

## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Despite a growing number of studies on the anarchist peasants' guerilla led by Nestor Ivanovich Makhno in the Ukraine during the Civil War, we still don't have a clear idea of the political program and the social base of this movement. This is mainly due to the circumstance that primary sources – publications by the Makhnovtsy, among others – have not been preserved, or made available for research.<sup>1</sup> This is the reason why the polemical positions taken up in the heat of the struggle, or memoirs published at a later date, have assumed an undeserved authority. They invite an approach to the subject along the same ideological lines as existed in 1917-21. With this in mind, the recent attempts at compiling comprehensive summaries by A. Skirda (1982), M. Malet (1982) and D. Dahlmann (1986) seem somewhat precipitate, with all due respect for the work that was done.<sup>2</sup>

Given this state of affairs, the Soviet historian and dissident Vladimir Nikolaevich Litvinov has made a welcome contribution in the form of the

<sup>1</sup> Only six of the forty-three issues of the periodical *Put' k svobode* (The road to liberty) published by the Makhnovtsy between May 1919 and July 1920 are available in Western libraries.

<sup>2</sup> Alexandre Skirda, Nestor Makhno. *Le Cosaque de l'Anarchie. La Lutte pour les Soviets Libres en Ukraine 1917-1921* (Paris, 1982); Michael Malet, *Nestor Makhno in the Russian Civil War* (London, 1982); Dittmar Dahlmann, *Land und Freiheit. Machnovščina und Zapatismo als Beispiele agrarrevolutionärer Bewegungen* (Stuttgart, 1986).

Of these three authors, Skirda is the most politically committed, but the explicitly states the anarchist premises in his work, which is well-documented. Even so, his 'libertarian' approach was attacked in the best of 1917-21 traditions by the English marxist C. Darch. (See his review of Skirda and Malet in *Economy and Society* XIV (1985) nr. 4, p. 524-536.)

Dahlman's synthesis is the most balanced, but he acknowledges that his evidence for at least one item, is poor: "Aufgrund der mangelhaften Quellenlage und der sich oftmals widersprechenden Literatur bleibt nur die Möglichkeit, aus den Selbstzeugnissen und den angesprochenen Zielgruppen auf die soziale Struktur der Bewegung zu schließen" (p. 120). For the official Soviet historiographical position, see: S.M. Semanov, "Makhnovshchina i ee krakh", *Voprosy Istorii*, 1966, nr. 9, p. 37-60.

article printed here, by limiting its subject matter to one aspect: the clarification of the nature of the military co-operation between the Bolsheviks and the Makhnovtsy in their war against the White Russian armies. After a short introduction on what went on before, the author concentrates on the events of the autumn of 1920, when the fourth military-political accord was reached: Litvinov has sought out answers to concrete questions such as: who initiated the negotiations for an accord (the Bolsheviks), did the treaty contribute to the fight against the White armies (yes, the Makhnovtsy played an important part in their defeat), who were the first to break the treaty (the Bolsheviks). Litvinov also pays attention to broader themes, such as the socio-political conceptions underlying the military strategy of the Makhnovtsy. Litvinov's approach to the subject – he makes no attempt to hide his anarchist sympathies – is less surprising than the sheer volume of the material on which he bases his case. This varies from obscure periodicals published in the 'twenties to archive material from Soviet-Russian institutions, unavailable up to now. Using this material, Litvinov gives definite answers to a number of questions in the second part of his exposition.

The text used here is that of the typewritten original as we have received it. However, obvious typing mistakes have been corrected and the notes transferred to the bottom of the page. Where necessary the bibliographic references in the notes have been supplemented. The text was made ready for printing by Els Wagenaar and Leo van Rossum. The obituary written by Roy Medvedev was translated from the Russian by Moira Donald. We gratefully acknowledge the sympathetic mediation of *Izток*, *revue libertaire sur les pays de l'Est*, published in Paris, whose editors provided us with the original of Litvinov's *samizdat* publication.

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