Makhnovists could not for the moment concern themselves with this irregular situation. However, a certain amount of Anarchist activity was reborn in the Ukraine. Some propaganda was resumed and a few newspapers reappeared.

The interest and sympathy of the labouring population for the libertarian ideas and movement surpassed all expectation. Coming out of prison in Moscow and returning to the Ukraine, I was

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<sup>4</sup> Francisco Ferrer, famous Spanish free-thinker, founder of a system of free education. An object of fierce hatred by the Catholic Church, he was falsely accused on its instigation of having taken part in revolutionary plots, and was shot in 1909. His execution gave rise to vast movements of protest throughout the whole world. Francisco Ferrer called himself an Anarchist.

surprised to see crowds filling our meeting hall in Kharkov, every evening and for every lecture that was announced. Each time, we had to turn away hundreds of people. And in spite of the already intense cold at that season, many people would remain outside, listening to every word through the half-open door.

Soon the ranks of the Ukrainian Anarchists were enlarged by a number of militants who came from Great Russia, where the Bolsheviks paid hardly any attention to the agreement concluded with Makhno, and every day the movement gained strength. This state of affairs could only hasten the reaction of the Bolsheviks, who were enraged at such success [for the Anarchists].

The Makhnovists counted heavily on the effects of the famous Fourth Clause of the political agreement. They insisted on the urgency of examining it and reaching a decision, for they were anxious to obtain the Bolsheviks' recognition of the right of economic and social self-government by the workers and the peasants. They demanded that the Soviet authorities choose between two possibilities; either to sign the article in question or to explain frankly why they were against it.

Little by little, it was on this question that the Anarchist propaganda concentrated. By the middle of November, this Fourth Clause had attracted public attention everywhere, and promised to assume capital importance in the future. But it was precisely this clause which seemed absolutely unacceptable in the eyes of the Bolsheviks.

It was around this time that an Anarchist congress was planned at Kharkov to establish the type of Anarchist activity to be carried on in the new circumstances. And it was around the same time that Lenin, reassured by the liquidation of Wrangel's adventure, began to prepare slyly for a new attack on the Makhnovists and the Anarchists, and ended by sending, one after another, his famous secret telegrams, of which the Anarchists were warned too late.

“As soon as Simon Karetnik's dispatch — announcing that he was with the insurrectionary troops in the Crimea and marching on Simferopol — had been sent to Gulai-Polya, Gregor Vassilevsky, Makhno's aide-de-camp, exclaimed: ‘This is the end of the agreement. I wager that in a week the Bolsheviks will be on our backs.’ That was said on November 16<sup>th</sup>, and on the 26<sup>th</sup> of the same month, the Bolsheviks treacherously attacked the Makhnovist staff and troops in the Crimea; they threw themselves at the same time on Gulai-Polya, seized the Makhnovist representatives at Kharkov, destroyed all the recently established Anarchist organisations there, and imprisoned all the Anarchists, of whom several had come for the congress. They proceeded in the same way all over the Ukraine.” (P. Archinov, op. cit. pp. 297–8.)

## Chapter 6. Third and Last War of the Bolsheviks Against the Makhnovists and Anarchists; Defeat of the Insurrectionary Army

Thus began the third and last war of the Bolsheviks against the Makhnovists, the Anarchists and the labouring masses of the Ukraine, a war which ended, after nine months of unequal and implacable struggle – with the military destruction of the free movement. Once again, brute force, based on deception and imposture, triumphed.

Naturally, the Bolshevik government was not slow to give explanations for its treachery. It pretended that the Makhnovists and the Anarchists were in the process of preparing a conspiracy and a vast insurrection against the Soviet government; it accused Makhno of having refused to go to the Caucasian front and of having started to levy troops from among the peasants in order to form an army against the Soviet authorities; it stated that instead of fighting Wrangel in the Crimea, the Makhnovists had been sniping at the rear-guard of the Red Army, etc.

It goes without saying that all these excuses were entirely untrue. But by repeating them, in the face of the forced silence of the Makhnovists and Anarchists, the Bolsheviks managed to make many people believe them, both abroad and in Russia.

There are several circumstances which make it possible for us to establish the truth [about this situation]:

1. On November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1920, the Makhnovists arrested at Pologui and Gulai-Polya nine Bolshevik spies belonging to the 42<sup>nd</sup> Sharpshooters' Division of the Red Army, who confessed to having been sent to Gulai-Polya by the chief of the counterespionage service to obtain information about the location of the houses of Makhno, the members of his staff, the commanders of the Insurrectionary Army and the members of the council. After this, they were supposed to remain in Gulai-Polya to await the arrival of the Red Army and then point out where the persons in question were to be found. In case the unexpected arrival of the Red Army forced these persons to flee into hiding these spies were supposed to shadow and not lose sight of them. The spies declared that there was going to be an attack on Gulai-Polya by November 24<sup>th</sup> or 25<sup>th</sup>.

The Council of the Revolutionary Insurgents and the commander of the army then sent to Rakovsky, at this time president of the Council of People's Commissars of the Ukraine, and also the Revolutionary Military Council of Kharkov, a detailed communication about this plot, demanding: I. The immediate arrest and arraignment before the Council of War of the chief of the 42<sup>nd</sup> Division and other persons involved in the plot; II. The prohibition of Red units travelling through Gulai-Polya. Pologui, Malaia-Tokmatchka and Turkenovka, in order to forestall any unpleasant incident.

The response of the Kharkov government was as follows: "The pretended 'plot' is only a simple misunderstanding. Nevertheless, the Soviet authorities, desirous of clearing up the matter, are putting it in the hands of a special commission and propose that the staff of the Makhnovist

army delegate two members to take part in the work of this commission.” This reply was sent by direct wire to Gulai-Polya from Kharkov on November 25.

The next morning, P. Rybin, secretary of the Council of Revolutionary Insurgents, again discussed this question and all the disputed points with Kharkov by direct wire. The Bolshevik authorities at Kharkov assured him that the affair of the 42<sup>nd</sup> Division would certainly be resolved to the complete satisfaction of the Makhnovists, and also added that the Fourth Clause of the political agreement was also about to be settled amicably, in a satisfactory manner.

This conversation with Rybin took place at 9 a.m. on November 26. But six hours earlier, in the middle of the night, the Makhnovist representatives at Kharkov had been seized, as well as all the Anarchists who were at Kharkov and elsewhere [in the Ukraine]. And exactly two hours after Rybin’s conversation by direct wire, Gulai-Polya was surrounded on all sides by Red troops and subjected to a furious bombardment. On the same day and at the same hour, the Makhnovist army in the Crimea was attacked. There the Bolsheviks succeeded by a ruse in capturing all members of the staff of that army, as well as its commander Simon Karetnik, and put them to death without exception.

2. Since I was at Kharkov with the representatives of the Makhnovist army and knew nothing of what was being plotted against us, I was delegated, on November 25, to see Rakovsky and learn directly from him what exactly was being done about the Fourth Clause of the agreement. Rakovsky received me very cordially, and invited me into his office. Sitting in a handsome armchair, and nonchalantly playing with an elegant paper knife, he assured me, smilingly, that the discussions between Kharkov and Moscow on the subject of the Fourth Clause were allrfof finished, that there was every reason to expect a satisfactory solution and that it would be a question of only a few days. But at the very moment when he was talking to me in this manner, the order to start the attack on the Anarchists and Makhnovists was in the drawer of the desk before which we sat.

The same evening, I gave a lecture on Anarchism at the Agricultural Institute at Kharkov. The hall was filled to capacity and the lecture ended very late, around 1 a.m. Returning home, I worked a little on an article for our newspaper, and went to bed about 2.30. I was hardly asleep when I was awakened by an ominous hubbub; shots, the clanking of weapons, the noise of boots on the stairs, knocking on doors, shouts and curses. I understood. I had only time to get dressed. Someone knocked furiously at the door of my room. “Open or we’ll break down the door.” As soon as the bolt was drawn, I was brutally seized, carried off and thrown into a cellar in which there were already several dozen of us. The Fourth Clause thus found a satisfactory solution.

3. On November 27<sup>th</sup>, the day after the attack on Gulai-Polya, the Makhnovists found on the Red Army prisoners whom they captured undated proclamations entitled Forward Against Makhno! and Death to Makhnovism! and published by the political section of the Fourth Army. The prisoners said they had received these proclamations on the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> of the month. They contained a call to action against Makhno, who was accused of having violated the clauses of the political and military agreement, of having refused to go to the Caucasian front, of having planned an uprising against the Soviet power, etc. This proved that all these accusations were fabricated and sent to the press even while the Insurrectionary Army was still in the process of beating a path across the Crimea and occupying Simferopol and while the Makhnovist representatives were peacefully working with the Soviet authorities at Kharkov and elsewhere.

4. During the months of October and November, 1920, i.e. while the military and political agreement between the Makhnovists and Bolsheviks was being negotiated and after it had just been completed, two Bolshevik plots to assassinate Makhno were uncovered by the Makhnovists.

[From all the facts that I have just recorded] it is evident that this vast operation [of the attack on Makhno] had to be carefully prepared and that its elaboration required at least two weeks. It was a question not merely of a simple treacherous assault on the Makhnovists, but of a meticulous scheme which was elaborated in all its details. The Bolsheviks even devised tricks to put the Makhnovists' vigilance to sleep, to lull them with false allegations of security, with lying promises, etc.

Such are the facts concerning the breaking of the pact between the Makhnovists and the Soviet Power. They are confirmed by certain documents of Soviet origin, e.g., the order which was issued by Frunze, at the time commander of the Southern Front. This document suffices to demonstrate the treachery of the Bolsheviks and reduce to nothing all their lies and subterfuge.

“Order to Comrade Makhno, Commander of the Insurrectionary Army. Copies to Commanders of the armies on the Southern Front. No. 00149. Issued at General Headquarters, Melitopol, November 23, 1920.

“By reason of the cessation of hostilities against Wrangel and his complete defeat, the Revolutionary Military Council of the Southern Front considers that the task of the partisan army is completed. It therefore proposes to the Revolutionary Military Council of the Insurrectionary Army that it immediately begin transforming the insurrectionary partisan units into regular military units of the Red Army.

“There is no more reason for the Insurrectionary Army to continue as such. On the contrary, the existence, alongside of the Red Army, of these units with a special organisation, pursuing special tasks, produces absolutely unacceptable results.<sup>1</sup>

“That is why the Revolutionary Military Council of the Southern Front orders the Revolutionary Military Council of the Insurrectionary Army to do the following:

1. All units of the Insurrectionary Army formations at present in the Crimea should be immediately incorporated into the Fourth Soviet Army. The Revolutionary Military Council should take charge of this transfer.

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<sup>1</sup> Frunze mentions several cases where soldiers of the Red Army were disarmed and even killed by the Makhnovists. But all the cases of which he speaks were closely examined by himself, Rakovsky and the representatives of the Makhnovists at Kharkov, and it was conclusively established: 1. that the the Makhnovists had nothing to do with these misdeeds. 2. that if hostile acts towards the army were committed by certain military detachments which did not belong to the Makhnovist army, this was primarily due to the fact that the Soviet authorities had neglected to publish, at an opportune time, and intelligibly, their agreement with the insurgents. In fact, it was known that numerous isolated military units, not incorporated into the Makhnovist army (we will be obliged to return to this subject a little later in another connection) operated here and there in the Ukraine. The majority of these units, while acting on their own, nevertheless respected the opinion and attitude of the Insurrectionary Army. They would certainly have ceased all hostility towards the Soviet authorities and armies if they had known about the agreement concluded with the Makhnovists.

Frunze seeks to justify his order in the manner of the Jesuits, with arguments that seem plausible but are really false. For he could not admit the only true argument, the desire of the Bolsheviks to rid themselves completely of the Makhnovist army and movement, once the Bolshevik power had no further need of the Insurrectionary Army. If he admitted this, he would have had to give his reasons. But then the lies of the government and its real attitude towards the labouring masses would be revealed.



2. The military formations at Gulai-Polya should be liquidated. The combatants will be distributed among the reserve detachments, according to the instructions of the commander of that part of the army.
3. The Revolutionary Military Council of the Insurrectionary Army shall take all necessary measures to explain to the combatants the need for this transformation.

Signed: M. Frunze, commander-in-chief of the Southern Front; Smilga, Member of the Revolutionary Military Council; Karaty-guin, chief-of-staff.”

The reader should recall the history of the agreement between the Soviet government and the Makhnovists. The signing of the pact was preceded by negotiations between the Makhnovist plenipotentiaries and the Bolshevik delegation, headed by the Communist Ivanoff, which came to the Makhnovist camp at Starobelsk especially for this purpose. These negotiations were continued at Kharkov, where the Makhnovist representatives worked for three weeks with the Bolsheviks to conclude the pact satisfactorily. Each article was carefully examined and debated by the two parties. The final version of this agreement was approved by the two parties, that is to say, by the Soviet government and the revolutionary insurgent region in the person of the Council of Revolutionary Insurgents of the Ukraine. It was sealed by their respective signatures.

According to the very nature of this agreement, none of the articles could be suspended or modified without prior agreement of the contracting parties. But Frunze's order not only suppressed the first article of the military agreement, but negated the whole agreement. It proves that the agreement was never taken seriously by the Bolsheviks; that in drawing it up the latter were playing a shameful comedy; that the pact was only a gross deception, a manoeuvre, a snare, to persuade the Makhnovists to march on Wrangel and get themselves wiped out.

Even Frunze's order, despite its appearance of brutal candour or simplicity, was designed to serve as a manoeuvre, as is shown by the following facts:

1. At the same time that Order No. 00149 was received [by Makhno], the Fourth Army of the Crimea received an order to act against the Makhnovists with all the means at its disposal and to use all its military forces in case the insurgents refused to obey.
2. Neither the staff of the Insurrectionary Army, stationed at Gulai-Polya, nor the Makhnovist delegation at Kharkov, had any word of this order. The Makhnovists only learned about it three or four weeks after the Bolshevik aggression, through some newspapers which fell fortuitously into their hands. The explanation for this is simple. The Bolsheviks, who were preparing secretly for a surprise attack on the Makhnovists, could not afford to put them on their guard by sending them in advance a document of this sort, since the planned attack would then have inevitably been repulsed.
3. At the same time they had to have a justification for their aggression. That is why Frunze's order was published in the papers only after the attack and the breach [with the Makhnovists]. It appeared for the first time on December 15, 1920, in the Kharkov paper *The Communist*.

All these machinations had as their objective the surprising of the Makhnovists, their destruction and the subsequent explanation of their actions by means of “justificatory evidence” to suggest that it was perfectly honourable.

As we have said elsewhere, the attack on the Makhnovists was accompanied by the mass arrest of Anarchist militants. These arrests, which took place all over the Ukraine, had as their purpose not only the total destruction of all Anarchist thought and activity, but also the stifling of any possibility of protest, of any attempt to explain to the people the real meaning of the events.

Not only the Anarchists proper, but also those who counted as their friends and acquaintances, or were interested in their literature, were arrested. At Elizabethgrad, fifteen youths between 15 and 18 years old were thrown into prison. It is true that the higher authorities at Nicolaev (the departmental capital) were dissatisfied with this capture, saying that they wanted real Anarchists and not children. But not one of these children was released on the spot.

At Kharkov, the pursuit of the Anarchists assumed proportions unheard of before. Snares and ambushes were organised to catch all the Anarchists in the city. A trap of this kind was set up in the Free Brotherhood Bookshop. Anyone who came to buy a book was seized and sent to the Cheka; they even imprisoned people who stopped to read the newspaper *Nabat* which appeared legally before the break and was posted on the wall of the bookshop.

One of the Kharkov Anarchists, Gregor Tsesnik, having escaped arrest, the Bolsheviks threw his wife, who had no political interests of any kind, into prison. She started a hunger strike, demanding her immediate release. The Bolsheviks then told her that if Tsesnik wanted to obtain her release, he had only to give himself up to the Cheka. Tsesnik, although seriously ill, did so and was imprisoned.

We have mentioned already that the staff of the Makhnovist army in the Crimea, as well as the commander, Simon Karetnik, were treacherously seized and executed on the spot. Martchenko, who commanded the cavalry, although surrounded and fiercely attacked by numerous units of the Bolshevik Fourth Army, managed to escape and break a passage through the natural obstacles and barricades of the fortified Perekop Isthmus. Leading his men, or rather the remnants of his men, by day and night forced marches, he succeeded in rejoining Makhno (who, as we will see presently, again escaped the Bolsheviks) at the little village of Kermentchik.

There were already rumours of the lucky escape of the Makhnovist army from the Crimea. Their return was impatiently awaited. Finally, on December 7<sup>th</sup>, a horseman arrived at full gallop to announce that Martchenko’s troops would be there in a few hours. The Makhnovists at Kermentchik turned out excitedly to meet heroes.

Their anguish can be imagined when they finally saw the little group of horsemen which was slowly approaching in the distance. Instead of the powerful cavalry of 1,500 mounts, a handful of 250 men returned from the furnace. At their head were Martchenko and Taranovsky (another brave commander of the Insurrectionary Army).

“I have the honour of announcing to you the return of the Crimean army”, said Martchenko with bitter irony. A few insurgents were able to smile. But Makhno himself was sombre and silent, trying to control his emotions. “Yes, brothers,” continued Martchenko, “now, at last, we know what the Communists are.”

A general assembly took place on the spot. The story of the events in the Crimea was retold. It was thus learned that the commander of the army, Karetnik, sent by the Bolshevik staff to Gulai-Polya, ostensibly to attend a military council, was treacherously arrested on the way; that Gavrilenko, chief-of-staff of the Crimean army and also all his aides and several of the unit

commanders were deceived in the same way. All were shot immediately. The Cultural and Propaganda Commission at Simferopol was arrested without any military ruse. Thus the victorious Insurrectionary Army of the Crimea was betrayed and annihilated by the Bolsheviks, their allies of the day before.

[An experience of my own throws a further light on these events.] Having been brought to the Cheka prison in Moscow after my arrest at Kharkov, I was called in one day by Samsonoff, who was then chief of the Secret Operations Section of the Cheka. Instead of questioning me, he drew me into a discussion of principles, and in this way we came to talk of the events in the Ukraine. I told him straightforwardly that I thought the behaviour of the Bolsheviks towards the Makhnovist movement was treacherous.

“Ah,” he replied with animation, “you call it treacherous? That only demonstrates your ineradicable naivete. As for us Bolsheviks, we see it as proof that we have learned much since the beginning of the Revolution and have now become really skilful statesmen. This time we did not let ourselves be victimised. When we needed Makhno, we took advantage of him, and when we had no further need of his services, and he began to be something of a nuisance, we got rid of him completely.”

Samsonoff's words were a complete admission of the real reasons for the Bolshevik's behaviour and for all their machinations. They should be engraved in the brains of all those who seek to understand the true nature of State Communism.

It remains for us to tell briefly the last dramatic incidents of this death struggle between authority and the revolution. We have already said that, despite the meticulousness of the Bolsheviks' preparations and the suddenness of their attack, Makhno once again escaped them. On November 26<sup>th</sup>, when Gulai-Polya was surrounded by the Red troops, only a special group of about 250 Makhnovist horsemen (including Makhno himself) were there. With this handful of men, numerically insignificant, but stimulated by their anger, Makhno (who had hardly recovered from his sickness and was suffering from his wounds, the most recent of which was a fractured ankle bone) launched a counter-attack. He managed to rout the cavalry regiment of the Red Army which was advancing on Gulai-Polya from Uspenovka, and thus escaped from the enemy's grip.

Soon he was engaged in organising the units of insurgents that flocked to him from all sides, as well as some groups of Red soldiers who left the Bolsheviks and came to join him. He succeeded in forming a unit of 1,000 horsemen and 1,500 infantrymen, with which he attempted a counter attack. Eight days later, he was again master of Gulai-Polya, having routed the 42<sup>nd</sup> Division of the Red Army and taken nearly six thousand prisoners. Of the latter about two thousand men declared themselves willing to join the Insurrectionary Army; the rest were set free on the same day, after having attended a great popular meeting. Three days later, Makhno inflicted another serious defeat on the Bolsheviks near Andreevka. During the whole night and the following day, he fought two Divisions of the Red Army and ended by defeating them, again taking from eight to ten thousand prisoners.

Makhno then struck three further consecutive blows at the Red Army, near Komar, near Tzarekonstantinovka, and in the vicinity of Berdiansk. The Bolshevik infantry fought reluctantly and took advantage of every opportunity to surrender.

“As soon as they were taken prisoner,” Archinov tells us, “the soldiers of the Red Army were set free. They were advised to return to their homes and no longer serve as instruments of Power to subjugate the people. But, the Makhnovists being forced

to move on immediately, the freed prisoners were reinstated in their respective units a few days later. Indeed, the Soviet authorities organised special commissions to recapture the soldiers of the Red Army who were set free by the Makhnovists, and thus the latter were caught in a magic circle from which they could not escape. As for the Bolsheviks, their procedure was much simpler. Following the orders of the Special Commission for the Struggle against Makhnovism, all Makhnovist prisoners were shot on the spot.” Op. cit., p. 315).

For some time the Makhnovists were encouraged by the thought of the victory which they seemed to be winning. It appeared to them that it was only necessary to beat two or three Bolshevik Divisions for an important part of the Red Army to join them and the rest to retreat towards the North. But soon, the peasants of various districts brought news that the Bolsheviks were not content to pursue the Insurrectionary Army, but were installing whole regiments, primarily of cavalry, in the conquered villages.

In fact, Makhno was soon surrounded at Fedorovka, to the south of Gulai-Polya, by several divisions of infantry and cavalry. The battle lasted without respite from 2 a.m. to 4 p.m. Breaking through the enemy ranks, Makhno managed to escape to the north-east. But three days later he had to fight another battle, near the village of Constantin, with a very large cavalry force and a vigorous artillery. From several officers who were taken prisoner, Makhno learned that there were four Bolshevik army corps, two of cavalry and two mixed, and that the Red commander hoped to surround him with the assistance of several further divisions.

This information agreed perfectly with that furnished by the peasants, as well as with the observations and conclusions of Makhno himself. It became increasingly clear that the defeat of two or three Red units was of no importance, in view of the enormous mass of troops which were being sent against the insurgents to obtain a decision at all costs; it was no longer a question of achieving a victory over the Bolshevik armies, but of avoiding the complete destruction of the Insurrectionary Army. This Army, reduced to some three thousand combatants, was obliged to fight daily, each time against an enemy four or five times superior in numbers and arms. In these conditions, catastrophe was no longer in doubt.

The Council of Revolutionary Insurgents then decided to abandon the southern region provisionally, leaving Makhno full freedom as to the direction of the general retreat.

“Makhno’s genius was about to be submitted to a supreme test,” says Archinov. “It appeared absolutely impossible to escape from the monstrous network of troops advancing from all sides towards the little group of insurgents; three thousand revolutionary militants were surrounded by an army of at least a hundred and fifty thousand men. But not for an instant did Makhno lose courage or presence of mind. He embarked on a heroic duel against this mass of troops.

“Surrounded by an infernal circle of Red divisions, he marched like a legendary Titan, fighting battle after battle, to the right, to the left, in front and to the rear. After routing several units of the Red Army and taking more than twenty thousand prisoners, Makhno — as if he were striking out blindly — set out first towards the east, in the direction of Yuzovska, although the workers of this mining region had warned him that he was awaited by an uninterrupted military barrier, and then turned sharply west, following fantastic routes which he alone knew.

“From this moment, the ordinary roads were completely abandoned. The movement of the army continued for hundreds of kilometres across fields and plateaux covered with snow and ice. To accomplish this march, it was necessary to be endowed with a prodigious sense of direction and orientation. No map, no compass could be of any use in such movements. Maps and instruments could indicate the direction, but could not prevent falling into a ravine or a torrent, which did not once happen to the Makhnovist army. Such a march across the hilly and roadless steppes was possible because the troops knew the configuration of the Ukrainian steppes perfectly.

“This fabulous manoeuvre permitted the Makhnovist army to avoid hundreds of enemy cannon and machine-guns. It allowed it to defeat at Petrovo two brigades of the 1<sup>st</sup> Bolshevik Cavalry which, believing Makhno to be a hundred kilometres away, were taken completely by surprise.

“This unequal struggle lasted for several months, with incessant battles by day and night. Arriving in the department of Kiev, the Makhnovist army found itself, in the coldest part of winter, in a hilly, rocky country which made it necessary to abandon all the artillery, supplies and munitions and even most of the wagons. At the same time, two enemy cavalry divisions, called Red Cossacks, came from the western frontier to join the mass of armies sent by the Bolsheviks against Makhno.

“All possibility of escape now appeared non-existent. The country contained as few resources as a graveyard. There was nothing but cliffs and steep ravines, all covered with ice, over which one could only advance extremely slowly. On all sides there was an incessant barrage of cannon and machine-gun fire. None of the Makhnovists expected to get out to safety again, but none thought of dispersing in a shameful flight. They decided to die together.

“It was unspeakably sad to see this handful of men, alone among the cliffs, the sky and the enemy fire, ready to fight to the end, and already seemingly condemned to death. A heart-rending grief, a mortal anguish, took hold of one, driving one to scream in despair, yes, to scream to the whole universe, that a dreadful crime was about to be committed, and that what was greatest in the hearts of the people, the noblest and most sublime thing that the people had produced in the heroic centuries of its history, was about to be destroyed, was about to perish for ever.

“Makhno met honourably the test that fate had imposed on him. He advanced to the borders of Galicia, went back to Kiev, re-crossed the Dnieper near that city, went down into the department of Poltava, then into that of Kharkov, turned back north again towards Kursk, and, following the railway tracks between this point and Belograd, got out of the enemy circle into a much more favourable situation and left far behind him the many Bolshevik divisions sent to pursue him.” (Op. cit., pp. 317–20.)

This attempt to capture Makhno’s army had failed, but the unequal duel between the handful of insurgents and the armies of the Soviet state was not over. The Bolshevik command continued to pursue its objective — the capture of the central nucleus of Makhnovism and its destruction. The Red divisions of the whole Ukraine were sent to overtake and blockade the remnants of the Insurrectionary Army. Soon, the iron vice clamped on the heroic handful of revolutionaries, and

the death struggle began again. Instead of telling the end of the drama ourselves, we prefer to reprint here the letter which Makhno sent to Archinov after he had left Russia, and which the latter quoted in his book. It shows admirably the very last convulsions of the struggle.

“Two days after your departure, my dear friend, I took the village of Korotcha in the department of Kursk. I had several thousand copies of the *Statutes of the Free Soviets* printed, and set out through Varpiarka and the Don region towards the departments of Ekaterinoslav and Taurid. I had to fight fierce battles every day, on one side against the Communist infantry which followed us step by step, and on the other against the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Army, which was sent against us by the Bolshevik staff.

“You know our horsemen. The Red cavalry, unless it is supported by infantry and armoured cars, can never hold them. That is why I managed, though not without serious losses, to break through without changing my direction. Our army demonstrated every day that it was really a popular and revolutionary army. In the material conditions which it endured, it should have melted away immediately, but, on the contrary, it never ceased to grow in manpower and resources.

“In one of the serious battles which we had to fight, our special detachment of cavalry lost thirty men killed, half of whom were commanders, among others our dear and good friend — young in years but old in military exploits — the chief of the detachment Gabriel Troian. He was killed instantly by a machine-gun bullet. At his side also fell Appolon and several other brave and devoted comrades.

“At some distance from Gulai-Polya, we were joined by our new troops, fresh and full of spirit, who were commanded by Bravo and Parkhomenko. A little later, the first brigade of Budenny’s 4<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division with its commander, Maslak, at its head, came over to our side. The struggle against the authority and despotism of the Bolsheviks became ever fiercer.

“At the beginning of March, 1921,<sup>2</sup> I told Brova and Maslak to form, from among the troops who were with me, a special unit to proceed towards the Don and the Kuban. Another group was formed under the command of Parkhomenko and sent into the Voronedj region, where Parkhomenko was killed. A third group, comprising 600 horsemen and Ivanuk’s regiment, was sent towards Kharkov.

“Around the same time, our best comrade and revolutionist, Vdovitchenko, was wounded in the fighting and had to be taken, accompanied, by a small detachment, to Novospassovka for treatment. An expeditionary force of Bolsheviks discovered his hiding place, and, while defending themselves against the enemy, Vdovitchenko and his comrade-in-arms Matrossenko, seeing that they were about to be captured, both shot themselves. Matrossenko fell instantly dead, but Vdovitchenko’s bullet was embedded under his skull above the neck. When the Communists found out who he was they treated him and saved him, temporarily, from death. He was in the hospital at AJexandroysk and begged his comrades to find a way of rescuing him. He was tortured atrociously. They tried to make him renounce Makhnovism and sign a paper

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<sup>2</sup> The reader will recall that this was the time of the Kronstadt revolt. It is incorrectly supposed that the Bolsheviks claimed that Makhno participated indirectly in that movement.

to that effect. He scornfully repulsed their offers, although he was so weak that he could hardly talk. Because of this refusal, he might have been shot at any moment. But I could not find out whether he was or not.

“During this time, I myself made a raid across the Dnieper towards Nikolaiev; then I recrossed the Dnieper above Perekop and went towards our region, where I hoped to meet some of our detachments. But the Communist command had prepared an ambush for me near Melitopol. It was impossible either to advance or to recross the Dnieper, since the melting of the snow had begun and the river was covered with floating cakes of ice. We had to fight, which meant that I must get back into the saddle and direct operations myself.<sup>3</sup>

“A section of the enemy troops were skilfully turned and eluded by our men, while I forced the others to keep on the alert for a whole 24 hours, harassing them with our patrols. During this time, I managed to make a forced march of sixty versts, to overcome — at dawn on the 8<sup>th</sup> March — a third Bolshevik army, camped on the shores of Lake Molotchny, and to get to the open space of the Vorkhny-Tomac region over the narrow promontory between this lake and the Sea of Azov. From there I sent Kurilenko into the Berdiansk-Melitopol region to direct the insurrectionary movement there. I myself went — with the intention of passing by Gulai-Polya — towards the department of Tchernigov, since peasant delegations had come from several of its districts to ask me to visit their region.

“In the course of this journey my troops — 1,500 horsemen under Petrenko and two regiments of infantry — were halted and encircled by strong Bolshevik divisions. Again, I had to direct the counter-attack myself. Our efforts were successful, we beat the enemy thoroughly and took many prisoners, as well as arms, guns, ammunition and horses.

“But two days later we were attacked by fresh and very brave troops. I must tell you that these daily combats had accustomed our men to placing so little value on their lives that exploits of extraordinary and sublime heroism had become everyday occurrences. With a cry of ‘Live free or die fighting!’, the men would throw themselves into the midst of no matter what unit, overturning enemies much stronger than themselves and forcing them to flee. “During our counter-attack [on this occasion], which was bold to the point of folly. I was struck with a bullet that entered my thigh and came out through the belly, near the appendix. I fell off my horse, and this made our counter-attack fail and forced us to retreat, the spirit of our troops having been broken by the cry of one of our men, no doubt inexperienced in battle, ‘Batko is killed!’

“They carried me for a dozen versts in a sort of cart, before dressing my wound, and I lost a great deal of blood. I remained unconscious, under the guard of Leo Zinkovsky; this was March 14<sup>th</sup>. During the night of the 15<sup>th</sup>, I regained consciousness. All the commanders of our army and the members of the staff, with Belach at their head, assembled at my bedside, asking me to sign an order to send detachments of a hun-

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<sup>3</sup> As we have said, Makhno had been wounded by a bullet that fractured his ankle, and he therefore mounted a horse only in cases of extreme necessity.

dred or two hundred men to Kurilenko, Kojin and others, who were directing the insurrectionary movement in various regions. They wanted me to retire with one regiment to a relatively quiet place, until I could get back into the saddle. I signed the order, and I permitted Zabudko to form a flying column to act on its own in our region, without, however, losing touch with me. By the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup> March, all these detachments had already left, except for a small special unit that remained with me.

“At this moment, the 9<sup>th</sup> Red Cavalry Division fell upon us and forced us to strike camp. They pursued us for 13 hours and over 180 versts. Finally, upon arriving at Slo-boda, on the shore of the Sea of Azov, we were able to change horses and halt for five hours. At dawn on the 17<sup>th</sup> March, we resumed the march towards Novospassovka. But after 17 versts on the road we met a new and quite fresh force of enemy cavalry. They had been sent after Kurilenko, but, having lost sight of him, they fell upon us. After pursuing us for 25 versts (we were completely exhausted and really incapable of fighting) these horsemen threw themselves resolutely upon us.

“What was to be done? I was incapable, not only of getting into the saddle, but even of sitting up. I was lying in the bottom of the cart, and saw a terrible hand-to-hand battle – a regular hacking – take place about two hundred yards away from me. Our men died only for my sake, only because they would not abandon me. But, in the last resort, there was no way to safety, either for them or for me. The enemy was five or six times as strong, for fresh reserves were constantly arriving.

“All at once I saw our machine-gun tenders – the same guns that were with me in your time (there were five of them under the command of Micha from the village of Tchernigovka near Berdiansk) – coming up to my cart, and I heard the men say to me: ‘Batko, your life is indispensable to the cause and to our peasant movement. That cause is dear to us. We are going to die soon, but our death will save you and those who will take faithful care of you. Don’t forget to repeat our words to our parents.’ One of them embraced me, then I could no longer see any of them near me. A moment later, Leo Zinkovsky carried me in his arms to the cart of a peasant who had passed nearby. I heard the machine-guns rattle and the bombs exploding in the distance. It was our gunners who were keeping the Bolsheviks from passing. We had time to travel three or four versts and cross a river. I was saved. But all our machine-gunners died there.

“Some time later we passed the place again, and the peasants of the village of Staroduvovka showed us the common grave where they had buried the machine-gunners. Dear friend, I still cannot keep back my tears when I think of those brave fighters, simple and honest peasants. Moreover, I must tell you that this episode seemed to cure me. On the evening of the same day, I got back into the saddle and left the region.

“During April I re-established contact with all the units of our troops, and sent those who were nearby to the Poltava region. During May, Kojin’s and Kurilenko’s units joined us and formed a body of 2,000 horsemen and several regiments of infantry. It was decided to march on Kharkov and chase out the big bosses of the Communist



Party. But they were on their guard. They sent more than sixty armoured cars, several divisions of cavalry, and a swarm of infantry to meet me. The fight with these troops lasted for weeks.

“A month later. Comrade Stchouss was killed in battle, in the same Poltava region. He was then chief-of-staff for Zabudko’s group. He had done his duty valiantly. And a month after that it was Kurilenko’s turn. He covered the march of our troops along the railway tracks, took personal charge of stationing the units, and was always in the leading squad. One day, he was surprised by Budenny’s horsemen and perished in the fight.

“On May 18<sup>th</sup>, Budenny’s horsemen were on the march from the Ekaterinoslav region towards the Don, to put down a peasant insurrection at the head of which were our comrades Brova and Maslak (who had been chief of Budenny’s First Brigade and had joined us with all his men).

“Our group was formed of several detachments united under the command of Petrenko-Platonoff. The main staff and 1 formed part of the group. This day it was fifteen or twenty versts from the road followed by Budenny’s army. Knowing, among other things, that I was always near this group, Budenny was tempted by the short distance that separated us from him. He ordered the chief of the armoured car unit, which was supposed to participate in suppressing the Don peasants, to send out 16 cars and blockade the village of Novogrigorievka. As for Budenny himself, he marched across the fields at the head of a part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division (formerly the Internal Service Division) in the direction of Novogrigorievka. He arrived there before the armoured cars, which were forced to avoid ravines, seek out fords and post sentries. The vigilance of our scouts put us in touch with all these movements, and allowed us to take precautions. At the moment when Budenny came in sight of our camp we threw ourselves upon him.

“Budenny, who was proudly galloping in the first rank, immediately turned tail. The disgraceful coward fled, abandoning his comrades. The combat that developed was a regular nightmare. The soldiers of the Red Army who were sent against us belonged to the troops who had remained until then in Central Russia. They had ‘insured internal order’. They did not know us; they had been told that we were common bandits and made it a point of honour not to retreat before criminals. As for the insurgents, they felt in the right and were firmly resolved to conquer and disarm the enemy. This combat was the fiercest of all we had to fight, either before or after. It ended in a complete defeat for Budenny’s troops, which led to the disintegration of his army and the desertion of many of his soldiers.

“Then I formed a unit of former Siberians, and sent them, armed and equipped with necessities, to Siberia under the command of Comrade Glasunoff. At the beginning of August, 1921, we learnt from the Bolsheviks’ papers that this unit had made its appearance in the Samara region. Then no more was said of it. “During the whole summer of 1921 we did not cease fighting. The extreme drought of that season and the consequent bad harvests in the departments of Ekaterinoslav, Tauride and parts of Kherson and Poltava, as well as the Don region, forced us to move, in one direction,

towards the Kuban and below Tzaritsin and Saratov, and, in the other, towards Kiev and Tchernigov. In the latter place, the struggle was led by Comrade Kojin. When we met again, he gave me a bundle of resolutions taken by the peasants of Tchernigov, declaring that they wanted to support us completely in our struggle. As for me, I made a raid across the Volga, with the units of Comrades Zabudko and Petrenko; then I withdrew across the Don, meeting on the way several of our units which I combined and to which I added Vdovitchenko's old group from Azov.

"At the beginning of August, 1921, it was decided that, in view of the severity of my wounds, I would leave for abroad, with some of our commanders, to undergo a thorough treatment. It was about the same time that our best commanders — Kojin, Petrenko and Zabudko — were seriously wounded. On August 13<sup>th</sup>, accompanied by a hundred horsemen, I set out in the direction of the Dnieper and, on the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup>, we crossed the river between Orlik and Kremenchug with the help of 17 fishing boats. On this day I was wounded six times, but always lightly. On the way we met several of our units, and explained to them the reasons for our departure for abroad. They all said the same thing: 'Go and get well, Batko, and then come back and save us.' "On August 19<sup>th</sup>, we came upon the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division of the Red Army, camped along the Ingulets river, twelve versts from Bobrinetz. To go back meant trouble, since we had been seen by a cavalry regiment on our right which was advancing to cut off our retreat. I therefore asked Zinkovsky to put me on horseback. In an instant, with drawn sabres and loud cheers, we hurled ourselves on the Division's machine-guns, which were massed in a village. We managed to capture thirteen Maxim guns and three Lewis guns. Then we prepared to continue our journey. But as soon as we had captured the machine-guns, the whole division attacked us. We were caught in a mousetrap. But, without losing courage, we attacked and beat the 38<sup>th</sup> Regiment and the Division. Having cut a passage for ourselves, we rode 110 versts without stopping, defending ourselves ceaselessly from the furious attacks of all these troops. We finally escaped, but only after having lost seventeen of our best comrades.

"On August 22<sup>nd</sup>, they had to take care of me again; a bullet struck me in the neck and came out of the right cheek. Once again I was lying in the bottom of a cart. On the 26<sup>th</sup>, we were obliged to fight a new battle with the Reds. We lost our best comrades and fighters, Petrenko-Platonoff and Ivanuk. I was compelled to alter our itinerary for the last time, and on August 28<sup>th</sup>, I crossed the Dniester. Here I am abroad ..."<sup>4</sup>

Thus, at the end of 1921, ended the great popular drama of the Ukraine, which represented a part of the history of the people, and not of parties, authorities or systems of oppression. For that reason it is not even suspected outside Russia,<sup>1</sup> all the official "supermen" and their acolytes having carefully concealed these facts. The historical truth would throw all these pygmies down from their pedestals of clay, just as the real popular revolution will one day throw into me dust all the power-wielding "supermen," whoever they may be. And then the men who know and dare will be able to write the true history of the people.

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<sup>4</sup> Except in libertarian circles and among a few specialists.

With its many Divisions, and without hesitating to use the most terrible means of repression and violence, the Communist government rapidly succeeded in wiping out or dispersing the last Makhnovist units wandering about the country. It also ended the resistance of the few remaining Petlurist troops in the south-west, as well as of numerous peasant detachments of a very varied nature, who were in a state of spontaneous revolt against the new lords or had taken to the hills to escape their implacable punishment.

Makhno and the handful of comrades in arms who had taken refuge with him abroad never saw again the country of their birth.

The whole of the Ukraine was subjugated by the Bolshevik dictatorship.

## Chapter 7. The Fate of Makhno and Some of His Comrades. Epilogue

By way of an epilogue, certain details about the final repression and also about the personal fate of certain Makhnovist militants would be in place here.

The third and last war of the Bolsheviks against the Makhnovists was also, obviously, a *war against the entire Ukrainian peasantry*.

Their aim was not only to destroy the Insurrectionary Army, but also *to subjugate this entire rebellious mass*, removing from it any chance to take up arms again and give a new birth to the movement. Their aim was to root out *the very seeds* of rebellion.

The Red Divisions went systematically through all the villages of the insurgent region, exterminating large numbers of peasants, frequently on the basis of information provided by rich local peasants (*kulaks*).

Hundreds of peasants were shot in Gulyai-Polye, Novo-spasovka, Uspenovka, Malaya Tokmachka, Pologi and other large villages of the region.

In various places the Chekists, thirsting for murder, shot the women and children of the insurgents.

This “repressive” campaign was directed by Frunze, commander-in-chief of the Southern Front. “We have to finish off the Makhnovshchina by the count of two,” he wrote in an order to the Army of the Southern Front before unleashing this action. And he carried himself as an old warrior, treating “this mob of muzhiks” in the manner of a conqueror, a new nobleman, sowing death and desolation around him.

And now we will give some brief notes on the personal fate of some of the participants in the Ukrainian popular movement.

**Simon Karetnik** was a peasant from Gulyai-Polye. One of the poorest in the village, he worked mostly as a farm labourer. He could only go to school for one year. An Anarchist from 1907, he participated in the movement from its first days. On various occasions he showed a remarkable talent for warfare. He was wounded many times in the fighting against Denikin. A member of the Council of Revolutionary Insurgents of the Ukraine, he was one of the best commanders of the Insurrectionary Army. In 1920 he often replaced Makhno as supreme commander of the army. He commanded the corps which was sent to the Crimea against Wrangel. After the latter’s defeat, he was sent for by the Bolsheviks, ostensibly to attend a military council, but was treacherously seized en route and shot at Melitopol. He left a widow and several orphans.

**Martchenko** was the son of a family of poor peasants from Gulyai-Polye. His education was incomplete. An Anarchist since 1907 (with Makhno and Karetnik), he was one of the first insurgents of the Gulyai-Polye region. He was wounded several times in the combats against Denikin’s troops. During the last two years of the insurrection, he commanded all the Makhnovist cavalry and was a member of the council of Revolutionary Insurgents. He was killed in January, 1921, near Poltava, in the course of a battle with the Reds. He left a widow.

**Gregor Vassilevsky** was the son of a poor peasant of Gulyai-Polye. He received an elementary education. An Anarchist before 1917, he participated in Makhnovism from its beginning. A personal friend of Makhno, he replaced him several times at the head of the army. He was killed in December, 1920, in the course of a battle against the Reds in the Kiev region. He left a widow and some orphans.

**Boris Veretelnikoff** was a peasant of Gulyai-Polye origin; later he became a foundry-hand in a local works, and afterwards at the Putilov factory in Petrograd. First a Social-Revolutionary, he became an Anarchist in 1918. A very gifted orator and organizer, he actively participated in all the phases of the Russian Revolution. In 1918, he returned to Gulyai-Polye and devoted himself mostly to propaganda. Later, he entered the Insurrectionary Army, gave proof of great military qualities, and for some time performed the functions of chief of staff. In June, 1919, he marched at the head of a hastily formed unit to try and defend Gulyai-Polye against the superior forces of Denikin. Totally encircled, he fought to the end beside his comrades and perished with his whole unit. He left a widow and orphans.

**Peter Gavrilenko** was a Gulyai-Polye peasant, an Anarchist since the 1905 Revolution, and one of the most active militants of Makhnovism. He played a part of the highest importance, as commander of the Third Corps, in the defeat of the Denikinist troops in June, 1919. In 1921, he performed the functions of chief of staff of the Crimean Army. After Wrangel's destruction, he was treacherously seized by the Bolsheviks, like Karetnik, and shot at Melitopol.

**Basil Kurilenko** was a peasant from Novospasovka who received an elementary education. An Anarchist from the beginning of the revolution, a talented popular propagandist, a militant of the highest moral quality, he also revealed himself to be one of the best commanders of the Insurrectionary Army. Wounded many times, he won several victories over Denikin's troops. He was killed in a skirmish with the Reds in the summer of 1921 and left a widow.

**Victor Belach** was a peasant from Novospasovka, who received an elementary education. He was an Anarchist, and up to 1919 he commanded a Makhnovist regiment. A very skilful strategist, he was later chief of staff of the Insurrectionary Army and drew up several remarkable plans of battle. In 1921, he fell into the hands of the Bolsheviks. His fate is unknown to us.

**Vdovitchenko** was an Anarchist peasant from Novospasovka, who received an elementary education. One of the most active participants in the revolutionary insurrection, he commanded the special unit of the Makhnovist troops. He played a considerable part in the defeat of Denikin's forces at Pere-gonovka, in September, 1919. In 1921, taken prisoner by the Bolsheviks, he disdainfully turned down their proposal to transfer to their service. His fate is unknown to us.

**Peter Rybin (Zonoff)** was a lathe worker, originally from the province of Orel. A revolutionist since 1905, he emigrated to America, where he took an active part in the exiled Russian revolutionary movement. In 1917 he returned to Russia, established himself in Ekaterinoslav, and accomplished considerable popular work in the field of reorganizing industry and transport. He first worked with the Bolsheviks as a professional specialist, but in 1920 he felt it was impossible to continue this collaboration, the activities of the Bolsheviks, in his view, running counter to the real interests of the workers and peasants. In the autumn of 1920 he joined the Makhnovist movement and devoted all his strength and knowledge to it. In 1921 he was arrested at Kharkov by the Cheka and shot. His comrade and friend, Dvigomiroff, who also returned from America and worked as a propagandist among the peasants of the Tchernigov region, was treacherously seized and shot around the same time.

**Kalachnikoff** was the son of a worker who received some education and became a second lieutenant in the Tsarist army before the revolution. In 1917, he became secretary of the Anarchist group at Gulyai-Polye. Later he entered the Insurrectionary Army and became one of its most eminent commanders. He was principal organizer of the uprising of Red troops at Novy-Bug in 1919, when the Makhnovist regiments, temporarily incorporated into the Bolshevik Army, were called to rejoin the Insurrectionary Army and brought several Red regiments with them. He led all these troops into the insurgent region. He was killed in 1920 in combat with the Reds. He left a widow and an orphan.

**Mikhaleff-Pavlenko** was the son of a peasant from Central Russia. In 1917 he was a member of an Anarchist group in Petrograd, and arrived in Gulyai-Polye at the beginning of 1919. Possessing a good professional education, he organized and commanded the engineering troops of the Insurrectionary Army. On the 10th and 12th of June, 1919, while serving on an armoured train which was engaged in the fight against Denikin's troops, he was treacherously seized, with his comrade, Burbyga, by the order of Voroshilov (who commanded the Fourteenth Bolshevik Army) and was executed on June 17th at Kharkov.

**Makeeff** was a worker of Ivanovo-Voznessensk, near Moscow, and a member of the Anarchist group in that city. At the end of April 1919 he arrived at Gulyai-Polye with thirty-five comrades. He first devoted himself to propaganda and later he entered the Insurrectionary Army. He was elected a member of the staff and was killed in November, 1919, fighting the Denikinists.

**Stchuss** was a poor peasant from the village of Bolchaia-Mikhailovka, who served in the Tsarist navy as a seaman. In the beginning of the Revolution he became one of the first and most active insurgents of the southern Ukraine. With a group of partisans, he carried on a fierce struggle against the Austro-German troops and those of the Hetman Skoropadsky. Later he joined the Insurrectionary Army and occupied various important posts. He was mortally wounded in June, 1921, in the course of a battle with the Bolshevik troops.

**Isador Luty** was one of the poorest peasants of Gulyai-Polye. He worked as a house-painter. An Anarchist and an intimate friend of Makhno, he took part in the insurrection from its beginning. He was killed in the battle of Peregonovka against the Denikinists in September, 1919.

**Thomas Kojin** was a revolutionary peasant, and, as a remarkable commander of the machine-gun section of the Insurrectionary Army, he played a part of the first importance in all the defeats inflicted on Denikin and Wrangel. He was seriously wounded during a battle with the Reds in 1921. His subsequent fate is unknown to us.

The brothers John and Alexander Lepetchenko were Anarchist peasants from Gulyai-Polye. They were among the first insurgents against the Hetman Skoropadsky and participated actively in all the fighting of the Makhnovist army. Alexander Lepetchenko was seized and shot by the Bolsheviks at Gulyai-Polye in the spring of 1920. The fate of his brother is unknown to us.

**Sereguin** was a peasant and an Anarchist since 1917. He took part in the insurrection from the beginning and was for most of the time chief of the supply section of the Makhnovist army. We do not know what became of him.

**Nestor Makhno's** brothers, **Gregor** and **Saivva**, both participated actively in the insurrection. Gregor was killed during the fighting against Denikin in September, 1919; Saivva, the eldest son of the family, was seized by the Bolsheviks at Gulyai-Polye, not in the course of a battle, but in his house, and shot.

Other Makhnovists we should mention briefly are: **Budanov**, anarchist worker (fate unknown), **Tchennoknijny**, schoolteacher (fate unknown), the **Tchuvenko** brothers, workers; (fate

unknown), **Serada**, peasant (seriously wounded in a battle against Wrangel and hospitalized by the Bolsheviks before their break with Makhno, he was shot by them under particularly odious circumstances, after the break in March, 1921); **Garkucha** (killed in 1920); **Koliada** (fate unknown); **Klein** (fate unknown); **Dermendji** (fate unknown); **Pravda** (fate unknown); **Bondaretz** (killed in 1920); **Brova** (killed); **Zabudko** (killed); **Petrenko** (killed); **Maslak** (fate unknown); **Troian** (killed); **Golik** (fate unknown); **Teheredniakov** (shot); **Dotzenko** (fate unknown); **Koval** (fate unknown); **Parkomenko** (killed); **Ivanuk** (killed); **Taranovsky** (killed); **Popoff** (shot); **Domachenko** (fate unknown); **Tykhenko** (fate unknown); **Buryma** (fate unknown), **Tchumak**, **Kratt**, **Kogan** and so many others whose names escape us.

All these men, like the thousands of anonymous combatants, came from the lowest levels of the working population; all of them revealed themselves at the moment of revolutionary action and served the true cause of the workers with all their strength and until their last breath. Outside this cause, they had nothing in life. Their personal existence, and almost always their families and their meagre possessions, as well, were destroyed. It is necessary to have the presumption, the insolence, the baseness of the Bolsheviks — those *parvenus* of the ignoble race of “statesmen” — to describe this sublime; popular revolutionary movement as a “kulak uprising” and “banditry.”

We should mention yet another individual case, one which is heinous to us.

**Bogush** was a Russian anarchist who had emigrated to America. He returned to Russia in 1921, after he was expelled from the United States together with other emigrants.<sup>1</sup>

At the time of the agreement between the Makhnovists and the Bolsheviks, Bogush was in Kharkov. Having heard a great deal about the legendary Gulyai-Polye, he had wanted to study the Makhnovshchina on the spot. Unfortunately, he was only able to see *free* Gulyai-Polye for a few hours. Immediately after the rupture, he returned to Kharkov. There he was arrested by the order of the Cheka, and was shot in March, 1921.

This execution can only have one explanation: the Bolsheviks did not want to leave alive a single person who had connections abroad, who knew the truth of their aggression against the Makhnovists, and who could have exposed it outside of Russia.

As for **Nestor Makhno**: he arrived in Rumania in August, 1921, where he and his comrades were interned. Makhno managed to escape to Poland. There he was arrested and tried for pretended crimes committed in the Ukraine against the interests of Poland, and was acquitted. He went on to Danzig, and was again imprisoned. He managed to escape once again, with the help of comrades, and finally settled in Paris.

Sick, and suffering bitterly from his many wounds, ignorant of the country's language and adapting himself with difficulty to surroundings which were so different from those he was accustomed to, he led in Paris a life which was as difficult materially as it was psychologically. His existence abroad was little more than a long and miserable agony, against which he was powerless to struggle. His friends helped him support the weight of these sad years of decline.

At times he attempted a certain activity; in particular, he started a history of his struggles and of the revolution in the Ukraine. But he could not finish it; it terminated at the end of 1918. Three volumes appeared, the first (in Russian and French) while the author was still alive, and the second and third (in Russian only) after his death.

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<sup>1</sup> He arrived in Russia at the same time as Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman, two well-known old anarchists whom we mentioned in the chapter on Kronstadt.

His health declined rapidly. Admitted to the Tenon Hospital, he died there in July, 1935. He was cremated at Pere-Lachaise Crematorium, where one can still see the urn containing his ashes. He left a widow and a daughter.

Before ending, it is necessary finally to refute the slanders — Bolshevik and otherwise — by which it has been sought to discredit the Makhnovist movement and to sully the reputation of the Insurrectionary Army and of Makhno himself. It is also necessary to examine more closely the *real* weaknesses and defects of Makhnovism and of those who animated and guided it.

We have spoken already of the Bolshevik attempts to represent the Makhnovist movement as a manifestation of banditry and Makhno himself as a bandit on a large scale. The information that has been given will, I hope, allow the reader to judge the truth of these slanders for himself, and I would not stress this point any further if it were not necessary to examine certain facts which have given this version a semblance of veracity and which have been utilised very skilfully by the Bolsheviks.

Despite its very widespread nature, the Makhnovist movement remained enclosed within its own borders and isolated from the rest of the world. Being a movement which arose from the popular masses themselves, it remained untouched by any manifestation of showmanship, publicity, or so-called glory. It accomplished no political action and gave rise to no directing elite. As a genuine, concrete and living movement, rather than a compound of red tape and the exploits of “genial leaders”, it had neither the time nor the possibility, nor even the need, to assemble documents that would preserve its ideas and acts “for posterity”.

Surrounded by implacable enemies on all sides, attacked without truce or quarter by the ruling party, submerged by the deafening voices of “statesmen” and their henchmen, and losing in the struggle at least nine-tenths of its best militants, this movement was doomed to remain in the shadows. And so it is not easy to uncover its fundamental nature. Just as thousands of modest heroes of all revolutionary periods remain for ever unknown, so it is almost inevitable that the Makhnovist movement should remain a scarcely known epic of the workers. It goes without saying that the Bolsheviks took advantage of these circumstances and the ignorance which sprang from them to say what they wanted about the movement.

In this connection another important point must be considered. During the confused and chaotic struggles which completely disorganised the life of the Ukraine between 1917 and 1921, there were numerous armed formations in operation, composed of unclassed and disoriented elements and led by adventurers, looters and bandits. These formations did not hesitate to make use of camouflage, and their “partisans” frequently wore a black ribbon and called themselves “Makhnovists”. Naturally, this gave rise to many regrettable confusions.

These groups had nothing in common with the Makhnovist movement, which fought and destroyed them. The Bolsheviks, needless to say, were well aware of the difference between the Insurrectionary Army and these bands without faith or morals. But the confusions served their purpose admirably, and as “experienced statesmen”, they exploited it for their own ends.

Here we should emphasise that the Makhnovists were extremely concerned for the good reputation of their army. Carefully, but in a very friendly way, they watched the conduct of each combatant, and behaved correctly towards the general population. Elements who could not rise to the general mental and normal level were not retained within the ranks.

This is illustrated by an episode which took place in the Insurrectionary Army after the defeat of the adventurer Grigoriev in the summer of 1919. This former Tsarist officer managed to involve several thousand deluded young Ukrainian peasants in a fairly extensive uprising against the



Bolsheviks — an uprising that was reactionary, pogromist and partly inspired by a simple desire for loot. In July, 1919, at the village of Sentova, Makhno and his friends unmasked Grigoriev before a public meeting to which they had invited him. Brutal, ignorant and not at all aware of the mentality of the Makhnovists, he spoke first and delivered a reactionary speech. Makhno replied in such a way that Grigoriev saw that he was lost and tried to use his weapons. In the course of a short fight he and his bodyguard were beaten.

It was decided that Grigoriev's young peasants, of whom the overwhelming majority were, in spite of everything, imbued with a revolutionary spirit that had been abused by their chief, could enter the Makhnovist Insurrectionary Army if they wished. But nearly all of these recruits had to be dismissed later on. Having acquired bad habits in Grigoriev's detachments, these soldiers could not rise to the moral level of the Makhnovist combatants. To be sure, the latter thought that in time they could have educated them, but in the existing conditions they could not concern themselves with such matters, and so, in order not to prejudice the good name of the Insurrectionary Army, they discharged them.

One especially shameful slander has been perpetrated by many writers of all shades of opinion against the Makhnovist movement in particular and Makhno personally. Some have spread it intentionally, but the majority have repeated it without bothering to check the sources or examine the facts closely.

It is alleged that the Makhnovists, and Makhno, were impregnated with anti-semitic feeling, that they pursued and massacred the Jews, that they supported and even organised pogroms. The more prudent reproach Makhno with having been a "secret" anti-semite, with having tolerated and closed his eyes to the acts committed by his bands, even if he did not sympathise with them.

We could cover dozens of pages with extensive and irrefutable proofs of the falseness of these assertions. We could mention articles and proclamations by Makhno and the Council of Revolutionary Insurgents denouncing anti-semitism. We could tell of spontaneous acts directed by Makhno himself and other insurgents against the slightest manifestation of the anti-semitic spirit on the part of a few isolated and misguided unfortunates in the army and the population. In such cases Makhno did not hesitate to react personally and violently.

One of the reasons for the execution of Grigoriev by the Makhnovists was his anti-semitism and the immense pogrom he organised at Elizabethgrad, which cost the lives of nearly three thousand persons. And the main cause of the dismissal of those of his partisans who had joined the Insurrectionary Army was the anti-semitic spirit which their former chief had managed to instil into them.

We could cite a whole series of similar facts, but we do not find it necessary to enlarge too much on this subject, and will content ourselves with mentioning briefly the following essential facts:

1. A fairly important part in the Makhnovist Army was played by revolutionists of Jewish origin.
2. Several members of the Education and Propaganda Commission were Jewish.
3. Besides many Jewish combatants in various units of the army, there was a battery composed entirely of Jewish artillerymen and a Jewish infantry unit.
4. Jewish colonies in the Ukraine furnished many volunteers to the Insurrectionary Army.

5. In general the Jewish population, which was very numerous in the Ukraine, took an active part in all the activities of the movement. The Jewish agricultural colonies which were scattered throughout the districts of Mariupol, Ber-diansk, Alexandrovsk, etc., participated in the regional assemblies of workers, peasants and partisans; they sent their delegates to the regional Revolutionary Military Council.
6. Rich and reactionary Jews certainly had to suffer from the Makhnovist army, not as Jews, but just in the same way as non-Jewish counter-revolutionaries.

Several years ago, in Paris, I had the occasion to interview the eminent Jewish writer and historian, M. Tcherikover, about the question of the Makhnovists and anti-Semitism. I reproduce his statement below.

M. Tcherikover is neither a revolutionary nor an Anarchist. He is simply a scrupulous, meticulous and objective historian. For years he has specialized in research on the persecutions of the Jews in Russia. He has published several basic and extraordinarily well-documented and precise works on this subject. He has received documents of every kind from all parts of the world. He has heard hundreds of depositions, both official and private, and he has checked all the facts rigorously before using them.

Here, verbatim, is what he replied to my question whether he knew anything precise about the attitude of the Makhnovist Army and Makhno himself with regard to the Jewish population: p>“I have concerned myself repeatedly with this question,” he told me. “Here are my conclusions, with the usual reservations in case more exact testimony should reach me in the future. An army is always an army, and armies inevitably commit culpable and reprehensible acts, for it is materially impossible to control and supervise every individual making up these masses of men who are taken away from their healthy and normal lives, who are thrown into an existence and into surroundings which release their evil impulses, and who are authorized to use violence, very often with impunity. You certainly know this as well as I do. The Makhnovist army was no exception to this rule. It also committed some reprehensible acts now and then. But I am glad to be able to say with certainty that, on the whole, the behaviour of Makhno’s army cannot be compared with that of the other armies which were operating in Russia during the events 1917–21. Two facts I can certify absolutely explicitly.

“1. It is undeniable that, of all these armies, including the Red Army, the Makhnovists behaved best with regard to the civil population in general and the Jewish population in particular. I have numerous testimonies to this. The proportion of justified complaints against the Makhnovist army, in comparison with the others, is negligible.

“2. Do not let us speak of pogroms alleged to have been organized by Makhno himself. This is a slander or an error. Nothing of the sort occurred. As for the Makhnovist Army, I have had hints and precise denunciations on this subject. But, up to the present, every time I have tried to check the facts, I have been obliged to declare that on the day in question no *Makhnovist* unit could have been at the place indicated, the whole army being far away from there. Upon examining the evidence closely, I established this fact, every time, with absolute certainty, at the place and on the date of the pogrom, *no Makhnovist* unit was operating or even located in the vicinity. *Not once* have I been able to prove the presence of a Makhnovist unit at the place where a pogrom against the Jews took place. Consequently, the pogroms in question could not have been the work of the Makhnovists.”

This testimony, which is impartial and precise, is one of the first importance. It confirms, among other things, a fact we have already mentioned, the presence of bands, committing all kinds of misdeeds and not disdaining the profits to be gained from a pogrom against the Jews, who covered themselves with the name of "Makhnovist". Only a scrupulous examination can sort out the confusion that occurred. There is no doubt that, in certain cases, the population itself was mistaken.

There is one further fact of which the reader should never lose sight. The Makhnovist movement was far from being the only revolutionary movement of the masses in the Ukraine. It was merely the most important and conscious of these movements, the most deeply popular and revolutionary. Other movements of the same type, less widespread, less clearly-defined and less well-organised were constantly arising in various places until the day when the last cry of freedom was stifled by the Bolsheviks. Such, for example, was the movement of the "Greens" which the foreign press occasionally mentioned and which was frequently confused with the Makhnovist movement. Less conscious of their real task than the Gulai-Polya insurgents, the combatants of these various formations frequently committed regrettable errors and excesses, and very often the Makhnovist movement was held responsible for such misconduct. Among other things, the Bolsheviks reproached the Makhnovists for not having reduced these various "chaotic bands" to a single movement, for not having organised them, etc. This reproach is a sample of Bolshevik hypocrisy, for what really bothered the Soviet government most was precisely the possibility that all the popular revolutionary forces of the Ukraine might be assembled under the aegis of the Makhnovist movement. Therefore, the Bolsheviks did their best to prevent this, and for them to reproach the Makhnovists for not achieving the unification was like reproaching someone for not being able to walk after you have tied his feet. [If they had been allowed to do so] the Makhnovists would certainly have ended by uniting under their standard all the popular revolutionary movements of the country.

The Makhnovist insurgents, and the population of the insurgent region as a whole, paid no attention to the nationality of the workers. From the beginning, the movement known as Makhnovitchina embraced the impoverished masses of all the nationalities inhabiting the Ukraine. The majority naturally consisted of peasants of Ukrainian nationality, but six per cent, or thereabouts were of Great Russian origin and there were also smaller proportions of Greeks, Jews, etc.

"Peasants, workers and partisans," said a Makhnovist proclamation in May, 1919, "you know that the workers of all nationalities — Russians, Jews, Poles, Germans, Armenians, etc. — are equally imprisoned in the abyss of poverty. You know how many honest and valiant revolutionary Jewish militants have given their lives in the course of the struggle for liberty. The revolution, and the honour of the workers, oblige us all to declare as loudly as possible that we make war on the same enemies, on Capital and the principle of Authority, which oppress all workers equally, whether they be of Russian, Polish, Jewish or any other nationality. We must proclaim everywhere that our enemies are the exploiters of all nationalities — the Russian manufacturer, the German iron magnate, the Jewish banker, the Polish aristocrat ... The bourgeoisie of all countries and all nationalities is united in a bitter struggle against the revolution, against the labouring masses of the whole world and of all nationalities."

Formed by the exploited, and merged into a single mass by the natural union of the workers, the Makhnovist movement was impregnated from the beginning with a deep feeling of fraternity

for all peoples. Not for an instant did it appeal to national or “patriotic” sentiments. The whole struggle of the Makhnovists against the Bolsheviks was conducted solely in the name of the rights and interests of Labour. National prejudice had no hold on the Makhnovist movement. Nobody was interested in the nationality of this or that combatant or disturbed by it. It must also be remembered that the true revolution fundamentally changes individuals and masses alike. If only the masses effectively achieve that revolution for themselves, if only their freedom of thought and action remain intact, if only no force succeeds in obstructing their path, the enthusiasm of the people in revolt can be unlimited. And it is then that one sees with what simplicity, with what ease, this natural enthusiasm carries away all prejudices, all artificial notions, all the ghosts that have accumulated for thousands of years — national ghosts, religious scarecrows, authoritarian chimeras.

The final accusation that the Bolsheviks levelled against Makhno was that, if he was not a bandit, he was at least an adventurer like Grigoriev, though more intelligent, cunning and polished than the latter. They claimed that Makhno pursued personal goals within the movement, under the guise of anarchist ideology, that he acted like a “little prince”, disregarding all the committees, commissions and councils, that he in fact exercised a complete personal dictatorship, by which the idealistic militants who participated in the movement allowed themselves — wittingly or unwittingly — to be fooled. It was further stated that he assembled around him a camarilla of “commanders” who were allowed to commit secret and disgraceful acts of violence, debauchery and depravity, and that he himself condoned these acts and participated in them, laughing up his sleeve at the ideologues, whom, as well as their ideas, he despised and mocked.

Here we touch on an admittedly delicate question. For here also there are facts which gave these accusations a semblance of truth, and of which the Bolsheviks took advantage. These facts were connected with certain real faults and weaknesses of which a closer examination is needed for the sake of the libertarian cause itself.

In a close examination of the Makhnovist movement, it is necessary to distinguish three categories of faults. First come those of a general nature, which did not depend on the will of the participants and for which nobody can be blamed. The most important of these were (i) the almost perpetual necessity of fighting and of being on the move, without being able to settle down anywhere, or, for that very reason, to consecrate themselves to sustained positive work; (ii) the existence of an army, which inevitably became more and more professional and permanent in character; (iii) the lack of a vigorous and organised workers’ movement to support the insurrection; (iv) the inadequacy of the intellectual forces in the service of the movement.

Next come certain faults of individuals, for which again they cannot be blamed — the lack of education, the inadequacy of theoretical and historical knowledge and of a broad view of society as a whole on the part of the animators of the movement. An unfortunate result of these inadequacies was the excessively trusting attitude of the Makhnovists towards the Communist state and its actions.

Last come the personal shortcomings of Makhno and his immediate friends, which were reprehensible in so far as they could have been avoided.

As for the first two categories, there is not much point, after what we have already said, in our enlarging to any great extent upon them, except for one circumstance that deserves special attention — the prolonged existence of an army.

Any army, of whatever kind, is an evil, and even a free and popular army, composed of volunteers and dedicated to the defence of a noble cause, is by its very nature a danger. Once it becomes

permanent, it inevitably detaches itself from the people and the world of labour. Its members lose the inclination and the ability to lead a healthy working life. With an imperceptible and therefore all the more dangerous gradualness, it becomes a collection of idlers who acquire anti-social, authoritarian and even dictatorial leanings, who acquire also a taste for violence as a thing in itself, for the use of brute force even in cases where recourse to such means is contrary to the very cause it purports to defend.

These defects develop most strongly among the leaders, but the rank-and-file is ever more disposed to follow their example, almost without thinking, even when they are in the wrong. It is in this way that all armies which have become permanent have tended in the last resort to become instruments of injustice and oppression. They end by forgetting their original purposes and come to feel that they are ends in themselves.

Did Makhno and the other initiators and organisers of the insurrectionary movement and its army possess these qualities? Did they rise above all corruption? I regret to say that the moral qualities of Makhno himself and of many of his friends and collaborators were not entirely equal to the strains that were imposed upon them.

During my stay with the Insurrectionary Army, I often heard it said that certain commanders — Kurilenko was especially mentioned — were morally better equipped than Makhno to inspire and guide the movement as a whole. It was sometimes added that even in military qualities Kurilenko was Makhno's equal, and that he certainly surpassed him in the breadth of his views. When I asked why, in this case, Makhno remained where he was, the reply was that, for certain traits of his character, Makhno was better liked and more highly esteemed by the mass of the army. They knew him better, they had been used to him for a long time and he enjoyed their absolute confidence, which was important to the movement. He was simpler, bolder, more comradely and more of a peasant.

It is certainly true that Makhno and several of his friends were remiss in certain moral duties which in their position they should have fulfilled without the least defection, and it is here that we touch on those weaknesses of the movement and those personal defects of its initiators which gave the Bolshevik assertions a semblance of veracity and which greatly damaged both the movement itself and its reputation.

Makhnovism was produced and led by men, and, like all human works, it has not only its light, but also its shadows. It is indispensable that we should look into these shadows, not only to satisfy our desire for truth and impartiality, but also to reach a better understanding of the movement as a whole and to draw from its experiences the necessary lessons and conclusions.

First, I will quote what Peter Archinov said on the subject:

“Makhno's personality,” he tells us, “contained many superior characteristics — spirit, will, hardihood, energy and activity. The traits, taken together, created an imposing impression, and made him remarkable even among revolutionists. At the same time, he lacked the theoretical knowledge needed to understand politics and history. That is why he frequently could not reach the necessary revolutionary generalisations and conclusions — or did not even perceive their necessity.

“The vast movement of the revolutionary insurrection imperatively demanded that new social and revolutionary formulas should be found that would be adequate to its nature. By reason of his lack of theoretical training, Makhno was not always equal to this task, and in view of his position at the centre of the revolutionary insurrection,

this defect had repercussions on the movement as a whole. We believe that if Makhno had possessed more extensive knowledge in the fields of history and the political and social sciences, the revolutionary insurrection would have recorded, instead of inevitable defeats, a series of victories which would have played an enormous and perhaps decisive role in the development of the Russian Revolution.

“Besides, Makhno possessed one characteristic that sometimes diminished his dominant qualities. At times a certain heedlessness took possession of him. Though full of energy and will, he occasionally showed, in times of exceptionally serious crisis, a frivolity that was incompatible with the degree of perspicacity demanded by the gravity of the situation. To give one example, the results of the victory in the Autumn of 1919 over Denikin’s counter-revolution were not sufficiently exploited in the direction of developing a pan-Ukrainian insurrection, although the moment was particularly favourable for such a task. The reason for this was a certain intoxication of victory, as well as a strong, and erroneous, sense of security and a measure of inattentiveness; the guides of the insurrection with Makhno at their head, installed themselves in the liberated region without guarding sufficiently against either the persistence of the White danger or the peril of Bolshevism, which was descending from the North.”

These criticisms are perfectly true. But they are not all that needs to be said, and we must complete what Archinov has barely hinted in mentioning Makhno’s “heedlessness”. For this heedlessness was itself very often the consequence of a deeper weakness, which at times brought Makhno to a state of moral collapse that undoubtedly affected the movement.

The paradox of Makhno’s character was that, despite his superior power of will and character, he was never strong enough to resist certain temptations, and with him he dragged down several of his friends and collaborators. Sometimes, however, it was the latter who dragged him down, and he was unable to oppose them resolutely.

His greatest fault was certainly the abuse of alcohol. He became addicted gradually, but at certain periods his condition was disgraceful in its manifestations. The effects of his drunkenness were primarily in the moral field. Physically he did not change, but under the influence of alcohol he became over-excited, mischievous, unjust, intractable and violent. Often, during my stay with the army, I left him in despair, unable to get anything reasonable out of him even when matters of some importance were concerned, because of his abnormal condition. (At certain periods, indeed, it became almost his “normal” condition!)

The second fault of Makhno and of many of his intimates — both commanders and others — was their behaviour towards women. Especially when drunk, these men let themselves indulge in shameful and even odious activities, going as far as orgies in which certain women were forced to participate. It goes without saying that these acts of debauchery produced a demoralising effect on those who knew about them, and Makhno’s good name suffered from this.

Such moral misconduct led inevitably to other excesses and abuses. Under the influence of alcohol, Makhno became irresponsible in his actions; he lost control of himself. Then it was personal caprice, often supported by violence, that suddenly replaced his sense of revolutionary duty; it was the despotism, the absurd pranks, the dictatorial antics of a warrior chief that were strangely substituted for the calm reflection, perspicacity, personal dignity and self-control in his attitude to others and to the cause which a man like Makhno should never have abandoned.

The inevitable result of these disorders and aberrations was an excess of “warrior sentiment” which led to the formation of a kind of military clique or camarilla about Makhno. This clique sometimes made decisions and committed acts without taking account of the opinion of the Council or of other institutions. It lost its sense of proportion, showed contempt towards all those who were outside it, and detached itself more and more from the mass of the combatants and the working population.

To support my view, I will mention an episode from among several I witnessed. One evening, when the Council had complained of the misconduct of certain commanders, Makhno entered in the middle of a session. He was drunk, and extremely excited. He drew his revolver, pointed it at the gathering, and, waving it to and fro before the members of the assembly, insulted them grossly. After that he went out without listening to any explanation. Even if the complaint had been unfounded, his way of replying to it was itself deserving of even greater complaint. I could add other episodes of the same kind.

Yet, having avoided overemphasising the highlights of the Makhnovist movement, we should take care not to exaggerate the shadows. In the first place, as Archinov says: “Makhno’s personality grew and developed with the revolution. Each year he became more profound and more conscious of his task. By 1921 he had gained considerably in depth of character, in comparison with the years of 1918 and 1919.” Furthermore, the misconduct of Makhno and some of his friends was, on the whole, sporadic and largely compensated for by all their highly meritorious exploits. It could not be considered a “line of conduct”; it was nothing more than a series of digressions. It was not — and this is important — a question of the calculated, permanent and rigid attitude of a government, which, regularly supported by coercive force, imposes itself permanently upon the whole community. In the general atmosphere of liberty, based on a vast and conscious popular movement, the evil could only be a localised wound, whose festering could not poison the whole organism.

In fact a serious resistance soon grew up against the deviations of Makhno and his “clique”, both among the commanders themselves and among the mass of the insurgents. Repeatedly, Makhno was called to order and made to feel the gravity of his misconduct. It must be said to his credit that he usually paid attention and tried to improve himself.

“One should not forget,” Peter Archinov rightly remarks, “the unfavourable conditions in which Makhno had lived from infancy, the environmental disadvantages he experienced from his first years, the almost complete lack of education of those who surrounded him, and, finally, the absence of experienced and enlightened help in his social and revolutionary struggle.

“What was most important was the general atmosphere of the movement. In the last analysis, it was neither Makhno nor the commanders who counted; it was the masses. They retained all their independence, all their freedom of opinion and action. One can be sure that, in this general atmosphere of a free movement, the activity of the masses would have ended by correcting the errors of the ‘chiefs’.

“Precisely in order that this brake, this resistance to the deviations of individuals, this localisation of the evil may always be possible, the complete freedom of opinion and action of the masses should be and remain the most important, absolute and unalterable conquest of the Revolution.

“How many times, during my stay in the Ukraine, could I observe, in contrast to the culpable attitude of certain ‘chiefs’, the simple and healthy reaction of the masses, when they were still free! And how many times I reflected: ‘It is not the chief, it is not the commander, it is not the professional revolutionary, it is not the elite that counts in a real revolution, it is the revolutionary mass. It is in them that truth and health reside. The role of the animator, of the real chief, of the real revolutionary, of the elite, is to aid the masses and remain worthy of the task.’”

In view of these considerations, there is no reason to magnify the weaknesses of the Makhnovist movement to the proportions they assume under the pens of the Bolsheviks. The latter deliberately exaggerated and distorted the faults of any individual for the purpose of discrediting the whole movement. Yet the Bolshevik leaders have only to look at themselves!

Nevertheless, certain of the faults and inadequacies we have mentioned undoubtedly weakened the movement at the time. Who knows what might have been the turn of events, despite all the obstacles and difficulties, had the movement been guided from the beginning in a manner that was more far-sighted, broader in vision and, in a few words, more worthy of the task?

“The efforts of the Makhnovists in their struggle against Denikin were enormous,” Archinov declares. “The heroism they showed during the last months was admired by everyone. In all the wide sweep of the liberated regions, they were the only ones to preserve the thunder of the revolutionary cause, they alone were the grave-diggers of the Denikinist counter-revolution. It was thus that the masses of the people understood events, both in the cities and in the country.

“But this very circumstance contributed to the development in many Makhnovists of the firm belief that they were from now on guaranteed against all provocation on the part of the Bolsheviks, that the Red Army which at the moment was coming down from the North, understood that the slanders of the Communist Party with regard to the Makhnovists were unfounded, that this army would not listen to a new fraud, a new provocation, that on the contrary it would make common cause with the Makhnovists when it met them face to face. Indeed, the optimism of some Makhnovists went as far as the belief that the Communist Party would probably not dare to organise a new outrage against the free people, since the Makhnovist tendency had manifestly been accepted by the broad masses of the country.

“The military and revolutionary activity of the Makhnovists was dominated by this state of mind. They confined themselves to occupying a part of the Dnieper and Donetz region. They did not seek to advance North and consolidate themselves there. They thought that when the two armies met, the policy to be adopted would by itself become apparent. This optimism did not correspond to the situation that existed in the Ukraine. And that is why the results were not those for which the Makhnovists hoped ...

“It is true that, in the Autumn of 1919, the annihilation of Denikin’s counter-revolution constituted one of the principal tasks of the Makhnovist movement and of the whole Russian Revolution. This task was performed entirely by the Makhnovists. But it did not constitute the whole of the mission which they had to fulfil during this



tragic period for the sake of the revolution. The country in revolt, liberated from Denikin's troops, urgently required an immediate organisation of defence over its whole territory. Without that defence, the country and all the revolutionary possibilities opened to it by the liquidation of Denikinism were every day in danger of being wiped out by the Statist armies of the Bolsheviks, which had been sent to the Ukraine in pursuit of Denikin's retreating troops ...

"In any event, Bolshevism would never accept the free existence of a popular movement, like Makhnovism, based on the masses themselves. Whatever the opinion of these masses, this would not prevent Bolshevism from doing everything to strangle and destroy the movement. That is why the Makhnovists, who were at the heart of events and popular movements in the Ukraine, should have taken in advance all the steps necessary to be secure against such an eventuality ...

"It is therefore incontestable that in the Autumn of 1919 one of the historic tasks imposed on Makhnovism by the course of events was the creation of a revolutionary army of sufficient strength to permit the people in revolt to defend their liberty, not only in an isolated and limited area, but in the whole territory of the Ukrainian insurrection. At the moment of the fierce struggle against Denikin, this would certainly have not been an easy task, but it was historically necessary and entirely possible, since the major part of the Ukraine was in the midst of revolution and was leaning towards Makhnovism. The units of insurgents who nocked to join the Makhnovists came not only from the southern part of the country, but also from the north (e.g. the troops of Bibik who occupied Poltava). Certain detachments of the Red Army, came from Central Russia, thirsting to fight for the social revolution under the banner of Makhnovism — among others, the fairly numerous troops who came from the department of Orel under the command of Ogarkoff. They arrived at Ekaterinoslav towards the end of October, having fought battles on the way against both the Bolshevik armies and those of Denikin.

"The standard of Makhnovism rose up spontaneously and floated over the whole Ukraine. It was only necessary to take the measures needed to organise the whole, to merge all the numerous armed formations which were wandering over the whole Ukraine into a single powerful popular and revolutionary army that could have mounted guard around the territory of the revolution. Such a force, defending the whole territory and not merely a narrow and limited region, would have been the most persuasive argument against the Bolsheviks, accustomed as they were to work and deal with force.

"However, the intoxication of the victories that had been won, plus a certain heedlessness, prevented the Makhnovists from creating a force of this sort at the opportune time. That is why, from the time the Bolsheviks entered the Ukraine, the Insurrectionary Army was obliged to withdraw into the limited area of Gulai-Polya. It was a serious military error; an error which the Bolsheviks were not slow in turning to their advantage and whose consequences fell heavily on the Makhnovists and with them on the whole revolution in the Ukraine." (Op. cit. pp. 253–9).

Without being obliged to concur with Archinov on all points, we must agree with him that, because of certain grave weaknesses, problems of capital importance were not envisaged and imperative tasks were not performed. Before I end this chapter, which I consider the most important and suggestive of my book, I want to address a few words to those who, by reason of their situation or for other reasons, are contemplating collaboration in the initial organisation of a popular movement in such a way as to give it animation and assistance. Let them not confine themselves to a simple reading of the epic of the Ukrainian masses. Let them reflect seriously on the weaknesses and errors of that popular revolution; there is no lack of lessons for them to learn.

Their task will be hard. Among other problems which must be solved now, among other difficulties which as far as possible should be surmounted and eliminated in advance, they must envisage the means of reconciling the need to defend the true revolution with that of avoiding the evils which an armed force engenders. Yes, let them reflect well, and to this end let them try to establish now the fundamental principles to guide their future action. Time is pressing. Their conclusions may be needed sooner than they think.

## Chapter 8. Testament of the Makhnovshchina to the Workers of the World

I would conclude with a passage from the final pages of Peter Archinov's book, a passage with which I associate myself fully:

“The history just narrated is far from giving a picture of the movement in all its grandeur. We have merely traced — and that briefly — the story of a single current of this movement (the most important, it is true), arising from the Gulai-Polya region. This current formed part of a much greater whole ...

“If we could have followed the movement in all the ramifications of Makhnovism throughout the whole Ukraine, if we could have traced the history of each of these lesser currents and then linked them together and illuminated them with a common light, we could have obtained a great tableau of a people, several million strong, in revolt, a people struggling under the standard of Makhnovism for the fundamental ideas of the real social revolution; true freedom and true equality. We hope that a more detailed and complex history of the Makhnovist movement will one day perform this task ...

“Makhnovism is universal and immortal ... Wherever the labouring masses do not let themselves be subjugated, wherever they cultivate the love of independence, wherever they concentrate and express their class will and spirit, they will always create their own popular social movements, they will act according to their own understanding. That is what constitutes the real essence of Makhnovism.

“The bloody tragedy of the Russian peasants and workers must not pass without leaving its trace on history. More than anything else, the practice of Socialism in Russia has demonstrated that the labouring classes have no friends, that they have only enemies who seek to take away the fruits of their toil. State Socialism has fully demonstrated that it also belongs among these enemies. This idea is being implanted, more firmly from year to year, in the consciousness of the masses of the people.

*“Proletarians of the whole world, look into the depths of your own beings, seek out the truth and realise it yourselves. You will find it nowhere else. Such is the watchword bequeathed by Russian Makhnovism to the workers of the world.”*

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