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NUMBER 6

SOVIET AFFAIRS

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by GEORGE KATKOV
- 2 Nestor Makhno
by DAVID FOOTMAN
- 3 Operations in Transcaspia 1918-
1919 and the 26 Commissars
Case
by C. H. ELLIS

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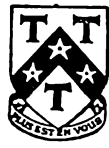
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Number Two

EDITED BY
DAVID FOOTMAN

1959
CHATTO & WINDUS
LONDON

23

PUBLISHED BY
CHATTO AND WINDUS LTD
42 WILLIAM IV STREET
LONDON WC2

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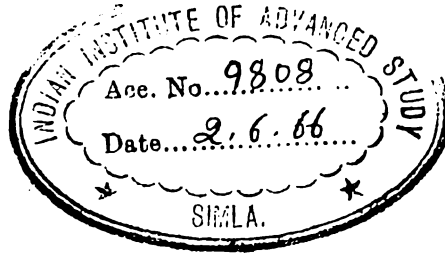
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PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
BUTLER AND TANNER LTD
FROME AND LONDON

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The main emphasis of the work at St Antony's College, Oxford, since its foundation in 1950 has been in the fields of modern history and international affairs. The College organizes a number of regular Seminars at which are read papers produced by its members in the course of their research or by visiting experts from other institutions. The College further sponsors the delivery of lectures in Oxford by scholars of international reputation in their respective fields.

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Three numbers a year are issued and each number is devoted to a particular topic or a particular part of the world.

GEORGE KATKOV

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THE KRONSTADT RISING

FOREWORD

This survey of the history of the Kronstadt uprising is based on published material which, although not easily available to the general public, is accessible to the historian in the West; a new light on what happened in Kronstadt in March 1921 may be thrown when and if the Soviet Archives are opened for impartial historical investigation. The Kronstadt rising, or, as it is called in the Soviet Union—with an innuendo—the Kronstadt mutiny, started on March 2nd 1921. Sixteen days later it was all over after a fierce and bloody battle on the ice of the Gulf of Finland. It was crushed with considerable loss of life on both sides by Red Army crack troops and Red Cadet Detachments (*Kursanty*), whose morale was boosted by some three hundred delegates to the Tenth Congress of the Communist Party (then meeting in Moscow) who were specially dispatched to Petrograd. The records of the events of those fateful days are scanty, and those that exist are often inaccurate. Indeed, they are mostly lies, wicked lies and pious ones. The mere fact that these lies are still repeated now, more than thirty years after the events, both in textbooks of history and in serious monographs that claim scholarly impartiality, shows that the occurrences of 1921 have not yet lost their political significance and that the conflicts, which called them into being, have not yet been resolved or outlived.

Testing the reliability of the reports on Kronstadt and the soundness of the various interpretations of them, I have found a relatively easy task. Much greater difficulties will beset the historian inquisitive enough to enquire how deep and how permanent were the political and social conflicts which brought about this eruption, how far reaching were its consequences for the political development of Soviet Russia.

In his *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923* E. H. Carr dismisses the Kronstadt rising in one sentence. Speaking of the discontent with the régime, which in 1921 became widespread and vocal for the first time outside political circles, and which spread both to peasants and factory workers, he remarks that “the Kronstadt mutiny of the beginning of March 1921 was its expression and its symbol”. A close study of what happened in Kronstadt seems however to point towards something a great deal more significant than this. The Kronstadt rising was a manifestation of the struggle between on the one side a government

which had set out to achieve political ends in opposition to the will and interests of large revolutionary masses and, on the other side, those masses to whose support, active and passive, this government owed its existence. The fateful proceedings of the Tenth Congress of the Communist Party in Moscow, which took place during the time of the Kronstadt rising, show that the desire to tame and "educate" these masses into submissiveness was a major factor in the formulation of the policy of the Communist rulers of Russia. The way that Soviet historians and politicians have treated the Kronstadt rising clearly shows that they consider it politically dangerous to interpret the rising as the result of a conflict between the Communist Government and the revolutionary masses. The official legend they tried to establish is an early example of historical falsification by Soviet historians intended to conceal and to gloss over the importance of that popular resistance of which, as Mr Carr says, Kronstadt was 'an expression and a symbol'.

In the case of Kronstadt their task of laying a smoke screen has not been an easy one. The proceedings of the Tenth Congress clearly show the sense of extreme danger which dominated Lenin and his team at that moment. They show that the decisions taken at that Congress were to a great extent dictated by this sense of emergency. I shall show that Lenin introduced some of the important measures inaugurated at that Congress just because he so clearly realized the real dangers of the situation, although the actual words he used about it were often untrue and disingenuous. This brings us to a further lesson that the Kronstadt rising could teach an unbiased historian. This is that many Soviet measures and many of the twists of the Party line have been dictated, as in 1921, by the requirements of the unceasing struggle against the opposition of the Russian revolutionary masses to the programme of the Communist Party; and that, every time this has been the case, a *fata Morgana* of non-existent dangers from imaginary enemies has been invoked and made as plausible as the whole of the propaganda machine could make it in order to conceal the leadership's real motives.

Of the various accounts and interpretations of the events at Kronstadt particular mention should be made of the relevant passages in Fedotoff-White's *The Growth of the Red Army*. This is a masterly exposition, and what I have to say about the military aspect of the conflict is largely based on it. On the political side I have a special debt of gratitude to Mr Leonard Schapiro, without whose advice and assistance in tracking down some of the material this study would never have been completed.

THE RUSSIA OF 1921

1921 marked the end of the Civil War and of foreign intervention in Russia. It is significant that the independent Menshevik Government in Georgia embarked from the port of Batum for its exile in the West on the very day when the final battle of Kronstadt was fought. For the first time the Soviet Government could claim virtual control over the whole territory of the R.S.F.S.R. It could now take stock of its unique position as the only Socialist government in the world, and begin to build up its diplomatic relations. And yet for the new rulers of Russia 1921 was no time for jubilation or relaxation. Agricultural and industrial production had dropped to a mere fraction of what it had been before the Revolution. Losses in human life had been enormous under the combined effect of war, starvation and epidemic. Transport was disorganized to an unheard-of degree, and this in the winter of 1920/21 brought with it a critical fuel shortage in the larger cities. The production of oil had fallen to one third, of coal to one sixth, of cotton to one fifth, of flax to one sixth, of sugar-beet to one quarter and of cast iron to one twentieth of what it had been in 1916. The purchasing power of the Petrograd workers' pay packet was down to less than one tenth of what it had been before World War I. Under these conditions the depopulation of the towns was proceeding rapidly and on an enormous scale. Petrograd, with its 2½ million inhabitants in 1917, was a town of just over 700,000 four years later.

Against this background of economic crisis social tensions developed. The Civil War united the town proletariat led by the Communist Party and large masses of otherwise politically disinterested peasants who were ready to fight the White armies out of fear of losing the land they had seized in 1917. With the end of the Civil War, this unity of peasants and proletariat came to an end. As a contemporary author put it: "After the victory over the White-Guardists, the peasantry ceased to feel the acute need for a proletarian state, which had been an important factor in the struggle against the militant landlords who were fighting to retain their grip on the land."¹ All strata of peasantry united

¹ Quoted by Pukhov (see Bibliographical note) from A. Shepkov: *Kronshtadtsky Myatezh* (Moskva-Leningrad 1924).

in opposing the wholesale requisition of their surplus produce (*prodrazverstka*), which was an essential part of War Communism.

Within the ranks of the industrial proletariat itself tensions and splits began to appear. The wages of industrial workers were far below the living minimum, and had to be supplemented by distribution of food. Workers were divided into groups and categories, some of whom received privileged rations. This arrangement could and did lead to abuse and to bitter feelings. Another serious grievance was the use by the authorities of the Labour Army (*Trudarmeitsi*). This was an invention of Trotsky, and consisted of labour detachments made up of men 'voluntarily' drafted direct from the Red Army (now that the Civil War was over); they were posted to plants where workers' discontent threatened to lead to strikes. They were thus, in intention, strike breakers. Absenteeism had become common in all the factories. This was caused partly by private expeditions of workers into the country in order to buy or barter from the peasants. On their way home these "sackbearers" (*meshekniki*) were liable to be stopped by "road-block detachments" (*zagruditelnye otryady*) which would confiscate the food on the grounds that it should have been delivered to the state, and charge the workers with "speculation". Resentment against the "road-block detachments" and their arbitrary ways found expression in nearly all the resolutions passed by workers during the Petrograd disturbances in late February 1921.

The Communist Party itself, under the leadership of the ailing Lenin, was far from united. Within the Party a group had emerged under the leadership of Shlyapnikov and Madame Kollontai, calling itself the 'Workers Opposition', which opposed the dictatorial methods of the leadership in enforcing Party discipline. In Petrograd a kind of private undeclared war was in progress between Trotsky and Zinoviev and their respective henchmen over paramount influence in the naval bases and shore establishments. The chain of authority was neither clearly defined nor universally accepted. Zinoviev, as Chairman of the Petrograd Soviet, desired the subordination to his Soviet of all Party and administrative organizations in that area, whether civilian, naval or military. Trotsky insisted on his right, as People's Commissar of Defence, to control Party organizations in military and naval establishments. He had successfully reorganized the Red Army in the struggle against the Whites and foreign intervention. He had abolished in the Army the committee system (under which orders were debated and voted on in regimental Soviets). In its place he had introduced rigid dis-

cipline, the enforcement of absolute obedience to the commands of officers, and a strict control of these officers by political commissars. In 1920 he began to introduce similar measures into the Navy. There was opposition from the sailors who were not used to such regimentation and saw no object in it now that the fighting was over; and also, surreptitiously, from Zinoviev who feared the increase in Trotsky's influence in the area.

Strong dissatisfaction with the activities of the Political Administration of the Baltic Fleet (*Pubalt*) was voiced not long after Trotsky's appointments of Raskolnikov and Baltis as its chiefs in 1921. On February 15th 1921 the second Communist Conference of the Baltic Fleet passed a resolution condemning the work of the *Pubalt*, accusing it of "losing contact with the masses" and of causing large-scale defections in the rank and file of the Communist Party.² The fall in membership of the Party was, however, at that time not restricted to the Navy, for, according to contemporary reports, in the second half of 1920 alone, the number of Communists in Petrograd had fallen by 26·4 per cent. The majority of these had been purged, while a quarter of them, nearly all workers, had left the Party voluntarily.

II

THE PETROGRAD WORKERS

On February 24th a meeting was called in Petrograd at the Trubochny Works, a large plant taken over by the Admiralty. In 1916-17 it had employed some 15,000 hands, mostly unskilled workers. In 1921 the number of workers must have been about three or four thousand. At this meeting the workers protested against their economic conditions and demanded the recall of the 'Labour Army' men. They then walked out in procession to enlist the support of other factories. They were met by detachments of the Cadets from the Officer Training Schools (*Kursanty*) who attempted to prevent them from demonstrating. There was no bloodshed although it is reported that some of the Cadets were disarmed by the crowd. The next day the movement spread to a number of other enterprises. The men of the

² See Mett, Ida: *La Commune de Cronstadt* (Spartacus, Paris, 1949), p. 25. The resolution is also quoted in Kornatovsky (see Bibliographical note).

large Baltiysky Works went on strike, and so did the Admiralty establishment on Galerny Island, the State Bank Note Printing Press, the George Borman Biscuit Factory, the Arsenal, and the shoe factories "Skorokhod" and "Pobeda" and others. The important power station in the Vyborg district stopped work. The famous Putilovsky works went on strike on the 26th, when more shipbuilding yards joined in it as well.

The grievances and demands of the workers found expression in resolutions passed at factory meetings and in leaflets which were distributed all over the city during the last few days of February. As far as the leaflets are concerned, they seem to have been largely inspired, if not actually initiated, by local cells of the opposition Socialist parties. Some bore the obvious mark of the Socialist Revolutionaries, whose main slogan remained the call for the Constituent Assembly, though it is not clear from these leaflets whether they were now asking for elections to a new Assembly or for a recall of that elected in late 1917, in which they held an absolute majority. The Menshevik inspired leaflets showed far less interest in the Constituent Assembly. Their main demand was for so-called "free labour" (*svobodny trud*). This was a portmanteau term which covered the right of the worker to choose his job and the general application of the principle of election (instead of appointment) to all responsible posts in the Trade Unions and in the Soviets. It also implied the withdrawal of the *trudarmeitsi* (Labour Army men) and the disbandment of the Communist armed detachments in the factories, which acted as bodyguards and enforcement squads for the bosses of the factory Communist cells. Both Socialist Revolutionaries and Mensheviks were at one in calling for freedom of the Press, speech and public assembly, and for a drastic restriction of the powers of the Cheka, or at any rate of its powers to suppress Left Wing parties and to interfere with working class movements.

Although the resolutions passed at workers' meetings often included the same political demands as the leaflets, their main concern was economic grievances, matters such as the system of privileged rations and the activities of the "road-block detachments". They were the expression of the workers' exasperation at the prolongation of War Communism. It is interesting to note that all these economic demands of the workers were in fact conceded by the Government while the Kronstadt revolt was in progress.

The fermentation in the factories and the demonstrations in the streets continued more or less uninterruptedly until the end

of the month. The Soviet authorities took immediate counter-measures. On the 24th a local Defence Committee (consisting of Lashevich, Anzelovich and Avrov) was appointed with large powers. A state of siege was proclaimed. A curfew was imposed from 11 p.m. to dawn, and gatherings of people in the street were strictly forbidden. A check on the workers in the various factories, beginning with the Trubochny Works, was undertaken by special committees. And in all factories three-man defence committees, the so-called *troiki*, were formed to fight against "counter-revolutionary agitation" and to watch out for possible disturbances. These *troiki* had under their orders the factory Communist guards, manned by Party members among the factory's workers and provided with arms. Order in the streets was enforced by the Cadets—*Kursanty*—who were placed under the command of the Petrograd Defence Committee.

These measures were only partly successful, for during the four days between February 25th and 28th new factories joined the strike movement and all over the city meetings were held, which passed resolutions of protest. In certain districts the *trudarmeitsi* fraternized with the strikers. The *Kursanty* showed great reluctance in using force against workers and on occasion allowed themselves to be disarmed by the crowds.

The situation became ominous as the anniversary of the February revolution approached. Indeed the disturbances were rather similar to the bread riots and strikes preceding the overthrow of the Tsarist régime in 1917. However, Petrograd was not the same as it had been then. In 1921 its workers had neither the numbers nor the vigour, nor the tangible incentives of 1917. The city's shrunken population was terribly underfed and there was little booty to be found in the municipal food stores. Also the revolutionary movement lacked a centre to which it could gravitate, a Tauride Palace with its bewildered, enthusiastic and complacent Duma deputies who could be made ephemeral leaders of the rising.

The Kronstadt sailors kept in touch with the events in Petrograd through groups of delegates who came into the city and attended factory meetings, took part in the demonstrations and listened attentively to the grievances of the workers. The delegates were appointed by mass meetings of the naval units lying icebound in Kronstadt harbour, and by the personnel of the naval establishments on the island. These gatherings issued their respective delegates with mandates authorizing them to enter Petrograd factories and to organize meetings in the city. It was a firmly established privilege of the Kronstadt sailors to participate

in the revolutionary activities of the city in this way. When the sailors' delegates turned up at the Petrograd Soviet to have their mandates confirmed, it would have been a departure from revolutionary tradition to refuse them. But on arrival in the factories the Kronstadt delegates came into conflict with the apparatus for suppression set up by the Defence Committee. Some of them are reported to have been arrested by the *troiki*. After clarification of their mandates, however, they had to be set free. The delegates returned almost daily to Kronstadt and reported on events to their comrades. A Soviet historian tells us that the Kronstadt delegates were disappointed at what they found in Petrograd. They complained, he says, that the workers had no political programme and were interested mainly in the satisfaction of their economic demands. He adds that the Kronstadt delegates wanted the workers to clamour for a Constituent Assembly. This last is difficult to believe. We shall see that the demand for a Constituent Assembly was suggested to the Kronstadt sailors more than once, mainly by the S.R.s, and that it was always emphatically and uncompromisingly rejected by them. At the same time it is quite certain that the delegates were critical of the political side of the Petrograd workers' agitation. Yet they were obviously aware of the potential political significance of what was going on. Petrichenko, one of the leaders of the rising who afterwards managed to escape to Finland, records that one of the main reasons for the suspicion and anger of the Kronstadt sailors was the discrepancy between what their own delegates reported and the official Soviet communiqués and commentaries, in which both the Government and the Party tried to play down the Petrograd riots and slur over their measures for suppressing them.

III

KRONSTADT ON THE EVE OF THE RISING

Kronstadt is a town and naval port compactly built at the western end of the island of Kotlin, some 20 miles from Petrograd, five miles from the south coast, at the place where the gulf narrows down and merges with the Neva estuary. It had been strongly fortified since the beginning of the eighteenth

century to cover the sea approaches to Petrograd and still is the main base of the Russian Baltic Fleet. Apart from the naval establishments proper, Kronstadt always possessed a military garrison manning the forts spread out on rocks and islands all round Kotlin. On the southern shore to the south-west the line of fortifications of which Kronstadt was the centre was flanked by an important town—Krasnaya Gorka. Due south lay the town of Oranienbaum, an important military base. On the northern coast of the Gulf Kronstadt is flanked by the forts on Cape Lisy Nos, to the west of which, near the then Finnish border, lies the town of Sestrovetsk. The waters round Kronstadt are ice-bound for three or four months every year, from December to late March. Normally, for most of this period, ice-breakers keep clear a channel between the island and Petrograd. But communications with the mainland (including the Finnish shore) are mostly maintained over the ice, which can carry heavy vehicles. A common route to Petrograd is over the ice to Oranienbaum and thence by train.

In 1921 the total population of the town and the military and naval base was about fifty thousand, of whom half were soldiers and sailors and half civilians. Apart from a few small traders, the great majority of the civilians were artificers and workers in the various naval shore establishments. Some of them were married and had their wives and families with them. Trade Unions mustered thirteen thousand members on the island, but adherents of the Communist Party were few—653 members and 149 candidates—and their numbers were dwindling. Of the garrison of twenty-five thousand men there were rather more soldiers manning the forts than sailors manning the ice-bound ships. In command were some fifteen hundred officers and commissars. Approximately 5 per cent of the garrison were regular members of the Communist Party.

Apart from *Pubalt*, authority in the town and port was vested in the Kronstadt Soviet of Workers, Ratings and Soldiers' Deputies, a Communist dominated body due for re-election in early March. But, as we have seen, the mass meetings of the soldiers and sailors influenced political activity and enjoyed a degree of official recognition.

The armaments of Kronstadt consisted mainly of artillery—the guns in the forts and the guns in the ships. There were two battleships in the harbour, the *Petropaulovsk* and the *Sevastopol*, both ice-bound and lying side by side, so close that each ship masked the broadside of the other. In all there were twenty-four twelve-inch guns in Kronstadt and one hundred and sixteen

guns of smaller calibre. Stocks of small arms were comparatively low. The total number of rifles available to the garrison is estimated at ten thousand.

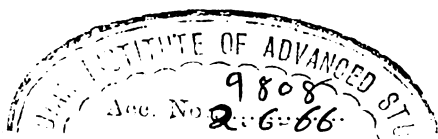
The Russian Navy, whose main base in the Baltic was Kronstadt, had played a unique role in the fateful development of the Russian revolutionary movement. Nowhere in the Russian armed forces was the tension between the officers and the rank and file so great as in the Navy and, in particular, in the Baltic Fleet. Nowhere was revolutionary propaganda better organized or conspiratorial techniques better developed, and nowhere did mutinies achieve greater notoriety and greater propaganda success. In the February days, the days of the 'great bloodless revolution', the Kronstadt sailors had showed a spirit of vindictiveness and revolutionary radicalism which went far beyond anything witnessed in the rest of the country or in the Army. The Commanding Officer of the Baltic Fleet and of Kronstadt and Nepepenin, Admiral Viren, was murdered, together with more than a hundred other officers. A Soviet of ratings and soldiers was immediately set up which on May 13th proclaimed itself the only supreme authority in Kronstadt. It is there that the abortive Bolshevik rising was hatched in July 1917. In a long telegram addressed to the Kronstadt Soviet on July 7th, Kerensky accused the sailors of 'stabbing the Revolution in the back', of being counter-revolutionaries. He demanded the handing over of all gang leaders and agitators and the reelection of the Central Committee of the Soviet of the Baltic Navy. His plea was defiantly ignored, and Kronstadt carried on as before. In the October days the Central Committee of the Baltic Fleet dispatched the cruiser *Aurora* to Petrograd. A few rounds of blank shot fired by this man-o'-war helped to break the last vestiges of resistance among the troops defending the Winter Palace. Soon after the October coup the Kronstadt sailors were in the vanguard of those who tried to assure and consolidate the social revolution by the physical extermination of the upper classes. It is significant that it was a group of Kronstadt sailors who murdered two former ministers, the Kadets Kokoshkin and Shingarev, in their beds in hospital. Lenin found this somewhat excessive and demanded the delivery of those guilty of the outrage. The Kronstadt Soviet flatly refused, and Lenin desisted.³ Again, in 1918, it was left to a sailor of the Baltic Fleet, Zheleznyak, to help Chernov somewhat roughly but quite determinedly out of the President's chair of the All Russian Constituent Assembly in that fateful

³ Steinberg I: *Als ich Volkscommissar war* (Munich 1929)

first and only meeting of the sole freely elected representative political body in Russian history. All this and more fully justifies Trotsky's estimate in 1917 of the Kronstadt sailors as "the pride and glory of the revolution".

They earned this title not by the Marxist orthodoxy of their political views, but by their ruthless insistence on extreme revolutionary action. They maintained this reputation all through the Civil War. The Kronstadt sailor became at that period a familiar and dreaded figure wherever he appeared as Commissar, as head of a local Cheka or Special Branch in the Army, as agitator or as organizer of 'spontaneous' action by the local supporters of the Soviet régime against any manœuvres of White-Guardists and counter-revolutionaries. Everywhere the Kronstadt sailors enjoyed a privileged position as the guardians of "revolutionary conscience". This was in accordance with Lenin's tendency to allow the "revolutionary conscience" of the extremists to decide the limits to which class struggle could be carried. The sailors were the *sans-culottes* of the Russian revolution. Between 1918 and 1921 they had been active on every front where the Red armies were fighting. They had taken part in the suppression of many internal uprisings and mutinies. In the Gulf of Finland itself, the Baltic sailors had permanently mobilized owing to the presence of a British fleet based on Reval. There had been a number of naval actions in the course of which units on both sides had been sunk or damaged.

By 1921, of course, a large proportion of the men who were serving in 1917 had left Kronstadt. Their place had been taken by new recruits. Certain Soviet historians have tried to claim that the Kronstadt sailors of 1921 had ceased to be the 'pride and glory of the Revolution' and had become mere peasant boys dressed in naval uniform. They called them *Ivanmory* (sea-yokels), an abusive parody of *Voenmory* (sea warriors). Statistical arguments used by these authors are not convincing. They show that the actual proportion of peasants serving in the Baltic Navy in 1921 was at that time rather smaller than the proportion of peasants in the Red Army in the same year.



THE BEGINNING OF THE RISING

Right up to February 26th 1921 there were no indications of any political agitation in Kronstadt. When the Commissar of the Baltic Fleet, Kuzmin, reported to the Petrograd Soviet late in February on the morale of the Baltic Fleet, he said that attempts at agitation among the sailors had been quite unsuccessful. He was later accused of lack of vigilance, but no evidence of seditious agitation in the Fleet at any previous date has been produced. There was, however, as already mentioned, much dissatisfaction with the activity of the commissars appointed by the new masters of the Baltic Fleet, Raskolnikov and Baltis. The leader of the insurgents, Petrichenko, claims in his reminiscences that the movement in Kronstadt was set off by the events in Petrograd and by the reports brought back to Kronstadt by the delegates who had been present and had taken part in these events.

These reports were made at meetings of the respective units held on the decks of the men-of-war and in the various forts. The commissars claimed the right to permit or forbid such meetings. This, however, was contrary to all Kronstadt traditions. Whatever the commissars might think or say, the men assembled. When the sailors gathered for an unauthorized meeting the commissars made no attempt to prevent it by force, and even attended it themselves. This is what happened at the joint meeting of the First and Second Squadrons of the Baltic Navy on board the *Petropavlovsk* on the 28th February when the ships' companies both of the *Petropavlovsk* and *Sevastopol* were present. The meeting was presided over by Petrichenko a senior clerk on the *Petropavlovsk*. The only document available of the proceedings is the resolution passed by the sailors. Soviet historians speak of a resolution couched in "Black Hundred" terms.⁴ They claim that the original text was substantially different from the one that was put to the vote at the public meeting in Anchor Square in Kronstadt on the next day, March 1st. They admit that no trace of the "Black Hundred" version could ever be found, but they assume that there must have been two meetings of the *Petropavlovsk* and *Sevastopol* crews and that the second meeting modified and 'camouflaged' the "Black Hun-

⁴ E.g. S. Pukhov in *Krasnaya Letopis* No. 1 (40) 1931, p. 9

dred" original version. There is no mention of two such meetings by any of the insurgents. It is also difficult to imagine that such a second meeting could have been called between the first meeting, in the *Petrovaulovsk* on February 28th, and the large public gathering of March 1st in Anchor Square.

The fact is that in 1931, ten years after the events, when for the first time comprehensive material concerning the Kronstadt mutiny was published in the Soviet Press, it was decided to quote the *Petrovaulovsk* resolution in full as it had appeared in the insurgents' own paper. This text, which we shall discuss below, could hardly be described as "Black Hundred" inspired. However, on the 2nd March 1921, in an Order of the Day calling for the re-establishment of Soviet authority in Kronstadt by every means available to the Soviet Government, Lenin and Trotsky mentioned an original "Black Hundred" resolution passed by the battleships' companies. Obviously, Soviet historians had no choice but to claim that the resolution which was published was an amended version of a "Black Hundred" resolution (a copy of which could not be found in 1931) and to invent a second meeting of the ships' companies at which the resolution was re-written.

The text of the resolution is:

Having heard the Report of the Representatives sent by the General Meeting of Ships' Crews to Petrograd to investigate the situation there, Resolved:

- (1) In view of the fact that the present Soviets do not express the will of the workers and the peasants, immediately to hold new elections by secret ballot, and to carry out a free pre-election campaign among workers and peasants;
- (2) To give freedom of speech and press to workers and peasants, to Anarchists and left Socialist parties;
- (3) To secure freedom of assembly for trade unions and peasant organizations;
- (4) To call a non-partisan Conference of the workers, Red Army soldiers and sailors of Petrograd, Kronstadt, and of Petrograd Province, no later than March 10, 1921;
- (5) To liberate all political prisoners of Socialist parties, as well as all workers, peasants, soldiers, and sailors imprisoned in connection with the labour and peasant movements;
- (6) To elect a Commission to review the cases of those held in prisons and concentration camps;
- (7) To abolish all *politotdeli* (Political Education and Agitation Departments) because no party should be given special privileges

in the propagation of its ideas or receive the financial support of the State for such purposes. Instead educational and cultural commissions should be elected, which should be provided for financially by the Government.

(8) To abolish immediately all 'road-block detachments'.

(9) To equalize the rations of all working people, with the exception of those employed in trades detrimental to health;

(10) To abolish the Communist fighting detachments in all branches of the Army, as well as the Communist guards kept on duty in mills and factories. Should such guards or military detachments be found necessary, they are to be appointed in the Army from the ranks, and in the factories at the workers' discretion.

(11) To give the peasants full freedom of action in regard to the land, and also the right to keep cattle, on condition that the peasants manage with their own means; that is, without employing hired labour;

(12) To request all branches of the Army, as well as our comrades the Military Commanders' Training Corps, to concur in our resolutions;

(13) To demand that the Press give the fullest publicity to our resolutions;

(14) To appoint a Travelling Commission of Control;

(15) To permit free production by artisans who do not employ hired labour.

Far from being "Black Hundred", this resolution cannot even be qualified as seditious when Communist standards of 1921 are applied. There was nothing that could be regarded as subversive in the demand for the re-election of Soviets. In Kronstadt itself new elections could be regarded as a matter of course, for the powers of the existing Kronstadt Soviet were due to expire on March 1st. The pretence of free electoral campaigns was still maintained by the Soviet Government. Demands for the freedom of the Press for left-wing parties, although in fact resisted by the Government, in themselves could not be considered counter-revolutionary. The resolution's attack on the "Political Education and Agitation Departments" and the supporting arguments were of a somewhat more dangerous kind. The Communist Party's claim to exclusive ideological leadership as the only unwavering defender of the interests of the proletariat and as the only custodian of the correct interpretation of Marxism had already been clearly stated by Lenin; and for a Communist it was a shocking idea that this thesis should be doubted by honest supporters of the Soviet régime.

And yet the allegation that the Communist Party had monopolized State funds for its propaganda obviously struck the Communist ideologians of the time in a sensitive spot. In their appeal to the Kronstadt insurgents, members of the Tenth Communist Party Congress were obviously on the defensive on this point. "You are alleging that we are forcing you to think in the Communist way only. We do not coerce anybody to think in the Communist way, you know that best yourselves, but we are trying to spread as widely as possible the light of Communist truth."⁵ Thus the Communist Party avoided the issue of monopolizing State power and funds for their propaganda, and did not repeat the Leninist claim that they were entitled to such monopoly by their status as the vanguard of the Revolution. They knew too well that the sailors and Red Army men of the Kronstadt garrison had themselves a widely recognized claim to this status.

The economic demands of the resolution were; extremely moderate and actually lagged far behind the measures that Lenin had been hatching in secret before the Tenth Congress took place and which were to become the New Economic Policy of the Soviet State. All these demands were conceded almost immediately after the outbreak of open sedition in Kronstadt.

Of greater importance was the sailors' demand for the abolition of all special armed Communist detachments in military units and in factories, and the proposal that if such guards or special detachments proved to be necessary they should not be appointed from above by the Government but elected freely and locally by the soldiers and workers of the unit or the factory concerned.

But above all it must have been the organizational proposals of the resolution which showed the red light to the Petrograd Communist authorities and forced them to oppose it and to bring the crisis to a head. These proposals in effect amounted to an attempt to organize the non-party supporters of the Soviet régime into a political force which would compete with the well-organized Communist minority and would deprive it of its exclusive leading position. This, of course, was contrary to the Leninist conception of an a-political, semi-proletarian mass which supports a Communist Government in recognition of its ideological charisma and its unswerving consistency in pursuit of the revolutionary goal.

The resolution proposed to mobilize the non-party workers

⁵ In Kornatovsky. The appeal from which this quotation is taken apparently never reached the insurgents.

and servicemen by means of an early non-party conference. The right of non-party proletarians to unite in political action was a dangerous challenge to the monopolistic position held by the Communist Party. And yet there can be little doubt that this right was widely upheld even in Communist quarters at that time, albeit hypocritically. It needed the unashamed cynicism of Lenin to launch a frontal attack on the principle of freedom of political action and association by non-party proletarians. This he did sometime after the Kronstadt uprising, in his memorandum *Political Results and Conclusions*: "We should not make a fetish of non-party conferences," he said. "They are valuable when they provide an opportunity for closer contact with the masses, with the strata of millions of working people who have not yet been corrupted and have been hitherto a-political, but they are harmful when they procure a platform for the Mensheviks and S.R.s camouflaged as non-party men." In other words, non-party conferences should be tolerated, or indeed, encouraged, only in so far as they can be held under Communist Party sponsorship and can provide an opportunity for Communist propaganda. The Kronstadt resolution leaves no doubt that its promoters wanted the non-party conference to become a political force independent of the Communist Party. We shall examine the allegation that the anti-Communist outlook expressed in this demand, and in the Kronstadt insurrection in general, was inspired by Menshevik and S.R. ideology. The resolution itself provides no evidence that this was the case. Indeed, it differs from many of the resolutions passed in the factories of Petrograd by the conspicuous absence of any call for the Constituent Assembly, or indeed for any measure of constitutional reform. Nor does it demand, as was alleged by Lenin at the Tenth Congress, "free trade". In its attack on the Communist Party the resolution does not ask for its dissolution but only for its relegation to the status of one of the revolutionary Soviet parties in a Soviet state. The legend that the Kronstadt sailors ever demanded "Soviets without Communists" was invented by the émigrés abroad.

When on the 28th February, at the general meeting of the First and Second Squadrons of the Baltic Fleet, the sailors—both Communist and non-party—unanimously voted for this resolution, they certainly expected that there would be some resistance to it on the part of the Political Commissars. And indeed the only two abstentions when the resolution was passed were those of the commissars of the *Petropavlovsk* and the *Sevastopol*. But the sailors certainly did not regard their resolution as a

counter-revolutionary act and certainly did not consider it to be an appeal for an armed uprising. In demanding that it should be widely publicized in the Soviet Press the Kronstadt sailors wanted to call the Communist bluff, and expose the Communist claim to enjoy having non-party popular support for their policy. The sailors did not for a moment think of breaking away from the Soviet Union and of establishing a border Government similar to the counter-revolutionary governments of the White generals. Should a conflict with the central Government arise they were ready for it, and were ready to handle it as they had handled their conflict with the Provisional Government of Kerensky in May 1917. They had experience of independent local revolutionary self-government and they hoped that the Petrograd workers and garrison would follow their example and thus bring about a political change in the whole of the R.S.F.S.R. They looked forward to the visit of Kalinin, arranged for the 1st March, so as to present him with a clear political programme. They considered themselves to be a political pressure group and not conspirators, and acted as such.

This is also what the Petrograd Defence Committee obviously believed the initiators of the Kronstadt movement to be. Otherwise they would not have sent Kuzmin, the Commissar of the Baltic Fleet, and Kalinin, the Chairman of the Central Executive Committee, to talk to the sailors in Kronstadt on March 1st; nor would Vasilyev, the Chairman of the Kronstadt Soviet, have presided at a meeting where this resolution was put to the vote. Kalinin was a popular speaker and the meeting was well attended. It is reported that some sixteen thousand sailors, soldiers and workers gathered in the Anchor Square. Kalinin had made successful appearances a few days before at various meetings in Petrograd (in particular at a large meeting of the Petrograd Naval base, where he had succeeded in strengthening the position of the local Defence Committee and inducing the strikers to return to work). The situation in the Anchor Square was somewhat different from that in Petrograd. Kalinin, who was received with customary honours, found it difficult to make himself heard. He was frequently interrupted by shouts of "Drop it, Kalinych." "You manage to keep warm yourself." "You have a number of jobs each carrying a nice round salary." Even so, the official Soviet historian prefers to explain Kalinin's failure not so much by the hostile attitude of the crowd as by the wind which carried his voice in the opposite direction. Kuzmin, the Commissar of the Baltic Fleet, spoke

after Kalinin, and his tone was most unfortunate. "Tell us about shooting every tenth man on the Northern front," shouted the multitude, referring to some incident during the Civil War on the Archangel front. Kuzmin answered, "I certainly did, and will do so again with counter-revolutionaries. You would have shot every fifth yourselves." The latter remark was meant to be complimentary but the threatening undertone was unmistakable. Vasilyev, feeling that the meeting might become more manageable if transferred from the open square to a closed hall, suggested an adjournment to the Engineering School. His proposal was rejected. Then, the *Petropavlovsk* resolution was put to the vote and was accepted quasi-unanimously with Kalinin, Kuzmin and Vasilyev voting ostentatiously against it. It was clear that the Kronstadt "revolutionary masses" were not going to follow the Petrograd leaders. And yet there was nothing seditious in the fact that the resolution was accepted. Following the vote on the resolution, the meeting proceeded to debate the problem of the elections to the Kronstadt Soviet, since the existing Soviet's powers had expired on that day. Vasilyev, the Chairman both of the meeting and of the Soviet, proposed the election of a delegates' Committee which would prepare the elections to the Soviet. His proposal was adopted and it was decided that every factory, and every naval and military unit would elect two delegates to the delegates' meeting which was convened for the following day. The general meeting then came to an end. Kuzmin remained in Kronstadt, while Kalinin left at once for Petrograd. There are conflicting reports about his departure, Soviet historians claiming that he was detained for a short while at the gates of Kronstadt. However he arrived safely that evening in Petrograd.

Meanwhile the situation in Kronstadt was becoming tense. One of the most disturbing features, from the point of view of the Party political leadership, was the defection of large numbers of Communist Party members who had not moved a finger in support of Kalinin at the Anchor Square meeting; indeed most of them voted with the others for the *Petropavlovsk* resolution. The only 'reliable' Communist group in Kronstadt seemed to be the Party School, numbering some 200 trainees. They were watched with suspicion by the sailors, who expected any moment some armed intervention on their part, on the lines of the *Kursanty's* suppression of the workers' demonstrations in Petrograd.

One Soviet historian, Pukhov, reports⁶ an incident which he

⁶ Pukhov in *Krasnaya Letopis* No. 1 (40) 1931, p. 16

alleges took place during the late evening of March 1st. A telegram was dispatched along the wire from Kronstadt, addressed to "all concerned" with the following wording: "In view of the situation in Kronstadt at the present moment the Communist Party is deprived of power and a Revolutionary Committee is in command. Non-party comrades, we ask you to take the administration into your hands and to look out sharply for the Communists. (Signed) Yakolenko."

This story should be viewed with some suspicion. The signature on the telegram is probably misprinted or misspelt and presumably should read "Yakovenko",⁷ as this was the name of one of the members of the Revolutionary Committee of Kronstadt. But it is important to remember that no such committee was officially formed on the 1st March, and furthermore that even if it had been established underground it would have been unbelievably incautious for the rebels to advertise its formation before they had the situation in Kronstadt itself firmly in their hands. The telegram has never been mentioned in any document or by any writer on the insurgent side. It could easily have been sent out twenty-four hours later, on the 2nd March, when the rebellion had officially broken out. In any case the evidence which Pukhov adduces for its having been dispatched on the night of the 1st March is inconclusive.

This does not mean that a committee or some committees were not already formed in the various units and establishments on March 1st. Delegates to the preparatory committee for the elections to the Kronstadt Soviet were to be nominated for next morning, and certainly the men were getting together and discussions were going on. No doubt the sailors of the First and Second Squadrons were determined not to let the Communists manipulate the elections. The delegates' meeting, which would determine electoral procedure, would decide whether the Communists were to have control of the elections proper (as they already did everywhere in Russia), or whether this time secrecy and a free choice of candidates would ensure a majority for the supporters of the sailors' resolution. The choice of delegates to the delegates' meeting was therefore crucial. There was not much time for agitation or organization. The Communists had the advantage of an established electoral machinery, whereas the sailors could rely only on more or less spontaneous popular support. This was, however, made more probable by their success at the meeting in the Anchor Square. The meetings for the elections of the delegates were held in all

⁷ Sometimes also spelled Yakimenko.

the units concerned early on the morning of March 2nd. From the report of one of these preliminary meetings, that of the Artillery administration, it is clear that the Communists met with organized resistance. Communist speakers were not allowed to mount the rostrum freely, as they were accustomed; the gathering as a whole was first asked whether it wanted to hear them. It is significant that they were eventually allowed to speak, although they were subjected to some interruptions. It is surprising that even in this atmosphere of semi-rebellion the proportion of Communists among the delegates finally elected to the delegates' meeting was about one third.

The elected delegates were to assemble on the *Petropaulovsk* at 11 a.m. There was, however, some misunderstanding about the place where the meeting was to be held, and two groups of delegates waited for each other, one on the *Petropaulovsk* and the other in the Engineers' School in the town.

When the delegates' meeting eventually opened (at the Engineers' School, after 2 p.m.) Vasilyev and Kuzmin adopted the same truculent attitude as at the previous meeting in the Anchor Square. There followed a discussion on procedural matters which seems to have gone on for about three hours in an atmosphere of complete disorder. In the end it was the sailors who had charge of the meeting and Petrichenko became the chairman. Kuzmin appealed to the patriotism of the meeting, and insisted that no dissension could be tolerated at a moment when the Republic was still in danger of an attack from Poland. He told the meeting flatly that the Communists would on no account surrender power or share it with another political party or group. This was naturally understood as a threat on the part of the Communists to crush the movement by force of arms. It was proposed to have Kuzmin and Vasilyev arrested on the spot, and a resolution to that effect was accepted, presumably by acclamation. This, if anything, should be considered as Kronstadt's first step towards active insubordination. However, the practice of arresting speakers at meetings on the spot by a decision of those attending had been well established since 1917. It had been successfully applied as recently as the previous week, by the Communists at meetings in the Petrograd factories (as reported by Pukhov himself); only in Petrograd those arrested had been the emissaries of the Kronstadt Garrison.

Feelings were running high as the meeting proceeded to work out instructions for a free and secret ballot to the local Soviet. At the same time the sailors were closely watching the move-

ments of the Party School trainees, who were believed to be strongly on the side of the Communist commissars. Suddenly a rumour swept the meeting that carts carrying armed men and ammunition were moving in the direction of the Engineers' School. Later the rumour proved to be unfounded. The Party School trainees were in fact leaving their quarters but they did not attempt to approach the Engineers' School; on the contrary, they were quitting Kronstadt and withdrawing south-west across the ice of the Gulf of Finland to the fort of Krasnaya Gorka on the mainland. Nevertheless the flurry disrupted the meeting, which was dissolved in some confusion, leaving its presidium of five men in charge of all authority in the town and fortress. Later this committee of five was enlarged by a further ten men and the whole became known as the Provisional Revolutionary Committee. There can be no doubt that on the evening of March 2nd Kronstadt was in open rebellion against what the rebels termed "The Communist Party usurpers who have seized power in the Soviet State".

For the next sixteen days the internal situation changed little. What went on in Kronstadt was probably in many respects very similar to what went on, at about this time, in those other districts of the R.S.F.S.R. where the authority of the central government was replaced by locally organized insurgent groups. In many places these insurgent régimes existed for much longer periods than in Kronstadt, and involved much larger areas and a much larger population. What makes the case of Kronstadt outstanding among the innumerable insurrections against the Soviet Government is the amount of reliable information we have available on the ideology of the rebels, on their tactics, their internal organization, their hopes and apprehensions and finally on their attitude towards their failure. Unlike all the other risings in Soviet Russia at that time Kronstadt was not completely cut off from the outer world. The rebels published a daily paper from March 3rd to March 16th. A number of them escaped to Finland after the rebellion was crushed and have provided detailed reports on what happened during those fateful days. Finally, the record of the debates of the Tenth Congress of the Communist Party, which took place in Moscow while the Kronstadt rebellion was actually going on, often reads like a running official commentary on the Kronstadt events.

We now propose to consider the military tactics of the rebels, the evolution of their ideology as reflected in the *Izvestia* of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee, the reaction of the

Communist rulers of Russia to the Kronstadt rebellion; and the various interpretations of the events put forward, at the time and later, by the various Russian parties.

v

THE MILITARY TACTICS OF THE INSURGENTS AND THE SUPPRESSION OF THE REBELLION

The sailors who seized power in Kronstadt on March 2nd were conscious of leading a movement which, they expected, would be followed up by the whole population of the Petrograd province and eventually by the whole of Russia. Their first move, at about midnight of March 2nd-3rd, was to get in touch with the Oranienbaum garrison where the Air Squadron under the command of a certain Kolesov was known to share the point of view of the Kronstadt rebels. Delegates arriving from Oranienbaum reported that the Naval Air Squadron had held meetings, had expressed approval of the Kronstadt resolution and had elected a revolutionary committee of their own. No individual soldiers and airmen in Russian units at that time were allowed to keep small arms, which were stored in a central depot. It is characteristic of the mentality of the men concerned that the Air Squadron made no attempt to seize this depot in Oranienbaum. They merely posted a small guard on their barracks. Meanwhile the Commandant of the Oranienbaum garrison took his counter-measures. The Kronstadt insurgents sent out a detachment across the ice to contact the Air Squadron. But when they arrived at Oranienbaum, before dawn on March 3rd, the sailors were met with fire and had to retreat to their island fortress. At 5 a.m. on the same morning an armoured train arrived in Oranienbaum from Petrograd. *Kursanty* surrounded the Naval Air Squadron barracks, arrested all ringleaders, and forty-four men were interrogated and shot the same afternoon. The Oranienbaum rebellion was crushed. This was a severe blow to the Kronstadt insurgents.

Having failed to establish a foothold in Oranienbaum, they made a considerable effort to get in touch with equally disaffected elements in other parts of the Petrograd province.

During the following few days some two hundred delegates were sent both to Petrograd and to the surrounding townships, each delegate supplied with 1000 leaflets. Ten of them managed eventually to return to Kronstadt. From Soviet sources we know that besides the men at Oranienbaum, other groups actively supported the insurgents during the early days of the rebellion in Petrograd itself and in particular in Peterhof. There was a seditious movement on the ice-breaker *Truvor* in Petrograd which, had it been successful, might have changed the whole strategic situation of Kronstadt by freeing some of the ice-bound warships. Delegates of the Kronstadt garrison carrying leaflets were arrested as far away as the station Dno on the Petrograd–Moscow railway. However, within two or three days of the outbreak in Kronstadt, the repressive measures of the Petrograd authorities were in full force and no open agitation in support of Kronstadt was tolerated. Yet the telephone between Kronstadt and Petrograd and between Kronstadt and Krasnaya Gorka continued to function. The Kronstadt sailors tried to get into touch with personal friends in various official positions and to acquaint them with their demands and the situation in general. On the other hand, the Communists attempted to ring up the leaders of the rebellion and to persuade them of the hopelessness of their position. These parleys went on up until about the 6th of March, by which time the situation had grown considerably tenser. It then became known in Kronstadt that on the order of Trotsky the Petrograd Soviet had arrested all families of Kronstadt workers, Red Army men and sailors as hostages for Communists arrested in Kronstadt. The Provisional Revolutionary Committee sent a telegram of protest branding this decision as a shameful and wicked manoeuvre, “unheard of in history”. On the same day, the 6th, a telegram was received from Petrograd, asking whether a fact-finding delegation of the Petrograd Soviet, consisting of Party and non-party representatives, could visit Kronstadt. The Provisional Revolutionary Committee replied by radio that “it did not trust the non-Party character of the non-Party delegates” of the Petrograd Soviet. In a counter-proposal (which they must have known was not acceptable) the Provisional Committee suggested that non-party representatives should be elected by factories and army and naval units and sent to Kronstadt together with an additional 15 per cent of Communists to be appointed by the Petrograd Soviet. The elections of the delegates were to take place in the presence of delegates from the Kronstadt garrison. This counter-proposal remained unanswered.

Besides these more or less direct negotiations, propaganda and counter-propaganda went on by radio throughout the whole period. On March 5th leaflets were dropped over Kronstadt by aircraft. The Provisional Committee's answer to this propaganda was to give space in their daily paper to reproducing these appeals. They reprinted not only the leaflet dropped on March 5th (in *Izvestia* on March 6th) but also broadcasts from the transmitters "Novaya Gollandiya" and Radio Moscow. In doing so, they obviously hoped to justify their own demands for the publication of the Kronstadt resolution and their other appeals in the Soviet Press; and also to make known to their followers from first-hand sources the fantastic and slanderous accusations raised against Kronstadt by Communist propaganda. This propaganda repeatedly alleged that Kronstadt was in the grip of a White-Guardist gang under the command of the head of the artillery service of the Kronstadt fortress, Colonel Kozlovsky. These allegations, however fantastic, provided for the sailors a partial explanation for the disappointing inaction of the Petrograd proletariat, whom the Kronstadt sailors had been expecting confidently to join them in the rising.

The failure of the rebellion to spread to the mainland must have become obvious to the Kronstadt leaders on March 3rd. Armed suppression by selected Red Army troops loomed ahead. On that same day a Defence Committee was formed under the chairmanship of the chairman of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee, Petrichenko. It appears that Colonel Kozlovsky did not take part in the meeting on March 3rd, but joined it later in his capacity as head of the artillery of the fortress. It is reported that he was in favour of more aggressive tactics and of a march on Petrograd, but that this was rejected by the Revolutionary Committee. However this may be, it is difficult to find fault with the decision not to make a sortie at that precise moment. The whole movement which had started in Petrograd and which took the shape of an open rebellion in Kronstadt, was relying on the support of the unorganized revolutionary masses and not on the military strength of such regular units as the insurgents could muster. True, Kronstadt possessed a unique force in the battleships *Petropavlovsk* and *Sevastopol*. But these were, at the moment, ice-bound and it could reasonably be hoped by the rebels that in the course of a fortnight or a month at the utmost, the ice on the Gulf of Finland would melt and the fleet could move on Petrograd, thus giving the necessary military support to renewed workers'

demonstrations in the former capital. A sortie over the ice would have involved the Kronstadt garrison in a battle with Communist crack troops who were better armed, superior in numbers and better trained for that kind of fighting. The inevitable result would have been military disaster. So the Defence Committee decided to prepare for a short siege and to start tentative negotiations in order to secure supplies for the Kronstadt base in case of a prolonged conflict. Thus from the beginnings, Kronstadt's military tactics were defensive and passive.

The Soviet Government's attack on Kronstadt was carried out in two stages. It was authorized by a decision of the Politbureau. The original plan was first to attempt negotiations with Kronstadt, then to present the insurgents with an ultimatum, and finally to storm the fortress and mutinous battleships across the ice of the Gulf of Finland. The first stage never materialized, unless the private parleys with individuals can be regarded as "negotiations". The ultimatum, written in a most violent manner, was delivered on the 5th March and was signed by Trotsky.

By that time Tukhachevsky, then Commander of the 7th Army, had been put in charge of the military operations. The first attempt to storm the fortress was launched on March 8th. It began by artillery preparation on March 7th which was followed on March 8th by an infantry attack on Kronstadt. Most of the troops concerned were drawn from the Petrograd garrison. The attack was a complete failure. The Government troops showed no fighting spirit, and on some sectors of the battlefield fighting was interrupted by parleys and agitation. Both sides allege misuse of the White Flag and both sides claimed to have captured prisoners and collected defectors. The official Soviet military historian reports heavy losses on the Government side in casualties and prisoners.

The Kronstadt *Izvestia* published on the 9th March a communiqué claiming that the enemy's attempts to launch an offensive from North and South had been repelled with considerable losses to the enemy. "There were no losses on our side." The only fort which the Government troops succeeded in capturing on the first day of the attack had to be abandoned by them the day following. The number of prisoners (or defectors?) was considerable. Five hundred men of the so-called Kronstadt Infantry Regiment (which was on garrison duty in Petrograd) were reported to have surrendered. Later the *Izvestia* of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee published lists of prisoners who asked to join the rebel force.

Tukhachevsky reacted to this first set-back by taking immediate measures to build up a new attacking force out of units brought from all parts of the country. The urgency of these measures was due to the fact that the ice on the Gulf of Finland was liable to break at any time. It had held so far only because of the exceptionally cold weather that winter. The low morale of the Government troops which had been so noticeable during the attack on March 8th was a matter of particular concern both to the Government and to Tukhachevsky. Seasoned and well-trained troops were brought from the Polish front, and whole battalions of Red Army cadets were included in the new attacking force. Three hundred members of the Tenth Communist Party Congress were put in charge of various units. Among them were such warriors of the Civil War as Dybenko the Baltic sailor, Fedko and S. Uritsky.⁸

Incidentally, the disorganization resulting from the departure for the front of so many members helped Lenin to make the rump of the Congress accept certain resolutions aiming at the suppression of the so-called "Workers Opposition". Ideologically the "Workers Opposition" was probably much closer to the mentality of the Kronstadt rebels than any of the political groups with which Lenin and subsequent historians tried to identify the insurgents. This affinity was pointed out by the Leninist majority at the Congress and must more than anything else have frightened the leaders of the labour opposition. They were just as eager to disclaim any inclination to appeal to armed rebellion in order to achieve their political aims as Lenin was to saddle them with the responsibility of having provoked the unconscious and semi-conscious masses into open counter-revolution by propagating their programme among them. When Mme Kollantai, one of the leaders of the Workers Opposition, claimed from the tribune of the Congress that the oppositionists were the first to volunteer for fighting on the

⁸ In a publication of the Central State Archives of the Red Army of the U.S.S.R. in 1957, in the documents relating to the award of orders and medals to units of the Red Army, the following Red Commanders Training Corps establishments were mentioned as having taken part in the suppression of the Kronstadt Rebellion:

The Third Smolensky Infantry School			
The 31st Smolensky Infantry Commander Course			
The 5th Peterhof	"	"	"
The Second Moscow	"	"	"
The Sixth Petrograd	"	"	"
The Torzhok Military Railway School	"	"	"
The 45th Vitebsk Infantry Commander Courses			(Document 56, p. 133)
The Military Engineers' School			(Document 58, p. 136)
The Petrograd District Courses of Sport and Pre-Military Training			(Document 79, p. 168)
			(Document 62, p. 140)

Kronstadt front she was severely reprimanded by the chairman, who said that it was unseemly for Communists to boast of having performed their duty.

In their propaganda to the troops the Political Commissars of the Government stuck to the legend that the rebels were White-Guardists. Petrichenko reports that according to his information certain Kronstadt rebels who were taken prisoner were subsequently dressed up in Tsarist uniforms with gold shoulder-straps and paraded in front of Government troops. Meanwhile steps were taken to ensure that none of the Kronstadt propaganda material should reach the troops selected for the repression of the rebellion. On the other hand, as we have seen, the Kronstadt Provisional Revolutionary Committee published in Kronstadt the propaganda material, including Trotsky's ultimatum, addressed to the rebels by the Government.

Besides the regular troops, which included two Brigades of the 27th Infantry Division (the 167th and the 32nd Brigades) and a composite division consisting largely of Red Cadets, the attacking force included Artillery and Air Force units. The troops were assembled on both north and south shores of the Gulf of Finland facing the island. The command of the Northern Group was entrusted to Kazansky and the Southern Group was led by Sedyakin, both former Tsarist officers.

In spite of all efforts the morale of the troops does not seem to have been entirely satisfactory. There is abundant evidence that many of the Communists who went to fight on the ice of the Gulf of Finland were in secret sympathy with the rebels and felt ashamed at shooting at fellow-proletarians. The legend of the White-Guardist plot found little credit with many of them. Communist students from Moscow University who were hastily dispatched to the Kronstadt front spoke later of their military exploit with shame, but at that time showed a desperate determination to support the Government's action.⁹ There are, however, also reports of an attempt to wreck the military operations against Kronstadt. Victor Serge reports that some officers of a regiment which had been brought from the Polish front to Oranienbaum and incorporated in the Southern Group of the Assault Force were organizing a revolt and intended to join the Kronstadt sailors. Other reports go as far as to say that this unit intended to march on Petrograd. The plot was discovered by the Secretary of the Petrograd Defence Committee, Zorin, who arrested the officer commanding the regiment and shot him together with a number of other officers.

⁹ See Barmine: *One Who Survived* (New York 1945), pp. 94-98

On March 15th Tukhachevsky and Peremytov signed the orders for the attack. These orders laid down that a preliminary bombardment by all available artillery was to start by 2 p.m. on the 16th; the Northern column was to launch its attack across the ice at 3 a.m. on the 17th; and the Southern at 4 a.m. The troops were to advance in close formation dressed in white camouflage overalls. Special measures were taken to supply the troops with sufficient arms and ammunition and to have them well fed and dressed, which must have been a formidable task in such a short preparatory period and in the conditions then prevailing in Russia.

It is difficult to say how far this attack took the rebels by surprise. Doubtless information about the concentration of troops on both sides of the Gulf must have reached them. But the ease of their victory on the 8th March might have lulled them into a sense of false security. Their experience of the Government's first attempt to dislodge them would have given them no reason to foresee the fanatical determination of the special formations sent to the assault on March 17th. This time the attacking troops were not ready to parley or defect. Possibly the knowledge of the real character of the rebellion which had by now seeped through to the Communists in the Government ranks was even helpful to the Government. It is unlikely that any well-informed Communist believed the allegation of a White-Guardist rising. But the maintenance of Communist leadership was first and foremost in their minds; and they believed Lenin when he told them that a Tsarist restoration was the only alternative to the dictatorship of the Communist Party. In any case the Government troops fought with a fanatical determination.

The preliminary bombardment of March 16th lasted from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. when darkness fell. It was answered by the guns of the Kronstadt forts and battleships, and by the emission of smokescreens. The rebel battleships were at a disadvantage in their artillery duel with the batteries of Krasnaya Gorka, which were situated on high ground and had an advantage of range and angle over the Kronstadt guns. Between 6 p.m. and the early hours of the 17th there was an uncanny lull, interrupted only by a bombing raid by Government planes on the fortress. The Kronstadt garrison endeavoured to keep a watch on any movements on the mainland coast and on the ice, using powerful searchlights. However, there was a heavy fog over the Gulf. According to the official Government report, assault troops who debouched on the ice in the early hours were out of sight of the coast after a few hundred yards. Their objective was the town

of Kronstadt itself; only those forts were to be captured which blocked the way to the Petrograd gate at the eastern extremity of Kotlin Island. The advance in close formation necessarily involved heavy losses, but was ordered to maintain pressure and keep the movement of the units under control. Each unit was headed by a group of volunteer shock troopers.

Contact was made at 5 a.m. on the 17th and immediately all guns of the besieged fortress opened fire. The main attack was launched from the southern shore of the Gulf of Finland in two groups, each of which advanced in two columns. The two columns of the first group started from a point east of Oranienbaum and made for the eastern coast of the Kotlin Island and the Petrograd gate of Kronstadt. Part of the 32nd Brigade and the 95th and 96th Regiments succeeded in crossing the ancient fortress moat at about 5 a.m. and street-fighting began. The 187th Rifle Brigade and the *Kursanty* under the command of Fedko gave them support and overcame the resistance at the Petrograd gate. The second group of the Southern force started from a point west of Oranienbaum and aimed at the southern coast of Kotlin: the 79th Brigade also succeeded in entering the town in the early hours, but was ejected by the defenders and thrown back on the ice.

The Northern force seems to have been greatly inferior in strength. The official history has it that a group consisting of two companies launched an attack on Fort Totleben. They were caught in a minefield laid in the ice, and in the subsequent explosion many of them were drowned. According to the official history, only eighteen men remained alive of the 2nd Battalion of the 2nd Regiment. Fort Totleben did not fall before midnight on March 18th.

In the meantime, all through the day of the 17th, the battle was swaying in the streets of Kronstadt itself. The operations of the Government troops were controlled from the mainland with the help of telephone lines laid across the ice, which maintained contact in spite of artillery fire from the fortress (which seems to have been intense, but, as far as one can judge from reports from both sides, rather haphazard). The fire slackened in the course of the afternoon, mainly, as Petrichenko stated later, because the guns of the shore batteries and of the ships became overheated. By 4 p.m. the defenders mounted a determined counter-attack which at one point threatened to throw the Government troops out of Kronstadt town. However, the situation was restored by the arrival of reinforcements including the 27th Cavalry Regiment and special detachments of

Petrograd Communists (*Piterskiye Kommynary*). But it was not until the attackers had managed—after the fall of darkness—to bring up light artillery into the streets that the issue was decided. By that time the defenders were in complete confusion although we must accept with some scepticism an official report that an internecine struggle had broken out among them. The defenders began to surrender in the early hours of the 18th, after the flight of many of their leaders over the ice towards the Finnish coast. The battleships were not seized by Government troops until 11 a.m. on the 18th. The official report has it that they only just managed to prevent the ships being scuttled.

The casualties of the Government troops and the insurgents are given separately in the official report. It states that on the Government side there were 700 dead and missing and some 2,500 wounded. The rebels are said to have suffered 600 dead and 1,000 wounded. It is likely that the total casualties were considerably heavier than this. Presumably the official figures do not include those on the rebel side who were summarily executed on the spot and were thus not classified as “fallen in battle”. The fighting, especially the street-fighting in the last stages, must have been savage and there have been reports from both sides of wholesale massacres of groups of defenders.¹⁰

Several hundred of the Kronstadt rebels including members of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee and its chairman Petrichenko made their way across the ice in the darkness to the Finnish mainland where they were interned. So did the unfortunate Kozlovsky, whom historical falsification has singled out as the leader of the rebellion.

VI

THE POLITICAL THEORY AND PRACTICE OF THE KRONSTADT REBELS

The *Petro-paulovsk* resolution remained unaltered throughout the 16 days of the rebellion as the political manifesto of the insurgents. However, the military emergency gave it a more revolutionary character than it had originally possessed. In itself the resolution of March 1st was not an appeal to overthrow the

¹⁰ See, for example, a report of the fighting published in Kornatovsky: *Kronstadt'sky Myatezh*, p. 91.

existing régime by force. If the resolution had been discussed by local Soviets on the mainland, or, perhaps, supported by the Workers Opposition of the Communist Party, then it would have remained a political programme fighting for acceptance by perfectly legitimate methods, and one which might have gained mass support. Because it was suppressed, it became revolutionary.

The Kronstadt insurgents were just a small fraction of the Russian revolutionary masses who, although without experienced political leadership, nevertheless succeeded in temporarily freeing themselves from the dictatorship of the Central Communist Government, owing to the peculiar geographical position of their island. They were, and remained throughout, supporters of Soviet rule. They were 'class conscious' and their liberalism never went so far as to recognize equal rights for members of the former ruling classes. But they refused to recognize the leadership of the Communist Party as the exclusive political authority of the Soviet State. In the Communist leaders they saw merely another clique of oppressors who were ready to sacrifice the interests of the masses for the sake of maintaining their political power. Speaking of Trotsky, the *Izvestia* of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee wrote on March 7th 1921: "He, this dictator of Soviet Russia which is being raped by the Communists, cares little about what is to become of the labouring masses, provided power remains in the hands of the Russian Communist Party. . . . The ninth wave of the revolution of the toilers is rising and will sweep away the base slanderers and bullies from the face of Soviet Russia, which they have disfigured."

However, the next day the ninth wave had become in the florid style of the *Izvestia* leader-writer "a new great revolutionary landslide" and "the foundation stone of the third revolution". This "third revolution" was to give at last to the labouring masses the chance to have their own freely elected Soviets, to function free from violent pressure from any party, and to reform the official trade unions into free associations of workers, peasants and working intelligentsia.

The slogan of a "Third Revolution" is an important development in the Kronstadt rising. It is in sharp contrast with the aims and slogans of traditional reactionary anti-Communist movements. In the hands of a skilful political propaganda machine it might very possibly have become at that time and, indeed, even much later a powerful political weapon. It implies that the social and economical conflicts which arise within

the Soviet State cannot be overcome merely by reforms inside the Communist controlled régime, but that remedies have to be found and enforced by the masses themselves, if necessary by recourse to arms. The opponents of the Soviet régime in 1921 were not ready to accept the idea of a "Third Revolution". They were still all committed to the old abandoned political programmes of 1917. By proclaiming themselves the vanguard of the "Third Revolution" the Kronstadt sailors drew a clear line between themselves and those who wanted a return to the principles of the February Revolution. In particular they did not endorse the Socialist Revolutionary demand for the recall or even the re-election of the Constituent Assembly. When the Chairman of that body, Victor Chernov, sent them a radiotelegram proposing to come to Kronstadt personally and offered 'all his resources and all his authority for the struggle under the banner of the Liberation of the People in the name of the Constituent Assembly', the Chairman of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee, Petrichenko, thanked Chernov for his good wishes but asked him to postpone his visit, at any rate until the situation was clearer.¹¹ This refusal to adopt the slogan of the Constituent Assembly was consistent with the sailors' political doctrines. They considered that the Soviet constitution provided them with all the necessary political means for getting rid of the dictatorship of the Communist Party (and indeed of any party), provided they showed sufficient determination to use these means. There was, they believed, no need either for a Constituent Assembly or for political alliances with parties which had compromised themselves in the eyes of the masses in 1917 and during the Civil War. The Communists could be ousted from power if the masses could stop their tampering with the elections to the Soviets, which was a violation of the existing constitution. The sailors had no quarrel with the principle of the dictatorship of the proletariat, but they did not accept the leadership of the Communist Party. This is the political platform which found its expression in the slogan of the "Third Revolution" and in such captions in the Kronstadt *Izvestia* as: "All power to the Soviets and not to the parties"; "Soviet authority will liberate the labouring peasantry from the yoke of the Communists".

The Kronstadt rebels were clearly conscious of the originality of their political ideas. They jealously safeguarded their aspirations against all attempts of other anti-Communist parties to exploit them for political aims which were different from theirs.

¹¹ Meit, *Ida*, op. cit. pp. 64 ff.

A significant leading article entitled "Gentlemen and Comrades" appearing in the Kronstadt *Izvestia* on March 6th proclaimed: "You comrades are now celebrating the triumph of a bloodless and great victory over the Communist dictatorship, but your enemies are also triumphant. However, your joy and their joy are based on irreconcilable motives. *You* are inspired by the burning desire to restore the real power of the Soviets and by the noble hope of providing the worker with free conditions of work and the peasant with the right to dispose at his free will of his land and the products of his labour; *they* are inspired with the hope of restoring the Tsarist rule of the whip and the privileges of the officer class. Your interests differ, and therefore they are no fellow-travellers of yours. You desired the overthrow of the rule of the Communists for the purpose of peaceful reconstruction and creative work, they wanted it for the enslavement of the workers and peasants. You are seeking freedom, they seek to shackle you once more. Be watchful. Do not let the wolves in sheeps' clothing approach the captain's bridge."

The question of the support of the organized proletariat abroad was very present in their minds. On the 8th of March the Provisional Revolutionary Committee sent a radio message to proletarians of all countries, reprinted in the *Izvestia* on March 10th, in which they stated: "We solemnly declare to the face of the proletariat of the whole world that we are not led by White-Guardist generals of any kind, and that there have not been and could not have been any negotiations with Finland on the subject of military support and food supplies. We are in possession of sufficient stocks of material and food for the time required to overthrow the Communists." But the last assurance was qualified and the message went on: "Should our struggle be prolonged, we might be forced to apply for help to provide food for our wounded heroes, for the children and for the civil population." In fact, negotiations were already going on with the Finnish Red Cross about food supplies, and a representative of this organization, a Captain Wilken, came on skis from Finland to supervise their distribution. This episode was seized on by the Communist propaganda machine and much has been made of the report that Captain Wilken was formerly an officer of the Imperial Russian Navy. Various Socialist Revolutionary émigrés—Chernov, Zenzinov, Kerensky and others—were also active in preparing the dispatch of supplies for Kronstadt, should these be needed. Soviet Intelligence agents intercepted some of the correspondence between

the various groups on this subject, and it was published by the Soviet Government. But in fact no help whatever from émigré quarters ever reached Kronstadt.

The Kronstadt *Izvestia* also reflects the policy of the Provisional Committee *vis-à-vis* the rank and file of the Communist Party. We have seen that the first act of insubordination had been the arrest of the Chairman of the outgoing Kronstadt Soviet, Vasilyev, and of the Political Commissar Kuzmin. A number of other Communists were also arrested, including the head of *Pubalt*, Baetis¹² (*Izvestia*, March 5th).

By March 16th some 300 Communists were detained in the Kronstadt prison.¹³ Their fate was a matter of great concern to the Soviet Government. The families of Kronstadt sailors living in Petrograd were seized as hostages and the Kronstadt garrison was warned that these would be shot if only a hair fell from the head of an arrested Communist. Particular anxiety was felt over Vasilyev and Kuzmin. Rumours were spread about the cruel treatment to which the arrested were subjected in prison, and later some of them published gruesome reports which also contained boasts about their heroic resistance. There can be no doubt that the Kronstadt Communists were frightened and expected to be treated in the same way as their own Cheka treated its prisoners. Therefore it is important to establish the truth on this point, in particular as it demonstrates an essential difference between the anti-Communist tactics of the Kronstadt rebellion and those of other anti-Communist movements. The fact is that no Communists were shot, none were court-martialled, and the Provisional Revolutionary Committee showed no vindictiveness. Victor Serge reports that he met Kuzmin a few days after his liberation by Tukhachevsky's forces, and expressed his astonishment at the freshness of his complexion in view of all the articles in the Petrograd Press about the extreme hardships he had undergone in prison. Kuzmin shrugged his shoulders and answered something to the effect that things were sometimes not so bad as they were said to be. The Provisional Revolutionary Committee were conscious of their responsibility in dealing with Communists right from the beginning. On March 4th they announced that the arrested Communists would not be molested; and they allowed three representatives of the Provisional Bureau of the Kronstadt organization of the Communist Party, Ilyin, Pervushin

¹² Or Batis.

¹³ See N. Kornatovsky, where reminiscences of some of the arrested Communists in Kronstadt are ignored.

and Kabanov, to visit them. On March 7th the Kronstadt *Izvestia* wrote: "The prolonged oppression of the labouring masses by the Communist dictatorship naturally provoked their indignation. As a result of this in several places [in Kronstadt] relatives of Communists have been boycotted and have been dismissed from public service. This should not happen. We wield no vengeance; we only protect our interests as workers. We must act with circumspection and remove only those who use sabotage and libellous agitation in attempting to hinder the re-establishment of the government and of the rights of the toiling masses."

On March 6th a number of Communists in the Krasno-armeisky fort attempted to follow the example of the trainees of the Party Political School. They made their way out of the fort and tried to escape over the ice to Oranienbaum. But they were intercepted and arrested. After this incident the revolutionary masters of Kronstadt adopted a rather stiffer attitude towards their political enemies inside the fortress. On March 10th an order of the Acting Commandant of Kronstadt required all Communists to surrender their arms. On Friday, March 11th, *Izvestia* gave details of the scale of food rations to be allotted to arrested Communists. In the same issue it was announced that the arrested men had been deprived of their footwear (in all, 280 pairs of shoes and boots), which were to be handed over to the fighting forces. The prisoners were issued with bark shoes. On March 13th in the order of the day Nr. 6—when military operations were already in full swing—the Provisional Revolutionary Committee announced that "Communists who remain in freedom have abused the trust of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee and have attempted to communicate by light signals with the enemy. The Provisional Revolutionary Committee enjoins on all citizens to keep a watchful eye on all enemies of the people and to arrest those guilty of such action." Traitors and spies were warned that they would be dealt with on the spot without trial "according to the laws which are required by the present moment". At the delegates' meeting on March 11th Petrichenko reported that some of the Communists who had remained in freedom were continuing to carry on Communist agitation and that Ilyin (one of those who visited the arrested Communists on March 4th) had had the effrontery to telephone to Krasnaya Gorka in order to inform the Government troops of the situation in Kronstadt.

There is however ample evidence that the conditions under which the arrested were held were on the whole very tolerable.

As a matter of fact the prisoners continued to act as a body and they even held general meetings, the minutes of which were sent to the Provisional Revolutionary Committee. In one of these they asked the Committee to allow the arrested Commissar of the battleship squadron, Zosimov, to go to Moscow "in order to explain to the All-Russian Executive Committee the true situation in Kronstadt". The Provisional Revolutionary Committee discussed this proposal and decided that no action should be taken as the situation must be well known to the Government of the R.S.F.S.R. from the radio messages of Kronstadt broadcasting station, messages which the Government had withheld from the people. Also liberation of Zosimov might be interpreted as a sign of weakness on the part of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee.

During the final assault on March 16th, when the first wave of the attacking forces reached the wall of the prison building near the naval harbour, they passed arms and ammunition to the inmates through the windows. The prisoners turned on their warders, broke out and took part in the last stages of the fighting.

However, the arrested Communists were only a minority of the total number of Party members. Most of them were left in freedom. They established early in March a Provisional Bureau of the Kronstadt organization of the Communist Party and issued an appeal to all the Communists in the forces. The appeal was published in the Kronstadt *Izvestia* on March 4th. In it the Provisional Bureau urged all Party members and candidates to carry on with their regular work. "Do not believe", the appeal went on, "nonsensical rumours spread by provocateurs who want to bring about bloodshed, that responsible Communists are being shot and that Communists are preparing an armed rising inside Kronstadt . . . The Communist Party have never betrayed and will never betray the workers, and will fight with arms in hand against all those overt and secret White-Guardists who seek to destroy the power of the Soviets of Workers and Peasants. The Provisional Bureau of the Communist Party recognizes the necessity for the re-election of the Soviet, and appeals to all Party Members to take part in this re-election. They appeal to all Party Members not to oppose the implementation of measures on which the Provisional Revolutionary Committee has decided."

This document was later denounced by Communist writers as proof of the degeneracy of the local Kronstadt Communist organization. The support that it offered to the Provisional Revolutionary Committee was, however, non-committal, and

the good faith of its signatories is open to doubt. At any rate, one of them was that same Ilyin who, as we have seen, was shortly to try to pass information on the dispositions in Kronstadt to the Government authorities on the mainland. It seems almost certain that the main motive of the local Communists who wrote the appeal was to play for time. At the moment they wrote it it was quite impossible for anyone in Kronstadt to judge whether the Soviet Government would decide to suppress the movement by force of arms.

After this first appeal the files of the Kronstadt *Izvestia* show no trace of any further activity on the part of the local "Provisional Bureau of the Communist Party". However, the paper continued to publish letters from Party members and candidates announcing their resignations. These letters were obviously spontaneous and are remarkable for the wide variety of views they express. Some of them, after accepting the resolution of March 1st, go on specifically to renounce the Communist principles formerly held. This did not mean that the writers were renouncing revolutionary Marxism; they merely refused to recognize the exclusive authority of the Communist Party and its exclusive leadership of the Soviet State. Others, without expressly defecting from the Party, denounced the Communist bureaucracy as provocations which were leading to bloodshed, and declared that "true Communists should not force their ideas upon others, but should go hand in hand with the labouring masses". They pledged allegiance to the Provisional Revolutionary Committee. The freedom of expression and variety of opinion in the letters is impressive. Next to the dejected letter of a telephonist from Fort Shants, who asks his comrades to 'forgive his involuntary stay in the ranks of the Communist Party' and promises 'to live up to the confidence they extend to him', we find elaborate attempts to reconcile an idealistic Communist creed with collaboration with the popular Kronstadt movement. A candidate of the Party, possibly one who voted for the Kronstadt resolution of March 1st, denounces the Government's lies about an alleged White-Guardist putsch in Kronstadt and writes: "As we now see that we have lost the confidence of the masses and in order not to provoke the anger of those whom we claim to represent, we must at once without delay declare: 'Citizen, take the administration of the state in your own hands, but give us the opportunity to take part in this work on equal terms with the others.'" Another Party candidate asks himself what a Communist idealist should do in the face of a popular opposition to the Party leadership's policy: "Some comrades",

he writes, "solve the problem by leaving the Party and becoming non-party men. But there are such who are firmly attached to the idea of the Communist revolution and in whom the Marxist ideology has struck deep roots. Such comrades should—without renouncing their membership of the Party—publicly declare that they assume no moral responsibility for the action of the Party bosses directed against workers and peasants and should apply themselves honestly to assist in putting right all the shortcomings of which there are all too many in our Soviet Russia." Finally a former worker of the Naval Artillery Laboratory (who was at the time head of the Financial Department of the Town Soviet) writes: "While respecting the idea of Communism as any other pure idea, I, as a rank and file member of the Party and as one who has served the toiling class from my early years, openly appeal to you: Let the workers breathe freely. There should be no more domination by any party. Our Soviets should express the will of the voters and not of the parties. We must implement the will of the labouring masses who are looking for truth and justice, for freedom and a better life, without violence, without torture chambers and shootings and tortures. Keeping the pure idea of Communism in my breast, because every pure idea is a belief in a better future, and no-one can kill it in a man, I declare at the same time that after three years of Party membership I have come to recognize the injustice of the Party bosses who have been infected by bureaucracy and have alienated themselves from the masses, and I therefore refuse to carry the hallmark of the Party and in future do not intend to join any other party."

We have no reason to doubt that these letters represented the feelings of the rank and file of the Party in Kronstadt. As Lenin himself admitted, such "moods" were widely spread among Communists and were the psychological background of the Workers' Opposition, whose fate was sealed during those very same days at the Tenth Congress of the Communist Party in Moscow. Communists who were in sympathy with these tendencies in the mentality of the popular masses easily lost their bearings, whereas, at the Congress they were ready to submit, grudgingly and with reservations, to the regimentation of Lenin; in Kronstadt, they ruefully went with the tide of popular feeling, at the same time claiming the sincerity of their theoretical convictions and maintaining their right to profess them.

As we have seen, the Provisional Revolutionary Committee was alive to the possibility of obtaining support from certain sections of the Communist Party. For the first few days of its

life, the Kronstadt *Izvestia* (up to March 6th) did not attack named individual leaders of the Communist Party and the Soviet Government, although the "degeneracy of the Party bosses" became an early slogan. On each of these days the *Izvestia* reprinted the leaflets dropped on Kronstadt, as well as monitored radio appeals denouncing the Kronstadt rising as a White-Guardist, S.R. and Menshevik adventure. Next to these they printed their own appeal, stressing the Soviet and proletarian character of the movement which they were heading. Only after the arrest as hostages of the families of Kronstadt sailors in Petrograd and the announcement of Trotsky's order to crush the Kronstadt revolt by military force did the Revolutionary Committee launch a violent denunciation of Trotsky as the main villain in the story. "Field-Marshal Trotsky" . . . "this reincarnation of Trepov" . . . "the bloodthirsty Trotsky" . . . "Malyuta Skuratov" . . . became standard terms of abuse. He was said to hover like a vulture in the sky above the heroic town of Kronstadt. Trotsky was also made responsible for the suppression of the workers' movement in Petrograd (*Izvestia*, March 16th). Next to him spokesmen of the Kronstadt sailors attacked Zinoviev, who was responsible for the action of the Petrograd Soviet. There was no attempt to exploit the rivalry between the two Communist leaders, although the Kronstadt Provisional Revolutionary Committee must have been well aware of it. It is significant that in speaking of Lenin the tone of the Kronstadt *Izvestia* was somewhat different. True to their principle of keeping their adherents completely informed of the Soviet Government's attitude towards the rising, the Provisional Revolutionary Committee gave a fair account of Lenin's interpretation of the developments as reflected in his speeches to the Tenth Congress of the Party. The article of March 14th is worth quoting extensively:

"One would have expected that at a time when the workers are rising to defend their downtrodden rights, Lenin would give up all trace of hypocrisy and speak the truth. Somehow in the minds of the workers and peasants Lenin has always been thought of in a different way from Trotsky and Zinoviev. If nobody believes a word of what Zinoviev and Trotsky say, Lenin has not yet lost the confidence of the masses. However . . . at the Tenth Congress of the Communist Party Lenin is repeating the usual Communist lies about the Kronstadt rising. He claims that the movement is carried out under the slogan of 'Freedom of Trade' and adds: 'It is for soviets, without however the dictatorship of Bolsheviks.' But he does not restrain

himself from speaking of White generals and petty bourgeois anarchist elements. We see that Lenin in uttering these abominations, is contradicting himself and involuntarily admitting that the movement is basically a fight for a Soviet régime and against the dictatorship of the Party. In his confusion he declares: This is a counter-revolution of a quite different order (from the White-Guardist one). It is very dangerous, in spite of the fact that the small amendments to our policy which it demands might appear at first sight negligible . . . The words 'danger' and 'dangerous' re-occur again and again in Lenin's speeches on Kronstadt. The chief of the Communists is now shaken, and appeals for the maximum of cohesion, because the cleavage concerns not only the dictatorship of the Communists, but the Party itself. . . . Quite recently Lenin declared at a meeting when the trade union question was discussed, that he was dead tired of it all and would be only too glad to drop it all and retire, quite apart from considerations of his health. But his associates will not let him go. He is their prisoner and must repeat the same slanders that they do. The Party has embarked on a policy which is opposed by Kronstadt where we are demanding not freedom of trade but the real rule of the Soviets."

The theme of the well-intentioned autocratic ruler who is a prisoner in the hands of his supporters has always been favoured in Russian political literature and in Russian popular myth. Its variations in the Kronstadt *Izvestia* only prove that the attack on Lenin had to be conducted on somewhat different lines from that on Trotsky and Zinoviev. The article quoted shows how clearly the Kronstadt rebels understood that their political demands came first and that the allegation put out by Lenin, that they were asking for freedom of trade, was just as slanderous as the bogey of the White Generals. They knew that the concessions of the New Economic Policy proclaimed at the Tenth Congress of the Communist Party would weaken the popular masses' determination to demand free elections to the Soviets. Accordingly, the insurgents were eager to discredit the incipient N.E.P. as soon as it was proclaimed. On March 15th the *Izvestia* wrote: "That Lenin, as a benevolent old landowner, intends to make a number of small concessions to the peasants only in order to screw up even tighter the jaws of the vice of Party dictatorship is shown by his sentence: 'of course we cannot do without coercion, because the country is terribly impoverished and tired'." In an article, *Socialism in Inverted Commas*, the *Izvestia* enumerated all the misdeeds of the Party leadership

which had promised a free rule of labour but which in fact produced only a "bureaucratic socialism" with Soviets consisting of officials who voted obediently as they were ordered by the Party Committee with its infallible commissars. To this Kronstadt opposed its programme "of a socialism of a different kind, of a Workers Soviet Republic where the *producer himself* will be the full owner and disposer of the produce of his labour".

All this is certainly primitive and rudimentary. It shows however that the opposition of the masses in Kronstadt to the policy of the Soviet Government was not merely directed against the malpractices of Soviet bureaucracy, Cheka terror and the suppression of popular democracy, like that practised in Kronstadt in 1917, but against the spiritual foundations of Communism, and possibly even against Marxism as such. The popular masses were beginning to understand that the ideal order towards which the leadership of the Communist Party was steering the Soviet State was based on a principle according to which all efforts of individual members of the community were to be regimented so as to serve exclusively the needs of society as a whole. What these needs were was to be determined by the Communist leadership of the State, which undertook, in exchange for their loyalty and total submission to the State and Party directives, to provide for all individual citizens those needs which the leadership considered legitimate. This Marxist ideal was fundamentally unacceptable not only to the peasantry, but also to a large part of the town proletariat. They were ready to assume the direction of State affairs through elected representatives. They were ready to make a temporary sacrifice of their labour, and indeed of their life, to keep power in the hands of the labouring masses, but they claimed the right to dispose of their labour and their individual efforts in general, in order to satisfy their own needs and provide for their own subsistence. This opposition to the basic principles of 'scientific socialism' as represented by Marxism was deeply rooted in the consciousness of the Russian masses and, however rudimentary its expression in the semi-literate journalism of the Kronstadt rebels might appear to us, it deserves the attention of the historian as perhaps the most articulate expression of that stifled opposition against which the Communist leadership of the Soviet State has been waging a relentless war for the last thirty years.

There is another indirect indication of how alienated the Kronstadt sailors were from orthodox Marxism-Leninism. We have seen that they were extremely eager to avoid anything

which the Government propaganda could exploit in support of the allegation that the rebellion was a White-Guardist movement. Yet they allowed religious ceremonies at the funerals of those who fell in the skirmishes on the approaches to Kronstadt. The *Izvestia* of March 14th announced that a *panychyda* will take place in the Chapel of the Military Hospital. The announcement was signed by the chairman of the Revolutionary Committee of Three of the Naval Hospital. On March 16th *Izvestia* announced that there would be a religious funeral service in the Naval Cathedral for a number of persons who had been killed or died of wounds. This was certainly a departure from the practice of solemn civic lay funerals for "victims of the revolution" which had been a typical feature, in 1917 and during the Civil War, all over Russia. It is hard to believe that the return to religious practices was based on a revival of religious feeling among the rebels. It is more plausible that their resumption was a defiant demonstration of independence from the spiritual tutelage of the Communist Party.

VII

HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF
THE KRONSTADT RISING

The account of the events in Kronstadt which we have given above was drawn without great difficulty on the basis of available evidence. And yet no event in the Russian Revolution has been more misrepresented by various interpreters. The underlying conflict which caused the rising was not removed by its violent suppression and still remains unresolved. This explains the prejudices about Kronstadt among contemporary historians, both among those who play down this conflict as a mere temporary hitch in the inevitable development towards Communism in Russia, and among those who believe that this conflict will, in the end, spell the failure of the experiment initiated by Lenin. Communist historians have tried to explain Kronstadt as the last convulsion of the Civil War. They have laboriously disguised the uprising as a resurgence of the activities of the pre-revolutionary Russian parties, and of interference by foreign powers. On the other side, almost every

anti-Communist interpreter has tried to establish a link between his own political programme and the attitude of the Kronstadt sailors, and to draw comfort from the fact that at least some of his aspirations were shared by a spontaneous popular movement inside Russia.

This picture is made even more confusing by the emergence of a third party in the ranks of the interpreters. After Trotsky had suffered his great political defeat and had become an émigré, claiming to be the victim of the Stalinist Thermidor, he was faced with the embarrassing task of explaining his violent action in suppressing a movement which had forestalled him by some years in denouncing the degeneration of the Communist Party and its betrayal of the proletarian revolution. He did so with his usual journalistic ardour and with his usual disregard for factual exactitude. His defence is not convincing and yet it has been accepted by some historians.

The polemics on Kronstadt are interesting not merely as a modern example of the falsification of history. In them the battle which the semi-literate Kronstadt sailors fought with arms against a régime which they had helped to install has been transferred to an ideological level. And it is by no means impossible that at some future date the same polemics may inspire and influence momentous political events.¹⁴

As we have seen, the sailors rose against a basic claim of the Communist Party to assume and to retain the leadership of the proletarian state, to the exclusion not only of all other socialist parties, but also of all spontaneous mass movements which might arise to protect any group interests not compatible with the line laid down by Lenin for progress towards the establishment of a Communist society. "Marxism teaches", said Lenin in a resolution he proposed at the Tenth Congress, "that only a political party of the working class, that is the Communist Party, can unite, educate and organize such a vanguard of the proletariat and of all the toilers in general as will be able to withstand the unavoidable relapse into professional narrowness and prejudices in the midst of the proletariat and at the same time will be able to control all the ramifications of the proletarian movement, that is the whole of the toiling masses. Without such a vanguard a dictatorship of the proletariat is unthinkable."

In order to maintain that the Communist Party alone could lead the proletarian masses, Lenin had to assume that the vast

¹⁴ These lines were written before the events in Berlin in 1953 and in Budapest in 1956.

majority of the toiling people accepted this leadership. In fact, the Soviet Government received considerable support from the proletariat and the peasantry in the struggle against White-Guardist movements and foreign intervention during the Civil War. But, when the Civil War ended it became obvious that this support could not be interpreted as a mandate to embark on social and economic policies which neither satisfied the expectations of the masses nor were understood by them. Therefore, the Communists had to prevent the emergence of any ideology which would compete with theirs in seeking the support of the workers and peasants. This is why non-party conferences appeared dangerous and even counter-revolutionary to Lenin. Any alternative political and social programme meant for him an implicit denial of the Communist Party's exclusive right to leadership. "In such a country as Russia," said Lenin, "the enormous preponderance of the small bourgeois element and the disasters of the last three years have given rise to particularly sharp swayings in the moods of the small bourgeois and semi-proletarian masses. At times these swayings go towards an alliance of these masses with the proletariat [for which read 'Communists'—G. K.]; sometimes they are towards bourgeois restoration. All the experience of previous revolutions shows that even the slightest relaxation in the unity and strength of the vanguard of the proletariat and of its influence on the masses will lead to the restoration of the power and property of capitalists and landowners and to nothing else."

The clue to the understanding of such arguments lies in the concept of semi-proletarian masses whose "enormous preponderance" in Russia was admitted by Lenin. These semi-proletarian masses comprised all landowning peasants, small artisans and small traders who did not employ labour but made their living by means of their own effort and skill in the use of their privately owned means of production, land and trading capital. In fact, even the proletarians proper (i.e. those who earned their living by working for capitalists) were to a large extent socially connected with the semi-proletarian masses. Many of them were seasonal factory workers who had not broken with their village communes, whereas others maintained family ties with their peasant relatives. It was the emergence of this stratum as a political force, which Lenin feared and which he alleged would inevitably restore pre-revolutionary conditions in Russia, unless it was controlled by the Communist Party.

For Lenin and for the Soviet Government there was no inconsistency in denouncing the Kronstadt movement as "coun-

ter-revolutionary"; anything which was not Marxist-Leninist was counter-revolutionary by definition in their terminology. Lenin, Trotsky and Zinoviev were less honest when they went further and claimed the movement was White-Guardist. Lenin gave his personal support to this lie only once, and that rather evasively. In a speech at the Tenth Congress he referred to the Kronstadt mutiny, behind which, he said, 'looms the familiar figure of a White General'. The Soviet propaganda machine could not dispense with the story of a White-Guardist movement, because otherwise Government troops would have refused to shoot at fellow semi-proletarians. The legend was forged as early as February 28th, as testified by Victor Serge, and a few foreign anarchists who were staying at that time in Petrograd. It was supported by the weakest and most palpably fraudulent arguments. It was alleged that a report in the French newspaper *Le Matin* of a rising in Kronstadt had prematurely appeared a fortnight before the event (by an oversight of the capitalist Press service). In fact, such newspaper stories were continually appearing in the Western press at that time, and the one in *Le Matin* could easily have been inspired by the rumours connected with the resolution of the Communists of the Baltic Fleet at their second conference in which they condemned the work of the *Pubalt* (see above, p. 15). After the suppression of the revolt when its character could no longer be a secret to anybody, the legend of the White-Guardist rising was nevertheless officially maintained and has gone into all the popular Communist history textbooks. As we have seen, there was no public trial of the mutineers. Thirteen men were arbitrarily selected from the many thousand prisoners and it was announced that they had been found guilty of mutiny and shot. The announcement carefully recorded their social status. Among them were five nobles and one former priest, and the rest were peasants. None of them belonged to the Provisional Revolutionary Committee and none, as far as can be ascertained, had played any part in political developments during the rebellion. Their execution was obviously meant to support the story of the "class degeneration" of the Kronstadt garrison. We know however that at the time these men were shot a number of the real leaders of Kronstadt were being held in Cheka prisons. Thus the Menshevik Dan reports that he was in prison with Perepelkin, a sailor of the battleship *Sevastopol* who was one of the original five members of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee and who headed its propaganda department. Perepelkin was, according to Dan, shot; but no announcement of this was made public.

The story of the White-Guardist rising, although it remains on the official record, has not been seriously upheld by those few Communist historians in the Soviet Union who have been allowed to publish the results of their detailed research on the event. The attitude towards it of some Western historians is all the more surprising. Mr Isaac Deutscher in the first volume of his Trotsky biography admits that the White-Guardist legend was not true. However, he finds it necessary to explain the origin of the legend by a genuine mistake on the part of the Communist leaders. These credulous beings were so used to associating any rising with White-Guardist agitation that they genuinely believed such a monstrous attack on the proletarian régime in Russia could only have been instigated by White-Guardists. In fact, according to Mr Deutscher, the rebellion was led by anarchists. We shall return to the question of anarchist influence in Kronstadt and will show that it did not exist. As far as the sincerity of the Communist rulers is concerned, it is enough to point out that the story of a 'White-Guardist rising by General Kozlovsky' was spread on February 28th and that Kalinin went to Kronstadt the next day to parley with the sailors. Is it conceivable that the delusion of the Soviet rulers went so far as to believe that Kalinin could safely undertake an official visit to the headquarters of a White-Guardist General?

In fairness to the Communist leadership we must admit that, if they did not *believe* in the White-Guardist story, they at least might have *dreaded* that it could become a reality. Lenin always professed that the only possible alternative to the dictatorship of the Communist Party was the restoration of the "régime of capitalists and landowners" and, indeed, of Tsarism. If the Kronstadt rebels had really wanted to join hands with the Whites, they might possibly have obtained the support of the Black Sea naval units, evacuated a few months before by Wrangel from Sebastopol and at that time interned by the French in Bizerta. The Kronstadt rising had indeed caught the imagination of the whole of the Russian emigration and Miliukov in Paris hailed it as the beginning of a popular movement of liberation. He was ready to accept a programme of "Soviets without Communists" which he mistakenly believed to be the Kronstadt slogan and even to warn the Socialist Revolutionaries not to insist on their demand for the recall of the Constituent Assembly. Lenin paid tribute to Miliukov's intelligence and tact, when he wrote: "The intelligent leader of the bourgeoisie and the landowners, the Kadet Miliukov, explains

patiently to the little fool Victor Chernov directly (and indirectly to the Mensheviks Dan and Rozhkov imprisoned in Petrograd for their contact with Kronstadt), that there is no hurry for the Constituent and that one can and ought to join the movement for a Soviet régime without Bolsheviki." Lenin explains that the White-Guardists, with whom he identified Miliukov, knew much better than the S.R.s and the Mensheviks how to drive in the thin end of the wedge to loosen the Bolshevik hold. Miliukov as the representative of a genuine class conscious of its interests was not prone to the waverings and verbosity of the petty-bourgeois parties. Lenin's belief in Miliukov's cunning and class consciousness in no way supports his gratuitous assertion that without the Communist Party power would inevitably slip back into the hands of the capital and landowning classes according to some inexorable law of social dynamics.

In 1921 Lenin drew a clear line between the version of the Kronstadt uprising which could be published in the press and the one he was prepared to expound to members of the Communist Party. To Party members he admitted that in a political sense, if not in a military one, the Kronstadt uprising was more dangerous for the Soviet régime than 'Kolchak, Denikin and Yudenich put together'.¹⁵ He explained to them that the defection of the semi-proletarian element in Kronstadt from the cause of the proletariat was due to the influence of the S.R.s, Right and Left, of Mensheviks camouflaged as non-party men, and of anarchists who had underground links with the remnants of the Makhno movement in the Ukraine. No real evidence to support these allegations has ever been produced by Soviet historians. It is true that all the groups and parties mentioned were to a greater or less extent in sympathy with the Kronstadt rising, and all of them would have been ready to give it political support, had there been any time for this. But events took them by surprise perhaps even more than they did the Soviet Government itself.

As far as the Right S.R.s are concerned, we have seen that the Kronstadt rebels explicitly repudiated their main political demand, that for the recall of the Constituent Assembly. Whether or not Lenin was right in alleging that Chernov had sent a personal emissary to Kronstadt is irrelevant. The insurgents' rejection of the demand for a Constituent Assembly even became a source of embarrassment for S.R. émigrés. An S.R. publication on the Kronstadt rising issued by the S.R. *Volya Rossii* in Prague in 1921 reports a conversation with some

¹⁵ Lenin: *Sochineniya* (3rd edition) vol. 26, p. 214

members of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee who escaped abroad, in which the latter refused to support the demand for a Constituent Assembly, because they did not trust elections based on "party lists". And the S.R. publication makes the melancholy comment: "This is how the Bolsheviki have succeeded in discrediting and vitiating the very idea of free elections on party lists." Of course the Party lists, of which there were dozens during the Constituent Assembly elections in November 1917, were a bewildering and unpopular feature of Russia's only free election. However, the Kronstadt sailors rejected the idea of a Constituent Assembly for simpler reasons, which everyone but the S.R.s understood: they did not want to be compromised by the bankrupt ideas of 1917, when a reform of electoral abuses in the existing Soviets could satisfy their demands. Allegations that the Provisional Revolutionary Committee had secretly agreed to support the demand for a Constituent Assembly in negotiations with Chernov have been put forward, but have never been substantiated. Nor does the fact that the S.R. émigré executive committee was trying to organize the dispatch of food supplies to the besieged fortress provide any evidence for the theory that the rebellion had been instigated by them.

The Left S.R.s were certainly much closer in their general political outlook to the programme of the Kronstadt Provisional Revolutionary Committee, but few accusations were made against them, perhaps just because of this fact. The Left S.R.s themselves emphatically denied any connexion with the sailors. Both in his speeches at the Tenth Congress and later Lenin also accused the Mensheviks of having incited the Kronstadt sailors to rebellion. In this connexion he named the Menshevik Dan who had been arrested on February 26th in Petrograd. Dan has since declared that he had nothing to do with the rising. In February he was directing the political work of a small Menshevik group in Petrograd and was a witness of the workers' demonstrations in the city. He did not share the sanguine view of the situation held by some of the Social Democrats of the Plekhanov fraction *Edinstvo*, who believed that the workers were ready to fight for a 'Constituent Assembly'. Dan instructed his group to proceed cautiously and to limit political demands in their clandestine press, to 'free elections to the Soviets'. Such a Menshevik leaflet was distributed in Petrograd, and its text has been published by a Soviet historian.¹⁶ Dan was expecting his arrest any moment and did not try to avoid

¹⁶ Kornatovsky, op. cit. p. 9

it. Finally, he was taken to the Cheka on February 26th, and was incarcerated in the Petropavlovsk Fortress with a number of other Mensheviks and S.R.s. His first intimation of unrest in Kronstadt (which he had believed to be firmly on the side of the Government) was the sound of the naval guns, which shook the prison fortress on March 6th. Dan learned later that some of his assistants in the Menshevik organization had actually printed an appeal to the Kronstadt sailors on March 6th, when the rebellion was in full swing. Dan's evidence is supported by the fact that Menshevik influence had never been strong in Kronstadt, which in 1917 was considered to be a special preserve of S.R.s, anarchists and to some extent of adherents of Trotsky. Had the Mensheviks expected anything serious to happen in Kronstadt, Dan would have done more to try to evade arrest. On the contrary, Dan was so little informed of what was going on on the island that he believed that the Government could rely on the Kronstadt sailors to put down any rebellion in Petrograd. Possibly this error of judgement of his in a critical situation made him somewhat prejudiced against the Kronstadt sailors, whom he later met in prison and whom he accused of "anarchist tendencies". During the few weeks he spent in Petrograd he seems to have been depressed and demoralized. He did not believe there was any fight left in the Petrograd proletariat and he found it difficult to explain how, in this general atmosphere of depression, such an outburst of political determination could have ever matured.

The relations between the leaders of the rebellion and the anarchists are somewhat more complicated. However, the question has been thrashed over so much that we probably know more about these relations than about any of the other political complications connected with the Kronstadt rising. It is therefore more than surprising that in 1954 Mr I. Deutscher in his book *The Prophet Armed* states, without quoting any references, that the Kronstadt rising was "led by anarchists".

The facts are as follows: in 1917 the anarchists had a stronghold in Kronstadt where they had a resident agitator, a certain Yarchuk, who was working under the directives of the anarchist intellectual leader Volin (Eichenbaum).¹⁷ The anarchists played a certain part in the defiant Kronstadt Soviet, where they were opposed by Trotsky's followers. In June 1917 a group of

¹⁷ Yarchuk described his experiences in Kronstadt in a book *Kronshtadt v Russkoi Revolutsii* (New York 1923) translated into several languages. The role of Yarchuk in Kronstadt has been referred to in Soviet literature on 1917 (Flerovskiy, *Kronshtadt v. Oktyabrskoi Revolutsii*).

Kronstadt sailors attempted to kidnap the Minister of Agriculture, Chernov. These men were anarchists and were carrying the anarchist black flags. We have mentioned the closure of the Constituent Assembly. Here again it was an anarchist Kronstadt sailor, Zheleznyak (or Zheleznyakov), who in January 1918 helped the same Chernov—the chairman of the Constituent Assembly—rather roughly from his chair, saying that the men guarding the hall (whom he commanded) were all tired and needed a rest and that the talking should stop. In the Civil War years both Yarchuk and Zheleznyak left to fight the White-Guardists in the south of Russia and neither of them ever returned to Kronstadt.

When the Kronstadt rising broke out, most of the anarchist leaders in Russia, including Volin and Olga Taratuta, were in jail. A fortnight before the Kronstadt outbreak the funeral of Kropotkin took place, on which occasion the black flag, for the last time, was carried through the streets of Moscow. It was then that the Cheka was forced to release, reluctantly, six of the anarchist leaders on parole, so that they could make their last farewell to their spiritual leader. During the Petrograd disturbances in February 1921 the anarchists managed to issue a leaflet in which they called for an insurrection against the Communists, but they warned the proletariat against seizure of 'state power'.¹⁸ This, according to the leaflet, would lead only to the re-emergence of tyranny, as had been recently made plain by the seizure of power by Communists. It is possible that Yarchuk, who was in freedom at that time, had something to do with this agitation. But Yarchuk never went to Kronstadt and was arrested on March 8th. He was accused of "contact with the Kronstadt rebellion", but all political suspects arrested at that time were accused of just this crime. There were at that period a number of foreign anarchists in Russia, including Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldmann. They were by then quite disillusioned with the way the proletarian state was being run by Lenin and the Communists. As is clear from Berkman's diary, the Kronstadt rebellion took them by surprise. They did not become the dupes of the "White-Guardist rebellion" legend, and soon understood that this slanderous accusation was only a preparation for the bloody suppression at the hands of Tukhachevsky. The foreign anarchists addressed a pathetic appeal to Zinoviev, asking him to intervene and prevent bloodshed by starting negotiations, and they offered to appoint a Committee of six, including two anarchists, in order to resolve the differ-

¹⁸ Published in Kornatovsky (see Bibliographical note), p. 164.

ences with Kronstadt by peaceful means. The appeal, signed by Goldmann, Berkman, Perkous and Petrovsky, was handed to Zinoviev on March 5th and it is not impossible that the telegram, dispatched to Kronstadt from Petrograd on the 6th and offering to send to Kronstadt a joint Party and non-Party fact-finding Commission (which we mentioned on p. 33) was a direct consequence of the initiative taken by the foreign anarchists. But even so—the fact that it was rejected by the Kronstadt Provisional Revolutionary Committee tends to show that there was no direct contact between the bewildered anarchists in Petrograd and the determined leaders of the Kronstadt sailors and soldiers.

The anarchists were mentioned only once in the *Izvestia*, of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee, namely in the text of the Kronstadt resolution of March 1st. Point 2 of the resolution demands “freedom of speech and press for workers and peasants, anarchist and left-wing socialist parties”. The resolution does not contain the usual anarchist denunciation of the State. On the contrary, they claim that the State machinery should be handed over to the representatives of workers and peasants. Nor is there any mention of insurgents fighting under the black flag either in the Provisional Revolutionary Committee’s publications or in those of the Communists. True, there are vague insinuations by Soviet historians that the chairman of the Provisional Committee, Petrichenko, had anarchist leanings; but all these amount to are rumours that Petrichenko had spent a certain period in the Ukraine in an area where Nestor Makhno’s gangs were operating. This area is somewhat larger than the whole of the British Isles and has a population of some seventeen million people.

Kronstadt produced a strong impression on the international anarchist movement. The anarchists were quite outspoken in their condemnation of the Soviet methods of suppression and in their sympathies with the rebels. They embarked on bitter polemics with Trotsky on this question, after his exile, and published a well-informed pamphlet on the rising. But they always claimed that they had never led it. In a publication by Russian anarchists on the persecution of anarchists in Soviet Russia, which we have seen in a Bulgarian translation (Sofia 1923), there is a list of all the names of anarchists who had been shot, imprisoned or banished by the Soviet Government. The list includes Yarchuk and Zheleznyak, but contains no names of other Kronstadt sailors. Both Berkman and Goldmann deny having ever instigated or led the Kronstadt rising. And Volin,

having devoted a chapter to the Kronstadt rising in his *La Révolution Inconnue*, deplors the fact that the Kronstadt sailors could not rise to a full understanding of anarchist ideals. The furthest one can go in meeting Mr Deutscher's extravagant assumption that anarchists led the Kronstadt movement is to repeat Ida Mett's cautious estimate: "One can only conclude that the anarchist influence on the Kronstadt insurrection was confined to the idea of workers' democracy, which anarchism propagated."

We have seen that the propagation of the idea of a camouflaged White-Guardist plot as the motive force behind the Kronstadt rebellion had a very understandable practical purpose: it was necessary in order to make the reluctant Red Army men fight against their brothers in Kronstadt. But Lenin's theory, that of camouflaged collusion (*smychka*) on the part of Socialist Revolutionary, Menshevik and anarchist leaders, who planned under the disguise of non-party men to regain their grip on the unstable mass of the semi-proletariat, served no such purpose. And it is not borne out by the facts. How did it arise in Lenin's mind, and what was his purpose in proclaiming it?

It was not invented on the spur of the moment. Such ideas had been conceived and promulgated as far back as July 1919. At the time, in a communication of the Central Committee entitled *All to the Struggle against Denikin*, Lenin stated: "We very well know the breeding ground in which counter-revolutionary enterprises, explosions of popular discontent, conspiracies, etc., are hatched. This is the milieu of the bourgeoisie, of the bourgeois intelligentsia, of the rich peasants in the villages, of the non-party populace everywhere, as well as of the S.R.s and of the Mensheviks." The document vituperates against petty-bourgeois democracy, headed by the S.R.s and Mensheviks, with its chronic tendency to sway to and fro between Bolshevism and the counter-revolution of Kolchak and Denikin. "We should not", the document continues, "allow ourselves to be misled by the words and ideologies of their leaders, by their personal honesty or hypocrisy. All this is of importance for their biographies, but of no political importance as far as the relations between classes are concerned." The Left S.R.s may well work "independently" without any agreement with the reactionaries and/or with Chernov, "but in fact they are Denikin's allies, pawns in his game". The passage ends by saying that it is far better to pick out, imprison and even shoot hundreds of such active opponents of the Soviet régime, including printers and railway workers, than to allow a victory of the counter-revolu-

tionary generals, which would lead to the torture and execution of tens of thousands of peasants and workers. Those who did not understand this necessity and who continued to whimper and complain of injustice should be made a laughing-stock and an object for public scorn.

Lenin's interpretation of the role of Mensheviks, S.R.s and anarchists in the Kronstadt rebellion in 1921 was modelled on the pattern of these accusations of counter-revolutionary activity raised against them in 1919. Lenin did not accuse them of conspiracy (*zagovor*) with the leaders of the Kronstadt rising, but of collusion (*smychka*). And he certainly was ready to apply to them the repressive methods recommended in the document of 1919.

The theory of 'collusion' could have been applied equally well to some of the Bolsheviks, in particular to those of the 'Workers Opposition'. Indeed, one point of the Kronstadt rebels' programme closely resembles some points made by the Workers Opposition in their statements before the Tenth Congress. The Kronstadt rebels were fighting for a "Workers Soviet Republic", where "the producer himself will be the supreme master and manager of the produce of his labour". The keyword here is "producer". It was also the keyword in the programme of the Workers Opposition. They proposed to set up an "All-Russian Congress of Producers", representing all the producing Trade Unions. This Congress was to elect a central body to which the administration of the whole national economy of the Republic should be entrusted. It was against this conception that the resolution of the Tenth Congress "On syndicalist and anarchist deviation in our Party" was directed. "The concept *producer*", said the Leninists, "is a dangerous departure from Marxism which teaches us to draw up clearly the boundaries between the classes. 'Producers' comprise both proletarians and semi-proletarians whose interests in the class struggle are opposed. By putting forward the slogan of a 'Congress of Producers' the Opposition ignores the primary educational and organizational task of the Party in its relations with proletarian trade unions. It confuses the relations of the proletariat with the semi-bourgeois and petty-bourgeois masses, and it thus undermines the work of the Party. Such ideas have to be fought relentlessly and systematically and their propagation is incompatible with the membership in the party."

Another resolution of the same Congress "on the Unity of the Party" stressed the events in Kronstadt as an example of how deviations and factions in the Party could be exploited by

the enemies of the Soviet régime. The resolution ends with a paragraph which was kept secret for a number of years, authorizing the Central Committee to remove from the Committee and even to exclude from the Party any member who persisted in practising these vices. Incidentally this paragraph was invoked when the expulsion of Trotsky was staged.

However, Lenin did not think it wise or necessary publicly to charge the Workers Opposition with *collusion* with the Kronstadt rebels. Here Lenin had his own good reasons. The Mensheviks and S.R.s had demonstrated—at least as far as their émigré members were concerned—their admiration for and support of the Kronstadt insurgents, whose programme they could not share and which they were to an appreciable degree committed to oppose. The Workers Opposition, whose economic and social aspirations were much closer to those of the Kronstadt movement (although politically more elaborate and articulate), abhorred the very idea of supporting this movement by open political action. They even applauded the violent suppression of the “mutiny” by force of arms. For Lenin to charge them with collusion would have involved expelling them from the Party and driving them underground. Outside the Party, they might have provided fresh leadership for the semi-proletarian masses who had in fact inspired their political programme. By sparing them the accusation of collusion, Lenin secured their active support for his policy of suppression in Kronstadt. They joined up with the other members of the Congress who went North to take part in the final assault on the fortress under the command of Tukhachevsky. It is noteworthy that a member of the Workers Opposition faction, Lutinov, who was at that time abroad in Berlin, expressed his approval of the suppression in an interview with the Press. Such was the power of Party discipline that these Party members who, at that very moment, were being deprived of the means for propagating inside the Party the views which they held to be right were unwilling to turn for support to the masses, whose needs had inspired these views and who had shown in Kronstadt their readiness to fight to the death for them.

Lenin's analysis of the Kronstadt rebellion has been repeated in a simplified form by Trotsky in his writings after his banishment. When at that period he was heckled by anarchists and asked to explain his decision, he simply stated that the action against Kronstadt had been a tragic necessity; the revolutionary government obviously could not abandon the fortress protecting Petrograd simply because a few anarchists and

dubious Socialist Revolutionaries were leading a handful of reactionary peasants and rebellious soldiers.

Lenin and Trotsky chose of their own free will to fight the Kronstadt men as counter-revolutionaries, and were inescapably driven to invent the evidence of connexions between Kronstadt and all possible counter-revolutionary groups. They made this choice because the only alternative to it—the toleration of a proletarian movement developing independently of Communist tutelage—was unacceptable to them. They claimed that such a movement would have swept them from power. In this they may have been right. All available evidence supports such an assumption. Where they were wrong was in pretending to believe that their probable downfall would have been the occasion for a Tsarist restoration. Of course they had no other choice. They could not admit that the Communist régime was capable of being threatened by a genuinely proletarian movement, and when such a movement arose, they had to crush it, and to interpret it to themselves and to the world as a counter-revolutionary coup.

AFTERMATH

The final attack against the Kronstadt insurgents ended on March 18th, the day on which the Soviet Press commemorated the anniversary of the Paris Commune. At the very moment when the reluctant (Menshevik-influenced) typographers were setting pages depicting the horrors of General Galifé's atrocities, Tukhachevsky's troops were butchering wounded prisoners of war in the streets of Kronstadt. Those who survived filled the Petrograd prisons and some of them were shot by the Cheka many months later. Others were sent to the concentration camp on the Solovetsky Islands, where they lived for years and where, if one can trust the report of a fellow-inmate, they helped to organize the first concentration camp labour force. Those who escaped to Finland were interned by the Finns. Some of them, including Petrichenko, the leader of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee, published statements in the Russian émigré Press. The S.R. émigrés organized collections to assist them financially. This did not prevent many of the sailors who reached Finland from going back to Russia, lured by the promise of an amnesty. Dan reports having met a number of

them in the Petropavlovsk fortress, where he was at that time incarcerated. They were bitter, he says, about having been fooled once again, for the Cheka kept a firm grip on them, and they as well were either shot or sent to concentration camps. In Kronstadt itself the Soviet was never reconstituted. All authority became vested in the Commander of the Naval Fortress. The troops brought up from various parts of Russia for the final assault were dispersed, and Tukhachevsky turned to his next task—the suppression of the peasant rising in the Tambov and the adjoining provinces, a less-urgent and less-spectacular assignment.

It has frequently been said that the Kronstadt events forced the hand of the Communist Government and speeded up the inauguration of the New Economic Policy. This is certainly not so. The New Economic Policy was devised at the beginning of the year and the principal newspapers opened a discussion on it in the middle of February, before the outbreak of the Petrograd riots or of any major unrest in Kronstadt. The discussion did not prove particularly fruitful, the political struggle inside the Communist Party being centred mainly on the Trade Union problem and the activities of the Workers Opposition. The resolutions introducing the New Economic Policy were prepared in advance for the Tenth Congress and they certainly took the majority of the delegates by surprise. But they were linked with the campaign to suppress any deviational movement inside the Party, which might reflect the political mood of which Kronstadt was an instance. The resolutions against factions, dealt with summarily and under pressure by the Tenth Congress, should be considered as a much more immediate consequence of the Kronstadt events than the inauguration of N.E.P. The entrenchment of the Communists in the government of Soviet Russia was secured by two sets of defensive measures. The one dealt, so to say, with the outer defences. It put an end to all political activity by non-communist parties. The claims of the Communist Party for exclusive leadership in the Soviet State were emphasized and this time it was clearly stated that non-party political activity would not be tolerated unless it was controlled by the Communist Party and would tend to strengthen the Communist Party's grip on the swaying semi-proletarian masses. Political agitation and propaganda were entrusted to a Party organization—"Glavpolitprosvet". Although it was to be a part of the People's Commissariat of Education, "this link with the state apparatus should not prevent the *Glavpolitprosvet* from becoming by the very essence of its work a direct instru-

ment (apparatus) of the Party in the system of state organizations". As far as its work with non-party masses was concerned, the "Party should maintain its monopolistic control of non-party conferences [*sic*] and congresses, as well as of agitation in Soviet elections." This was a clear enough answer to the Kronstadt demands for free electoral agitation and the divorce of political propaganda work from the State. A further detail illustrates the desire of the Communist leadership to make the ban on non-communist controlled political propaganda absolutely watertight. In its resolution on the *Glavpolitprosvet*, the Tenth Congress stated that the General Trade Union Council (V.Ts.S.P.S.) and the Provisional Trade Union Councils should join their efforts with those of the *Glavpolitprosvet* and "should use for their purposes the apparatus and the resources" of the latter. This meant the complete subordination of the political and cultural educational work of the Trade Unions to the control of the Party bureaucratic machinery. At the same time, the Komsomol (the Communist Youth Organization) was allowed far more freedom in the organization of its educational and recreational activities. The Komsomol was merely to co-operate with the *Glavpolitprosvet*. We see that in the mind of Lenin, who inspired these resolutions, Communist youngsters could be trusted with running their clubs, organizing their lectures, etc., while experienced Trade Unionist workers, many of whom were former Mensheviks or Menshevik sympathizers, could not, and therefore must be made to use the apparatus of Party dictatorship.

As far as the inner defences of Party dictatorship were concerned, the main task in Lenin's view was to prevent the formation of oppositional groups inside the Party, which might act as spokesmen for the demands of the non-communist proletariat and semi-proletariat and which might be tempted to seek the support of these masses in internal party-political strife. In an angry, aggressive speech Lenin shouted that this was no time for oppositional activity, that the Party had had enough of it, that he would "put the lid" on all opposition. No factional activity, no political pressure groups inside the Party, no inner Party caucus would be tolerated. To enforce this, a secret clause on sanctions to be taken against deviationists was inserted in the resolution. At the same time Trotsky's platform, which was to perpetuate and to develop the policy of War Communism, was brought under fire. This provided an opportunity to make the policy inaugurated at the Tenth Congress appear not only as one of economic concessions, but of political

moderation as well. But in point of fact it signified the final abandonment of the 1917 principle, that the Communist Party would play the same part in the proletarian state as a parliamentary majority played in a bourgeois democracy. The resolutions of the Tenth Congress consolidated the triumph of the theory which was openly stated at the Twelfth Congress of the Communist Party in 1922, that the dictatorship of the proletariat was impossible without the dictatorship of the Communist Party.¹⁹

¹⁹ This formula, which emanated from Zinoviev, was strongly criticized by Stalin, although never officially corrected. Stalin's criticism does not affect the substance of the formula or attack the principle of the exclusive, all-pervading control of public life by the Communist Party. It only stresses the importance of maintaining the make-believe that the State and the masses are only educated and guided by the Party, which does not even possess an instrument of coercion. Dictatorship is the business of the Soviet State, which is merely guided in its activities by the Party.

EPILOGUE

Lenin seized power in 1917 in the name of the 'proletariat'. For those who had studied his philosophy of history it might have been clear that by 'proletariat' he did not mean any of the existing oppressed classes in the Russian Empire, but a vision of future humanity. Those, however, who supported him in the streets of Petrograd and Moscow in 1917 did not and could not understand the ambiguity of this keyword in Lenin's philosophy of history. The Baltic sailors who followed him in 1917 and through the years of the Civil War believed that they were the proletariat in whose name Lenin was ruling the country and preparing the imminent battles of world revolution. They were confirmed in this mistaken belief by the behaviour of the confirmed leaders, by Trotsky's adulations, by the demagogic encouragement of Zinoviev, by Lenin's publicized warnings to the Party Leadership urging them to renew like Anteaus their revolutionary powers by keeping in touch with the infallible instincts of these masses. It was not the fault of the workers and peasants who supported the Soviet régime in the first few years of its existence that they believed its programme to be an implementation of their own economic, political and social aspirations. The Bolshevik leaders had consciously or unconsciously done everything to maintain this delusion. True, during the three and a half years of the Civil War sacrifices had been imposed on the popular masses by their leaders, which they probably had not originally expected. These were, however, explained away by the necessities of war and were to a large extent compensated by the change in social status and the ostensible increase of political influence which the formerly depressed classes seemed now to enjoy.

Awakening from these illusions came first to the peasants, but it did not remain confined to them for the simple reason that the revolutionary masses who supported the Bolsheviks both in 1917 and in the Civil War were never divided into socially opposed groups. The small strata of industrial workers in Russia was still closely connected with the agrarian population and was to a great extent nothing but an overflow of the land-starved peasantry. No wonder that they displayed the lack of that proletarian class-consciousness which (in the eyes of Lenin) alone could qualify representatives of the oppressed masses for

the title of real proletarians and predetermine them (according to Lenin) to embrace his own revolutionary Marxist faith. In 1917 Lenin had ignored the warning of other Socialists not to seize power before the emergence of a genuinely proletarian class after many years of democratic capitalist development. As it happened he seized power in the name of a proletariat which did not exist, with the help of revolutionary masses which were not consciously proletarian (i.e. not ripe to identify their vital aspirations with the Utopian components of Marxist doctrine). The opposition that he later met from these masses should not have come as a surprise to him.

By 1921, however, every political group and organization which could have given a programmatic expression to the economic and social aspirations of the revolutionary masses had been crushed between the millstones of the opposing camps in the Civil War. Lenin did his best to bring this about by slandering the other socialist parties as supporters of counter-revolution. The Kronstadt rising is the most conspicuous attempt of these revolutionary masses to come out in defence of their aspirations by putting out a programme and creating an organization of their own, without the leadership of professional politicians and intellectuals.

They succeeded in formulating their programme. They even succeeded in the initial stages of creating an organization. They managed after three and a half years of bitterness, mutual distrust and wartime discipline to recapture the rapturous mood of the first days of the February Revolution, of that intoxication with the sense of liberty which was characteristic of the crowds milling in the streets of the capital in February 1917. The unfortunate survivors of the rising who fell into the hands of the Cheka spoke of it to their fellow-inmates, and although the record written down by Perepelkin (which he hoped would be smuggled out abroad) has since been lost, the text of the Kronstadt *Izvestia* and the testimony of Dan are sufficient proof of this achievement. But they failed to achieve the military success which would have made them leaders of popular resistance to the establishment of the dictatorial régime inaugurated by Lenin and perfected by Stalin. For the people Kronstadt remained merely a symbol of this popular resistance and as such its significance is just as great now as it was in 1921. For the Communist Party, Kronstadt has become a repressed political 'Traumea'.

Among the Bolsheviks themselves there were many who never realized that there was a profound gulf between the "conscious

proletariat" of the future Communist State and the living mass of Russian people who were longing for bread, land and peace. Many of them believed that with the fall of the régime of political oppression and privilege, nothing would remain to prevent these oppressed masses from becoming politically conscious, i.e. instinctively Marxist. The Kronstadt events opened the eyes of these Bolsheviks to realities which they had refused to see before. Kronstadt forced them to realize that the popular masses who had provided them with disciplined troops to fight against counter-revolution had ceased to be their allies. The masses had been ready to join the Bolsheviks in their struggle against legality based on property, so long as property and legality were the means of enforcing and maintaining social, political and economic privilege. But once these privileges were finally abolished the attitude of these masses changed: and they were ready to rally to the defence of legality and property in so far as these ensured for the worker and the peasant the opportunity to take care of his material well-being and the freedom to decide for himself what he thought was good for him.

A number of Bolsheviks were in profound sympathy with these claims of the revolutionary masses. Their sympathies were rooted in the populist (Narodnik) trend of the Russian revolutionary movement and had been strengthened by ties of blood during the Civil War. They must have recognized that the defection of the Revolutionary masses was an inevitable consequence of by-passing a capitalist stage of development under a bourgeois democratic régime. These Bolsheviks hoped for a development of the Soviet State which would replace the one foreseen by Marx, and saw it coming with the advent of N.E.P. With the lessening of economic tensions the political opposition of the masses would diminish, they hoped.

Lenin himself must have shared these views to a certain extent. But for him, it was clear that this policy of appeasement inaugurated by N.E.P. should not go hand in hand with an increase of political influence for the masses. He did not seize power in 1917 in order to become a propagandist of Communist ideas before a socially underdeveloped semi-proletariat. He therefore squarely admitted that he did not expect overwhelming popular support for himself and the Bolshevik Government. He asked his followers to accept the fact that it was necessary for his Government to neutralize the antagonism of the revolutionary masses by means of economic bribes, by military force, and finally by slandering the memory of those who had opposed

him and fallen in the struggle and denouncing them as counter-revolutionaries. Many of those in the party to whom these demands were addressed were taken aback by them. But the astonishing thing is that they had caused no defection in the ranks of the Bolsheviks. In his memoirs²⁰ Victor Serge looks back with a mixture of remorse, dismay and self-righteousness on the moral decision which he made in the Kronstadt days not to join the protest of the anarchists.

He did not for a moment believe the story of the White-Guardist plot. Like so many Communists at that time he knew that the Kronstadt rising reflected far better than the programme of the Bolshevik Party the true mood of the popular masses. He was, as so many Communists in the opposition groups, in sympathy with these aspirations and yet he decided to give his full support to the Government just as did the members of the Workers Opposition who went to fight on the ice of the Gulf of Finland. Years afterwards he provided the following excuse for this surprising decision: Although the Kronstadt sailors were justified in their demands they would never be able to maintain the proletarian dictatorship. According to him the defeat of the Bolshevik Government would have led not to freely elected Soviets, but to Soviets from which the Bolsheviks would have been excluded. It would have meant the return of bankrupt bourgeois and semi-bourgeois parties, the return of the émigrés to political life and the end of the social revolution. Lenin's government, although doctrinaire and tyrannical, was the only guarantee against a counter-revolution. "Totalitarianism is with us", Serge admitted.

²⁰ Serge, Victor: *Mémoires d'un révolutionnaire* (Paris 1951), pp. 145

Documentary evidence on the Kronstadt rising is confined to a very small number of publications. The main source is the *Izvestia* on the Provisional Revolutionary Committee reprinted in full in the Appendix to *Pravda o Kronshtadte. Ocherk geroi-cheskoi borby Kronshtadtsev protiv diktatury kommunisticheskoi partii*, published in book form by the newspaper *Volya Rossii*, Prague 1921. The text preceding the Appendix gives an account of the events from the Socialist-Revolutionary point of view, but is based on interviews with the participants of the rebellion.

A first-hand account of the events has been given by the Chairman of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee Petrichenko in a separate pamphlet *Pravda o kronshtadtskikh sobyiti-yakh*, pp. 24, 1921.

The earliest literature on the rising has not been accessible to the author. Some references to it are contained in M. L. Lurye: *Kronshtadtsky myatezh v sovetskoi i beloi literaturre i pechati*, published in *Krasnaya Letopis* No. 2 (41), Leningrad 1931. Lurye's work was never completed and only the part dealing with the Soviet literature appeared in *Krasnaya Letopis*. A list of contemporary publications in Soviet periodicals was given by the same author in the compilation edited by Kornatovsky (see below). Among the works referred to by Lurye the most interesting seem to be the following:

A. Shepkov: *Kronshtadtsky Myatezh* (ed. Moskovsky Rabochy) Leningrad 1924.

V. Kuznetsov: *Is vospominaniy politrabotnika*, GIZ M.-L. 1930.

Rafail: *Kronshtadtsky myatezh*, Ukr. Giz, 1921.

The publications on which I had to rely are all connected with the tenth anniversary of the rebellion and have been composed by Party historians to whom some archive material was available. The two main works in book form are:

A. S. Pukhov: *Kronshtadtsky myatezh 1921 goda* (ed. Molodaya Gvardiya M.-L. 1931). (The book was not available to the author, who used the serialized version in *Krasnaya Letopis* No. 4 (37) 1930, No. 6 (39) 1930 and No. 1 (40) 1931.)

N. Kornatovsky: *Kronshtadtsky myatezh. Sbornik statei vospominaniy i dokumentov* (ed. Leningradskoye oblastnoe izdatelstvo. Leningrad 1931).

As far as the military operations are concerned a full analysis

seems to have been given at an early date in the No. 8 issue of the military magazine *Voennoye znanie* for 1921 in articles signed by Tukhachevsky, Dybenko and Verkhovsky. This was not available to the author. A fairly detailed account is given in the contribution by S. Uritsky to the first volume of *Grazhdanskaya Voyna*, edited by A. S. Bubnov, S. S. Kamenev and R. P. Eidemann, Moscow 1928–1930, and some of the reminiscences in Kornatovsky.

For the political side of the events see the report of the Tenth Congress of the Communist Party: *Stenografichesky otchet desyatogo syezda*, and the resolutions of the Congress in *VKP (b) v rezolyutsiyakh*. An analysis of the part played by the delegates to the Tenth Congress has been attempted by S. E. Rabinovich in *Krasnaya Letopis* No. 2 (41), Leningrad 1931, pp. 22–56. For the Menshevik version see F. Dan, *Dva Goda skitaniy*, Berlin 1929, and Shlyapnikov's speech at the Tenth Congress as well as N. N. Boldin, *Mensheviki v Kronshtadtskom myatezhe* in *Krasnaya Letopis* No. 3 (42) 1931, pp. 5–31. The anarchist point of view originally expressed in Berkman's *The Kronstadt Rebellion* and in Emma Goldmann's *My disillusionment in Russia*, London 1925, has been exhaustively summed up in: Ida Mett, *La commune de Cronstadt. Crépuscle sanglant des Soviets*, Spartacus, Paris 1949. This contains also a reply to some of Trotsky's belated apologies for his action against the Kronstadt sailors. Ida Mett gives the chapter and verse for Trotsky's statements on this subject. She also gives a short bibliography of periodicals published outside Russia dealing with Kronstadt. A much longer list of articles, which appeared in 1921 in the Soviet Press on Kronstadt, will be found in Kornatovsky, in an Appendix by M. L. Lurye. After 1931 the Kronstadt rising ceased to be a subject on which Soviet historians would engage in (and publish) research, however conformist or biased it might be.

The most balanced and well-documented accounts of the Kronstadt events will be found in Fedotoff-White, *The Growth of the Red Army*, Princeton 1944, and Leonard Schapiro, *The Rise of the Communist Autocracy*, London 1954.

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DAVID FOOTMAN

*

NESTOR MAKHNO

Nestor Makhno was an outstanding example of the revolutionary peasant. He was a fighting guerrilla leader of rare calibre, and made an important contribution both to the Bolshevik defeat in south Russia in the summer of 1919 and to the subsequent collapse of Denikin and later of Wrangel. His was one of the very few revolutionary movements to be led and controlled throughout by members of "the toiling masses"; and he provides the one instance in history where for a period of months and over a wide area supreme power was in the hands of professed Anarchists. The importance the Bolsheviks attached to him is shown by the violence of the vituperation and the paucity of fact in relevant Soviet writing.

While much contemporary material concerned with the movement is no longer available, there are four works of particular interest: Makhno's unfinished autobiography;¹ the "official" history by one of his close associates;² a Soviet account written in the early twenties and drawing on Security Service and other archives;³ and the memoirs of an Anarchist intellectual who served as chairman of the Revolutionary Military Soviet at Makhno's headquarters.⁴ Further details are available in V. A. Antonov-Ovseenko's *Zapiski o Grazhdanskoi Voine*, Vol. IV (Moscow 1933).

Although Makhno in the course of his campaigns covered a wide area, his movement was in some respects a local one, with its centre and spiritual capital in Gulyai-Polye, a large village half-way between Ekaterinoslav on the Dnieper and the Sea of Azov. It was here that Makhno himself was born and brought up, and it was from the surrounding parts of the Ekaterinoslav, Tauride and Kherson *guberniye* that came the great majority of his followers.

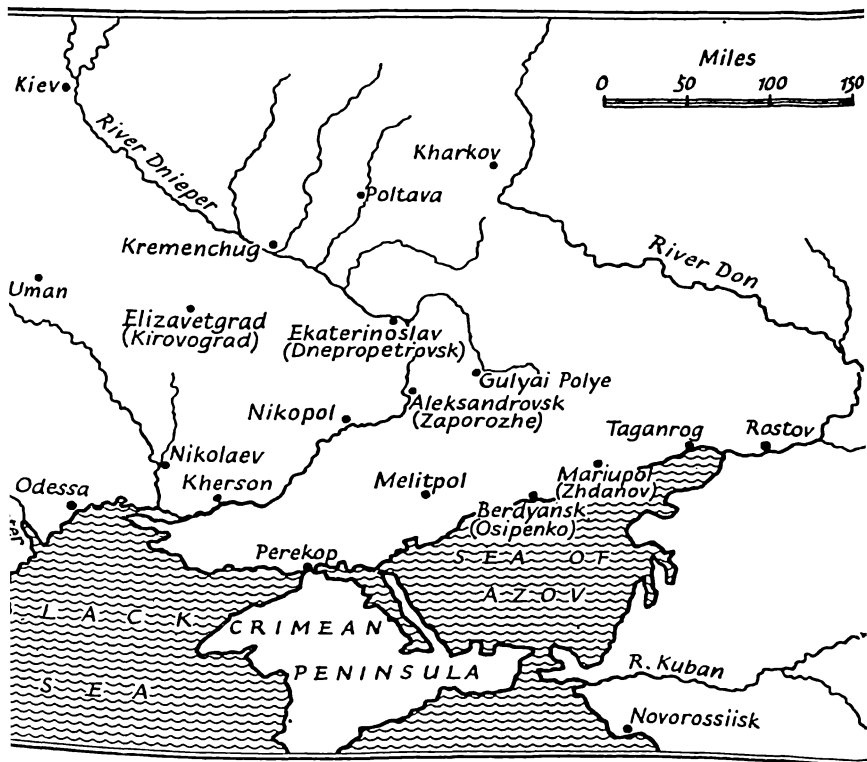
These three provinces, sometimes known as the "troika", possess characteristics not common to the rest of the Ukraine. The *troika's* rural population contained appreciable non-Ukrainian elements—Great Russians, Germans, Greeks, Bulgarians and

¹ Makhno, Nestor: Vol. I, *Russkaya revolyutsiya na Ukraine* (Paris 1929). Vol. II: *Pod udarami Kontrevolyutsiye* (Paris 1936). Vol. III: *Ukrainskaya revolyutsiya iul'-dekabr 1918* (Paris 1937)

² Arshinov, P.: *Istoriya makhnovskogo dvizheniya 1918-1921 gg.* (Berlin 1923)

³ Kubanin, M.: *Makhnoshchina* (Leningrad n.d.)

⁴ Voline, V. M. (Eichenbaum): *La Révolution Inconnue* (Paris n.d.)



Tartars, and a number of Jewish agricultural colonies, whereas in other areas the peasants, all Ukrainians, were confronted with a landowning class all Polish or Great Russian and with a merchant class all Jews. The economic pattern differed also, with the development of mining and industry to the north and north-east and a somewhat more “capitalistic” pattern of farming. It is significant too that the *troika* as a whole, and Gulyai-Polye in particular, had a tradition of turbulence, and were the scene of serious disorders in 1905. It has been pointed out that it was just those villages which had been most unruly under the Tsarist régime that were to give most trouble to the Bolsheviks.

(ii)

Makhno was born, in October 1889, of an almost destitute peasant family. From the age of 7 he earned a little money

minding cattle. At 12 he became a full-time agricultural labourer, but three years later he left the land to work at a local foundry. A year or two afterwards as a result of the local repercussions of the 1905 revolution, he became concerned with politics.

Anarchists of various groups were then comparatively numerous in the Ukraine. There were Anarchist-Communists, Anarchist-Syndicalists and Anarchist-Individualists (the Anarchist-Universalists appeared later), but their ideological differences were blurred. The group to which Makhno adhered were nominally Anarchist-Communists, but first and foremost fighting revolutionaries. Their aims were to "dispose of the myths of the other parties and lead the social revolution".⁵ At Gulyai-Polye the immediate task was to fight, by terrorist means, against the police repression following the disorders of 1905-1906. Before he was 19 Makhno was arrested and sentenced to life imprisonment for his share in the murder of a police officer. The next nine years, up to March 1917, he spent in the Butyrka Prison at Moscow.

Here he made friends with a fellow-prisoner, one Arshinov from Ekaterinoslav, an ex-carpenter in a railway workshop and editor of an illegal Bolshevik news-sheet and subsequently a militant Anarchist, who had arrived in the Butyrka at about the same time as Makhno. Arshinov was a man who had taken great pains to educate himself, and such political and general education as Makhno ever acquired was due to his fellow-prisoner. Not that he was an easy or an apt pupil. He never learned to speak Russian correctly. All the same, he was always writing, and his fellow-prisoners were "bombarded" by his endless manuscripts. When not writing he was arguing. He was consumed by a restless and turbulent vitality, that earned him the sarcastic nick-name of *Skromny* (modest). He was always in trouble with the prison authorities, and spent much of his time in irons or in the freezing punishment cells—where he probably contracted the tubercular trouble that eventually helped to kill him. He was intensely proud of being an Anarchist. He conceived a lasting horror of prisons, and at the height of his success on capturing a town one of his first acts would be to free the prison inmates and destroy the building.

⁵ Arshinov, op. cit. p. 48

On the release of the political prisoners following the February revolution of 1917 Arshinov stayed on in Moscow. Makhno remained only three weeks in order to polish up his ideological equipment and to meet the leading Moscow Anarchists. Then he returned home to carry on the work of the revolution. His ultimate aims were simple. All instruments of government were to be destroyed. All political parties were to be opposed, as all of them were working for some or other form of new government in which the party members would assume the role of a ruling class. All social and economic affairs were to be settled in friendly discussion between freely elected representatives of the toiling masses.

Makhno was the one political prisoner that Gulyai-Polye possessed and he returned as a hero. There was still a small Anarchist group in the village and they arranged a reception for him. Here he issued a firm demand for organization. This occasioned some demur: to the more meticulous Anarchists organization as such was suspect. Mass action should be spontaneous and the only permissible activity was propaganda. However, Makhno had his way, and by the end of March the Gulyai-Polye Association of Peasants was founded, with himself as chairman.

Before long he had made himself the effective political boss of the district. In August the Kornilov affair and the appeal of the Petrograd Soviet provided just the lead he had been waiting for. A Committee for the Defence of the Revolution was formed with, inevitably, Makhno as chairman, and the expropriation of all large land holdings, factories and workshops was taken in hand. The representatives of the Provisional Government at Ekaterinoslav were powerless to interfere.

By comparison the Bolshevik *coup d'état* of October created little stir. It took some weeks before it was possible to form a clear idea as to what had happened; and of course, much longer before the new Petrograd régime could exercise effective control in the provinces. But the slogans "Land to the Peasants" and "Factories to the Workers" were perfectly acceptable. To Makhno's peasants it seemed that the inhabitants of Petrograd were doing just what they themselves had done a few weeks before.

At Gulyai-Polye the toiling masses proceeded, more or less

peacefully if untidily, to consolidate their revolution. The little factories functioned, or failed to function, under the control of the workers. The estates were split up, without much incident, among the peasants. Most of the peasants, having got their land, took no further interest in outside affairs. But under the drive of a few idealists a certain number of agricultural communes were formed, where an elected committee of elders would allot the work, and then themselves work alongside their colleagues. Makhno himself became a member of one of them.

Relations with the Soviets of Aleksandrovsk and Ekaterinoslav remained friendly if somewhat reserved. They were dominated by Bolsheviks and Left S.R.s, and it was proper to support these revolutionary parties against the Whites on the Don and also against the Kiev Rada (regarded by Makhno as a gang of bourgeois chauvinists). Arms were obtained, with Bolshevik assistance, and a Gulyai-Polye militia was recruited and sent off to support the Red forces. At the same time Makhno's visits to the neighbouring towns filled him with misgivings for the future. From what he had seen of the Bolsheviks and Left S.R.s in action he felt that they were not loyal to the spirit of their slogans. There were too many arrests. Whichever of the two parties attained ascendancy—he was convinced that sooner or later one would squeeze out the other—was likely to endeavour to impose its authority “in the harsh sense of the word”. Lack of unity and lack of organization among the local Anarchists prevented them from being more than “the tail of the Bolshevik-Left S.R. bloc”.⁶ He set his hopes on the Anarchist movement in the capitals; but his letters to them asking for advice and guidance remained unanswered.

Meanwhile there arose the problem of putting into practice the basic principle of Anarchist economy—the exchange of commodities freely arranged between free organizations of free producers. The south Ukrainian peasants had plenty of grain: what they needed was manufactured goods. Accordingly a Gulyai-Polye comrade was sent on a tour of the towns. He seems to have been cordially received by the workers everywhere, and in Moscow he met with tangible success. Two Moscow trade union representatives arrived at Gulyai-Polye to fix details. The grain was loaded on rail cars, sent off under a Gulyai-Polye guard and duly arrived. The Moscow workers held to their part of the bargain, and a consignment of textiles and other manufactured goods was dispatched to the south. It was held up at Aleksandrovsk. There was intense indignation

⁶ Makhno, *op. cit.* Vol. I, p. 138

among the Gulyai-Polye peasants, who threatened to march on the town. The threat was enough. The Aleksandrovsik Soviet gave way, and the consignment was duly released and distributed among its rightful recipients.

The implications of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty were not immediately apparent in Gulyai-Polye. The Kiev Rada propaganda could be countered without much difficulty. But towards the end of March Ukrainian troops were across the Dnieper, with, apparently, German and Austrian detachments in support, and there was no evidence that the Red forces were putting up an effective resistance. The fainter-hearted in the region began to waver. At a mass meeting at Gulyai-Polye Makhno declared that they could now rely only on themselves and must fight for their freedom. There was a rush of volunteers. Makhno was elected Commander-in-Chief. Local intellectuals were gingered into organizing a medical service. More arms were obtained, and a sizeable detachment was moved up to reinforce the Red garrison of Aleksandrovsik.

Meanwhile it was becoming more and more apparent that there was no cohesion among the Red units. Each was acting on his own, "often in those sectors where there was no enemy".⁷ When they did meet the enemy they were liable to panic. Makhno was summoned for consultation to the headquarters of Yegorov, the Commander of the Red Forces. When he reached the rendezvous he found that headquarters had moved eastwards, so for the next forty-eight hours he followed, over country cluttered with refugees and stragglers and drunken bands of Red sailors, after the ever-receding headquarters staff. On his way news reached him that Gulyai-Polye had been occupied by the enemy. He made desperate efforts to rally some groups of stragglers to come back with him and liberate the village. But far too few were willing, and his only course was to go on east again to Taganrog, the point for which all the stragglers seemed to be making, and collect any of his people he could find. He went on, he records, full of grief and shame at the collapse of his revolution.⁸

Taganrog was crowded with Red Army detachments, stragglers, deserters and civilian refugees. A fortnight previously, on April 13th, Moscow had staged its anti-Anarchist drive. The Cheka had raided their premises and arrested several hundred members; and haphazard arrests of Anarchists were taking place in Taganrog. Makhno himself was not molested; he found a number of refugees from Gulyai-Polye and neighbouring

⁷ Makhno, op. cit. Vol. I, p. 196

⁸ Ibid. pp. 197-211

villages, and in late April they held a congress to decide on future policy.

It would be wrong to consider these refugees as typical of the south Ukrainian population. The bulk of the peasantry (and, indeed, the townsmen) stayed where they were. They had their land. They were not particularly interested in politics. A few felt themselves good Ukrainians and welcomed the Rada. Others hoped that the new régime would mean the establishment of peace and order. It was mainly the convinced revolutionaries and those whose recent activities marked them out for reprisals that had evacuated. The unanimity and bellicosity of the Taganrog congress are therefore not surprising.

They were determined to re-establish their revolution in Gulyai-Polye. They now realized that they had little to hope either from the Bolshevik Government or from the Bolshevik higher command: they must fight their own battles themselves. After discussion of ways and means it was decided that late June and early July, the harvest season, was the best time for subversive work among the peasants. It was therefore agreed that the congress participants should infiltrate back to the area at that season singly or in twos and threes. Once back they would re-establish contacts; spread propaganda; organize clandestine groups of potential fighters; collect arms; and urgently and conspiratorially prepare the ground for a general peasant revolt.⁹

The time chosen for action meant an interval of nearly eight weeks; and Makhno decided to spend this period going round the big centres of Soviet Russia. He wanted to find out for himself what had happened to the Anarchists, and what they were intending to do. He wished to see what Bolshevik supremacy meant in practice, and what was the position and attitude of the workers in the big factories. He needed to know first hand what help and what obstruction he might expect for his coming revolution in the south. The account of his Odyssey, which takes up the second volume of his memoirs, affords a fascinating worm's-eye view of Bolshevik Russia in the spring of 1918.

(iv)

Makhno arrived in Moscow in early June after a tour that had included Tsaritsyn, Saratov, Astrakhan and Tambov. While *en route* he heard news of the dispersal of the Ukrainian Rada

⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 75-80

and of the installation of Skoropadsky with German backing—which convinced him of Lenin's error in accepting the Brest-Litovsk Treaty. Later came news of the Czech revolt and the establishment of the S.R.-dominated Government at Samara. In all these cities administration was confused if not chaotic. In Saratov, for instance, there was a large force of Red sailors (from both Kronstadt and the Black Sea) engaged in constant friction and intermittent shooting with the Saratov Cheka—each side branding the other as counter-revolutionaries. A third irreconcilable element was the "Detachment of Odessa Terrorists", two hundred and fifty strong, who arrived about the same time as Makhno and who refused either to be disarmed or to go back and fight the Hetman.¹⁰

A depressing feature of his tour was to note the general eclipse of the Anarchist movement. In some centres the groups had disintegrated. Such groups as still existed had no funds, no organization, no will to action. Members were in constant fear of arrest by the Cheka; and Makhno himself found it wiser to conceal his political affiliation and only to display his card as Chairman of the Gulyai-Polye Committee for the Defence of the Revolution. To the young man from Gulyai-Polye Moscow appeared as "the capital of the Paper Revolution", a vast factory turning out empty resolutions and slogans while one political party, by means of force and fraud, elevated itself into the position of a ruling class.

Here again the Anarchists seemed cowed and demoralized, largely concerned with keeping out of trouble. His old friend Arshinov had taken on the post of Secretary of the Society for the Ideological Propagation of Anarchism. Makhno was present at some of their meetings, and was impressed by their cultural and theoretical range. But there seemed no urge for action. Again and again in his memoirs he comes back to his phrase "paper revolution". He attended a conference of Anarchists including a few like himself from the south, but no one present seemed to intend to go back there and fight for his convictions. The meeting would not even accept the proposal to ask Bolshevik permission to set up an organization for underground work in the Ukraine. There seemed an unbridgeable gap between what Makhno was burning to do and the general mood of the movement. Afterwards, when his revolution had flared up and been extinguished, his historian was to suggest that the Anarchist leaders "had overslept" the Makhno movement.¹¹

¹⁰ Makhno, *op. cit.* Vol. I, pp. 75-80

¹¹ Arshinov, *op. cit.* p. 18

During his three weeks' stay in Moscow he went to the All Russian Congress of Textile Unions, where "were concentrated the flower of the Socialists then living in the centre of the paper revolution. They got up one after another, talked, waved their arms and screamed, each louder than the one before." He also attended some Left S.R. meetings. He felt sympathy with the Left S.R.s: they had, he believed, not approved of the drive against the Anarchists in April, and they were ashamed of their impotence *vis-à-vis* Lenin. He was impressed with Kamkov and with Spiridonova. But, like the Anarchists, they had "good will in plenty but not enough strength to tackle the enormous task of re-orientating the course of the Revolution".

One episode of Makhno's Moscow visit gave him pleasure. As a boy in prison his great hero had been P. A. Kropotkin, and in spite of all his disappointments with the Anarchist leadership the admiration remained. He made a number of attempts to see the old man, and at last succeeded.¹² They had a long conversation. No practical guidance was forthcoming; he was told that even the issue of his return to the Ukraine was one which he, Makhno, alone could decide. But he met with a sympathy that he had not before experienced. As he was leaving Kropotkin said: "One must remember, dear comrade, that there is no sentimentality about our struggle. But selflessness and strength of heart and will on our way towards our goal will conquer all." Years later, long after the defeat of his revolution, when Makhno himself was a dying man in the humiliation and penury of emigration he was to write: "I have always remembered these words of Petr Alekseevich. And when our comrades come to know all that I did in the Russian Revolution in the Ukraine and then in the independent Ukrainian Revolution—in the vanguard of which revolutionary *Makhnovshchina* played so outstanding a role—they will recognize in my activities that selflessness and that strength of heart and will about which Petr Alekseevich spoke to me. I hope this precept will enable them to develop these traits of character in themselves."

His meeting with Lenin was unplanned and unexpected. He went to the Kremlin to get himself a billeting card, blundered into Sverdlov's office; and Sverdlov found the young revolutionary from the south sufficiently interesting to arrange an appointment with Lenin for the following morning.

Makhno was received with a paternal simplicity. Lenin patted his shoulder, put him down in one chair and Sverdlov in another, told his secretary they were not to be disturbed for

¹² Makhno, op. cit. Vol. II, pp. 107-116

an hour. All through the interview he talked slowly and clearly, with frequent repetitions to make sure there was no misunderstanding in question or answer.

Lenin asked what the Ukrainian peasants made of the slogan "All power to the local Soviets". Makhno replied that they took it literally—assuming they were to have complete control of all affairs affecting them, and added, when Lenin asked him, that he himself felt this was the correct interpretation.

Lenin: "Then the peasants are infected with anarchism."

Makhno: "Do you think that is bad?"

Lenin: "I did not say that; it may be to the good if it speeds up the victory of Communism."

Lenin went on to observe that mere peasant enthusiasm would burn itself out—it could not survive serious blows from the counter-revolution. Makhno said that a leader should not be pessimistic or sceptical. Lenin pointed out that the Anarchists had no serious organization, they were unable to organize either the proletariat or the poor peasants, and thus unable to defend the Revolution.

Lenin showed particular interest in the military performance of the Red Guards, and questioned Makhno in very great detail. Then he asked about the propaganda in the villages, and Makhno explained that, on the revolutionary side, there was little of it and what there was was ineffective.

Lenin turned to Sverdlov and said that the true path to victory was the reorganization of the Red Guards into the Red Army. Then he asked Makhno his plans, and when Makhno said he was going home, illegally, commented that the Anarchists had plenty of fanaticism and self-sacrifice but they were short-sighted; they neglected the present for the far distant future. Turning back to Makhno he said he must not take this too hardly: he (Makhno) was a good man, and if only a third of the Russian Anarchists were like him the Bolsheviks would "on certain conditions" be prepared to go a long way with them in the free organization of production.

Makhno records that he was uncomfortably conscious of coming under the spell of Lenin's personality: he was beginning to feel reverence for the man he knew to be most responsible for the drive against the Anarchists. He protested that Anarchists were thorough revolutionaries. Lenin said, "We know the Anarchists as well as you. They all think only of the distant future and pay no regard to the practical problems of the present." Makhno replied that he was a simple ill-educated peasant. He could not properly argue with a man like Lenin.

But it was quite untrue that the Anarchists did not concern themselves with present realities. The whole revolutionary struggle in the villages against the Kiev Rada had been carried on by the Anarchists and a few S.R.s. There were no Bolsheviks in the villages and if there were any they had no influence. It was the Anarchists who had done the fighting.

Makhno records his feeling of frustration at this interview—he realized the enormous opportunities offered to him and he could not take them. He could not properly express himself. Finally Lenin asked if he would like help for his journey home; Makhno said he would, and Sverdlov on Lenin's instructions telephoned to a certain Karpenko. Lenin told Makhno to take this as evidence that after all he was not so ill disposed towards the Anarchists; he should go and see Karpenko who would help him cross the frontier.

Makhno: "What frontier?"

Lenin: "Don't you know that a frontier has been established between the Ukraine and Russia?"

Makhno: "And you consider the Ukraine as Soviet Russia?"

Lenin: "To consider is one thing, to see is another." ¹³

In due course the Bolshevik organization in charge of illegal frontier crossings provided Makhno with a false passport in the name of Ivan Yakoliev Shepel, school-teacher and reserve officer from near Taganrog. On the 29th June Arshinov came with him to the station and saw him off. After a long slow journey the train reached Kursk, and then Belenikino, which was the terminal. The little station was crowded with refugees, one or two from Gulyai-Polye who told Makhno that in his absence his mother's house had been burned down, one of his brothers executed and another lodged in Aleksandrovsk gaol. He hired a cab to take him across no-man's-land and reached Belgorod without incident. He found a secluded spot and put on the Ukrainian officer's uniform that had been given to him to match his passport.

(v)

Events had seen to it that the date Makhno had fixed back in Taganrog for his rendezvous with the Ukrainian Revolution was well timed. As has been mentioned, the bulk of the peasantry, in spite of Makhno's brave words to Lenin, had offered no resistance to the Rada and the German armies. In

¹³ Makhno, op. cit. Vol. II, pp. 120-135

a large number of villages the invaders had been welcomed. Even the return of the landlords in their wake did not in itself make for large-scale disturbances. Reports reaching Soviet Russia tended to show that most of the peasants could have been induced to pay a small rent for the land they had taken over. But the landlords were greedy: they wanted the harvest, and the peasants were firmly convinced that the crops they had themselves sown and harvested were their personal property. On top of this came the special agreements between Kiev and the Central Powers for the bulk delivery of grain and other foodstuffs. The peasants tried to cheat. When that failed they started burning barns and sabotaging transport. There were isolated cases of small bands offering armed resistance.¹⁴

In their occupation of western Russia German troops held the northern and central areas, the whole of the territory bordering on Soviet Russia as far as the Don, and the Crimea and Tauride province in the south. The Roumanians were west of Odessa. In between, holding most of the Ekaterinoslav and Kherson provinces, were the Austro-Hungarians. It was with the latter that Makhno had mainly to do during the first few months of his activity.

The final stages of his journey back were precarious. The authorities got wind of his return and he had to jump the train to avoid arrest. He made his way on foot to a village some twenty kilometres from Gulyai-Polye where he had friends who would hide him, and there established his conspiratorial headquarters. On July the 4th he issued his first secret circular, made out in ten copies and passed by safe hand to peasants he knew he could trust: in it he announced his return and warned recipients to be ready to act. An immediate reply from Gulyai-Polye urged him not to come back to the village. There was an Austrian garrison. The place was full of spies and all members of the former Soviet were under arrest. The Jews had betrayed the village back in April, and now it was the young Jews who were hunting down the revolutionaries and the Jewish bourgeoisie was encouraging them.

Makhno was worried at this evidence of anti-Semitism. His people were making the Jews to be the scapegoat of past misfortunes and the excuse for present inaction. He wrote that while the rich Jews would naturally side with the invaders against the Anarchists the poorer Jews were the peasants' friends and allies. He also composed a second circular, dated July 2nd, outlining the programme to be undertaken. Peasants

¹⁴ Kubanin, *op. cit.* pp. 33-37

must first organize, so that every small village and every quarter of each big village had its own proper fighting squad. When the squads were formed they should watch for the opportunity to start small-scale action against isolated landowners.

He continued to receive messages warning him against coming to Gulyai-Polye; his presence would inevitably become known and provoke reprisals on the poorer peasants. But he was tired of inaction. One night, escorted by two armed peasants, he arrived at the cottage of a widow on the outskirts of Gulyai-Polye. Children were sent round with messages, and all through the small hours his old friends collected in the cottage. There were many absentees—dead, deported or in prison. Of those that turned up most were dispirited; some of them urged him to leave; a few were anxious to help. He remained in hiding for three or four nights and organized some “initiator groups” of three to five men under his own orders. But then came news that in some of the neighbouring villages the recipients of his first circular had understood it to be a signal to act: peasants had staged some premature and ineffective attacks on landowners’ houses. The authorities were alerted and there was a wave of arrests and house-searches in Gulyai-Polye itself. The pessimists seemed to have been justified. Makhno was smuggled out of the village and went into hiding with some distant cousins at Ternovka, a village fifty miles away.¹⁵

(vi)

If Gulyai-Polye was the Mecca of the Makhnovite movement Ternovka has some claims to be its Medina. There was plenty of fighting spirit in the village; also a small stock of arms, left behind in the spring by the retreating Red Guards and carefully hidden. Makhno organized the young men into squads. A few weeks later, as more and more evidence came in of peasant unrest, he issued the slogan “Death to all who with the aid of German-Austrian-Hetmanite bayonets remove from peasants and workers the conquests of their Revolution”, and initiated a series of attacks on landlords’ country houses. Some landlords were killed, as were any guards who might be stationed there; others abandoned their properties and went off to the garrison towns to await the restoration of order. Makhno’s raids covered an ever wider range, more and more volunteers joined up with his band and in mid-September he felt his

¹⁵ Makhno, Vol. III, pp. 5-30

resources were adequate for an attack on Gulyai-Polye. On the march towards the village he surprised and disarmed two Hetmanite detachments and thus came into possession of sufficient Hetmanite army and militia caps and overcoats to disguise his little army. For four days the Makhnovites operated in a circle of about thirty miles round Gulyai-Polye. The Austrian authorities were warned of their approach. Punitive expeditions came after them, missed them, took reprisals on the villages and the young villagers ran away to join up with the insurgents. One night Makhno with a fighting patrol ran into a company of Austrians, who took them to be Hetmanite militia so that they were able to withhold their fire until point-blank range. The Austrian company commander was among those killed. The prisoners included three Galicians who were sent back to their battalion with a letter dictated by Makhno and addressed to the Austrian rank and file: these were told to shoot their officers and make their way home to start a revolution there—otherwise they would be killed by the Ukrainian revolutionaries. A problem after this little battle was the disposal of the Austrian corpses, which, if found, would provoke reprisals on the local villagers; so a squad of peasants were called out to cart them and dump them on the nearest landlord's property.

Peasants were now rallying to Makhno in hundreds, some with rifles, some without. There were continual councils of war as to the next move, and a wide variety of opinion. Some wanted to launch an attack on Gulyai-Polye, others to disperse and instigate a general rising in the villages all round. The very uncertainty and constant change of insurgent plans added to the difficulties of the Austrian Intelligence, and in the event on the night the attack was staged most of the troops had been sent off on various false scents. The attack was successful: only the garrison headquarters staff managed to get away in the darkness and confusion. The Makhnovites seized the post office, the printing press and the railway station (which was some miles out of the centre of the village). Old scores were paid. Hundreds of leaflets were rolled off calling on the peasants to rally to the revolution.

It was one thing to seize Gulyai-Polye, but quite another to hold it. Some of the hot-heads wished to hold on at all costs, but Makhno realized he had no prospect of successfully defending the village against regular troops. When news was received from the local stationmaster of the approach of enemy troop trains, Makhno moved out his little army; fought a successful

rearguard action; undertook a forced march of eighty miles and then paused to refit.¹⁶

The successful seizure and evacuation of Gulyai-Polye was Makhno's first important military operation. The second was the engagement at Dibrivka which took place a few days later.

While at rest in the forest near this village he was joined by another insurgent force under one Shchus, whom he had met during the fighting in the spring and who had attended the Taganrog congress.

The combined army now totalled nearly 1,500 men. Makhno planned a long-range raid (of which he was later to conduct so many) across the southern Ukraine to the Sea of Azov. One problem was that a number of Shchus's men were wounded, but these had found girls in the village, and when the girls heard of the proposed expedition they all volunteered to ride with their men with the army on peasant carts and look after them *en route*.

There were busy days of preparation. It was here that the Makhnovite pattern of feeding the army first took shape. At a mass meeting the peasants would indicate the richest households. These (not unnaturally) would agree to provide one sheep each. All peasants gave bread, according to their capacity. There was recruiting: but no volunteers were accepted over and above those for whom arms were available: the others were put on a register. And there were continuous mass meetings and speeches at which Makhno was at pains to emphasize the danger not only from the Hetman and the Germans but also from the White Generals in the south-east.

And then one night the Austrians attacked. A few partisans held up their advance while the wounded were loaded on to carts and taken off to the forest. The villagers panicked and implored Makhno not to retreat, but he knew that withdrawal was essential. All that night and most of the next day his men hid in the forest. Then, when the enemy were reported to be on parade in the main square they launched their counter-attack. They moved in surreptitiously, in small groups. One girl tried to give the alarm, but she was caught and knocked on the head to stop her screaming. The partisans climbed over the back walls and occupied the shops and houses overlooking the square. The enemy troops were resting. Their rifles were stacked; some men were lying down. Makhno opened fire at eighty yards' range. It was a massacre rather than a battle. Some of the enemy got away. Some barricaded themselves in

¹⁶ Makhno, Vol. III, pp. 50-70

houses, and the houses were set on fire. The village woke up "like an ant heap". Peasants swarmed out of the houses with axes and hammers, chasing after the fugitives and beating the prisoners. There had been one Austrian battalion, detachments of Hetmanite and German colonist volunteers and a contingent of militia. Makhno saved some twenty Austrians from lynching, tied up their wounds, fed them and sent them off to tell the story to their companions. All other prisoners were killed, as was the girl who had tried to give the alarm. Next day Austrian reinforcements arrived with a number of field guns. The *makhnovtsi* were shelled out of the village and shelled again when they took up positions in the forest. Makhno and Shchus were both hit, Shchus seriously. Frightened peasants streamed after them out of the village. But Makhno had no means of helping the peasants. He had no alternative but to withdraw again, this time right out of the area. Next night, already miles away, he could see the glow in the sky from the burning houses of Dibrivka.¹⁷

(vii)

In the next three weeks Makhno's raids covered many hundreds of miles, and were marked by an extreme ferocity. The slogan was "Death, death, death to all on the side of the Hetman." He wrote afterwards that this was "not a slogan thought out by those that sit in offices . . . but dictated by factual reality".¹⁸ His detachments operated round Berdyansk, Maryupol and Pavlograd, exterminating landlords and militia. His main force once came up against a Hungarian battalion and was badly mauled: he told his partisans they would have to learn to fight like Magyars. But mostly he was able to avoid the occupying armies who were tending more and more to concentrate in the urban centres and big railway junctions.

The sphere and scope of his operations widened. He felt himself no longer a mere guerrilla leader but, once again, the instrument of a social revolution. The policy of vengeance and destruction was ceasing to be adequate. The revolution must build up its stores of arms, horses, money and essential supplies. Measures were thought out, and approved at a mass meeting of the insurgent army, for a system of organized requisitions. Revolutionary Tribunals were set up; public enemies were no longer to be shot out of hand but to be executed

¹⁷ Makhno, Vol. III, pp. 71-96¹⁸ Ibid. p. 98

publicly after some show of court proceedings. The main insurgent army came to be followed by a long column of carts carrying cash and stores, and it was now possible to offer immediate relief to any destitute villages on the route.

In early October the Austrians evacuated Gulyai-Polye and the insurgent army marched in, this time to stay there, except for one brief interval, for some months. Makhno's first act was to send an ultimatum to the (Hetmanite) Town Commandant of Aleksandrovsk, demanding the release of all the prison inmates. When, eventually, the Gulyai-Polye Anarchists (including Makhno's brother) came back home they were given a resounding welcome and afforded a much-needed reinforcement of the military and administrative staffs.

Makhno was in the field when the momentous news came from Kiev that Hetman Skoropadsky was no longer in power and that a Directory, of the same political colour and largely of the same personnel as the former Rada, had assumed the government of the Ukraine. There was much jubilation among the peasants, but Makhno had misgivings. He regarded the Directory, as he had regarded the Rada, as an instrument of bourgeois chauvinism. At the same time there was need for caution: his infant revolution had already a great many enemies and not nearly sufficient armed forces. When he returned to Gulyai-Polye there were days of anxious deliberation as to the policy to be adopted. Makhno's own account of this period is incomplete; he was a dying man when he reached this stage of his memoirs and there are long gaps in his record. But it is certain that at one stage a decision was made to maintain, for the moment, an attitude of cautious neutrality; and that a few days later the decision was reversed in favour of war. Makhno's memoirs give no indication of the reason for this change. It may have been the hope of coming to some working alliance with the Bolsheviks.

In the late autumn and winter of 1918 the Red Army's counter-offensive on the Eastern front of the Civil War carried Bolshevik power as far as Ufa and Orenburg. But in the south the Red offensive against the Cossacks and the White Volunteer Army petered out: there were disturbances in the Red rear and disaffection among certain subordinate Red commanders. In addition the Red troops were badly hit by typhus. In November Denikin captured Stavropol and a few weeks later the north Caucasian Red Army was completely broken.

In the Ukraine the withdrawal of the German and Austro-Hungarian occupation armies meant the removal of the one

force capable of enforcing some kind of order. In the coastal area and the Crimea a number of weak and transient local authorities came into being; Denikin sent his representatives to the main centres, and the French were soon to land in some force. At Kiev the Directory made desperate efforts to raise and maintain an army capable of defending its existence. The Bolsheviks made ready to stage a second invasion. In the interior, throughout the countryside, there operated a wide variety of petty war lords and band leaders, some with nationalist or political slogans and some mere bandits. Makhno's position was exceptional on account of the strength of his army, of the hold he had established on the loyalty of the peasants of his area, and of the nature of his political ideals and programme.

The German-Austrian retirement offered Makhno a unique opportunity to build up a reserve of arms and stores, and his memoirs are full of incidents with German retreating units. There was some fighting. There was a good deal of negotiation, and a fair amount of double-crossing. These few weeks saw an appreciable increase both in the effective strength of the Makhnovite Army and in Makhno's own personal reputation. This last was no longer merely local. In the Soviet Russian Press he came to be frequently and favourably featured as a true revolutionary fighter. In mid-December 1918 he received and accepted an invitation from the underground Bolshevik committee at Ekaterinoslav to take part in an attempt to seize the town from the Petlurist garrison and to assume command of all the insurgent forces.

Makhno brought up his troops at night to a working-class suburb on the west bank of the Dnieper, and they came into town, their arms concealed under their greatcoats, on an early morning workmen's train. The station was seized at once. Some Bolshevik workers' detachments and a few S.R.s also came into action. A Petlurist artillery officer changed sides, with a number of his guns and gun teams. After three or four days of confused fighting the insurgents had occupied the greater part of the town. Makhno seized the prison and released the inmates; he arrested and shot the prosecutor who had secured his conviction ten years before; and he issued proclamations forbidding looting. A new Soviet was installed as the governing authority, but it functioned for only twenty-four hours as the Petlurists brought up reinforcements and the Makhnovites were forced to withdraw. A few days later the Red Army pressed out the Petlurists.

We have an account of the fighting in Ekaterinoslav from

a professor of law at the University,¹⁹ who with his wife occupied one floor in a house overlooking a square that became a no-man's land between the opposing forces. Shells screamed overhead, and spent bullets pattered down on the roof. The unbellicose occupants of the professor's house gathered together in the first floor, which seemed to them to be the least unsafe, and "waited in silence for death". On the evening of the fourth day the shooting died down. Then there was knocking, and some ten men pushed in through the street door, insisting that they required the house. The landlord pleaded and argued: eventually they agreed to take the front rooms and leave the back to the residents. So the residents retired to the back, but their visitors pushed in after them and more crowded in from the street. A meal had been laid on the table and the partisans sat down to it; the ladies of the house made haste to serve them.

They were members of a Makhnovite machine-gun section. Their dress was varied—uniforms of every kind, peasant dress; some wore expensive civilian fur coats. All were armed to the teeth and hung about with hand grenades. One, who was very drunk, kept giving accounts of the bourgeois he had shot. "They were very stupid," he said. "They squeaked all the time." The men were not unfriendly. One produced a pair of stockings which he offered to the professor's wife. She was convinced they had just been pulled off a dead women's legs and refused in horror: there was an ugly moment, but the landlord accepted them on behalf of his daughter. One elderly peasant was awestruck at the splendour of the first urban interior he had ever seen, and offered formal thanks between each mouthful.

The commander of the detachment joined them. He would not eat or drink, but he sat at the table and talked. He was anti-Semite. He described his leader Makhno as "a real Communist, not like the Petlurists who have sold themselves to the Jews". He went on to explain that when they occupied a town Makhno allowed his men to take one pair of whatever he needed, provided the man could carry it himself. Whoever took more than that was shot. Peaceful inhabitants need not be frightened, as the Makhnovites only killed Germans and Jews; these, after all, were the main bourgeois.

In due course the squad went out to relieve their companions. The commander gave permission for the door between the front and back rooms to be bolted. During the night men came in and rattled at the inner door. In the square in front there was

¹⁹ Igrenév, G., in *Arkhiv Russkoy Revolyutsii* (Berlin 1921) Vol. III, pp. 234-243

intermittent shouting and bursts of machine-gun fire. Next morning all was quiet with the men at their posts in the square. In the front room a cupboard had been broken open and all the linen stolen, and a sack of hand grenades was lying under a bed. The landlord called to a partisan who came and collected the bombs. When, later, firing began again it was from the Petlurist reinforcements, and the Makhnovites retreated.

(viii)

After the fighting at Ekaterinoslav the *Makhnovtsi* went back towards Gulyai-Polye. For the first few weeks of 1919 the advancing Red Armies by-passed this area, where Makhno and his staff went ahead with their work of military and social organization. This period saw the beginnings of what might be called the Makhnovite Government in that two Congresses were held, the first in January at Velikaya Mikhailovka and the second three weeks later at Gulyai-Polye. They were composed of delegates of peasants, workers and of the insurgent army, and were intended to clarify and record the decisions of the toiling masses and to be regarded as the supreme authority for the liberated area. This area, for the time being, was exclusively rural and the workers' representation was insignificant. Peasant delegates, however, came in from thirty-two *volosts*.

There were rousing revolutionary speeches, and tirades against European and American imperialists and their instruments such as Denikin, Kolchak and Petlura. There was also in the general resolution a warning: "With deep regret the Congress must also declare that apart from external enemies a perhaps even greater danger, arising from its internal shortcomings, threatens the Revolution of the Russian and Ukrainian peasants and workers. The Soviet Governments of Russia and of the Ukraine, by their orders and decrees, are making efforts to deprive local soviets of peasants and workers' deputies of their freedom and autonomy." The Bolsheviki Party, the resolution went on, was "demanding a monopoly of the Revolution".²⁰

The main civil achievement was the establishment of a Regional Revolutionary Military Soviet of Peasants, Workers and Insurgents, a permanent committee with no powers to initiate policy but designed merely to implement the decisions of the periodic congresses. Otherwise the re-establishment of the

²⁰ Kubanin, *op. cit.* pp. 52, 53

former agricultural commune was approved. A resolution was passed urging the setting up of "free", i.e. non-political, Soviets of toilers in all districts; and another urging "direct union" between peasants in the country and workers in the towns. This last remained academic; communications were too bad and there was too great a variety of military occupation to allow any real contact between villagers and big town labour. But the Makhnovites did at least make the considerable gesture of dispatching a large consignment of grain to the hungry factory workers of Petrograd and Moscow.²¹

However, the main emphasis of the two Congresses was upon defence. Makhno had learned the lesson of the spring of 1918: a social revolution must have an effective military force to protect it. All through the early weeks of 1919 Makhnovite detachments were fighting the Whites in the south, and this continuous campaigning was bringing home to Makhno the shortcomings of volunteerism. The flow of volunteers did not dry up: sometimes there were more than he could arm. But it was spasmodic and unpredictable. Individuals and groups were apt to get tired of the war and return to their homes. It was essential to put the man-power question on a regular basis.

Accordingly, at Makhno's insistence, the second Congress passed a resolution in favour of "general, voluntary and egalitarian mobilization". The orthodox Anarchist line, expressed at an Anarchist gathering of this period, was that "no compulsory army . . . can be regarded as a true defender of the social revolution",²² and debate ranged round the issue as to whether enlistment could be described as "voluntary" (whatever the feelings of individuals) if it took place as the result of a resolution voluntarily passed by representatives of the community as a whole. Makhno gained his point. A Soviet writer suggests that the issue proved that Makhno knew his peasants better than did the Anarchist intellectuals: peasants held back from volunteering because they knew that the Whites shot all Red volunteers. As mobilized men they would be safer.²³

The first contact between Makhno's staff and that of Dybenko, the local Red Army commander, took place at the end of February. Relations were friendly. Each side needed the military alliance. Makhno continued to be featured in the Soviet Press as a champion of the toiling masses. When the Red Army proposed, in March, a unification of military forces

²¹ Arshinov, op. cit. pp. 89, 90, 93. Voline, op. cit. pp. 545, 550

²² Yaroslavsky: *History of Anarchism in Russia* (London n.d.) p. 67

²³ Kubanin, op. cit. p. 45

against Denikin (now in supreme command of all the Whites in the south), it took little time to come to an agreement.

This first of the three agreements to be negotiated by Makhno with the Bolsheviks laid down that the Makhnovite Army was to maintain its own internal organization, but would be subordinate for operational purposes to the Red Army Higher Command, and would furthermore accept Red Army nominees as Political Commissars down to regimental level. It was to receive, from the Bolsheviks, arms and supplies on the same level as the neighbouring Red Army units. It was to keep its name of Insurgent Army [later it was to adopt the title of "Insurgent Revolutionary Army of the Ukraine (Makhnovites)] and to retain its (Anarchist) black flags. Nothing was said about the civil administration of the areas of Makhnovite occupation.²⁴

The agreement with Makhno marked the beginning of a number of Red successes in the south. In late March Grigoriev (an ex-Tsarist officer who had served the Petlurists and then defected with his partisan army to the Bolsheviks) captured Kherson. In April the French hurriedly evacuated Odessa and the Reds marched in. The same month the Red Army occupied the Crimea. But in spite of this, the Bolsheviks were meeting difficulties in their attempts to assimilate and re-integrate the newly re-occupied southern provinces. Bolshevik policy, while approving the distribution to the poorer peasants of some of the landowners' estates, laid down that the rest was to be administered as State farms. Vineyards and sugar-beet plantations were to be State property, as was all live stock and equipment belonging to the dispossessed gentry. The peasants on the other hand maintained that all property of the former landlords was now by right their own, as had been arranged at Gulyai-Polye (Makhno's agricultural communes had been entirely voluntary). Furthermore, the Red Armies lived off the country and that meant requisitions and mobilization orders. Red commissars and Cheka officials (who often happened to be Jews) soon became objects of hatred. Bolshevik Party organization and propaganda was weak enough in most of the towns, and non-existent in the rural areas. Attempts were already being made to form committees of poor peasants, but these were ineffective. Poor peasants had no time for committees which were often packed with kulaks. In any case there was little incentive for the poorer peasant to co-operate with his new rulers. The

²⁴ Arshinov, *op. cit.* pp. 93-95 Voline, *op. cit.* pp. 551-553
Kubanin, *op. cit.* p. 46

villagers, rich and poor alike, were united in their opposition. Some of them believed that a new party had come into power in Moscow. They were, they proclaimed, for the Bolsheviks who had given them the land, but they were against the Communists who were now trying to rob them.²⁵ Recent experience seemed to have shown that authority could be successfully resisted and throughout the area there were refusals to deliver, arsons, lynchings, and action by armed bands. Trouble began to spread to the locally recruited Red units. The Second Ukrainian Red Army Division was confidentially reported to be riddled with indiscipline, drunkenness, card-playing, anti-Communism, anti-Semitism, pro-Makhno and Black Flag slogans.²⁶

The reference to the Black Flag is not isolated. Anarchist influence was reported from Aleksandrovsk and other centres. Anarchists were holding a conference in Kursk at about this time and in one of their resolutions it was stated that "the Ukrainian Revolution will have great chances of rapidly becoming Anarchist in its ideas".²⁷ The position called for renewed Bolshevik measures against the Anarchists. *Nabat*, the main Anarchist newspaper in the Ukraine, was suppressed, and its editorial board dispersed under threat of arrest. Some of them came to Makhno at Gulyai-Polye; Voline, the most eminent, was delayed *en route* but arrived there in the summer and was elected chairman of the Revolutionary Military Soviet. Arshinov had already arrived (in April) from Moscow and had assumed charge of Makhnovite education and propaganda. There was some justification for suspecting Gulyai-Polye of becoming a centre of ideological opposition.

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Relations between Bolsheviks and Makhnovites were already deteriorating when in April the Revolutionary Military Soviet at Gulyai-Polye convoked the Third Congress of Peasants, Workers and Insurgents. When the Congress was in session a telegram was received from Dybenko denouncing it as counter-revolutionary. Makhno was away at the front; but the newly arrived intellectuals sent back a long reply arguing out that the Congress was the expression of the will of the toiling masses. Meanwhile military co-operation continued. Antonov-Ovseenko

²⁵ Kubanin, *op. cit.* pp. 62, 63

²⁷ Yaroslavsky, *op. cit.* p. 65

²⁶ *Ibid.* p. 50

paid a friendly visit to the Makhnovite headquarters on April 29th, and S. S. Kamenev on May 4th. Kamenev suggested that it might be wise to dissolve the Revolutionary Military Soviet: he was told that unlike similarly titled bodies elsewhere, which were instruments of a political party, the local R.M.S. was the creation of the people themselves.²⁸

It was now that favourable mention of Makhno ceased to appear in the Soviet Press; an increasingly critical note became apparent. Supplies failed to get through to Makhnovite units and areas. It may be significant that Trotsky (to whom Makhno's ideas and methods were bound to be anathema) was now paying more personal attention to the southern front. But in May the whole military position was completely changed when Grigoriev, main Soviet commander in the south-west, staged a revolt against his Bolshevik masters and proclaimed himself Ataman of Kherson and the Tauride.

Red garrisons in some centres remained true to Moscow; in others they declared themselves neutral. Many Soviet troops came over to Grigoriev. The peasants (in so far as they counted) were anti-Bolshevik. The Soviet south-western front collapsed, and it seemed possible that if Makhno defected the south-eastern front would collapse as well. On May 12th Kamenev telegraphed the news of Grigoriev's revolt to Makhno: "The decisive moment has come—either you stand with the workers and peasants of all Russia, or you in fact open the front to the enemy . . . I rely on your revolutionary honour." Makhno replied that he did not know what were Grigoriev's intentions: if he were trying to set up a government he was a common adventurer. Meanwhile the Makhnovite Army remained "unchangeably true to the Revolution of the Peasants and Workers, but not to instruments of violence like your Commissars and Chekas". At the same time he issued a general order to his troops facing Denikin: all at the front should stand fast, without regard to the quarrels between the Bolsheviks and Grigoriev.²⁹ However, it soon became apparent that Grigoriev was not an important factor. His troops carried out savage pogroms and considerable looting: but he had no constructive ability and was unable to keep his army together. Within a few weeks he was little more than a bandit leader with some two or three thousand guerrillas. The Bolsheviks once more felt able to take a firmer line.

²⁸ Arshinov, *op. cit.* pp. 97-104
Voline, *op. cit.* pp. 555-561

²⁹ Kubanin, *op. cit.* pp. 86-87
Arshinov, *op. cit.* pp. 137-143
Voline, *op. cit.* pp. 584-587

In the latter part of May the Cheka sent over two agents to assassinate Makhno; one lost his nerve and confessed to the Insurgent Razvedka. Both were executed. By this time the secret services both of the Makhnovites and the Soviet authorities were busy penetrating the opposite party—a state of affairs which lasted till 1921. Makhno received warning not to venture into any Bolshevik-held town. The Red hold-back of supplies for the Insurgents developed into a blockade of the area. Makhnovite units at the front ran short of ammunition. (Makhno's people, incidentally, never learned to conserve their arms or munitions: despite the huge stocks they acquired by one means or another they were always running short.)

The cause of the open break was a decision to convoke a Fourth Congress of Peasants', Workers' and Insurgents' Representatives at Gulyai-Polye. The deterioration in relations with the Bolsheviks had coincided with the onset of Denikin's big spring offensive: and the R.M.S. announced on the 30th May that the situation was such that "it could be handled only by the toiling masses themselves and not by individual persons or political parties". The rank and file of the Red Army were publicly invited to send representatives on the same basis as the Makhnovite units.

Trotsky, then at Kharkov, may or may not have been informed of the text of the convocation when he wrote the denunciation of *Makhnovshchina* in his train newspaper *Na Puti* on June 2nd. In any case, the approach to the Red Army rank and file (whose dubious loyalty had been shown up in the Grigoriev affair) called for far more drastic measures. Order No. 1824, signed by Trotsky at Kharkov on June 4th, forbade the holding of the Congress, declared that any participation amounted to high treason against the Soviet State and ordered the arrest of all delegates and all concerned with the distribution of the invitations. There is reason to believe that a further (secret) order called for the arrest of Makhno.

No copy of Order No. 1824 was sent direct to Makhno. Meanwhile the White offensive was gathering momentum. Gulyai-Polye was captured by Cossacks on June 6th. The following day a Red Army armoured train was sent to Makhno as a reinforcement, with a message that his units were expected to resist to the end; and he himself received an invitation to come and confer with Voroshilov and Mezhlauk at their headquarters. By this time Makhno was in possession of Order 1824 and of a subsequent order under which he was to hand over his command. On June 9th he sent off a long telegram to

Voroshilov with copies to Lenin and to Trotsky. He rebutted the charges made against him, maintained that the Bolsheviks found Insurgent methods to be incompatible with their dictatorship, but added that in view of the gravity of the situation and of Bolshevik hostility to himself he proposed to resign from his command.

It is difficult, on the evidence available, to trace the exact sequence of events in this confused period. But in any case Makhno went to Aleksandrovsk and handed over his command to a Red Army officer temporarily out of touch with Kharkov. He instructed the commanders of his units in Red Army formations to remain at their posts. He himself with a small force of picked cavalry crossed the Dnieper. While on the east of the river the Bolsheviks were losing successively Ekaterinoslav and Kharkov, Makhno, on the right bank, was fighting small engagements with any Red units that opposed him, liquidating Bolshevik and Cheka organizations in the villages, and encouraging the peasants to form free Soviets. Towards the end of the month he came into contact with Grigoriev.³⁰

Makhno believed Grigoriev to be an adventurer, and therefore a counter-revolutionary (as all adventurers were *ipso facto* counter-revolutionary). At the same time he was more than ever obsessed with the necessity of building up his army and he felt the Grigoriev force contained good potential material. He therefore agreed to hold a conference, and in mid-July Grigoriev arrived at Makhno's headquarters. He made a bad first impression by commenting adversely on the Jews there, and followed this up by his attitude throughout the conference. The Makhnovites held that the object of joint action was to fight against the Whites and the Bolsheviks, but that to fight the Bolsheviks was a counter-revolutionary act unless this was done in the name of the Social Revolution. Grigoriev's line was that the Bolsheviks and the Petlurists were swine: he had had experience of them and he knew. He implied it would be admissible to join up with any ally against the Bolsheviks. As for the Whites, he had had no experience of them and so did not know what they were like.

The association was a very brief one. Two White Army emissaries called at Makhno's headquarters with a letter for Grigoriev. The emissaries were discreetly liquidated, and a few hours later Grigoriev and his bodyguard were shot at a private meeting by members of Makhno's staff. A subsequent joint congress

³⁰ Voline, op. cit. pp. 562-575 Arshinov, op. cit. pp. 116-128
Kubanin, op. cit. pp. 77-78

of both armies was harangued by Makhno and his senior officers, and approved of what had taken place on the grounds that it was "historically necessary". All partisan detachments formerly under Grigoriev were incorporated in the common Insurgent Makhnovite Army.

The Makhnovite propagandists gave the fullest publicity to the execution of Grigoriev, and a copy of the circular telegram announcing the event was sent to the Kremlin in Moscow. The accretion of military strength was not, however, as great as Makhno had hoped. The *Grigorievtsi* had seen little serious fighting for many weeks, and unlimited looting, pogroms and drunkenness had demoralized them. As Voline puts it "they were ignorant, and, having contracted bad habits during their time with Grigoriev, they were unable to raise themselves to the moral level of the Makhnovite partisans".³¹

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The summer of 1919 was one of sustained military disaster for the Soviet armies in the south. Denikin's advance was continuous. In July the Red Army had to be pulled out of the Crimea. In August Denikin captured Kherson, Nikolaev and Odessa along the Black Sea coast, and Kiev to the north. Further east General Mamontov started his spectacular raid behind the Red lines. Arshinov records Makhno's "disgust" at Bolshevik feebleness. Indeed, the general picture was reminiscent of the early months of 1918 when the Germans were advancing. The Red Armies in the south, ineffective and demoralized, seemed to be disintegrating. In July Makhno sent messages to his former units now with the Red Armies that they should return. Most of them joined up with him near Elizavetgrad in August. A number of Red Army soldiers came with them. Makhno spent a few days reorganizing his force, which now amounted to more than 15,000 with four infantry brigades, one cavalry brigade, a detachment of artillery and a special machine-gun regiment equipped with 500 machine-guns.

The inception of this new phase of his activities was marked by the issue of his Order No. 1 of August 5th 1919. This laid down the general principles for Insurgent conduct. Their enemies were listed as the rich bourgeoisie—whether Russian, Ukrainian or Jewish—furthermore, all those who upheld an

³¹ Kubanin, op. cit. pp. 79-83 Arshinov, op. cit. pp. 131-134
Voline, op. cit. p. 672

unjust social order of a bourgeois nature such as Bolshevik Commissars, the Cheka, or members of punitive detachments. All these last were to be arrested and sent to headquarters or shot on the spot if they tried to resist. Insurgents must renounce any consideration of personal profit: there must be no beating up or robbing of peaceful Jews; there must be no arbitrary or independent requisitioning. Behaviour must be orderly and disciplined. Drunkenness was a crime, especially to be seen drunk in the streets. An insurgent must always be ready for battle; but he must be considerate to the local population.³² Following the issue of this order the Insurgent Army captured Elizavetgrad from the Whites and pressed on towards Odessa.

There is good evidence that the Whites soon came to regard Makhno's new army as their toughest immediate opponent. Special troops were detailed for use against him—officers' battalions and picked cavalry, whose fighting qualities earned Makhno's respect. There was a set battle to the north of Odessa and the Insurgents were beaten: their opponents were in too great strength, and, as always, they themselves ran short of ammunition. White pressure increased, and Makhno was forced to retire northwards and then north-westwards.

Voline, who took part in it, has left a vivid picture of the retreat of the main column through the heat and dust of an exceptionally dry autumn. The cavalry were away to the rear or on the flanks, in almost continuous brushes with White patrols. The infantry were carried in two-horse peasant carts (*tachankas*)—two partisans and a driver on each—the first cart of all bearing the black flag with the slogans "Liberty or Death" and "Land for the Peasants, Factories for the Workers". There were innumerable carts carrying wounded, and the column was swelled by peasant families, with all their belongings and livestock—refugees from White brutalities.³³

One attempt was made to make a stand, but the enemy were too strong and the retreat continued. In late September the column made contact with a strong Petlurist force near Uman and Peregonovka. The Whites were hard on their heels and the position was critical. Negotiations were started with the Petlurists, with the inevitable reserves and suspicions on both sides. An agreement was reached by which the Petlurists undertook to take care of Makhno's wounded and to observe neutrality as between him and the Whites. The Makhnovites at once attempted to win over the Petlurist rank and file, and leaflets were hurriedly printed on the portable press and distributed.

³² Arshinov, *op. cit.* pp. 211–213

³³ Voline, *op. cit.* pp. 578–579

But before any effect became apparent Makhno received secret information that the Petlurists were negotiating behind his back with the White Command. He was completely surrounded.

On September 26th he launched a counter-attack with all his force against the White positions. It was the bloodiest engagement of all Makhno's campaigns. After twenty-four hours of fighting the Whites were beaten (they lost twenty guns and a hundred and twenty machine-guns), and the Insurgents were driving westwards. The speed of their advance, through the thinly-held White rear, is almost incredible. Within a fortnight they successively captured Krivoi Rog, Nikopol, Aleksandrovsk, Gulyai-Polye; and Melitpol, Berdyansk and Mariupol on the Sea of Azov. On October 20th they took Ekaterinoslav. There is some justification for the claim that Peregonovka was one of the decisive battles of the Civil War in the south.³⁴

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The three or four months from October 1919 marked the peak of Makhno's career. Denikin's White armies were committed to the supreme gamble of the drive towards Moscow, reaching Orel, their furthest point north, shortly after Makhno's breakout at Peregonovka. But the Whites had failed to build up reserves, and there were no troops available effectively to hold the rear areas. To dislodge Makhno from one centre entailed withdrawing the garrison from another. During these weeks many towns changed hands several times. The operations covered almost the whole area of the White communications. Huge stocks of stores were seized when Makhno captured the big railway junctions, and the supply lines from the Black Sea ports to the Whites in the north were cut again and again.

Makhno was not the only guerrilla leader operating against Denikin; there were a number of smaller bands, some proclaiming themselves pro-Makhno, some pro-Petlurist. But these were insignificant in comparison with the Makhnovites, who for some months constituted what amounted to a free republic covering most of the southern Ukraine. The peasants were solidly behind Makhno; the State farm system and the enforced grain collections had made them anti-Soviet, and the behaviour of the Whites had made them even more anti-Denikin. Soviet attempts to split the peasantry and isolate the kulak had so far

³⁴ Kubanin, *op. cit.* pp. 86-87 Arshinov, *op. cit.* pp. 137-143
Voline, *op. cit.* pp. 584-587

failed. Back in February the Gulyai-Polyc Congress had declared it is essential not to split the toilers into parties and into mutually hostile groups . . . ways and means of our new agricultural order must be devised by the free and natural decision and initiative of the peasantry as a whole". The existence of *Kulachestvo* was recognized, but that, it was felt, was a problem that would solve itself in the course of time. At the end of the year the general feeling in the villages was still very ready to support this Makhnovite line.

Makhno and his Revolutionary Military Soviet had no need for misgivings regarding the villagers. The towns, however, presented a more complicated, but extremely important, problem. In early October when Makhno's partisans were approaching Berdyansk he issued an order: "Comrade Insurgents! Every day that passes sees an extension of the area of activity of the Revolutionary Insurgent Army. Probably the hour is not far distant when the Insurgents will liberate some or other town from the grip of Denikin. This will be a *town* [underlined in the original] set free by the Makhnovite Insurgents from any kind of government. This will be a town in which, under the protection of the Revolutionary Insurgents, a free life will spring into being, in which there will grow up a free organization of Workers in union with the Peasants and Insurgents." A fortnight later, in front of Ekaterinoslav, there appears perhaps to be a note of anxiety in the order of the day: "The nature of our behaviour in the towns we capture is a question of life and death for the whole of our movement." In all towns captured notices were posted up to inform the inhabitants that the place was, for the time being, occupied by the Makhnovite Insurgent Revolutionary Army, a force in the service of no government, no political party and no dictatorship. The Army's sole aim was to protect the liberty of the toilers against all. This liberty of the toilers was their own possession and subject to no restriction whatever. It was now for the peasants and workers to organize themselves as they wished. The Army was willing to help and to advise, but would not govern and would not give orders.³⁵

The most serious Makhnovite attempt to sponsor free organizations of industrial workers took place at Aleksandrovska, where two trade-union conferences under Insurgent auspices were held in mid-October 1919. Both Voline and Arshinov, who were there at the time, admit that their practical results were

³⁵ Kubanin, op. cit. pp. 112, 113 Arshinov, op. cit. p. 145
Voline, op. cit. pp. 598-599

negligible. Arshinov suggests that the workers were bewildered at the novelty of the ideas put to them; also that the town was too near the front.³⁶ Voline speaks of fears that the town would soon be recaptured either by the Whites or by the Bolsheviks.³⁷ But in fact the workers were primarily concerned with wages. The railwaymen on the line from Aleksandrovsk to Melitpol had had no pay for weeks. Makhno advised them to come to an equitable understanding with those that used the railway, and recoup themselves out of the proceeds. In point of fact, Makhno did later allot certain funds seized at Ekaterinoslav to paying the railwaymen, but workers in other branches were less fortunate; it was pointless to exhort them to organize a free economic order from below. The only union that made a serious attempt to work on Makhnovite lines was that of the bakers (in which the Anarchists had long had a strong footing): the union appointed a committee of five to draw up a scheme for the socialization of bread grains and for the baking of bread for the whole population.

There was plain speaking at the workers' conferences in Aleksandrovsk and at a further meeting held in Ekaterinoslav. Menshevik speakers were so critical of the Insurgent handling of affairs that Makhno referred to them as "bourgeois mongrels". The Mensheviks then left the meeting, the S.R. representatives with them, and a number of trade unions passed resolutions protesting at the insult to the working class. Makhno explained that he was referring only to the Menshevik Party.³⁸

Makhnovite ideas on industrial affairs were of course utopian nonsense; but they accentuated their difficulties with the workers by their financial measures. The villages could subsist for long periods on what they produced themselves; but the worker, unless in receipt of rations, must be paid a sufficient wage in an acceptable currency to enable him to cover his basic needs. It was the general practice of the opposing sides in the civil war to refuse to recognize the enemy's currency (though the Bolsheviks for a time accepted Ukrainian Petlurist roubles). Makhno proclaimed all Russian currencies as valid, and when he levied contributions on monied classes and institutions he would accept currencies annulled by the previous occupant. The result, accentuated by the manoeuvres of the black bourse operators, was a fantastic wave of inflation in which the town worker was the main sufferer.³⁹

³⁶ Arshinov, *op. cit.* p. 145

³⁸ Kubanin, *op. cit.* pp. 103-107

³⁷ Voline, *op. cit.* p. 603

³⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 99-100

At the end of October there took place in Aleksandrovsk a general Congress of Peasants, Workers and Insurgents. To prevent manœuvres by the political parties, election campaigning was forbidden. It was hurriedly convened, and the representation could not claim to cover the whole of the area under Makhnovite influence. Some three hundred delegates were present of whom a hundred and eighty were peasants. There were seventeen worker delegates including eleven Mensheviks and two Bolsheviks (one of the latter was subsequently shot by the Cheka on a charge of spying for Denikin). The workers' delegates played little part in the proceedings.

Matters dealt with included the perennial question of manpower; there was the old argument as to whether or not a "voluntary" enlistment should be enforced. In the end this Congress also accepted Makhno's plea for a general mobilization in all liberated areas. The maintenance of the Army was discussed, and it was agreed that supplies be obtained by means of free contributions, requisitions from the rich and war booty. It was decided to hold a further general Congress at an early date in Ekaterinoslav. Finally a resolution was passed to speed up by every means, and in every town and village the establishment of free Soviets and of free associations and committees for the unconstrained and amicable settlement of all social and economic problems. There were a few doubting voices. A peasant from the Melitpol area asked: "If there is a bridge between two of our villages and the bridge gets broken, who is to repair it? If neither village wishes to do the work, then we will not have a bridge and we will not be able to go to town." But such objections did not seem worth taking into account. Voline had laid down months before (in the *Kharkov Nabat* of March 2nd 1919) that for Anarchists there was "no such thing as determined possibility or determined impossibility", and the simple revolutionaries of the Aleksandrovsk Congress were flushed with victory and filled with the vista of their community of free associations spreading ever wider, over the whole Ukraine, over Soviet Russia, over the West.

At the final session delegates were invited to raise any questions they wished, not excluding grievances or complaints against the Insurgent Army. One delegate pointed out the unsatisfactory state of the medical arrangements; a commission

was appointed to enquire and to suggest means of improvement. Another, after some hesitation, complained of irregularities on the part of the Makhnovite *razvedka*; again a commission was appointed. A third speaker went so far as to complain against no less a person than the commandant of Insurgent troops in Aleksandrovska, one Klein, who after pasting the town with notices demanding sobriety, had himself got publicly and riotously drunk. A message was sent to ask Klein to appear before the Congress. Those who knew Klein's forceful and violent personality felt anxious. But when Klein arrived he at once confessed to the charge and expressed his regrets. He was, he said in mitigation, a simple soldier; an administrative post in a town made him bored and frustrated; he wished to go back to the front. The Congress accepted this explanation, and passed a resolution requesting the Makhnovite staff to transfer Klein to a combatant post.⁴⁰

The Makhnovites implemented their promises of freedom of the Press, and soon after their capture of Ekaterinoslav a number of papers began to appear, including organs of Right S.R.s, Left S.R.s and Bolsheviks (*Zvezda*). The only restriction was in the military field: all papers had to follow the communiqués of the Makhnovite *Put k Svobode*. But while expression was free "the preparation or organization of enforcement on the masses of any régime affecting their complete freedom" was forbidden. Any serious work by the local Bolshevik cells had thus to be conducted conspiratorially.

That such work was in fact undertaken we know from the record of one Miroshesky,⁴¹ a Communist Party official sent to Ekaterinoslav shortly before the Insurgent Army arrived. Underground work was based on the editorial office of *Zvezda*. The task was twofold: to work on "neutral" industrial workers and win them over to the Soviet cause, and to split the Makhnovites. The policy of instigating class struggle in the villages, of setting the poor peasants against the kulaks was being vigorously and not unsuccessfully pursued in Soviet Russia, and it was for the little group of Bolsheviks in Ekaterinoslav to prepare the ground, not only in the surrounding villages but also in the ranks of the Insurgent Army. Some progress was made: secret Bolshevik cells were formed in the Insurgent Iron Division, and the Divisional Commander himself, Polonsky, was won over. But the Makhnovite *razvedka* discovered what was happening

⁴⁰ Arshinov, op. cit. pp. 146-147 Kubanin, op. cit. pp. 91-96

Voline, op. cit. pp. 604-619

⁴¹ Miroshesky, V. in *Proletarskaya Revolyutsiya*, Vol. 9 (1922) pp. 197-206

and Polonsky and others were arrested. The Bolsheviks instigated an appeal for their trial in open court. This was refused and all were summarily shot. It was the first serious case of treachery that the Makhnovite movement had experienced.

Altogether Makhno's brief stay in the provincial capital was an unhappy one. His hold on the town remained precarious: the Whites were still on the opposite bank of the Dnieper and the town was intermittently shelled by their artillery. The project of a Second General Congress had to be abandoned. The town remained throughout under the control of the officer commanding the troops and the *razvedka*. Only negligible progress was made with the formation of free associations. But the main feature of the occupation was the full impact of the typhus epidemic upon troops and civilians alike. Makhno himself was soon to fall sick of it. Doctors were pressed into service and desperate attempts were made to organize hospitals: but survivors had nightmare stories to tell of the filth, confusion, lack of medicines and equipment, and appalling death-rate. On the approach of the retreating White armies from the north it was decided to evacuate.⁴²

Makhnovite apologists like Arshinov and Voline are extremely sensitive to Bolshevik jibes that neither in Ekaterinoslav nor anywhere else did the movement show any constructive achievement. Their answer is that they never had time for it: they were always being forced out of their centres by some greatly superior enemy army. Military considerations were paramount, and often incompatible with civilian aspirations: Voline, with his strict Anarchist conscience, went so far as to lay down that "Every army, of any kind, is an evil."⁴³

As we have seen, the movement now included some Anarchist intellectuals. Arshinov had arrived early in 1919 and started the newspaper *Put k Svobode*. In June the Federation of Anarchist Organizations in the Ukraine, much harried by the Bolsheviks, had decided to shift their headquarters to Makhno's area. This coincided with the Bolshevik break with Makhno and with Denikin's summer advance. Voline did not reach Makhno till August, and some of his colleagues never got through at all. Of those that did succeed in arriving only Voline and Arshinov remained loyal to Makhno to the end; the others, after a few months, found it impossible to reconcile Anarchist theory with partisan practice and left him. But for a time at least the weekly journal *Nabat*, the most important Anarchist organ in the

⁴² Arshinov, op. cit. p. 156
Kubanin, op. cit. pp. 190-191

⁴³ Voline, op. cit. p. 679
Arshinov, op. cit. p. 241

Ukraine, was edited at the Insurgent headquarters and the new arrivals did much to improve the quality of the Makhnovite papers and leaflets.

In one or two areas some progress was made towards the establishment of schools. The aim was to put into practice the educational ideas of the Spanish Anarchist, Francisco Ferrer. Schools were to be the possession of the toiling masses themselves and to be entirely independent of any influence from Church or State. Teachers were to receive their livelihood from the communities they served. We hear of commissions being appointed, who were to work out plans. There is no available evidence to show whether such schools actually started to function.⁴⁴

Makhnovite opposition to any form of racial or national discrimination was frequently and clearly expressed. The Petlurists were opposed because they were bourgeois. Makhnovite ideas on Ukrainian independence were defined by the Revolutionary Military Soviet in a declaration of October 1919: independence meant the free association of workers and peasants, and had nothing to do with "independence of a nationalistic type". Jews held leading positions in the movement throughout its existence, and anti-Semitism was regularly denounced in orders and proclamations and in articles in *Put k Svobode*. Some anti-Semitism of course persisted, but cases of ill treatment or of incitement against Jews were on occasion severely punished. We hear of Makhno himself shooting a partisan of long service who had chalked up a notice: "Defend the Revolution! Long Live Makhno! Down with the Jews."⁴⁵

The Makhnovite attitude to the administration of justice was laid down in a declaration of the Gulyai-Polye Congress of February 1919: "On the question of the need to organize a judicial administrative apparatus we suggest as a basic principle that any rigid permanent court and police machinery and any definitive codification of laws constitute infringements of the population's rights of self defence . . . True justice cannot be administratively organized but must come as a living, free, creative act of the community . . . Law and order must be upheld by the living force of the local community, and must not be left to police specialists".⁴⁶

It seems irrelevant to argue the question of Makhnovite capacity for constructive achievement. Many of their ideas made sense to Ukrainian peasants whose one political obsession was

⁴⁴ Arshinov, op. cit. pp. 176-177 Voline, op. cit. pp. 637-638

⁴⁵ Arshinov, op. cit. pp. 203-208

⁴⁶ Kubanin, op. cit. p. 115

to be rid of any outside interference. Most of their ideas make nonsense when applied to any larger or more developed administrative unit. If left to themselves, Makhno and his advisers might, by trial and error, have so modified their ideas so as to make possible some more or less workable social order. But they had too many enemies and were always on the run. They had no constitutional apparatus. Their supreme authority was the Congress, but they were often chased out of their centres before the Congress sessions could be held. The Revolutionary Military Soviet was merely the instrument of the Congress, and in point of fact the R.M.S. was largely ignored by the military staff. In the emotional and physical circumstances of the time *Makhnovshchina* could not be an organized political movement. It was an army—an outstanding partisan army—with great powers of arousing peasant enthusiasm and a number of rather muddled ideas.

(xiii)

There were very wide fluctuations in the numerical strength of the Insurgent Army. The peak period was late 1919 when Makhno's prestige was at its highest and when he had a very wide area from which to draw recruits. Soviet estimates at this period vary from 40,000 infantry and 15,000 cavalry to 14,000 infantry, 6,000 cavalry, 5,000 gunners and machine-gunners: Makhno then possessed 48 field guns, 4 armoured trains, 4 armoured cars and 1,000 machine-guns. In any case his force represented at least the same effective fighting strength as an average Soviet army on the Southern Front.⁴⁷

No posts of command were held by former Tsarist officers, or by anyone of middle- or upper-class birth. Voline lists thirteen of Makhno's principal subordinate commanders, of whom eleven were peasants and two workers. A similar list of eighteen given by Arshinov breaks down into fourteen peasants, three workers and one village school-teacher.⁴⁸ Voline gives the racial composition of the Army as 85 per cent Ukrainian, 8 per cent Great Russian and the remainder Jews, Greeks, Tartars and Germans from the southern Ukraine.⁴⁹ It is agreed that a high proportion of both officers and men came from Gulyai-Polye and the surrounding areas. The main weapons were sawn-off

⁴⁷ Kubanin, op. cit. pp. 162, 174

⁴⁸ Voline, op. cit. pp. 664-667 Arshinov, op. cit. pp. 221-227

⁴⁹ Voline, op. cit. p. 677

rifles and machine-guns—the latter for the most part mounted on *tachankas*. Dress was very variegated. A man would wear what he had till he could take something better. At Ekaterinoslav Miroshevsky saw many insurgents dressed in British uniforms captured from the Whites. He noted that morale at that time was high and bellicose: the men were determined to liquidate Denikin, then to liquidate the Moscow Commissars, and then march westwards against the European bourgeois.⁵⁰ The Insurgents were pitiless fighters and gave no quarter to the Whites, unless there was reason to believe that the prisoners were willing to change sides. There were incessant orders against looting and drunkenness, and intermittent drastic punishments: a Brigade Commander was shot for looting in October 1919 and a Regimental Commander in the summer of 1920. But the trouble was never eradicated: the peasant insurgents had been brought up to regard townsmen as their enemies and conceived it their right to take what they wanted from towns.

The Army was organized into divisions of three brigades, with three regiments to a brigade and three battalions to a regiment. Each unit had a Political Commissar, elected by the rank and file. Makhno nominated the officers commanding independently operating task forces. Other commanders were sometimes elected, sometimes nominated. Makhno retained the right to annul an election if he disapproved of the candidate selected: at the same time, if a unit was dissatisfied with a nominated commander the man was usually transferred. In late 1919 in the war against Denikin the Army operated mostly as a whole; in 1920 the circumstances of the fighting against the Bolsheviks brought about an increasing tendency to detach independent task forces; when these had completed their mission they would return to a given rendezvous, or await further orders by courier.

The enforcement of discipline was a matter of ever-recurring difficulty, in particular the problem of how to make units obey unwelcome orders. Here of course the personality of the commanding officer was of enormous importance: Makhno issued an order in December 1919 laying the blame for certain lapses upon the commanders. There were cases in which units were punished for disobeying orders by having their horses and arms taken from them. Regimental and battalion mass meetings played a certain role. We hear of a regimental meeting which passed a resolution against all card playing and against the issue of hard liquor either to partisans or to their commanding

⁵⁰ *Prolet. Rev.* Vol. 9 (1922) pp. 200-204

officers. The same meeting passed a resolution that all orders must be obeyed provided that the commanding officer was sober at the time of giving it.⁵¹

Makhno must have shown remarkable judgement in his selection of his subordinate commanders. The qualifications were exacting. Apart from acquiring and keeping the absolute confidence of their troops they needed initiative, resource, flexibility and indefatigable physical toughness. Speed and surprise were the essence of Makhnovite tactics. Infantry were carried in carts and both infantry and cavalry could move at twice the speed of regular army troops. Makhno would seize every opportunity of getting behind his enemy. If attacked he would retreat, leave a small unit in front of the enemy to act as decoy, pass his main body round the flanks, and counter-attack from the rear. The partisans made use of every trick that peasant cunning could devise—ambushes, use of enemy uniforms, pretended surrenders. If surrounded with no chance of a break-out a unit would bury its arms and stores and disappear, as peasants, into the surrounding villages, waiting to re-form as soon as the enemy had passed on. At the peak of Makhno's hold on village loyalties it was almost impossible for the enemy to locate Insurgent formations: the peasants would not talk. Intelligence and communications were comparatively simple matters for the Insurgents.

Though the question of supply was always appearing on the agenda of Makhnovite Congresses it does not appear that any serious attempt was made to establish an organized supply department. There is no record of the setting-up of repair shops or S.A.A. factories as was done by the Red Army, and even by most of the partisan movements in Siberia. For one thing the Insurgents were too frequently on the run; for another, small amateur workshops could have done nothing to make good the enormous wastage of small arms and ammunition. In the course of his career Makhno captured huge quantities of stores of all kinds from his various enemies. Much was distributed to the local villagers. Of the rest Makhno's habit was to bury, in great secrecy, such arms as it was not feasible or convenient to carry away. Later on the Bolsheviks dug up a number of these caches. We also hear of Makhno burying gold. Food and horses were provided by the villages. One secret of Makhnovite speed was that his men could always exchange tired horses for fresh ones *en route*. Later on, when the incessant passage of fighting bands and armies had drained the Ukrainian villages of their re-

⁵¹ Kubanin, *op. cit.* pp. 183-184

sources, the question of food and horses became more difficult. Throughout their campaigns the Makhnovites showed extreme concern for their sick and wounded, and long trains of carts of wounded and typhus cases followed the main body of the Army: but their circumstances allowed no opportunity for the setting up of any effective medical service.⁵²

Of the Makhnovite security services—the *Razvedka* and the *Kommissiya Protivmakhnovskikh Del*—we know very little. Their excesses were violently arraigned by the Bolsheviks, and Kubanin cites them as proof of Makhnovite hypocrisy in vilifying the Cheka. Makhno's later campaigns are among the most vindictive and bloody in history, and in the circumstances one can safely assume that these services were responsible for frequent injustices and atrocities. Voline is witness to the fact that they were under no effective control.⁵³ But, like their opposite numbers the Cheka, they seem to have been not unsuccessful in carrying out the task which they were set.

(xiv)

Makhno himself at the height of his power retained many of the characteristics of the young man who, three years before, had come home from the Butyrka Prison to make the Ukrainian revolution a reality. He retained his remarkable physical vitality. In spite of his lung affection and the aftermath of typhus and many wounds he could outride and outwork any of his colleagues. He would never go to bed till the task he had set himself was finished, and two hours later he would be tapping at the windows of his sleeping staff to bring them back to their work. He lived like a peasant himself and was always accessible to his peasants. He would always make time to talk to peasants, drink with them, take a hand with a flail. He would book the date two weeks in advance for a village wedding. Hence his enormous popularity. It was said that some of his subordinates, Kurilenko in particular, were at least as good soldiers and probably better administrators than Makhno: but no one could carry the countryside as he could.

He became increasingly engrossed in military matters, and it was harder and harder to keep him away from the front line when military operations were in progress. When sick or severely wounded he insisted on being carried in a cart with the front troops till he was well enough to ride a horse again.

⁵² Ibid. pp. 172-173, 189⁵³ Voline, op. cit. p. 683

He was daring, persistent and resourceful; whatever the crisis that faced him he was never nervy or panicky. Nerves only became apparent in his office. As time went on he grew impatient of administrative details, and also of the theoretical disquisitions of his articulate Anarchist friends. He could not be bothered with the wordy resolutions of the Revolutionary Military Soviet. Voline in his deposition when in Bolshevik hands wrote that "Makhno's personal attitude to the R.M.S. was partly to ignore it". The *Nabat* Anarchists who left him in 1920 carried a resolution at their conference later that year to the effect that "Bat'ka Makhno, as leader of the Makhnovshchina, while possessing many valuable revolutionary qualities, belongs, unfortunately, to that class of person who cannot always subordinate their personal caprices to the good of the movement." Voline in later years was to say of him that "he had no theoretical or historical political knowledge; he was thus unable to make the necessary revolutionary generalizations and deductions". Arshinov makes the same complaint.

Makhno was a heavy drinker, increasingly so as time went on. Kubanin quotes a number of extracts from the diary of his "wife", Fedora Gaenko (which was alleged to have been captured by the Red Army and preserved in the archives at Kharkov), giving instances of his drunkenness. Arshinov disputes the diary's authenticity, pointing out that his legal wife, Galina Andreevna (who escaped abroad with him), neither kept nor lost a diary. There is however plenty of independent evidence of his drinking habits. Voline considers the influence of alcohol to have been deplorable. "It had little effect on his physical constitution. But alcohol made him ill-disposed, bad tempered, excitable, unjust, intractable, violent. How often during my time with the Army I was in a state of despair when I left him, having been able to get no sense out of the man because of his abnormal state. Indeed at certain periods it almost became his normal state." Voline goes on: "The second failing of Makhno and of many of his close associates was their attitude towards women. These men, especially when intoxicated, could not refrain from behaviour that was improper—disgusting would often be the correct adjective—amounting almost to orgies in which certain women were obliged to participate."⁵⁴

Makhno became less and less inclined to take advice. As he became increasingly dictatorial he developed a false sense of security. His decisions were capricious, made on the spur of

⁵⁴ Voline, op. cit. pp. 681-683

the moment. He refused to think things out or to calculate possible future developments. It would have been easy to foretell the Bolshevik attack at the beginning of 1920, and their second attack at the end of that year. But in neither case did Makhno make any counter-preparations.

(xv)

The Red Army captured Kharkov and Kiev in December 1919. They marched into Ekaterinoslav a month after Makhno withdrew. A few weeks later they took Tsaritsyn and Rostov. The Whites were decisively beaten: by the end of March they had been driven into the Crimea, and Denikin was about to hand over to Wrangel.

The Red Army advance guard first contacted the Makhnovite Army in Aleksandrovsk in December. Relations at first again were friendly: there was a sense of solidarity in the victories over the Whites, and there were fraternal meetings and greetings. But shortly afterwards, at the turn of the year, the headquarters of the Fourteenth Red Army (under Voroshilov) sent Makhno formal instructions that he should proceed with the whole of his Army to take up positions on the Polish frontier. It is true that there were military reasons for reinforcing this sector, though the Polish war was not to break out for another five months. But it is admitted on the Soviet side that this order was primarily "dictated by the necessity" of liquidating *Makhnovschina* as an independent movement. Only when he was far removed from his home country would it be possible to counteract his influence, and to split up and integrate his partisans into various Red Army formations.

There were other occasions (notably in Siberia) of the Soviet authorities solving the problem of difficult partisan leaders by sending them off to fight on distant fronts. Makhno and his staff, however, were perfectly aware of the underlying Soviet motives. A reasoned reply was sent to the Fourteenth Army: the Insurgent Army, more revolutionary than any other army, would stay in the Ukraine where it belonged; the proposed transfer to the Polish frontier was pointless, and in any case impossible until the typhus had abated. At the same time an appeal was made, over the heads of the Red Command, to the Red Army rank and file that they should not be party to this "provocation". There was no immediate response from the Bolshevik side. But in mid-January the Central Committee

of the Ukrainian Communist Party declared Makhno and his force to be outside the law, and the Red Army attacked. There followed eight months of the most savage fighting in which the Makhnovites were ever engaged.⁵⁵

In their new campaign to assimilate the southern Ukraine the Bolsheviks were in a far stronger position than they had been in the spring. With Denikin beaten and the Polish war not yet started they had far more troops at their disposal. Trotsky's reconditioning of the Red Army had had time to take effect. Subsidiary services, not least the Cheka, had been re-inforced and improved. Experience of the White Armies had made the peasants less hostile towards the Reds, and the Soviet Government were now in a better position to work to a set policy rather than on a series of hasty improvisations. In February regulations were passed to assure a further distribution of land to the poorer peasants, and within a few months the unpopular State farms had been cut down by half in numbers and by two-thirds in acreage. More land was taken from the richer peasants and handed over to the poorer. An intensified drive was undertaken to split the peasantry and to secure the active co-operation of the *bednyaks* against the kulaks.

The war of 1920 was not a war of large-scale battles. There were a few engagements, and Gulyai-Polye changed hands several times with considerable bloodshed. Insurgent strength at this period was certainly less than in late 1919, and Makhno's offensives were necessarily confined to surprise attacks on isolated Red formations. The Bolshevik objective was twofold—to round up Makhno, and to eradicate his influence in the countryside. In the first they failed; in the second by weight of numbers and consistent ruthlessness they achieved a partial success. One of the first Makhnovite casualties was Voline: he was lying sick with typhus when overrun by the Reds and sent back to prison in Moscow.

On the occupation of a village by the Red Army the Cheka would hunt out and hang all active Makhnovite supporters; an amenable Soviet would be set up; officials would be appointed or imported to organize the poor peasants and to arrange for the deliveries of produce; and three or four Red militia men left as armed support for the new village bosses. This method did not always work. Though the Sovkhoz system had been appreciably modified, War Communism remained. There were

⁵⁵ Arshinov, op. cit. pp. 157-158 Kubanin, op. cit. pp. 123-124
Voline, op. cit. pp. 623-624

requisitions, mobilization and forced labour. The enforced deliveries of produce were harsh, haphazard and bitterly resented. Peasant obstruction and resentment again came into play. Newly appointed members of Soviets (and even of poor peasant committees) would sometimes reveal themselves as kulaks. Bolshevik nominees would be murdered, driven out, or terrorized into refraining from carrying out their jobs. At any moment a Makhnovite band might appear, out of the blue, and all the new bosses would be rounded up and shot.

It is impossible to estimate the casualties involved. Voline and Arshinov give a figure of 200,000 peasants killed by the Reds—a large proportion being Cheka executions. The Makhnovites killed all Bolshevik Party activists they could catch, all Cheka and Militia members, and all officials of forced delivery and poor peasant organizations. In the military operations the Bolsheviks shot all prisoners. The Makhnovites shot all captured officers unless the Red rank and file strongly interceded for them. The rank and file were usually sent home, though a number volunteered for service with the Insurgents. Red Army reports complain of poor morale; certain Red commanders and political commissars were arrested for the unsatisfactory showing of their units. It is certain that numbers of the Red Army rank and file had little heart in this particular phase of the civil war. The Reds used a number of Lettish and Chinese troops to decrease the risk of fraternization.

The outbreak of the Polish War did not cause a serious depletion of the Red Army in the southern Ukraine. Red superiority in numbers continued to be overwhelming. Makhno and his main body were pursued hither and thither across the country. On occasion he was brought to fight and was beaten; but always he would elude his opponent, reform and reappear to strike a blow when least expected. We hear of his capturing half a battery, a supply train, a whole Red infantry regiment. All the resources of Bolshevik propaganda and misinformation were called into play. There were frequent reports of his death or capture. The Cheka staged further abortive attempts to assassinate him.

However, Bolshevik strength and methods began to tell. Makhno was appreciably weaker in the late summer of 1920 than he had been in the spring. The successive occupation of village after village by the Red Army and the Cheka meant the successive elimination (or terrorization) of all anti-Bolshevik activists. Furthermore, the continued years of fighting and requisitions had left the villagers exhausted and destitute.

They wanted peace, any sort of peace. They had no supplies or horses left for even the much-reduced Makhnovite armies. They had nothing to give, and they resented demands made on them. The question of horses was all-important for Makhno's tactics were based on speed, and speed depended on fresh horses.⁵⁶

(xvi)

As opposed to the Polish War, the Wrangel campaign directly affected the Insurgent Army. Wrangel was determined to make use of any available ally. As early as May 13th 1920 he issued an order that his troops should, where possible, co-ordinate with Makhno and other anti-Bolshevik groups, whereupon Bolshevik papers published allegations of Makhno-Wrangel collaboration. On June 18th the White Command dispatched a couple of emissaries (a colonel and a captain) with formal proposals to Makhno for joint operations against the Reds. The matter was considered at a meeting of the Insurgent Command on July 9th: the colonel was shot and the captain hanged with a placard bearing the legend "There never was and never will be any association on the part of Makhno with White-Guardists, and if any other White Headquarters wish to send a further envoy he will meet with the same fate as this one." Makhno issued a proclamation stating what he had done, as refutation of Bolshevik slanders.

It is agreed that the initiative for joint action against Wrangel came from the Makhnovites. Proposals to this end were telegraphed by Makhno to Kharkov and Moscow in July and again in August. Soviet historians suggest that Makhno was forced to make this approach by the pressure of general peasant opinion; and Arshinov makes the rather significant remark that if Makhno had to choose between Wrangel and the Bolsheviks the important factor was that the Bolsheviks had lied to them and cheated them, but the main enemy of the masses was still Wrangel.⁵⁷ Kubanin suggests that Makhno's aims in making the approach were firstly to ensure the defeat of Wrangel, and secondly to have the chance to infiltrate into the Red Army,

⁵⁶ Arshinov, op. cit. pp. 159-164 Kubanin, op. cit. pp. 124-147

Voline, op. cit. pp. 626-627

⁵⁷ *Grazhdanskaya Voina 1918-1921 gg.* (edited Bubnov and others, Moscow 1928-1930) Vol. III, p. 511

Arshinov, op. cit. pp. 169-170

and subvert and win over an appreciable portion of the Red troops.⁵⁸ The second point may be true. But by this time Makhno was less than ever inclined to work out a long-term programme; he may just have blindly relied on his luck. In any case, it is certain he would have run any risk in order to annihilate Wrangel. He remained to the end the implacable enemy of the Whites.

Makhno's approach to the Reds was left unanswered till September. Then Wrangel staged his big offensive: Berdyansk was overrun, then Gulyai-Polye, Aleksandrovska Sinelnikovo and Ekaterinoslav. Towards the end of the month a Bolshevik representative arrived at Makhnovite headquarters: then two Makhnovite delegates were sent to Kharkov and an agreement was negotiated between October 10th and 15th.

The agreement was in two parts, military and political. The Military Section contained four clauses. (i) The Insurgent Army would retain its own internal organization, but would be subordinate operationally to the Red Higher Command. (ii) The Insurgent Army would not recruit or accept as volunteers any Red Army deserters. (iii) Makhno was to issue a signed proclamation to be published and distributed by the Soviet authorities, calling upon the population to take no action detrimental to the Red Army or to the Soviet Government. (iv) The families of members of the Insurgent Army living in Soviet-held areas were to enjoy the same rights as Red Army families.

The Political Section contained three clauses. (i) All Makhnovites and all Anarchists under arrest in Soviet hands were to be set free forthwith. (ii) Makhnovites and Anarchists were to have full liberty of expression, subject to the requirements of military censorship and provided that nothing was expressed that tended towards the overthrow of Soviet Power. The Soviet authorities would provide Makhnovites and Anarchists with technical facilities for the expression of their views. (iii) Makhnovites and Anarchists were to enjoy full rights of participation in elections to local Soviets, including the right to be elected. They were to have the right to participate in the organization of the forthcoming Fifth All-Ukrainian Congress of Soviets.

There was, in addition, a fourth clause in the Political Section, which occasioned a great deal of argument, and which the Bolshevik negotiators refused to sign, but referred back to their higher authorities. It was to the effect that in areas

⁵⁸ Kubanin, *op. cit.* p. 153

occupied by the Insurgent Army the population was to create and maintain its own free and autonomous social and economic order—these areas subsequently to be federated with Soviet Russia by means of agreements to be freely negotiated with the appropriate Soviet Government organs.⁵⁹

The Makhnovites pressed for the full agreement to be published at once. The Military Section appeared in the Bolshevik papers fairly promptly, but the Political Section only after some delay. Nothing more came of the draft fourth political clause which, as Kubanin points out, was obviously quite unacceptable to the Bolsheviks. But an official Soviet communiqué was issued to the effect that Makhno had never helped Wrangel and that allegations that he had done so had been untrue. And a start was made with the implementation of the rest of the Political Section. A number of Makhnovites and Anarchists in Soviet prisons were in fact released. These included Voline, who came to Kharkov, started up *Nabat* again and made preparations for another Anarchist conference to be held in Kharkov at the end of the year.

The Bolsheviks obviously felt these measures necessary in order to ensure the full co-operation of the Makhnovite Army. They did not underestimate Wrangel and they wished to rally all the resources available for what might prove to be a hard and prolonged campaign. A Soviet historian writes that the agreement with Makhno was “justified by the strategic conditions”.⁶⁰ But, as Kubanin states flatly, there was never the slightest intention on the Bolshevik side of keeping to the agreement once its military value had passed.⁶¹ Months later, when Voline was in prison again, he was told by his Cheka interrogator: “When we had need of Makhno we knew how to make use of him, and when we no longer had need, when in fact he was becoming a nuisance, we knew how to get rid of him once and for all.”⁶²

It would be idle to pretend that there was good faith on the Makhnovite side. They were all perfectly aware that a further clash would come, and they were determined that their own ideas, and not the Bolsheviks', should in the end prevail. But they do not seem to have made any practical plans. The loudly voiced Bolshevik accusations of treachery may well be justified on the score of ultimate intention, but not on the

⁵⁹ Arshinov, op. cit. pp. 171-173 Voline, op. cit. pp. 631-633

Kubanin, op. cit. pp. 157-158

⁶⁰ *Grazhdanskaya Voina*, Vol. III, p. 512 ⁶¹ Kubanin, op. cit. p. 650

⁶² Voline, op. cit. p. 650

score of serious conspiratorial work. Makhnovite hopes seem to have laid on a crescendo of popular feeling in their favour both in the villages and in the rank and file of the Red Army. But this needed time, and events moved much too fast for them.

Makhno did not on this occasion accompany his units to the front. He went back to Gulyai-Polye—his first chance of returning home in any security after nine months of hard fighting. With him went his headquarters staff and some 3,000 Insurgents.

The Red Army counter-offensive against Wrangel was spectacular in its speed and success. By early November the Whites had been driven off the mainland and the Perekop positions defending the Crimea had been forced. In mid-November news reached Gulyai-Polye that the Red Army, together with some Insurgent units under Karetnik, were marching on Simferopol; and a member of Makhno's staff remarked: "This is the end of the agreement. Within a week the Bolsheviks will be attacking us."

The importance that the Bolsheviks attached to Makhno is evidenced by the scope, the speed, the thoroughness and the secrecy of the preparations they made for his liquidation. (Voline, on seemingly good authority, reproduces copies of telegrams showing Lenin's personal interest.) On November 23rd nine Bolshevik security service agents were captured by the *Razvedka* in Gulai-Polye. They confessed under interrogation that they had been sent by the commander of the 42nd (Red Army) Division, with the assignment to locate and watch the place of residence and movements of Makhno and his principal officers: they were to remain there till the arrival of the Red Army which was expected in a couple of days. Makhno's Chief of Staff contacted Kharkov on the direct telegraph line, made a strong protest and demanded the arrest of the O.C. 42nd Division and any others responsible. Kharkov replied that there must be some misunderstanding: they would institute enquiries. In a further telegraphic conversation a day or two later Kharkov promised that the incident would be settled to Makhnovite satisfaction. When pressed on the matter of Clause 4 of the Political Agreement (the Makhnovites were impatiently awaiting its approval by Moscow), Kharkov replied that here too a satisfactory solution was imminent.

In Kharkov on November 25th Voline secured an interview with Rakovsky, head of the Ukrainian Soviet Government. There had been some police persecution of *Nabat* readers,

contrary to the agreement of October. Voline also pressed for a speedy approval of Clause 4. Rakovsky promised early satisfaction on both counts. That night Voline, together with other Anarchists, was arrested and *Nabat* suppressed. The Makhnovite negotiators of the October Agreement, who were staying on in Kharkov pending settlement of Clause 4, were seized, removed to Moscow and there executed.

At Red Army Headquarters at Melitpol on November 23rd Frunze signed Order 00149 requiring complete integration in the Red Army of all Insurgent units. This order was not made public till mid-December. On the 25th or 26th the commander of the Makhnovite forces in the Crimea was invited to a Red Army command post where he was seized and shot. The Makhnovite units were surrounded, but 250 cavalry broke through and eventually joined up with Makhno.

On November 26th the Red Army attacked Gulyai-Polye in force.⁶³ Makhno was completely surrounded. But he fought his way out of the village, collected some reinforcements, counter-attacked and recaptured the village. In this engagement the 42nd Red Army Division was routed, losing (according to Arshinov) 6,000 prisoners, of whom 2,000 agreed to serve under Makhno and the rest sent to their homes. Three days later Makhno defeated two further Red divisions, again with a huge haul of prisoners of whom a large proportion volunteered to join him. This development caused serious concern to the Red Army authorities, and a special catchment corps was organized, with firing squads, to pick up stragglers and prevent news spreading. For a few days there was considerable optimism at Makhnovite headquarters: it was felt that all that was needed was another victory or two and the war against the Bolsheviks would be won. But the Red Army continued to bring up further reinforcements: twice again the Insurgent Army was encircled and had to fight its way out, and each time the victory was more dearly won. Reports brought by peasants made it apparent that no less than four Red Army Corps were being assembled. At a meeting of the Soviet of Revolutionary Insurgents it was agreed that there was no prospect of being able to hold the Gulyai-Polye area, and the Makhnovite Army retreated northwards.

It was an extremely severe winter. The Red Army held all important road junctions in force, and for the most part the

⁶³ Arshinov, op. cit. pp. 180-189 Kubanin, op. cit. pp. 159, 213

Voline, op. cit. pp. 639-648

Voline: *Nineteen Seventeen* (London 1954) p. 158

Insurgents moved over the frozen fields. Up north, not far from Kiev, they had to abandon their artillery and heavy baggage in the snow. In the following eight months of almost continuous fighting Makhno covered the whole of the Ukraine. From the Kiev province he struck east, skirting Poltava, Kursk and Kharkov. It was at this period that, a thousand miles to the north, the Kronstadt sailors were fighting under slogans somewhat similar to his own; but we do not know whether news of Kronstadt ever reached him. He was badly wounded and when, in early March, he came south again he had to be carried in a cart. He passed through the Gulyai-Polye area, reached the Black Sea coast and turned east along the Sea of Azov. On his way north again he was wounded once more near Gulyai-Polye; but was sufficiently recovered to ride a horse at the rendezvous of his troops he had fixed for April in the Poltava province.

In 1921 the Soviet Armies were still on a war footing, and there was no external enemy. The whole of the military machine in south Russia was available for the elimination of Makhno, and for the support of the State and Party organizations and Cheka in their work on the integration of the Ukrainian villages. It was the story of 1920 all over again, but this time with the scales weighted far more heavily on the side of the Soviet Power. It is remarkable too that, in spite of the introduction, in early 1921, of the N.E.P. measures to remove most of the peasants' grievances, Red Army reports should still complain of the support afforded to Makhno by the villagers.

Arshinov reproduces a letter written later by Makhno to a friend in which he describes the "nightmare" of those last few months. There were victories; more often than not he got the better of his brushes with the Bolsheviks. Now and then he captured a small town, when his first move would be to seize the local printing press and run off leaflets demanding free Soviets. There were moments of encouragement, as when a delegation of Chernigov peasants came to one of his columns to offer their support. But in the unequal struggle his resources progressively dwindled. He himself in this last period was wounded six times, twice seriously. Of the thirteen principal subordinate commanders listed by Voline (who included Makhno's closest personal friends), four were dead before the final break with the Bolsheviks in November 1920. During the next six months Makhno lost all the nine survivors: two were seized and shot in the Crimea; two were taken prisoner—their subsequent fate unknown; one was executed by the Cheka and

the remaining four killed in battle. Casualties among the rank and file were very heavy.

Owing to the intensity of the pursuit and the difficulties of supply it became necessary to operate in ever smaller units. Small detachments were sent off to operate independently—and mostly disappeared. In early August Makhno realized he could do no more, and on August 13th he crossed the Dnieper for the last time, between Orlik and Kremenchug, making for the West. On the 16th he was cornered by the Reds but fought his way out, capturing thirteen Maxims and three Lewis guns. His own losses were seventeen men. There was another battle on the 22nd when he was hit again, this time badly, and had once more to be carried on a cart. On the 26th, almost in sight of the frontier, there was a final engagement. On the evening of the 28th the survivors, numbering two hundred and fifty men, crossed the Dnieper into Roumania.⁶⁴

(xvii)

Arshinov did not accompany Makhno to Roumania. He went back to the Anarchist undergrounds of the Ukraine and Great Russia where he wrote his book. In due course the manuscript was smuggled out for publication in Berlin.

Voline meanwhile was lodged in the Taganka Prison in Moscow. In the summer of 1921 he staged a hunger strike which came to the knowledge of an international Red Trades Union Congress then in session in Moscow. French and Spanish Anarchist delegates made representations on his behalf, in consequence of which the Soviet Government released him and expelled him from Soviet territory.

Makhno and his little force were disarmed and interned by the Roumanians, and there followed a series of acrimonious diplomatic notes from Moscow demanding his extradition. There is reason to believe that the Roumanian authorities connived at his escape across the Polish frontier. Here he was arrested and brought to trial on a charge of "anti-Polish activities" in the Ukraine. He was acquitted, went on to Danzig and was arrested again. All this time international Anarchist organizations had been vocal on his behalf, and he was eventually allowed to move to Paris and settle there.

⁶⁴ Kubanin, *op. cit.* p. 159 Arshinov, *op. cit.* pp. 189-200
Voline, *op. cit.* pp. 651-661

His final period was an unhappy one. He was miserably poor. Before leaving the Ukraine he had dug up one of his hidden stocks of gold, but that was soon spent. His turbulent life had worn him out and his health was broken. He never learned to speak any French. Voline speaks of his "difficulty in adjusting himself to circumstances so very different from his former way of life". He was moody, quarrelsome, subject to fits of extreme depression. He started to work on his memoirs and Voline attempted to help set in order his illiterate manuscript. A first volume was completed and issued during his lifetime, but then he quarrelled with Voline, and two further parts, edited by Voline, appeared only after his death. He died in 1935 and his ashes were buried in the Père Lachaise Cemetery.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Arshinov, *op. cit.* pp. 253-258 Voline, *op. cit.* pp. 7-11, 669

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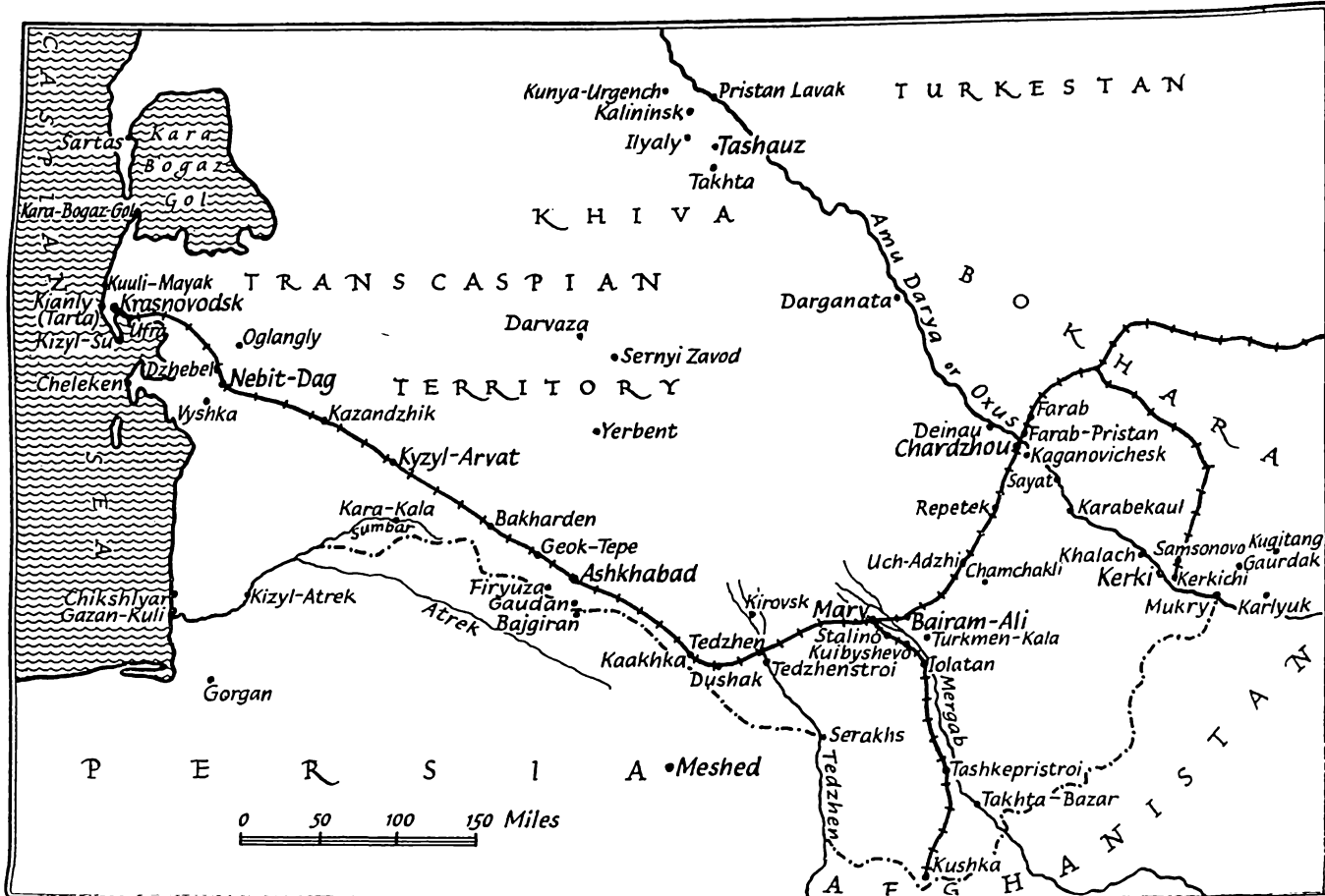
OPERATIONS IN TRASCASPIA
1918-1919
& THE 26 COMMISSARS CASE

The year 1917 had been a most unfavourable one for the Allies. The losses during the Somme battles in the autumn of 1916, and in the fighting at Ypres and Passchendaele in the summer of 1917 placed a severe strain on British and French manpower. There had been mutiny in the French Army. Italy had suffered a severe setback, and the entry of Roumania coinciding with the beginning of the Russian collapse was quickly followed by the occupation of Bucharest and Constanza by the German Army.

On the extended Eastern fronts some progress had been made against the Turks in Syria and Mesopotamia. The capture of Baghdad by a British-Indian force to some extent retrieved the disaster at Kut some months previously. But Turkey remained a force to be reckoned with. Turkish pan-Turanian and pan-Islamic propaganda was not without effect in Persia, Afghanistan and even in northern India, and contributed, more than was realized at the time, to developments in the Caucasus and Russian Central Asia.

The immediate effect of the October revolution was the disintegration of the Russian Army. By the time a formal armistice with Germany had been signed early in December, no effective Russian force remained on any front. German and Austrian armies were shortly to occupy the Ukraine and penetrate into the Caucasus. The Russians had withdrawn from Kars and other points on the Caucasian front, and were being withdrawn from Persia, where a force under General Baratov had been operating on the right flank of the British army in Mesopotamia. In N.E. Persia, a Russian Cossack force which had shared with Indian troops the task of screening the Afghan-Persian frontier was also withdrawn.

The Turks made no secret of their intention to advance through the Caucasus and Persian Azerbaijan to the Caspian and beyond. General Nuri Pasha, a half-brother of Enver Pasha, had been appointed to the command of a newly formed "Army of Islam", the object of which was to seize Azerbaijan and the Caspian coast of Persia, rally the Moslem population of the Caucasus, Transcaspia and Turkistan, and threaten India from the north and north-west. Central Asia with its large Moslem population, mainly of Turkish stock, seemed to offer a prospect for the realization of Turkey's pan-Turanian plans.



P E R S I A • Meshed

0 50 100 150 Miles

There were also economic factors. The Central Powers were short of oil, cotton, non-ferrous metals and other commodities. Baku oil, Georgian manganese, and Turkistan cotton (accumulated stocks of which were stored at Krasnovodsk and along the Transcaspiian Railway) would inevitably fall into the hands of the Turks and the Germans unless counter-measures were taken. With the Black Sea controlled by the Turks and Germans, and the railways through the Ukraine under German control, the Central Powers would be assured of easy access to these supplies. No resistance to their advance could be expected from the Russians or the population of Transcaucasia; indeed, it appeared likely that the autonomous régimes established in Georgia and Azerbaijan would, if any-thing, facilitate their progress.

Another factor was the existence in Turkistan of some 35,000 Austro-Hungarian and German prisoners of war, who had been freed to fend for themselves by the Tashkent Soviet after the October revolution. Reports reaching the Government of India suggested that these men might become the spearhead of an enemy force threatening India through Persia and Afghanistan if reorganized by an invading army, possibly by arrangement with the local authorities whose anti-British attitude had already been shown. Many of these prisoners had already been enrolled by the Tashkent Soviet in their Red Guards.¹

II

The decision was therefore taken in January 1918, after consultation between London and the Army Command in India, to send a small force of armoured cars from Baghdad under General Dunsterville through N.W. Persia to the Caspian port of Enzeli, to collaborate with that part of the Cossack force under General Bicharakov which had refused to obey the Soviet order to withdraw from Persia.² The instructions to Dunsterville at that time were to clear the road to the

¹ *Official History of the War (1914-1918) Vol. IV, Mesopotamian Campaign*
 Tod, Col. T. K.: Article in *Army Quarterly*, Vol. XVI, No. 2 (1928)
 Etherton, Lt.-Col. P. T.: *In the heart of Asia* (London 1925)

Brun, Cap. A. H.: *Troublous Times* (London 1931)

² The decision to send General Dunsterville to N.W. Persia and the Caspian was a military one. At that time no definite decision had been arrived at regarding British action in Baku.

Official History of the War (1914-1918) Vol. IV, Mesopotamia Campaign.
 Dunsterville, Maj.-Gen. L. C.: *Dunsterforce* (London 1920)

Caspian to watch developments in the Caucasus, and to establish contact with any who were able and willing to resist the Turkish advance. In February, it was further decided to send small missions to Tashkent via Kashgar, and to Meshed in Persian Khorasan to establish contacts likely to be useful if and when the Turkish armies reached the Caspian.

After some delay, two officers of the Indian Political Department, Lieut.-Colonel Bailey and Major Blacker, arrived in Kashgar, where they came under the orders of the British Consul-General, Sir George Macartney. They did not reach Tashkent until July 1918, by which time there had been a revolt in Transcaspia against the Tashkent Soviet, soon to be followed by an appeal from the new anti-Soviet Government to the British for help. All this was unknown to Bailey and Blacker, who had no means of communicating with India; and it naturally created a most unfavourable atmosphere for negotiating with the Tashkent Soviet on the disposal of German and Austro-Hungarian P.O.W.s, cotton stocks and the Turkish threat to the Central Asian Railway. The Allied landings (in August) in Archangel and Vladivostok made matters worse, and the attitude of the Tashkent Soviet soon became openly hostile. Macartney, who had joined the Mission, returned to Kashgar with Blacker, and Bailey went into hiding until the following year, when he succeeded in making his way, in disguise, through Bokhara to Persia. Bailey's disappearance and the failure of the local Cheka to locate him had caused great concern to the Tashkent Soviet, and had given rise to a number of legends concerning his role in inciting and organizing anti-Russian and anti-Bolshevik revolts throughout Central Asia.³

III

The mission to Meshed under Major-General Malleeson, an Indian Army intelligence officer, arrived at its destination in early July 1918. Meanwhile, Indian troops had taken over the screening duties abandoned by the Russians along the Afghan frontier between Birjand and Meshed. This force, known as the East Persian Cordon, came under Malleeson's command, and was responsible for screening the frontier and stopping the passage of enemy agents.⁴

³ Bailey, Lt.-Col. F. M.: *Mission to Tashkent* (London 1946)

Park, A. G.: *Bolshevism in Turkistan* (New York 1957)

⁴ Enemy agents, both German and Turkish, were active in Kabul at this time. Pan-Turanian and pan-Islamic propaganda was being disseminated by Turkish

The task of Malleon's Mission (some half-dozen officers and a small wireless mobile unit) was to obtain information on developments in Transcaspia and to establish contacts. If the Turks were to occupy Baku and attempt to use the Central Asian Railway from Krasnovodsk to the interior, Malleon, with the help of any friendly local elements, was to do everything possible to render the railway unusable and to prevent the stocks of cotton at Krasnovodsk and along the line from falling into enemy hands.

About the time of the Mission's arrival at Meshed a successful revolt against the Bolshevik-dominated Tashkent Soviet had taken place in Transcaspia. Dissatisfaction had been developing for some time, partly due to Tashkent's high-handed methods, but mainly to the food shortage, following the cutting by General Dutov's Orenburg Cossacks of the railway link with Russia. (The substitution of cotton for wheat cultivation, brought about by the Tsarist régime, had made Turkistan dependent on Russian and Siberian grain.) Bands of the so-called Bas-machi were active in Fergana and elsewhere, and there was serious disaffection among the Tekke Turkmen tribes, both settled and nomad, who formed a large part of the population of the area between Krasnovodsk, Merv and Khiva. The Tekkes bitterly resented interference in their affairs by local Soviets composed mainly of Russians and Armenians. Their leader, Oraz Sirdar (a former Colonel in the Tsarist Army, and son of the defender of Goek Tepe against the Russians in the eighties), was less concerned with pan-Turanian ideas than with the right of self-government for the tribal areas, and the preservation of traditional tribal life.⁵

The tension had come to a head in June 1918, when the Tashkent Soviet, faced with increasing local difficulties and

agents in Persia, and among the Moslem population of Bokhara and Turkistan. Two Indian revolutionary leaders, Mahendra Pratap and Barkatulla, who had spent some time in Berlin during the war, and who had discussed their plans with Lenin in Petrograd, were actively engaged in Tashkent with the encouragement of the local Soviet in anti-British propaganda in Afghanistan and India.

Official History of the War (1914-1918) Vol. IV

Malleon, Maj.-Gen. Sir W. in *Fortnightly Review*, May 1923

⁵ In 1916 a revolt of the Turkmen, Kirghiz and Kazaks took place in Turkistan following a decision by the Tsarist Government to mobilize the native population for labour service at the front. Hitherto they had not been liable for military service.

The revolt was crushed with great severity by General Kuropatkin, the military Governor of Turkistan. Resentment still smouldered among the Moslem population at the time of the revolution and contributed to their desire to achieve an autonomous status within a federated Russian republic.

Chokaev, Mustafa: *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society* No. XVIII (1931)
Hayit, Baymirza: *Turkistan in XX Jahrhundert* (Darmstadt 1956)

cut off from Moscow by Dutov, decided to mobilize Turkistan manpower, and to tighten control over all economic resources, including the railway workshops at Kizyl-Arvat. Resistance to these proposals came first from the Transcaspian railway workers. Meetings of protest took place at Kizyl-Arvat, Ashkhabad and other centres, where Socialist Revolutionary and Menshevik members of local Soviets began to organize resistance to Communists. The head of the Tashkent Soviet, Kolesov, visited Ashkhabad and declared martial law. As, however, there continued to be protest meetings and demands for the withdrawal of the mobilization order and for free elections to Soviets, Tashkent dispatched a Commissar, Frolov, with a detachment of Red Guards and instructions to liquidate the opposition. He started a reign of terror and moved on to Kizyl-Arvat. Here, however, the railwaymen revolted; the Red Guards came over to the railwaymen and Frolov and a number of Bolsheviks with him were seized and shot. A few days later, on July 14th, the oppositionists set up a new government in Ashkhabad consisting of Mensheviks, S.R.s and one Tekke Turkmen, which rapidly extended its control along the railway from Krasnovodsk to Merv, arresting and sometimes executing the former Bolshevik bosses.

The new Ashkhabad government, known as the "Ashkhabad Committee", had the support of the bourgeoisie and the railway workers (who were strongly represented on it) and enjoyed at least the hopeful goodwill of the Turkmen. The government's most urgent task was to organize a defence position near Chardjui, where the railway crosses the Amu Darya (Oxus). Officered by Russians, most of the troops available were Armenians, Turkmen and Caucasians, with a few ex-soldiers of the former Russian garrison. But they were poorly armed, with only a few guns and little ammunition, and were no match even for the mixed Red force of ex-P.O.W.s, workers, and demobilized soldiers sent against them by Tashkent. The Ashkhabad army was forced back to Bairem Ali, some 30 miles east of Merv.

The Ashkhabad Committee, well aware that their position was precarious, in early August appealed to General Malleon for help. Two representatives, Dokhov (Menshevik) and Dorrer (S.R.), arrived in Meshed to present their case. Discussions were held and proposals for an agreement were submitted to Simla and London.

Meanwhile the position in Baku and Transcaucasia generally had taken a turn for the worse.⁶ Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan had declared their independence in early April and were attempting to enter into negotiations with the Turks and Germans. Mutual distrust prevented any continued co-operation between the three Caucasian states. Friction between the Moslem and largely pro-Turk Azerbaijanis and the Armenians was exploited by the Turks, who occupied Batum on April 15th and were advancing through Armenian territory towards Azerbaijan. The Georgians established contact with the Germans, who were now in control of the Ukraine and were advancing into the Caucasus from Black Sea ports. General Kress von Kressenstein, the German commander, aimed at securing Georgian manganese and Baku oil; and a German mission travelled to Astrakhan (presumably with the connivance of Moscow) to attempt to acquire cotton and oil from the Caspian area.

German aims appeared to be mainly economic, although the High Command was not averse to putting pressure on the weakest links in the British Imperial armour, India and the Persian Gulf. There appeared to be little German sympathy with Turkish pan-Turanian ambitions except in so far as strategic advantages could be derived from them.⁷

Despite the promises of autonomy made at the Bolshevik Party Conference of April 1917 and at the Petrograd Soviet in the following November, the actual progress of events in the Caucasus, threatening the loss of Baku oil and Transcaspian cotton, caused great concern to the hard-pressed Bolshevik leadership. Several important members of the Party, including Shaumyan, soon to play a leading role in Baku, were sent by Lenin to Transcaucasia to endeavour to rally local Communists and check the movements for autonomy. Having failed in Tiflis, Shaumyan and his colleagues went on to Baku, where the oil workers were mostly Russian and Armenian and the local Communists well organized. A Baku Soviet was formed with the co-operation of the S.R.s, Mensheviks and

⁶ *Official History of the War* (1914-1918) Vol. IV, p. 159

Dunsterville, *op. cit.*

⁷ Von der Goltz, General Freiherr: *Zwischen Kaukasus und Sinai* (Berlin 1923)

Avalov (Avalishvili), Z.: *Nezavisimost Gruzii 1918-1921* (Paris 1920)

Dunsterville, *op. cit.*

Armenian "Dashnaki", whose fear of the Turks and the pro-Turkish Azerbaijanis drove them into the Russian camp. The Soviet proceeded to nationalize industry, banking and shipping, and to seize all lands belonging to those considered unfriendly to the new régime. The Bolsheviks then set to work to undermine the influence of their S.R., Menshevik and Dashnak partners, and to secure absolute control of Baku. But the Turks continued to advance and an Azerbaijan Fifth Column was actively preparing for their arrival.

By the middle of May the situation in Baku had become chaotic. Soviet troops sent from Astrakhan were unreliable, and local levies, with remnants of Caucasian army units, were militarily useless. Meanwhile in north Persia the Dunsterforce was advancing slowly and with constantly changing instructions towards Enzeli. Following a short battle with a Persian revolutionary group, the Jangalis, the port was occupied on June 27th. Dunsterville, who had already received feelers from the Baku non-Communist leaders, was now authorized to send a reconnaissance party to Baku.

At this juncture there was an overturn in Baku. Following a stormy session in the Soviet, all Bolshevik members resigned, and were promptly arrested by a new government, representing opposition groups, and calling itself the Centro-Caspian Directorate. Negotiations with Dunsterville followed quickly. The greater part of the Caspian merchant marine and several warships supported the new Baku régime, and a number of the former placed themselves at the disposal of the British. As a result of further negotiations, the armed vessels also came under British control, and were organized into a small Caspian Flotilla under a British naval officer, Captain Norris, who had been hurriedly posted to Dunsterforce for the purpose.⁸

The Centro-Caspian Directorate, conscious of its weakness, urged Dunsterville to bring up as large a British force as possible. But even with the reinforcements which had arrived in Enzeli from Baghdad, the British commander was unable to provide more than some nine hundred men and a few guns. And by the second week of September, Turkish pressure had reached a stage when all hope of holding Baku had to be abandoned. In the course of the final Turkish attacks the local forces disintegrated and Dunsterville's only course was to extricate and embark his own troops, who had suffered many casualties, and withdraw to Enzeli.

⁸ Norris, Capt. D., R.N. in *Journal of the Central Asian Society*, Vols. IX-X (1922-1923)

As has been seen, the events that led up to the Ashkhabad revolt against Tashkent, the formation of the Ashkhabad Committee, and the appeal to the Malleson Mission for help, coincided roughly with a somewhat similar pattern of events across the Caspian in Baku.

Malleson's task, as indicated earlier, was to prevent the Turks making use of the Transcaspian Railway, and to check their advance into Central Asia. It was in no way to promote rebellion, to pave the way for British territorial expansion or extension of political influence, or to support this or that group on ideological grounds. The sole aim of the Mission was to take advantage of favourable circumstances as they arose, to provide local support where military advantage was to be gained, and to take all possible steps with one object in view, i.e. to block the enemy's advance, and defeat him by all practicable means.⁹

The terms of the agreement reached between Malleson and the Ashkhabad representatives were inevitably provisional and contingent on each party being in a position to fulfil the requirements of the other. These requirements were not necessarily matters of common interest. The British objective was military and limited to the duration of hostilities; that of the Ashkhabad Committee was to maintain itself against the Tashkent Soviet. While the Russian members of the Committee regarded themselves as revolutionaries, their position after breaking with Tashkent left little room for ideological considerations. Their immediate problem was to defend themselves, to pay the railwaymen and other government employees, obtain supplies of

⁹ Soviet publications frequently refer to the existence of an agreement purported to have been reached between a representative of the "Turkistan Military organization" and "The British Government", whereby, in return for assistance, British protection would be extended over Turkistan for 55 years. The origin of this story seems to be articles which appeared in the newspaper *Pravda* dated November 22 1922 and June 5 1923. It has been repeated with variations in a number of Soviet books and articles, including the official publication: *Trudi*, vol. xix, published by the Tadzhikistan Academy of Sciences, 1954. Also in A. H. Babakhodzhaev's book: *Proval anglieskoi agressivnoi politiki v Srednei Asii (1917-1920)*, Tashkent 1955, an interesting but extremely inaccurate account of events in Turkistan at that time. No such agreement ever existed. Schemes of this kind were from time to time submitted by representatives of counter-revolutionary organizations but received scant attention.

The signing of the "Agreement" is variously stated by Soviet writers to have taken place in Tashkent, Meshed and Krasnovodsk. No one in any of these places would have had authority to negotiate any such agreement on behalf of His Majesty's Government.

food, and await the outcome of the widespread reaction against Bolshevism, which at that time seemed to have a reasonable prospect of success. The Ashkhabad representatives accordingly demanded military supplies, especially artillery and machine-guns, officers to train and organize their troops, and a small contingent of troops to stiffen their own makeshift army, money and credit. The British requirement was co-operation in mining the harbour of Krasnovodsk, in denying the Central Asian Railway to the Turks, the apprehension of enemy agents, and steps to prevent cotton supplies falling into enemy hands.

The agreement with the Ashkhabad government was reached on the 19th August 1918, some five weeks after the Ashkhabad revolt and the assassination of Frolov, and not (as is asserted by Bolshevik writers) before that event. It will be clear from the foregoing that no revolt in Transcaspia would have had any chance of success had the government of Baku remained in Bolshevik hands. While the timing of both events was fortuitous, the coincidence of the fall of the Bolshevik régime in Baku and the revolt against Tashkent in Transcaspia undoubtedly influenced Simla and London in their decision to give provisional support to both governments, and to authorize Dunsterville to secure naval control of the Caspian. The military resources at the disposal of both Dunsterforce and Malleon's Mission were too small in themselves to offer serious resistance to the enemy advance, but at least they provided focal points for the co-ordination and stiffening of actual and potential local resistance.

Heartened by the agreement with the Mission, the Ashkhabad Committee proceeded to reorganize. In addition to Funtikov (S.R.) and Dorrer (S.R.), its original members, the Committee included several other S.R.s and Mensheviks, Zimen (S.R.), a Merv schoolmaster and Orientalist who became Foreign Secretary, Belov and Kurilev, both railwaymen (and Mensheviks), and Obez Sirdar, probably as a sop to the Turkmen whose horsemen formed a substantial, although unpredictable, part of the Transcaspian army. One Drushkin (? S.R.), a Tashkent lawyer, was later appointed chief of police. Except for Zimen and Dorrer, the Committee members were men of little education or knowledge of the outside world, doctrinaire in outlook, and without administrative experience. Funtikov turned out to be as brutal and unscrupulous as the Commissar Frolov, whose execution he had organized in July.

The appointment of a Russian regular officer, General Kryutin, as Minister of War, brought some order into military

affairs. Armoured trains were improvised, similar to those possessed by the Reds, although their guns were of limited range. The front line near Bairam Ali, covering the Merv Oasis (the chief source of the food supply), was little more than a railway strong-point, protected by armoured trains and flanked by thinly held positions in the desert, mainly occupied by Turkmen cavalry.

The Tashkent Soviet mobilized reinforcements, and in early August their troops attacked the Bairam Ali position, driving the Transcaspian force back to Dushak, 100 miles west of the Merv Oasis. By this time, one company of the 19th Punjabis, detached from the East Persian Cordon, together with a small machine-gun unit, had joined the Transcaspians at Dushak, but were forced, in the face of resolute Red attacks, to fall back to Kaakha, a few miles farther west. Here the rest of the 19th Punjabis, who had crossed the Persian frontier at Artyk, joined up in time to take part in the fierce but inconclusive battle of Kaakha.¹⁰

The total force under Oraz Sirdar's command at that time was less than 2,000 men, of whom more than half were Turkmen, a courageous but unreliable element. The artillery consisted of four 16-pounder field guns and some antiquated muzzle-loaders. The impact of a regiment of well-trained Indian infantry, and efficient machine-gun units, undoubtedly prevented the complete rout of Oraz Sirdar's men.¹¹

The Bolsheviks once back in Merv started on a policy of vigorous repression with arrests (and frequent executions) of Ashkhabad sympathizers and those suspected of any complicity in the July revolt against Tashkent and in the subsequent killing of the Bolshevik bosses. Meanwhile the loss of the Merv Oasis—the main granary of Transcaspia—was a severe blow to the Ashkhabad Committee. There was an acute food shortage. Requisitioning and other counter-measures added to the discontent. There were riots and disturbances, and the genuine grievances of the poorer classes were skilfully exploited by the

¹⁰ Knollys, Lt.-Col. D. E. in *Journal of the Central Asian Society* Vol. XIII (1925)

¹¹ The total strength of British and Indian troops in Transcaspia at this time was less than 350 men; at the time of withdrawal, the total was less than 1,000, a third of which number were at Ashkhabad or on lines of communication. Transcaspian, Russian, Armenian and Turkmen troops were about double this number. Apart from a few Infantry and Cavalry belonging to the East Persian Cordon, and a hundred or so Hazara and Baluchi levies, General Malleon had no reserves at his disposal. This was the "vast army" which, according to some Soviet accounts, aimed at occupying an area almost as large as Europe, and reducing it to colonial subjection.

See Appendix.

Bolshevik underground. Finances were chaotic, with all the various rouble currencies steadily depreciating. Demands for higher wages to meet the rising cost of living could not be met. By the end of October, a revolt of the railwaymen seemed imminent, and the Ashkhabad Committee again turned to the British Mission for help. An ingenious financial scheme was negotiated and put into operation, whereby promissory notes backed by the British Mission were issued, redeemable in 90 days in roubles. At the same time a reserve of silver, provided by the Mission with the agreement of the Government of India, was made available to enable the Ashkhabad government to issue rouble notes to an agreed amount, and in due course to pay off holders of promissory notes issued in advance as a form of credit by the Malleson Mission.

By this means the financial crisis was staved off, and the recapture of the Merv Oasis (after sharp fighting and heavy casualties) in November enabled the government to overcome, at least in part, the shortage of supplies. But the inept handling by the Committee as then constituted of so many important problems had lost it such popularity as it had ever enjoyed. The Turkmen were dissatisfied, and the military pressing for more effective leadership; and a plot was on foot, actively supported by Funtikov, to stage a *coup d'état*. In the event Drushkin (with British approval) replaced the former government by a "Committee of Public Safety", consisting of himself, Zimen, Belov and Obez Baev. One of the first acts of the new régime was to arrest Funtikov.

VI

It was before the recapture of Merv and the reconstitution of the Ashkhabad Committee that the incident of the 26 Baku Commissars took place. These leading Bolsheviks, arrested when the Directorate assumed power in Baku, were later released following discussions with a Russian Bolshevik emissary who arrived in Baku from Astrakhan with a small detachment of Soviet troops. The Commissars were granted permission to leave for Astrakhan by sea, but were rearrested when it was discovered that they had made clandestine arrangements, with the connivance of the Soviet Mission, to ship a large quantity of arms and equipment to Astrakhan. They were again imprisoned, and a charge of treachery was laid against them by

the Directorate, but they were still awaiting trial when the Turkish Army arrived in the immediate vicinity of the city.

In the ensuing panic the Commissars were once again released from prison (either with or without the orders of the Directorate), and allowed to take ship to proceed to Astrakhan with their families. They accordingly embarked on the S.S. *Turkman* on September 14th, the day before the Turks arrived in Baku. The ship's crew, however (who had been working for the Directorate), feared they would be arrested by the Bolsheviks on arrival in Astrakhan; moreover, some of them had their families in Krasnovodsk. They therefore insisted on changing course, on the pretext there was not sufficient oil fuel to reach Astrakhan, and arrived off Krasnovodsk at dawn on the 15th.

The *Turkman* was hailed by the Krasnovodsk guardship, whose commander, after a short conversation with the captain, ordered the ship to proceed under escort to Ufra, a few miles along the coast from Krasnovodsk. Meanwhile a message was sent ashore from the guardship to the Town Commandant, Kuhn, informing him of the identity of the ship's passengers. Kuhn immediately proceeded to Ufra with an armed escort. When the ship had berthed, the Commissars were disarmed and placed under arrest, being separated from their families.

Kuhn, a Caucasian Cossack officer with a reputation for ruthlessness, was Chairman of the Krasnovodsk Committee as well as Town Commandant. He immediately notified the Ashkhabad Committee of the arrival of the Commissars, and asked for instructions. At that time there was no representative of the Meshed Mission in Krasnovodsk, the only British officer in the vicinity being a liaison officer, Colonel Battine, who had recently arrived from General Dunsterville's H.Q. at Enzeli with a small guard. He was neither informed nor consulted by Kuhn.

On the 18th of September Malleon was informed by Dokhov, the Ashkhabad liaison officer in Meshed, of the arrival of the Commissars in Krasnovodsk and was asked for his views. Malleon told Dokhov that in his opinion it was undesirable that the Commissars be allowed to proceed along the railway, and urged that they should be handed over to the British Mission as hostages for the numerous British subjects who at that time were being detained by the Soviet Government. He offered to provide an escort to take over the Commissars at a convenient point, and added that arrangements could be made for their transportation to India.

Dokhov agreed that this might be the most desirable course, but doubted whether it would be possible to hold the Commissars while all the arrangements were being made. He undertook, however, to inform the Committee of Malleeson's views, but hinted that it might be too late to seek a solution along the lines suggested.

Malleeson, having reported to Headquarters in India, got into touch by telegram with his own liaison officer, Captain Teague-Jones, in Ashkhabad, giving him an account of the conversation with Dokhov, and instructing him to press his (Malleeson's) views on the Committee. This the liaison officer, who in the meanwhile had been given some account of the situation by Zimen, proceeded to do, and requested the Committee (which was then in Session) to inform him in due course of their decision. The Committee had already received Dokhov's report, and had also received an urgent request from Kuhn to take the Commissars off his hands as insufficient accommodation was available in the local jail, and he feared (or affected to fear) that the pro-Bolshevik sympathizers among the dock and railway workers would attempt to release them by force.

The Committee, consisting of Funtikov, Kurilev, Zimen and Dorrer, sat until a late hour, apparently without reaching agreement. It subsequently became known that both Funtikov and Kurilev were in favour of shooting the Commissars, while the other two members of the Committee, although opposing this action, were unable to suggest any practical alternative. There is no sure evidence as to whether the Committee intended to consider the matter further at a subsequent session, or whether they empowered Funtikov to act as he saw fit. But in any case Funtikov sent instructions to Kuhn to execute the Commissars on the charge of having "betrayed Baku to the Turks".

This order Kuhn proceeded to carry out. On the night of the 19th-20th September the 26 Commissars, among them the leading members of the former Bolshevik government in Baku, Shaumyan, Djaparidze, Korganov, and Fioletov, were taken by train to a point in the desert, some 200 kilometres east of Krasnovodsk, and there summarily shot.

No information regarding the shooting was allowed to reach the public, and no explanation as to how the decision was reached was ever offered to the British. Teague-Jones eventually managed to contact Funtikov late on the night of the 19th; Funtikov, who had been drinking, stated bluntly that the Commissars had been shot. Neither then nor later were any details given. Malleeson (who meanwhile had obtained the agreement

of Simla to his proposals for dealing with the matter), as soon as he heard what had happened, sent a strong protest to the Ashkhabad Committee, in which his superiors in Simla fully concurred.

By its action in executing the Commissars, the Ashkhabad Committee forfeited any chance that might have remained for coming to any sort of working arrangement with Tashkent. The Committee were by no means united and some members showed a disposition to dissociate themselves from Funtikov's views and actions. The Committee became less than ever able to cope with their tasks and the situation came to a head in the financial crisis a few weeks later. The subsequent reorganization of the government into a Committee of Public Safety has already been mentioned.

It seems unlikely that news of the shooting of the Commissars became known in Moscow until February or March of the new year, although their disappearance had been the subject of enquiry to H.M. Government by the Soviet Foreign Minister, M. Chicherin, towards the end of September.¹² At that time, H.M. Government in London was not aware of the shooting. A number of British officials in Moscow and the North Caucasus had been arrested and were being held by the Soviet Government, and it was the desire of the British Government to secure their release by exchange of Soviet detainees in British hands, among whom, it was supposed, the Commissars would be numbered.¹³

The first public reference to the incident appeared in an article published in the Baku newspaper, *Znamia Trudi*, early in March 1919. By this time British forces under the command of General Thompson were now in occupation of Baku, having arrived some time previously from Constantinople to ensure that the terms of the armistice with Turkey were carried out. The article was written by one Vadim Chaikin, a Socialist Revolutionary journalist who had visited Transcaspia some time previously, and had evidently gained some knowledge of the affair either on the spot from ex-members of the Ashkhabad government or from persons arriving in Baku from Transcaspia. One of his main informants may well have been Funtikov himself: the latter was under arrest at the time of Chiakin's visit to

¹² White Paper, Russia No. 1 (1923) *Correspondence between H.M. Government and Soviet Government.*

¹³ Reports of the arrest of British subjects and of the conditions in which they were being held were the subject of exchanges between the Soviet Foreign Office and M. Chicherin at that time, and in the absence of British official representation in Moscow were conducted through neutral channels.

Ashkhabad, and Chaikin claims to have seen him in prison. It is very possible that Funtikov and his associates were anxious to shift from their own shoulders any responsibility for the execution of the Commissars; this would not be the only occasion during the Civil War where Allied officers were found to be convenient scapegoats.

Chaikin, in his articles, placed the blame for the shooting squarely on the British, suggesting that the action was carried out by British instigation, and that British officers had actually been present. Not unnaturally, these articles caused some excitement. A *dementi* was issued in the Baku Press, and Chaikin was asked to produce evidence, but declined, except on terms which were unacceptable to the British commander.¹⁴

Chaikin's articles were shortly afterwards followed by a book which he published in Moscow, in which he reiterated his charges, elaborating his previous account by giving a "circumstantial" account of the tragedy, and mentioning the names of various British and Transcaspian government officials and personalities as having been personally implicated.

The publication of Chaikin's book was followed by the transmission of a Soviet wireless message *en clair* on the 23rd April, in which the Soviet Government accused the British of being responsible for the transportation of the Commissars from Baku, and for their subsequent arrest and execution. The statements contained in Chaikin's book were quoted in evidence, and the whole incident was presented as an example of British perfidy and callous brutality.

The Soviet Government declined to accept any assurance from the British Government that no British representative had any responsibility for the evacuation of the Commissars from Baku or for their subsequent shooting; and has continued to this day in its internal and external propoganda, and in historical accounts of the revolutionary period, including the two editions of the *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia* to present the case exactly as stated in Chaikin's articles and book. The fate of the 26 Commissars has become part of the epic of the Bolshevik revolution, and is presented in chapter and verse, no less than in picture and sculpture, as a British-inspired action. (Some paintings go so far as to depict the execution of the Commissars with British officers standing by with smoking revolvers.)

¹⁴ Chaikin demanded that a mixed commission, including Bolshevik representatives, be set up as a public board of enquiry with safeguards for witnesses. This was rejected by the British Commander who evidently considered it would serve merely as a platform for propoganda.

The reoccupation of Merv in November by the Transcaspian army, now reinforced by two squadrons of Indian cavalry from Meshed, and a battery of artillery and two companies of infantry from Enzeli via Krasnovodsk, enabled Oraz Sirdar, the Transcaspian commander, to consolidate his position some 30 miles east of Merv. Meanwhile the Red forces had been considerably reinforced by troops and military material from Kushkh, the terminus of the branch line from Merv to the Afghan frontier. Armoured trains were equipped with heavier guns. The Red command was reorganized, discipline and administration were tightened up, and the lessons of the recent fighting with Indian regular troops were noted and digested.

The surrender of Turkey at the end of October, followed shortly by that of Austria and Germany, brought about a change in the political and military situation, but some months were to elapse before the British were able to disengage themselves from Transcaspia. A threatening situation began to develop in Afghanistan, where the enemies of the Emir Habibullah were plotting his assassination, and the security of the North-West Frontier of India became a matter of concern.

In the reactionary and still independent state of Bokhara, a democratic party known as the Young Bokharans were in touch with the Tashkent Soviet with whom their relations were intermittently good and bad. The Emir of Bokhara, anxious about his future, was attempting to enlist the support of Kabul and Teheran, and towards the end of 1918 had even made tentative approaches to the British Mission in Meshed. A similar situation had developed in the remote and equally reactionary state of Khiva, whose government was in the hands of an ex-bandit, and whose relations with the Russian Reds were no less strained.

Tashkent's relations with Bokhara had been mishandled by Kolesov (the Chairman of the Soviet) who, after making a clumsy attempt to overturn the Emir's government with the co-operation of the Young Bokharans, was forced to come to terms, but awaited an opportunity to renew the attack. Meanwhile the general confusion was accentuated by the intrigues and manœuvres of a number of anti-Bolshevik elements from Basmachi groups to underground organizations of Russian ex-officers who, in spite of their very different origin and outlook, found common ground for opposing the Bolsheviks.

The Emir of Bokhara received little positive benefits from his approaches to Kabul and to the British Mission. The Emir of Afghanistan offered sympathy and advice, a few officers to assist in training the Bokharan Army, and some equipment. The British Mission, conscious of the military advantage of the existence of a Bokharan Army as a potential threat to the Turkistan Red Army flank, encouraged the Ashkhabad Committee to keep in contact with the Emir. Early in 1919, in response to a plea for military equipment, Malleeson sent a small consignment of rifles and ammunition to Bokhara by camel train, accompanied by two Indian Army non-commissioned officers. But he advised the Emir to avoid, as far as possible, being drawn into military operations unless attacked.¹⁵

It was in this atmosphere of uncertainty, with no clear directives from Simla or London, that the British Mission continued to provide support to the Transcaspian government and military forces after the surrender of the Central Powers. Early in January 1919, the British force in Transcaspia, now about 1,000 strong, came under the direction of the British Commander-in-Chief Black Sea, General Milne, whose troops had occupied Constantinople and were taking over key positions in Transcaucasia, including Baku. Brigadier Beatty, an Indian Army officer, was placed in command of British and Indian troops at the Transcaspian front near Annenkovo, the tactical command remaining nominally with Oraz Sirdar. Red attacks on January 16th were repulsed with heavy losses to the Reds, and it seemed certain both to Beatty and to Oraz Sirdar that a resolute attack on the Red Army would succeed in driving it back to Chardjui on the Amu Darya.

However, by this time it was the policy of the British Prime Minister to put an end to military commitments on Russian territory. With the disappearance of the Turkish threat, and the unlikelihood of the ex-enemy prisoners in Turkistan constituting any danger to India, there was no longer any military reason to keep British troops in Transcaspia. Moreover, the situation in Afghanistan was uncertain and any available troops might well be needed to deal with possible disturbance from that quarter.

¹⁵ In Soviet accounts of British relations with Bokhara and Khiva, it is frequently stated that a number of British officers were sent to both places to train and organize their forces. The number of these officers is variously stated as being anything from a dozen to 200. In fact, no British officers were ever sent to Bokhara, other than the two Indian N.C.O.s who accompanied the delivery of a small consignment of rifles. General Dunsterville established contact with Khiva for intelligence purposes, but no officers were sent to Khiva. Colonel Bailey's whereabouts and his passage through Bokhara in disguise were unknown to the Meshed Mission, until his arrival in Persia in Feb. 1920.

Malleson was therefore informed in February of the intention to withdraw all British and Indian troops from Transcaspiya at the earliest possible date. For the time being, he was instructed that British and Indian troops at the front were not to advance beyond their present positions. Despite the difficulty of complying with such an order (particularly in the event of a Red Army attack), Beatty had no alternative but to make the best of the situation. To announce the intended British withdrawal before taking steps to safeguard the situation at the front as well as at Ashkhabad, was to court disaster. Malleson, after consultation with his military chiefs, obtained permission to postpone the actual departure until March, by which time it was estimated the Transcaspiyan government (warned in confidence) would be able to obtain compensating reinforcements from Denikin's forces in the North Caucasus. Meanwhile, rumours were put into circulation designed to reach the ears of Tashkent, that the British were planning a large-scale flanking operation. These rumours were evidently effective as no further attack on the Transcaspiyan position took place before the British withdrawal to Meshed and Baku.

Early in March the intention to withdraw was made public. Not unnaturally, it caused considerable alarm and despondency particularly among the Turkmen, with whom British and Indian officers and men had become extremely friendly. A formal request was made by Turkmen leaders to General Malleson for British protection to be extended to their tribal areas, a plea which, of course, could not be entertained.¹⁶ Appeals to General Malleson to delay the departure of British troops were made by all classes. The actual date of withdrawal was postponed until the 1st April, by which date reinforcements had begun to arrive from General Denikin. By the 5th April, the last of the British and Indian troops had left, together with those officers of the Mission who had been in liaison with the Committee in Ashkhabad.

On the departure of the British, the situation on the Transcaspiyan front remained quiet, except for patrol skirmishes, until

¹⁶ Even those Turkmen leaders who looked towards the advancing Turks for protection turned to the British after the collapse of Turkish pan-Turanian plans. Of all the Turki tribes of Russian Turkistan, the Tekke were the least reconciled to Russian domination.

From time to time, tentative approaches were made by individual Basmachi leaders to the British Consulate-General in Kashgar, but they received little encouragement from that quarter, despite Soviet charges of active collusion.

Etherton, *op. cit.*

Castagne, Jos.: *Les Basmachis* (Paris 1925)

Malleson, Maj.-Gen. Sir W. in *Journal of the Central Asian Society*, Vol. IX-X (1922-1923)

May, when the Tashkent Soviet army attacked in force and reoccupied Merv. During the next few weeks the Transcaspians were forced farther westwards, and by the 15th July they evacuated Ashkhabad. They held on to Kizyl-Arvat for a few weeks, then retreated to Krasnovodsk, which fell to the Red Army in the late autumn.

Most members of the Committee found their way to Baku or crossed over to Persia, where several of the Turkmen leaders, including Oraz Sirdar, took refuge. Many Turkmen joined the Khivan irregular force under the ex-bandit leader Djunaid-Khan, whose bands were a thorn in the flesh to the Bolsheviks until Turkistan was overrun by the Red Army under Frunze and Kuibyshev after the defeat of Kolchak. The fate of the majority of the Ashkhabad leaders is unknown, but it is believed that several of them were captured in Baku later and executed.

Thus ended an episode, which by now has become merely one of the many obscure and incidental side-shows of British military history—an almost forgotten campaign.

The Malleson Mission remained in Meshed until the spring of 1920. During the Afghan War, which broke out a few weeks after the withdrawal from Transcaspia, the Mission, now somewhat precariously situated, conducted intelligence and counter-propaganda activities against the Afghan Government and those authorities north of the border who were believed to be seeking to exploit the war to their advantage. The confusion that is reflected in Soviet accounts of the conflict and its subsequent repercussions in Turkistan may be attributed to some extent to the success of the Mission's propaganda activities.

APPENDIX

BRITISH AND INDIAN TROOPS TAKING PART
IN OPERATIONS IN TRANSCASPIA,
AUGUST 1918 TO APRIL 1919

1. From August 1918 until November 1918.
28th Indian Cavalry, 2 Squadrons
19th Punjabi Infantry, 2 Companies
2. From November 1918 until April 1919.
28th Indian Cavalry, 3 Squadrons
19th Punjabi Infantry, 3 Companies
1/4th Hampshire Regt., 1 Company
Royal Warwick Regt., 2 Companies
44th Battery, Royal Field Artillery
*British and Indian Details, from East Persian Cordon
and Dunsterforce—about 50 officers and other ranks.*

Total British strength at time of evacuation: 950 officers
and men.

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