

BOLSHEVIK BASHING IN THE OLD UKRAINE



By Martin Van Lubin

It is August of 1921, and 3000 anarchists of the Ukrainian Insurrectionist Army are surrounded by 150,000 troops of the Bolshevik Red Army. Not fearing the inevitable, the anarchists shout "live free or die fighting" and charge into the Bolshevik ranks.

The Red Army panics and an entire battalion is captured. The officers are shot and the soldiers are set free and told to return home. Most are stunned by the humanity of the Ukrainian anarchists after being told by

treaty, allowing the Austro-German regime to occupy the Ukraine with half-a-million troops.

Nestor Makhno, a poor peasant who had been imprisoned by the Czarist regime for his insurrectionary activities, made his way home in the general confusion of the times, joining with a small group of peasants, including Peter Arshinov, he took to the hills to commence guerrilla activities against the landlords and other mainstays of the old order.

A price was soon put on Makhno's head and in Sept.

they liberated a city, voluntary labor unions were encouraged. For example, when Aleksandrovka was liberated, the railway workers established a voluntary union to organize the railway network of the region.

The Bolsheviks were to show their true colors later on, but the first great reactionary threat came from the disposed Monarchists who fielded two large armies, the first under

General Deniken and the second under General Wrangle. Early in 1919 Deniken's army invaded the Ukraine but the Makhnovists soon put them on the retreat. The courage of the insurrectionists was reported bravely in the Bolshevik press, and in a fraternal spirit the Makhnovists sent a captured train of 100 cars of grain to the starving workers in Moscow.

In mid-1919, when the Red Army showed up to help fight the counter-revolutionary forces, the Makhnovists entered unseamly into a united front, a strictly military alliance which was not to interfere with the political autonomy of the Ukraine.

But as the "White threat" temporarily weakened and the Red Army poured in more troops, the united front came unraveled. The Bolsheviks started setting up their bureaucracy complete with Chekas (secret police) in the previously liberated villages and were met with hostility, and in many instances violence from the indignant peasants. In turn this brought mass arrests and a vicious campaign of slander against the insurrectionist movement.

The Russian press accused the Makhnovists of being Kulaks (rich peasants), secret Czarists, and anti-Semitic pogromists (raping, robbing and murdering in Jewish villages). However, just as they declared Makhno and the peasant leadership to be outlaws, the Bolsheviks had to reverse direction.

Trotsky Flip-Flops
One of their strongest

own, retreating in the face of a vicious White assault.

The path of the Makhnovist retreat was toward the area of Kherson where the Bolshevik renegade Gregor-
ev had sent a message to Makhno proposing they cease hostilities and unite against their common enemy, the Bolsheviks. Pleading to be sympathetic to

the idea, the Makhnovists agreed to meet in the Village of Sentova on July 27, 1919. When the day came, both armies, 20,000 in number, met in an open field. Grigor'ev spoke first with an appeal for a united front against the Bolsheviks and even a suggestion that they join forces with the Czarist general Deniken. Makhno spoke next and immediately accused Grigor'ev of being a reactionary and racist anti-Semite. Sensing that it was going badly, Grigor'ev reached for his gun, but Makhno had the drop and shot him in front of his whole army. A few of Grigor'ev's senior staff reached for their weapons, but they too were shot down. This coup totally disintegrated Grigor'ev's army.

By this time, the Makhnovists were very low on supplies and munitions. They were immediately put on the defensive again by the much larger Denikinist army, but their characteristic audacity and courage more than evened the odds, and Denikin's general staff was captured and the army liquidated. Thus ended the gravest threat to the Russian Revolution.

The hope among the Ukrainian Insurrectionists was that the Bolshevik regime would now recognize them as a genuine revolutionary movement and leave the region alone. Weary of fighting and weak from casualties and disease, the Makhnovists chose to relax the military front and concentrate on the much needed social construction. But the Bolsheviks had other plans.

Early in 1920 Trotsky ordered the Makhnovist Army to go to the Polish front. The Makhnovists replied that they were under no obligation to follow Bol-

shhevik detachments defeated to the Makhnovist Army. This time they were in Lettish and Chinese troops who couldn't speak the language and had no knowledge of the Ukrainian peoples' movement.

Reign of Terror

In a reign of terror unleashed against the common villagers, the Bolsheviks murdered an estimated 200,000 people. Outnumbered, the anarchists fought on for six months but finally even their courageous tactics could not overcome the 150,000 Red troops. In August of 1921, suffering from numerous wounds, Makhno was smuggled out of the country to France where he died in 1935. Prior to his death he counted among his comrades a young anarchist from Spain who himself would become a major historical figure. The man's name was Buenaventura Durutti.

Since Arshinov's book was translated, another important work has been published which is also interesting reading for anyone interested in the other side of the Russian Revolution—the Unknown Revolution by Voline. The section on the Ukraine is basically a reproduction of Arshinov's work with certain criticisms added on. Voline feels that the Makhnovists had tendencies towards a "warrior mentality" that hindered the consolidation of military gains into more solid social structures which could have resisted Bolshevik aggression. He also criticizes the Makhnovists for such personality traits as "excessive womanizing and alcohol drinking."

The History of the Makhnovist Movement is for the student of history who still recognizes the truth of a story not told by the winners. It offers a well-documented chronology of the real content of the Russian Revolution—that the self-activity of the people, what they created and what they defended, was an essentially anarcho-communist in nature. The book is also for the Leninist who has elevated a series of half-truths and outright lies into the equally spurious realm of historical inevitability.

Some Bolshevik apologists claim the Ukrainian episode was just the "rough start" of an otherwise good revolution. This ignores the outright genocide of the free Ukrainian people and their deliberate slandering by Lenin and his successors in order to bring them under Bolshevik domination. As Arshinov said, "It is not difficult to recognize in these Bolshevik traits an ancient breed of master."

It should be noted that both the Arshinov and Voline books will soon be out of print, so they should be ordered soon from Black and Red, Box 9546, Detroit, Mich. 48202.

Other mention of the Makhnovist Movement can be found in *Black and Red*, *Anarchists*, by Paul Avrich (Princeton University Press); *Obsolete Communism: The Left Wing Alternative*, by Daniel G. Bédard; and *The Philosophy of the Urban Guerrilla*, by Abraham Guillen.

Trotsky's Red Army Commissars that these were common bands and enemies of the Revolution.

This is just one incident from the History of the Makhnovist Movement. It's no dry, historical rehab, but an action-packed thriller detailing the struggle of the people of the Southern Ukraine for self-determination and the right to create a libertarian society next door to the emerging Bolshevik State. It's a story of Soviet treachery, of astounding heroics on the part of common peasants, and of a tragic finale in which the peasant army—after three years of unceasing battle against the enemies of the Revolution—is decisively crushed by "revolutionary" forces and its outstanding figure, Nestor Makhno, driven into exile.

Written in 1921 by Peter Arshinov, a Ukrainian anarchist and close friend of Makhno, the book has only recently been translated by Lorraine and Freddy Perlin, and published in a joint effort by Black and Red Publishers and Solidarity Bookshop. It provides a welcome corrective for the official histories of the time as concocted by the Bolsheviks and their admirers.

The setting is the Southern Ukraine, where, following the 1917 Revolution, a spontaneous flowering of freedom is underway. The estates of the wealthy landowners are being taken over by peasant collectives, and voluntary village cooperatives are flourishing. But this freedom is soon to be curtailed, as Lenin has signed the Brest-Litovsk



Nestor Makhno (1889-1935)

shevik orders and they were in no position to fight anyway because of a rampant typhus epidemic. The Insurrectionist army were declared outlaws and the Ukraine was invaded by several divisions of Red troops.

The Bolsheviks had learned their lessons from their previous campaign against the Ukraine, when entire