

# **Makhno and the Makhnovshchina**

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## **Abstract**

*In 1918, when Ukraine was going through a chaotic period, Ukrainian workers and peasants as a whole rebelled, and this action spawned a movement called 'Makhnovshchina', which means belonging to the Makhno. The Makhnovists, who had been fighting the Bolsheviks throughout the year 1920, eventually succumbed. This research article, called 'Makhno and Makhnovshchina', aimed to transfer it to the reader by using a number of written sources and considering the historical and social process of the Makhnovshchina movement, which united under the leadership of anarcho-communist leader Nestor Makhno. Questions of 'Who is Nestor Makhno?' and 'Who are the Makhnovists?' were trying to be answered and evaluations were made accordingly. In this context, the findings to be obtained in the research paper are limited to the historical and social process and biography.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Makhnovshchina Movement arose as a result of the uprising of workers and peasants in Ukraine in the summer of 1918. They gathered under the black flag under the leadership of Nestor Makhno, who had just started his political life at the age of 17 and had taken part in various anarchist groups. According to the saying of Peter Arshinov, Makhnovshchina did not spend a single day in peace from the day it was formed until its last moments. It began by taking action against the oppression of Austro-German, Hungarian, and Hetman domination, and after a long struggle with the Red Army, it was defeated. After their defeat, Makhno and his wife fled to Romania. Although they tried to return to Ukraine, they failed in this and were deported. First, Makhno went to Poland, after his prison life in there he went to Germany and finally to Paris, where he would stay until the end of his life. Nestor Makhno died on July 25, 1934, due to tuberculosis disease. (Arshinov, 1998)

### **1. WHO IS NESTOR MAKHNO?**

Nestor Makhno was born in 1889 in the village of Huliai-Pole (Gulya Polya), Southern Ukraine. He was the leader of the Ukrainian anarchist movement 'Makhnovshchina' (Sysyn, 1977). In 1905, when he was just 17 years old, he joined an anarchist group which is his first political experience. Makhno took part in the most dangerous actions of the anarchist struggle. He was sentenced to death in 1908 for being a member of anarchist groups and participating in violent acts. But because he was underage, the death penalty was commuted to life imprisonment. Makhno spent his prison life in the Butirki Prison, the central prison of Moscow. Interestingly, during this time, Makhno considered the prison a place where he could educate himself. And he learned mathematics, Russian grammar, Russian literature, cultural history, and political economy (Arshinov, 1998).

The February Revolution, which took place in 1917, freed Makhno from prison. After being released from prison, he returned to his village, Huliai Pole, and as soon as he returned to his village, he started working on how he could organize the peasants starting with his own village. Makhno and his comrades were accepted among the peasants. They were gaining new partisans wherever they went. As a result, scattered guerrilla gangs gathered under the black flag led by Makhno. Makhno, who was quite deheroized among the people, was taken the nickname 'Batko'

in 1918, as the leader of the revolutionary uprising, which means 'father' in the Ukrainian language. In 1919, an attempt was made to kill two Çeka agents, but this attempt ended in failure (Arshinov, 1998).

After the outlawing of Makhno, the agricultural communes of the Makhnovists were disbanded, and then the massacres of the Deniken Forces began. At the end of all this, the Makhnovists were forced to retreat, and throughout 1920, the Bolsheviks continued the struggle against Makhno and his comrades. And in the end, the Makhnovists succumbed. Later, Makhno and his wife fled to Romania and stayed there for a while. He tried to escape from here and return to Ukraine, but failed, and he and his wife were deported. After that Makhno fled to Poland. Here he was tried and went to prison. He was released on December 1, 1923, due to a lack of evidence. Makhno left his wife and fled first to Berlin, and then to Paris, and remained in Paris for the rest of his life. He died on July 25, 1934, due to tuberculosis disease. (Arshinov, 1998)

## 2. MAKHNOVSHCHINA

Makhnovshchina means 'one who belongs to Makhno'. It is an anarcho-communist movement that arose as a result of the uprising of the peasants as a whole in the summer of 1918. October and November of 1918, the Makhno detachments launched a struggle against the counter-revolution of the Hetman (the political title given to military commanders in the Ukrainian State). At that moment, the Austro-German military units had lost their former strength. Makhno took advantage of this situation. "*He had held talks with soldiers, established neutral relations with those who sympathized with the revolution. Thanks to this, the soldiers left their weapons to the Makhnovists.*" (Arshinov, 1998:69). When Makhno could not establish positive relations with these military units (Austro-German), he used military force to expel them from the region. After three days of fighting, Makhno had completely captured Huliai Pole. When the Austro-German troops retreated from the territory of Ukraine after World War I, the supporters of the Ukrainian nationalist leader Symon Petlyura made an attempt to seize the territory. In 1919, the Red Army made an offer to Makhno to act together, aimed at combating the nationalist leader Symon Petlyura and the commander of the White Army, Anton Denikin. Makhno and the Makhnovists agreed to this on their own terms (Arshinov, 1998). The insurgent army became part of the Red Army under the following conditions:

- a) the internal organization of the rebel army will remain the same as before;*
  - b) we will accept the commissars appointed by the communist authorities;*
  - c) we will obey only the Red high command in direct military matters;*
  - d) we will not be removed from the front line opened against Denikin;*
  - e) we will receive material and food support on a par with the Red Army;*
  - f) It will not change its name and black flag, which is the Revolutionary Rebel Army."*
- (Arshinov, 1998:78)

However, initially, Bolsheviks hoped that they would be able to attract the Makhnovists to their ranks, but this was not possible. After that, the Bolsheviks went on the offensive against the Makhnovists. The communist press accused the Makhnovist movement of being the 'kulak'

movement, and its slogans of being counter-revolutionary, and launched a campaign suggesting that the movement's actions were harmful to the revolution. In the sequel, an attempt was made to kill Makhno. In the sequel, an attempt was made to kill Makhno. The struggle between the Bolsheviks and the Makhnovists continued throughout the 1920 year. Finally, the Makhnovists succumbed (Arshinov, 1998).

## CONCLUSION

*“Statists are afraid of free people. They claim that without authority, people will lose their sociability, plunge into pleasure and fun pass out and return to primitiveness.”* (Arshinov, 1998:71). The idea that people will ‘return to primitivism’ is actually a very important point that the Makhnovist movement is trying to prove to us. The conflict between the Red Army and the Makhnovists and the chaos created by this conflict, the death of thousands of people, and their defamation policies call into question the concept of primitivism. The desire of the authority to suppress and manage people in their interests demonizes people's actions for freedom. At this point, we need to ask this question: Is it authority or the absence of authority that returns people to primitivism?

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