The RAVEN ANARCHIST QUARTERLY 8

Volume 2 No. 4 OCTOBER 1989

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Cover illustration: woodcut by Falké from Crapouillot (Paris)
special number on “l’anarchie” January 1938.
To spend £50 million as did President Mitterand and his 'socialist' government on a week of carnival to commemorate the bi-centenary of the French Revolution was obviously good for business: for the souvenir shops, the makers of tee-shirts, the fancy dress and not least the Tourist Industry. An estimated £100 million poured into the Capital that week. Who can still accuse only the British of being 'a nation of shopkeepers'?

This issue of The Raven had been hurriedly put together in the event that Raven 7 starved of food had died or was too weak to fly. As so often happens, the challenge worked wonders on the patient's keepers and this issue was delayed to allow Raven 7 to take off, and with at least one contribution by Heiner Becker on Kropotkin as Historian of the French Revolution.

In compiling this issue of The Raven we felt we could not compete with the commercial publishers. We understand that in this country alone some 48 books have appeared but that in France the grand total of publications, books and magazines exceeded a thousand titles! (All good business for about three months and then watch out for them on the remainder shelves, assuming they haven't already been pulped, with the souvenirs and the tee shirts and the fancy dresses and hats.) All this hypocrisy and razzmatazz was brilliantly summed up by Daniel Singer in, of all places, the September issue of Sanity.

Long live the Revolution, as long as it is dead and buried with no prospect of resurrection. That thought came to mind as the French celebrated the bicentennial of their Great French Revolution.

The programme was most impressive with books and documents, and in Paris alone some 56 conferences devoted to the subject, as well as exhibitions large and small. But, writes Daniel Singer

the climax came on July 14, when French President François Mitterand was accompanied by such iconoclastic sans-culottes as George Bush, Maggie Thatcher and Helmut Kohl — a party more suited to honour Marie Antoinette than commemorate the storming of the Bastille.

We anarchists commemorate centenaries and bi-centenaries neither for business nor romantic reasons, but to take advantage of a certain climate created by the media to put over our interpretation of these events. Thus for the 50th anniversary of the declaration of World War II we have published a 400-page volume plus four supplementary volumes of Selections from the journals we published during those eventful years (see inside back cover).

This issue of The Raven 'On Revolution' far from being a recital of the revolutions that failed is, if anything, a reminder to those who only cash-in on their revolutions every hundred years (the French built the Eiffel Tower in 1889 and the Opera House near the Bastille in 1989) that however hopeless Revolution may appear at any moment in history, so long as power and privilege are secure in the hands of a minority only revolution can rid society of the whole apparatus of power (which today means the financial institutions, the
multinationals, and the large property owners). More than 120 years ago Baku-
nin was reminding the bourgeoisie that it was in the name of equality that
they overthrew and massacred the nobility. And it is in the name of equality that
we now demand either the violent death or the voluntary suicide of the bourgeoisie, only
with this difference — that being less bloodthirsty than the bourgeoisie of the revolutionary
period, we do not want the death of men but the abolition of positions and things (The
Lullers 1868-69)

So far as the selection of articles for this issue On Revolution is concerned
we have concentrated on those of the 20th Century and the approach has been
to learn the lessons rather than present an historical resumé which is available
anyway in great detail in F.P. and other publications (see page 112). The Wilhelm-
shaven Revolt and Three Years of Struggle in Spain are, to our minds, important
documents. The former is the account by an individual revolutionary, neither
a follower nor a leader; he didn't let somebody else tell him what he should
do. His Author's Note is a gem which ends: 'After all, I have kept my head, I
am, therefore, able to make further use of it'. The former is a colourless docu-
ment by a group of syndicalists and anarchists, some with a long history, who
have enjoyed more than two years in situations of authority, and are rationalising
all the compromises they made by seeking scapegoats: the danger that the
foreign powers would intervene if their property interests were threatened, and
the communists. They don't explain how that tiny minority (the CP membership
was no more than 30,000 in 1936) could become so important within months!

The Skira article (specially translated for this issue by Colin Ward) it goes
without saying is of tremendous importance. That the present regime in USSR
is prepared to 'rehabilitate' Nestor Makhno's army of the Ukraine is more than
significant. We are awaiting reactions from the Communist Party in this country
and from their coffee table monthly Marxism Today but without much hope.
After all they did not respond to a similar invitation from Freedom Press
when we published The May Days — Barcelona 1937 in 1987.

So far as THE Revolution is concerned we are happy to limit ourselves to
publishing Kropotkin's concluding chapter to his monumental work on The
Great French Revolution. In the September issue of Freedom Nicolas Walter
asserts that Kropotkin was 'neither a reliable historian nor a reliable scientist'.
Malatesta pointed this out, not as brutally, a long time ago when he wrote

His normal procedure was to start with a hypothesis and then look for the facts that
would confirm it — which may be a good method for discovering new things; but what
happened and quite unintentionally, was that he did not see the ones which invalidated
his hypothesis.

And if anyone thinks his conclusions too optimistic one could point out that
as a good historian Kropotkin was seeking to assess the positive gains of the
Revolution not from the point of view of someone living a century later but
from that of a peasant for whom 'liberation' meant the end of serfdom and the
introduction of the wage system. What Kropotkin thought of the wage system
in his own time was already in print in 1888 (included in Why Work? Arguments

We should really be celebrating two hundred years of the wage system by a
Revolution for its abolition!
The Anarchist Revolution

The revolution is the creation of new living institutions, new groupings, new social relationships; it is the destruction of privileges and monopolies; it is the new spirit of justice, of brotherhood, of freedom which must renew the whole of social life, raise the moral level and the material conditions of the masses by calling on them to provide, through their direct action, for their own futures. Revolution is the organisation of all public services by those who work in them in their own interest as well as the public’s. Revolution is the destruction of all coercive ties; it is the autonomy of groups, of communes, of regions. Revolution is the free federation brought about by a desire for brotherhood, by individual and collective interests, by the needs of production and defence. Revolution is the constitution of innumerable free groupings based on ideas, wishes and tastes of all kinds that exist among the people. Revolution is the forming and disbanding of thousands of representative district, communal, regional, national bodies which, without having any legislative powers, serve to make known and to co-ordinate the desires and interests of people near and far and which act through information, advice and example. Revolution is freedom proved in the crucible of facts — and lasts so long as freedom lasts, that is until others, taking advantage of the weariness that overtakes the masses, of the inevitable disappointments that follow exaggerated hopes, of the probable errors and human faults, succeed in constituting a power, which supported by an army of conscripts or mercenaries, lays down the law, arrests the movement at the point it has reached, and then begins the reaction.¹

¹ Pensiero e Volontà, 15 June 1924. See also Malatesta: Life and Ideas (Freedom Press 1965)
Herbert Read

The Method of Revolution

Anarchism is a word of many meanings, many interpretations. Because of its vagueness, because of its associations with terrorism and with the pathetic actions of deluded individuals, it often seems advisable to abandon it. But no other word will do. Anarchy — anarchia — absence of government: it is an exact symbol of our meaning and is sanctioned by long historical usage. For these reasons I think we must retain the words anarchy and anarchism, infuse them with new thought and definite policies, so that reanimated and redeemed they will stand for a new way of living, a whole philosophy of life.

From its very earliest days the socialist movement included two opposed elements, which were philosophical rather than political in their essence. They perhaps derived, in the long history of European thought, from the old scholastic distinction between realism and nominalism. It is the distinction between those who believe in the real existence of universal qualities or ideas, and those who believe that all such ideas are abstractions derived from the world of experience. When Hegel raised the State to the level of an abstract entity, there was a part of humanity ready to follow him and to subordinate all variety and individualism to this conception. For if the State is given an absolute existence, it becomes the supreme end of all worldly activity: it is conceived as the perfect organisation of all our social activities, and no activities can be tolerated which interfere with its unity and order. But Hegel’s conception of the State did not command general assent: another part of humanity refused to believe in the real existence of such an entity. The only reality, they said, is the individual: the individual with his sensations and desires, his weaknesses and grandeur, his folly and heroism. The State, they held, is only valuable in so far as it secures and promotes the happiness of the individual.

This debate was first published in three issues of Spain and the World for September 16, October 28 and November 12th 1938. Herbert Read (1893-1968) needs no introduction. T Mitchelson was the nom de plume of a Bulgarian anarchist, Theodore Michalsceeff, who first came to this country in the early 1930’s to avoid military service and spent some time at the Whiteway Colony with Tom Keell and his family. He then apparently went to Hamburg University to do a thesis on Anarchism! This writer met him in London in 1938 but lost touch when World War II was declared in 1939. Perhaps there are readers of this note who can shed light on this comrade and his thesis.
That statement already gives a relative value to the State: the State is valuable in so far as it promotes the well-being of the individual. The extreme egotism of Max Stirner, which asserts that only the individual and his desires have any validity, is not in question. That particular philosophy, which is not without its historical interest and importance, was effectively demolished by Karl Marx, and has only a remote connection with modern anarchism. What we have still to distinguish is, on the one hand, an attitude which values communal effort only so far as it promotes the happiness of the individual; and, on the other hand, an attitude which is prepared to sacrifice that happiness to the wholeness, or perfection, or power of this abstraction called the State.

Naturally every politician and reformer will protest that his ultimate aim is the greatest happiness of the greatest number of individuals, and rationally it is difficult to see how any other doctrine can be held. But very few of the doctrines for which men organise themselves can be described as rational. The history of religion, the history of politics, the history of civilisation itself, is merely the passage from one form of obsession to another; and in the name of such an obsession — which is always called an ideal or a principle or simply ‘the truth’ or ‘the faith’ — men are enslaved, deprived of their freedom, and compelled by force to act against their individual interests.

Socialism has always been in this same danger. Properly regarded, socialism is the rational organisation of society to the end that men shall live together in freedom, security and plenty. There is nothing idealistic about such an aim. It is a question of the practical ordering of production and distribution, and though certain principles are involved, such as equality and justice, these are not so much abstract ideals as economic quantities. To equalise the burdens and benefits of production is a simple sum in division: it does not depend on the invocation of any article of faith.

If we examine the principles of socialism as expressed, for example, in the Communist Manifesto, we do not find any arguments in favour of an idealistic conception of the State. Far from it. The State is everywhere recognised by the founders of modern socialism — by Marx, Engels, and Lenin no less than by Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin — as the product of social distinctions and an instrument of oppression. I could quote scores of texts to that effect, but let this summary from Engels’s book on The Origin of the Family, quoted with approval by Lenin in his book, The State and Revolution, suffice:

The State is therefore by no means a power imposed on society from the outside; just as little is it ‘the reality of the moral idea’, ‘the image and reality of reason’, as Hegel asserted. Rather, it is a product of a society at a certain stage
of development; it is the admission that this society has become entangled in an insoluble contradiction with itself, that it is cleft into irreconcilable antagonisms, classes with conflicting economic interests, may not consume themselves and society in sterile struggle, a power apparently standing above society becomes necessary, whose purpose is to moderate the conflict and keep it within the bounds of ‘order’; and this power arising out of society, but placing itself above it, and increasingly separating itself from it, is the State.

Modern anarchism — the consciousness that is growing up within the socialist movement and which cannot be stifled by any accusations of Trotskyism, liberalism, idealism, etc., is merely a reaffirmation of this view of the State. It expresses the conviction that, in the actual process of revolution, society has once more become entangled in an insoluble contradiction, has been cleft into irreconcilable antagonisms; and it asserts that these antagonisms have produced a form of State more absolute than ever.

Though I maintain that all the necessary principles of anarchism are to be found in the works of Marx, Engels and Lenin, nevertheless in examining the historical development of socialism during the last hundred years in search of the cause of this sad deviation, I think we are bound to discover that in certain questions of revolutionary tactics, Bakunin and not Marx was right.

The difference between Marx and Bakunin (apart from a difference of temperament) was really a difference in their conception of revolution. Marx conceived revolution as an historical process — a violent change, no doubt, but a change brought about by a trained and disciplined class-conscious proletariat.

Bakunin, on the other hand, conceived revolution as a spontaneous act — an explosion of forces that could no longer be repressed. Marx thought out a plan of campaign, with every step consolidated on an economic basis. Bakunin saw elemental passions directed to the immediate destruction of evil and to the equally immediate establishment of justice. This aspect of Bakunin’s creed has since his time received a powerful reinforcement in Sorel’s theory of direct action and the general strike.

But there is also this difference: Marx regarded the process of revolution as a process of inevitable evolution, comparable to the evolution of organic life. Capitalism contains within itself the seeds of its own destruction, and so revolution was held to be only possible in societies which had undergone a complete capitalist development, and were ripe, as it were, for the change — ready for the fruit to fall. But Sorel saw nothing inevitable or organic about the process of revolution; according to him, the proletariat must hold itself completely aloof from all such gradualist concepts; it must ‘build up institutions without any
parallel in the history of the middle class; it must 'form ideas which depend solely on its position as producer in industry'; and finally it must 'acquire habits of liberty with which the middle class nowadays are no longer acquainted'. The whole success of a revolution will depend on the proletariat having developed a new spirit, a new ethics, a new philosophy of life which breaks completely with all existing conceptions of society, and which is established with catastrophic violence.

It is obvious — more obvious now than it was in 1906 when Sorel published his 'Reflections on Violence' — that a doctrine of violence can be used in more than one direction. Sorel's most effective disciple, in actual fact, has been Mussolini. But it is equally obvious that a doctrine of discipline and training and organic continuity with capitalism can be used in more than one direction, and the National-Socialist party of Germany is there to prove it. But if we keep close to what we have regarded as the essential test of socialism — the disappearance of the State — then we shall be able to make the necessary distinctions.

The practical difference between the two methods of revolution is a difference in the time element. The Marxian revolution can only be achieved over a period of many years: the anarchist revolution is a question of hours. But this is too abstract a way of looking at the question: what is actually involved is human psychology. A revolutionary policy which needs a period of years for its accomplishment must work through the intellectual faculties — the passions are subordinated, or excluded altogether. But a violent revolution is achieved by passion, and the intellect is dormant. What is destroyed is destroyed in anger: what is created is created by instinct.

The word 'instinct' will be seized on as evidence of an underlying mysticism, but I do not refuse that term, or rather what it implies. I am not a mystic, but my whole reading of history convinces me that nothing worth while is ever done that is not done in a spirit of fervour, of exaltation, of glory. In that spirit the Bastille fell, and the Commune was established; in that spirit the Russian Revolution triumphed and in that spirit the unarmed workers of the Spanish Republic threw themselves against the guns of the insurgent army and rendered the revolt abortive. But having achieved your end in righteous anger, there comes the task of consolidation. It is then that the calculators come forward, the men of craft and cunning, the doctrinaire economists and the dogmatic politicians. Men who are brave in battle are often humble in affairs, and easily surrender the position to these agents of efficiency. The position is then lost again.

'Politicians', says Sorel, 'argue about social conflicts in exactly the same manner as diplomats argue about international affairs; all the actual fighting apparatus
interests them very little; they see in the combatants nothing but instruments. The proletariat is their army, which they love in the same way that a colonial administrator loves the troops which enable him to bring large numbers of negroes under his authority; they apply themselves to the task of training the proletariat, because they are in a hurry to win quickly the great battles which will deliver the State into their hands; they keep up the ardour of their men, as the ardour of troops of mercenaries has always been kept up, by promises of pillage, by appeals to hatred, and also by the small favours which their occupancy of a few political places enables them to distribute already. But the proletariat for them is so much cannon-fodder . . .

The reinforcement of the power of the State is at the basis of all their conceptions; in the organisations which they at present control, the politicians are already preparing the framework of a strong, centralised and disciplined authority, which will not be hampered by the criticism of an opposition, which will be able to enforce silence, and which will give currency to its lies.'

These prophetic words, let me again remind you, were written more than thirty years ago.

The great necessity to-day is to study the causes of revolutionary failure. There is scarcely an honest socialist anywhere in the world who is not perturbed by this problem. Those who are orthodox attempt to explain it away on economic grounds: the survival of capitalist elements, the lack of adequate machinery for production, the necessity for evolving in logical historical phases, and so on. But these are precisely the reasons which do not convince the anarchist. In the course of history revolution has failed too often, and always we are given these same excuses. But look at the objective features of these failures, these reactions, these relapses, and what do you find? Always the same features! The establishment of a central governing body, the acquisition of privileges by this governing body, the creation of a new governing class, the re-division of society into rich and poor, master and servant, the powerful and the oppressed.

This process does not need an economic explanation. There is an explanation nearer home, nearer the truth, an explanation based on the limitations and weaknesses of the average human being. In short, the explanation is to be found in psychology rather than in economics.

Marx and Lenin repudiated one abstraction — the State. But in its place they put another — the dictatorship of the proletariat. They defined the proletariat as 'the class of modern wage-labourers who, having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labour power in order to live' — a very clear and just definition. And we have seen that the revolution is to be effected by this class becoming conscious of itself, organising itself and forcibly overthrowing all existing social conditions. Having secured power, this class is to maintain a dictatorship until all injustices have been abolished and all
class distinctions have disappeared. The nation will then be one vast community of producers organised for mutual benefit, and the proletariat as such will disappear and the State itself will wither away.

What actually happened in Russia, and what is now happening in Spain, is something very different. The proletariat in a sudden fervour committed its act of revolt; and out of the resulting chaos a minority emerged consisting mainly of intellectuals and professional politicians. This minority constituted a dictatorship in the name of the proletariat; but then almost their first act was to disarm the proletariat, to close the ranks of the party, establish a state army and a state police, and finally reduce the workers to a state of dependence far more absolute than before. There then ensues a series of intrigues among the politicians themselves whose sole purpose is to maintain a particular group in power and finally there emerges a single power within the group, a dictator or leader.

Socialism is in retreat. Everywhere in Europe it is being compelled to adopt the methods of its adversaries, to establish tyranny to resist tyranny; and in the process it is corrupted, defeated spiritually and materially. Socialism must retreat still further — to its first principles. It must recognise that a revolution will never be effected or maintained unless it is based on a complete and independent philosophy of life. The proletariat must have its own ethics and its own culture — something other than a watered version of bourgeois morality or a respectful imitation of academic learning. It must establish its ethics on the basis of its life and labour, and a new culture on fresh perceptions. Perhaps there are certain eternal verities in morality and art; but there is no reason to suppose that they are embodied in the manners and taste of a decadent civilisation. In any case, it is for the proletariat to choose, and not to be intimidated by the values established by the capitalist epoch. It is for the proletariat to discover its own values; and this it can only do in isolation. It must suspect every voice that addresses it from outside its own ranks (including the one that is addressing it now); it must reject every idea which it does not instinctively recognise as native to its own modes of feeling and perception. It must close its ranks and create its own clerisy. If it cannot achieve its own destiny, it has no destiny to achieve. Its dictators are projections of its own weakness: the shadows of its own death. Its only life is in the first principle of its faith: an organic community of free and equal individuals.
T. Michelson

Some Remarks on Herbert Read’s Article

I was at once very pleased and a little disappointed to read Herbert Read’s article on ‘The Method of Revolution’. Very pleased because his article is one of the few contributions to the theoretical side of anarchism to be found in the columns of *Spain and the World*. Disappointed, because it contained some statements which are rather confusing.

First of all, Herbert Read makes the old mistake of dealing superficially with the individualist aspect of anarchism. Like Kropotkin he seems to usurp the term anarchism only for the revolutionary communist anarchism and forgets that there are many other currents of anarchist philosophy which are no less entitled to the use of the denomination anarchism than the revolutionary anarcho-communist one. I need only mention the pacifist-communist, the pacifist-individualist, the ego-individualist, the mutu-individualist, the mutualist, the religious, the syndicalist, etc., tendencies of anarchism which are just as important constituent parts of the integral anarchist philosophy, as revolutionary communist anarchism itself.

From an unprejudiced general anarchist point of view, it is utterly wrong to aver that Stirner’s ego-individualism ‘has only a remote connection with modern anarchism’. This may hold true only in respect of the communalistic tendencies of anarchism, but is absolutely absurd if related to the several individualistic currents of it. As a matter of fact, Stirner’s sturdy and vigorous anarchism is cherished nowadays not only by the individualists of different denominations, but also by many communist anarchists who are not always in sympathy with some of the aspects of the Stirnerian philosophy.

And again, I don’t understand how Karl Marx’s criticism may be used by an anarchist as a criticism in judging of the anarchisity (if I may use this term) of Stirner’s philosophy. For, if Karl Marx, according to Read, has ‘effectively demolished’ Stirner’s conception, has he not done (sic!) the same with those of Bakunin, Proudhon and of anarchism in general? Any Marxist will tell us, with Lenin and Preobrazensky, that anarchism is but a subtle petty-bourgeois philosophy, invented in the cabinet of idle philanthropists, but having no relations to hard facts and therefore being detrimental to the cause of liberty.
Herbert Read seems, however, to have fed too much on Marxian philosophy, otherwise he would never have maintained that 'all the necessary principles of anarchism are to be found in the works of Marx, Engels and Lenin'. Nor would he have maintained that 'modern anarchism is merely a reaffirmation of this view of the State', i.e. that the State is a 'power arising out of society, but placing itself above it, and increasingly separating itself from it'. If anarchism was nothing more than this, we may just as well pack up and surrender the field to some current better entitled to lead the struggle for liberty.

Fortunately anarchism is much more than this mere point — it is an entire science of politics, economics, and society, it is moreover a new moral conception which has little in common with Marxian philosophy. Anarchism and Marxism differ from their very starting points. For, whereas the anarchists, from Godwin to Malatesta and from Stirner to Sebastian Faure, take as their starting point the individual, and hold that society is made for the individual and justifies its existence only then and in so far as it fulfils this destination; the Marxists, on the contrary, take Society for their starting point and, by making the individual subservient to it, sacrifice lightheartedly its happiness to the entity — society.

But this, of course, is only the beginning of the differences. Anarchism and Marxism differ on almost every important issue. Even when they seem to agree, as for instance in regard of the repudiation of the State, they do part company sooner or later. For, whereas the anarchists defy the State and strive at a society without either State or Government, the Marxists would use the State as a means of the realisation of their political and economic ideals, and then, by setting up their dictatorship of the proletariat, they bring back, under another form and name, the old order of things. Bolshevik Russia is a sufficient illustration of the workings of the Marxian anti-Statian philosophy. Or would Herbert Read maintain that there is even the shadow of anarchism, or of the anarchist ideal of society, in the immense territory of the Soviet Union? Of course not, for he himself says respecting Russia and Spain: 'the proletariat in a sudden fervour committed its act of revolt, and out of the resulting chaos a minority emerged consisting mainly of intellectuals and professional politicians. This minority constituted a dictatorship in the name of the proletariat, to close the ranks of the party, establish a State army, and a State police, and finally reduce the workers to a state of dependence far more absolute than before.' Thus has happened in Russia, thus happens in Spain, and thus will happen everywhere where it is acted upon Marxian principles. It is queer then that Herbert Read puts Marx's, Engels' and Lenin's conception of the State ('as the product of social distinctions and an
instrument of oppression’) on the same level with those of Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin. Or must I tell him that Marx, Engels and Lenin attack only the State of others, the bourgeois State, and believe that the State in their own hands, may become an instrument of the general weal, whereas Kropotkin, Bakunin and Proudhon repudiate every and each form of State?

It is not true either that ‘the difference between Marx and Bakunin (apart from a difference of temperament) was really a difference in their conception of revolution’. Neither is it true that ‘the Marxian revolution can only be achieved over a period of many years: the anarchist revolution is a question of hours’. The difference between Marx and Bakunin was a fundamental one, and its scope is as wide as the difference between Marxism and anarchism in general. As to the ‘anarchist revolution’, it is most absurd to maintain that it ‘is a question of hours’, for revolution, in the anarchist sense of the word, means not only an abolition of the existing order of society, which alone can by no means be achieved in a few hours or days, but also a reconstruction, a re-organisation of society on anarchist bases. Can this tremendous task be ‘a question of hours’?

Last of all, I don’t see what Read means by: ‘it is for the proletariat to discover its own values; and this it can only do in isolation. It must suspect every voice that addresses it from outside its own ranks; it must reject every idea which it does not instinctively recognise as native to its own modes of feeling and perception. It must close its ranks and create its own clerisy.’ Where did the proletariat get these special qualifications and this exceptional wisdom from? Since when has anarchism turned into a merely proletarian conception, teaching the proletariat to distrust and keep aloof from the rest of humanity? Does not such a conception open ajar the door to dictatorships ‘of the proletariat’ and such like mischiefs? No, this is not the way towards ‘an organic community of free and equal individuals’.

In closing up the argument I should like to beg Herbert Read not to take in bad turn my criticism of his article, for, my intention was far less to criticise him than to throw some light on the questions at issue, which I considered necessary.
Herbert Read replies

I welcome T. Michelson’s very acute criticism of my article, and on some points I willingly accept his correction. In particular I admit that my contrast between a Marxian revolution which can only be achieved over a period of years and an anarchist revolution which is a question of hours is a metaphorical exaggeration. My main motive was to argue against ‘the inevitability of gradualism’. A policy of revolution by planned stages leads to apathy in the revolutionary classes; the direction is left to leaders, whose only thought is to organise their followers in a well-disciplined army. We call it trade-union organisation, but what it becomes in effect is an industrial hierarchy which can be taken over by whatever power happens to direct the State. My point is that the control of the State must be seized violently, catastrophically; the re-organisation of society can then proceed according to programme. The alternative, for the anarchist, is not any other kind of revolution (there is no other kind), but rather a passive philosophical attitude which strives to direct all social movements towards the anarchist ideal.

Proletarian ‘values’. I do not imply that the proletariat possesses any exceptional wisdom, or any special perceptions or sensibility. The true values are human values, or absolute values in relation to humanity. But it is the proletariat’s special function to realise these values. It can only do so by remaining a coherent, independent force, and it can only maintain its coherence and independence by refusing to have anything to do with bourgeois culture and bourgeois ‘society’. I grant that bourgeois culture contains many of the human values which we all desire to see established; and these will eventually be taken over by a new order of society. But to take them over on bourgeois terms (a seat in the stalls) — that is the beginning of the betrayal.

But much more important is the question of principle involved in the discussion of Stirner and Marx. On this point I must defend myself without reservation, for I believe the whole future of anarchism is bound up with this question. There is a type of anarchist, just as there is a type of Marxist, who is simply incapable of any progressive development of thought. They have their prophet and their dogmas, and no event in history, no advance in thought, can prevail against them.
When Stirner published his great book, he gave perfect expression to a logical thesis — the thesis of individualism. Marx, in his turn, gave perfect expression to a contrary thesis — the thesis of communism. That contradiction must be resolved, and by the very method of dialectics which Marx used to such good effect. I believe that to a great extent Marx resolved this fundamental contradiction, and that it is the Marxists, and not Marx, who, in Michelson's words, 'take Society for their starting point and, by making the individual subservient to it, sacrifice light-heartedly its happiness to the entity — society'. Marx, I would still maintain, 'effectively demolished' Stirner (in the German Ideology), but he also profited by Stirner. He took the advice of Engels, which was: 'But what is true in his (Stirner's) principle, we, too, must accept. And what is true is that before we can be active in any cause we must make it our own egoistic cause — and that in this sense, quite aside from any material expectations, we are communists in virtue of our egoism, and that out of egoism we want to be human beings and not merely individuals.' (Letter of November 19, 1844. Trans. Sidney Hook.) But if Marx could learn from Stirner, we can learn from Marx. I venture to think that I have passed through Marx to something nearer the truth; but in the process I have gained a tremendous respect for the genius of Marx, and until we anarchists have produced an economist and philosopher approaching his stature, it is simply futile to ignore his work. We have to build on the basis of that work; we have to conceive socialist thought as a dialectical development which includes Marx, Engels and Lenin no less than Stirner, Proudhon and Kropotkin. A practical anarchism for today must be Kropotkin. A practical anarchism for today must be directed towards the solution of immediate social and economic problems — that is to say, it must be revolutionary and communist. To insist upon individualistic anarchism is merely, in the circumstances, to condemn the whole doctrine to ineffectiveness.
Peter Kropotkin

Reflections on the French Revolution

When one sees that terrible and powerful Convention wrecking itself in 1794-1795, that proud and strong Republic disappearing, and France, after the demoralising régime of the Directory, falling under the military yoke of a Bonaparte, one is impelled to ask: ‘What was the good of the Revolution if the nation had to fall back again under despotism?’ In the course of the nineteenth century, this question has been constantly put, and the timid and conservative have worn it threadbare as an argument against revolutions in general.

Those who have seen in the Revolution only a change in the Government, those who are ignorant of its economic as well as its educational work, those alone could put such a question.

The France we see during the last days of the eighteenth century, at the moment of the coup d'état on the 18th Brumaire, is not the France that existed before 1789. Would it have been possible for the old France, wretchedly poor and with a third of her population suffering yearly from dearth, to have maintained the Napoleonic Wars, coming so soon after the terrible wars of the Republic between 1792 and 1799, when all Europe was attacking her?

The fact is, that a new France had been constituted since 1792-1793. Scarcity still prevailed in many of the departments, and its full horrors were felt especially after the coup d'état of Thermidor, when the maximum price for all foodstuffs was abolished. There were still some departments which did not produce enough wheat to feed themselves, and as the war went on, and all means of transport were requisitioned for its supplies, there was scarcity in those departments. But everything tends to prove that France was even then producing much more of the necessaries of life of every kind than in 1789.

Never was there in France such energetic ploughing, Michelet tells
us, as in 1792, when the peasant was ploughing the lands he had taken back from the lords, the convents, the churches, and was goading his oxen to the cry of ‘Allons Prusse! Allons Autriche!’ Never had there been so much clearing of lands — even royalist writers admit this — as during those years of revolution. The first good harvest, in 1794, brought relief to two-thirds of France — at least in the villages, for all this time the towns were threatened with scarcity of food. Not that it was scarce in France as a whole, or that the sans-culotte municipalities neglected to take measures to feed those who could not find employment, but from the fact that all beasts of burden not actually used in tillage were requisitioned to carry food and ammunition to the fourteen armies of the Republic. In those days there were no railways, and all but the main roads were in the state they are to this day in Russia — well-nigh impassable.

A new France was born during those four years of revolution. For the first time in centuries the peasant ate his fill, straightened his back and dared to speak out. Read the detailed reports concerning the return of Louis XVI to Paris, when he was brought back a prisoner from Varennes, in June 1791, by the peasants, and say: ‘Could such a thing, such an interest in the public welfare, such a devotion to it, and such an independence of judgment and action have been possible before 1789?’ A new nation had been born in the meantime, just as we see to-day a new nation coming into life in Russia and in Turkey.

It was owing to this new birth that France was able to maintain her wars under the Republic and Napoleon, and to carry the principles of the Great Revolution into Switzerland, Italy, Spain, Belgium, Holland, Germany, and even to the borders of Russia. And when, after all those wars, after having mentally followed the French armies as far as Egypt and Moscow, we expect to find France in 1815 reduced to an appalling misery and her lands laid waste, we find, instead, that even in its eastern portions and in the Jura, the country is much more prosperous than it was at the time when Péton, pointing out to Louis XVI the luxuriant banks of the Marne, asked him if there was anywhere in the world a kingdom more beautiful than the one the King had not wished to keep.

The self-contained energy was such in villages regenerated by the Revolution, that in a few years France became a country of well-to-do peasants, and her enemies soon discovered that in spite of all the blood she had shed and the losses she had sustained, France, in respect of her productivity, was the richest country in Europe. Her wealth, indeed, is not drawn from the Indies or from her foreign commerce: it comes from her own soil, from her love of the soil, from her own skill and industry. She is the richest country, because of the subdivision of her wealth, and
she is still richer because of the possibilities she offers for the future.

Such was the effect of the Revolution. And if the casual observer sees in Napoleonic France only a love of glory, the historian realises that even the wars France waged at that period were undertaken to secure the fruits of the Revolution — to keep the lands that had been retaken from the lords, the priests and the rich, and the liberties that had been won from despotism and the Court. If France was willing in those years to bleed herself to death, merely to prevent the Germans, the English, and the Russians from forcing a Louis XVIII upon her, it was because she did not want the return of the emigrant nobles to mean that the ci-devants would take back the lands which had been watered already with the peasant’s sweat, and the liberties which had been sanctified with the patriot’s blood. And France fought so well for twenty-three years, that when she was compelled at last to admit the Bourbons, it was she who imposed conditions on them. The Bourbons might reign, but the lands were to be kept by those who had taken them from the feudal lords, so that even during the White Terror of the Bourbons they dared not touch those lands. The old régime could not be re-established.

This is what is gained by making a Revolution.

There are other things to be pointed out. In the history of all nations a time comes when fundamental changes are bound to take place in the whole of the national life. Royal despotism and feudalism were dying in 1789; it was impossible to keep them alive; they had to go.

But then, two ways were opened out before France: reform or revolution.

At such times there is always a moment when reform is still possible; but if advantage has not been taken of that moment, if an obstinate resistance has been opposed to the requirements of the new life, up to the point when blood has flowed in the streets, as it flowed on July 14, 1789, then there must be a Revolution. And once the Revolution has begun, it must necessarily develop to its last conclusions — that is to say, to the highest point it is capable of attaining — were it only temporarily, being given a certain condition of the public mind at this particular moment.

If we represent the slow progress of a period of evolution by a line drawn on paper, we shall see this line gradually though slowly rising. Then there comes a Revolution, and the line makes a sudden leap upwards. In England the line would be represented as rising to the Puritan Republic of Cromwell; in France it rises to the Sans-culotte Republic of 1793. However, at this height progress cannot be maintained; all the hostile forces league together against it, and the
Republic goes down. Our line, after having reached that height, drops. Reaction follows. For the political life of France the line drops very low indeed, but by degrees it rises again, and when peace is restored in 1815 in France, and in 1688 in England — both countries are found to have attained a level much higher than they were on prior to their Revolutions.

After that, evolution is resumed: our line again begins to rise slowly: but, besides taking place on a very much higher level, the rising of the line will in nearly every case be also much more rapid than before the period of disturbance.

This is a law of human progress, and also a law of individual progress. The more recent history of France confirms this very law by showing how it was necessary to pass through the Commune to arrive at the Third Republic.

The work of the French Revolution is not confined merely to what it obtained and what was retained of it in France. It is to be found also in the principles bequeathed by it to the succeeding century — in the line of direction it marked out for the future.

A reform is always a compromise with the past, but the progress accomplished by revolution is always a promise of future progress. If the Great French Revolution was the summing up of a century’s evolution, it also marked out in its turn the programme of evolution to be accomplished in the course of the nineteenth century.

It is a law in the world’s history that the period of a hundred or a hundred and thirty years, more or less, which passes between two great revolutions, receives its character from the revolution in which this period began. The nations endeavour to realise in their institutions the inheritance bequeathed by the last revolution. All that this last could not yet put into practice, all the great thoughts which were thrown into circulation during the turmoil, and which the revolution either could not or did not know how to apply, all the attempts at sociological reconstruction, which were born during the revolution, will go to make up the substance of evolution during the epoch that follows the revolution, with the addition of those new ideas to which this evolution will give birth, when trying to put into practice the programme marked out by the last upheaval. Then, a new revolution will be brought about in some other nation, and this nation in its turn will set the problems for the following century. Such has hitherto been the trend of history.

Two great conquests, in fact, characterise the century which has passed since 1789-1793. Both owe their origin to the French Revolution, which had carried on the work of the English Revolution while enlarging and invigorating it with all the progress that had been made since the English middle classes beheaded their King and
transferred his power to the Parliament. These two great triumphs are: the abolition of serfdom and the abolition of absolutism, by which personal liberties have been conferred upon the individual, undreamt of by the serf of the lord and the subject of the absolute king, while at the same time they have brought about the development of the middle classes and the capitalist régime.

These two achievements represent the principal work of the nineteenth century, begun in France in 1789 and slowly spread over Europe in the course of that century.

The work of the enfranchisement, begun by the French peasants in 1789, was continued in Spain, Italy, Switzerland, Germany and Austria by the armies of the sans-culottes. Unfortunately, this work hardly penetrated into Poland and did not reach Russia at all.

The abolition of serfdom in Europe would have been already completed in the first half of the nineteenth century if the French bourgeoisie, coming into power in 1794 over the dead bodies of Anarchists, Cordeliers, and Jacobins, had not checked the revolutionary impulse, restored monarchy, and handed over France to the imperial juggler, the first Napoleon. This ex-sans-culotte, now a general of the sans-culottes, speedily began to prop up aristocracy; but the impulsion had been given, the institution of serfdom had already received a mortal blow. It was abolished in Spain and Italy in spite of the temporary triumph of reaction. It was closely pressed in Germany after 1811, and disappeared in that country definitively in 1848. In 1861, Russia was compelled to emancipate her serfs, and the war of 1878 put an end to serfdom in the Balkan peninsula.

The cycle is now complete. The right of the lord over the person of the peasant no longer exists in Europe, even in those countries where the feudal dues have still to be redeemed.

This fact is not sufficiently appreciated by historians. Absorbed as they are in political questions, they do not perceive the importance of the abolition of serfdom, which is, however, the essential feature of the nineteenth century. The rivalries between nations and the wars resulting from them, the policies of the Great Powers which occupy so much of the historian’s attention, have all sprung from that one great fact — the abolition of serfdom and the development of the wage-system which has taken its place.

The French peasant, in revolting a hundred and twenty years ago against the lord who made him beat the ponds lest croaking frogs should disturb his master’s sleep, has thus freed the peasants of all Europe. In four years, by burning the documents which registered his subjection, by setting fire to the châteaux, and by executing the owners of them who refused to recognise his rights as a human being, the
French peasant so stirred up all Europe that it is to-day altogether free from the degradation of serfdom.

On the other hand, the abolition of absolute power has also taken a little over a hundred years to make the tour of Europe. Attacked in England in 1648, and vanquished in France in 1789, royal authority based on divine right is no longer exercised save in Russia, but there, too it is at its last gasp. Even the little Balkan States and Turkey have now their representative assemblies, and Russia is entering the same cycle.

In this respect the Revolution of 1789-1793 has also accomplished its work. Equality before the law and representative government have now their place in almost all the codes of Europe. In theory, at least, the law makes no distinctions between men, and every one has the right to participate, more or less, in the government.

The absolute monarch — master of his subjects — and the lord — master of the soil and the peasants, by right of birth — have both disappeared. The middle classes now govern Europe.

But at the same time the Great Revolution has bequeathed to us some other principles of an infinitely higher import; the principles of communism. We have seen how all through the Great Revolution the communist idea kept coming to the front, and how after the fall of the Girondins numerous attempts and sometimes great attempts were made in this direction. Fourierism descends in a direct line from L’Ange on one side and from Chalier on the other. Babeuf is the direct descendant of ideas which stirred the masses to enthusiasm in 1793; he, Buonarotti, and Sylvain Maréchal have only systematised them a little or even merely put them into literary form. But the secret societies organised by Babeuf and Buonarotti were the origin of the communistes matérialistes secret societies through which Blanqui and Barbès conspired under the bourgeois monarchy of Louis-Philippe. Later on, in 1866, the International Working Men’s Association appeared in the direct line of descent from these societies. As to ‘socialism’ we know now that this term came into vogue to avoid the term ‘communism’, which at one time was dangerous because the secret communist societies became societies for action, and were rigorously suppressed by the bourgeoisie then in power.

There is, therefore, a direct filiation from the Enragés of 1793 and the Babeuf conspiracy of 1795 to the International Working Men’s Association of 1866-1878.

There is also a direct descent of ideas. Up till now, modern socialism has added absolutely nothing to the ideas which were circulating among the French people between 1789 and 1794, and which it was attempted
to put into practice in the Year II of the Republic. Modern socialism has only systematised those ideas and found arguments in their favour, either by turning against the middle-class economists certain of their own definitions, or by generalising certain facts noticed in the development of industrial capitalism, in the course of the nineteenth century.

But I permit myself to maintain also that, however vague it may have been, however little support it endeavoured to draw from arguments dressed in scientific garb, and however little use it made of the pseudo-scientific slang of the middle-class economists, the popular communism of the first two years of the Republic saw clearer, and went much deeper in its analyses, than modern socialism.

First of all, it was communism in the consumption of the necessaries of life — not in production only; it was the communalisation and the nationalisation of what economists know as consumption — to which the stern republicans of 1793 turned, above all, their attention, when they tried to establish their stores of grain and provisions in every commune, when they set on foot a gigantic enquiry to find and fix the true value of the objects of prime and secondary necessity, and when they inspired Robespierre to declare that only the superfluity of foodstuffs should become articles of commerce, and that what was necessary belonged to all.

Born out of the pressing necessities of those troublous years, the communism of 1793, with its affirmation of the right of all to sustenance and to the land for its production, its denial of the right of any one to hold more land than he and his family could cultivate — that is, more than a farm of 120 acres — and its attempt to communalise all trade and industry — this communism went straighter to the heart of things than all the minimum programmes of our own time, or even all the maximum preambles of such programmes.

In any case, what we learn to-day from the study of the Great Revolution is, that it was the source and origin of all the present communist, anarchist and socialist conceptions. We have but badly understood our common mother, but now we have found her again in the midst of the sans-culottes, and we see what we have to learn from her.

Humanity advances by stages and these stages have been marked for several hundred years by great revolutions. After the Netherlands came England with her revolution in 1648-1657, and then it was the turn of France. Each great revolution has in it, besides, something special and original. England and France both abolished royal absolutism. But in doing so England was chiefly interested in the personal rights of the individual, particularly in matters of religion, as well as the local rights
of every parish and every community. As to France, she turned her chief attention to the land question, and in striking a mortal blow at the feudal system she struck also at the great fortunes, and sent forth into the world the idea of nationalising the soil, and of socialising commerce and the chief industries.

Which of the nations will take upon herself the terrible but glorious task of the next great revolution? One may have thought for a time that it would be Russia. But if she should push her revolution further than the mere limitation of the imperial power; if she touches the land question in a revolutionary spirit — how far will she go? Will she know how to avoid the mistake made by the French Assemblies, and will she socialise the land and give it only to those who want to cultivate it with their own hands? We know not: any answer to this question would belong to the domain of prophecy.

The one thing certain is, that whatsoever nation enters on the path of revolution in our own day, it will be heir to all our forefathers have done in France. The blood they shed was shed for humanity — the sufferings they endured were borne for the entire human race; their struggles, the ideas they gave to the world, the shock of those ideas, are all included in the heritage of mankind. All have borne fruit and will bear more; still finer, as we advance towards those wide horizons opening out before us, where, like some great beacon to point the way, flame the words — LIBERTY, EQUALITY, FRATERNITY.
John Hewetson

Dormant Seeds of 1848

'As for the greater number of revolutionists, they unhappily know only of the theatrical side of former revolutions as related with forced effect by historians, and they scarcely suspected the immense work accomplished in France during the years 1789-93 by millions of obscure persons — work which caused France to be in 1793 quite a different nation from what she was four years previously.'

Peter Kropotkin
Revolutionary Studies

Revolutions in the past have resulted from the accumulation of tendencies in social evolution. It has not been difficult for historians to disentangle the various factors and analyse them — to show where they reinforce one another, and where their clashes brought suddenly into the open long dormant antagonisms. At such moment the old structures of society fall away and the new society thus born seems to take steps forward more rapidly in a few years — or even months — than the whole preceding century has achieved.

Revolutions are thus occasions of progress, and its opportunity. It is therefore natural that the revolutions of the past should be anatomised more and more closely today when dissatisfaction with existing social forms is almost universal. It is for their lessons that we chiefly study such movements of the past, and 1848 provides a focus for many trends

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which have by no means exhausted their interest or relevance for the present age.

We live in a pre-eminently political epoch. For years now we have grown accustomed to the spectacle of masses of humanity groaning under conditions of misery, and often enough of horror, resulting from no action of their own, but from some political decision taken by people they have never seen, in Capitals they have never visited. They are completely divorced from responsibility for their own lives. The Treaty of Versailles produced a mass of miserable and dissatisfied minority populations; the ‘settlements’ of today are repeating the process on an even grander scale. While between the two trudge the columns of refugees, of displaced persons, fleeing from France, from Spain; from Chiang Kai-shek, from Japanese or German or Russian invaders; from hostile Sikh or Moslem majorities; always from some manoeuvres which may have reality in the dim world of politics but which are hideously alien from the warm world of human contact and human kinship.

These helpless and hopeless columns of dehumanised humanity are almost the distinguishing feature of recent history. The callousness, the inhuman indifference which sets these weary symptoms afoot is scarcely unexpected, however. They spring from political actions, from the domain of leaders, of men in morning suits or other uniform signing documents in the dreary splendour of state apartments. The pre-eminent engines of such contemporary misery are the determined and disciplined groups who constitute the political parties, more especially the totalitarian, monolithic political parties which have been increasingly dominant since 1918.

The manifest misery of the refugees is only the open symptom of our age and our politics-ridden lives. Where human relations should be warm and touched with sympathy, they are in fact sterilised by the distrust and stiffness which is implied in the word ‘bureaucracy.’ Its increasing pervasion of human life and its effects on human character are responsible for the almost universal dissatisfaction with existing social forms; but the massive misery which forms the background to the weary journeys, and the frustration and defeat of human hopes and aspirations has at the same time removed the optimism which used to inform the conception of Progress. Hence social change is not now greeted as an opportunity for a new life, but rather feared as the probable precursor of yet more misery. Horrible as these are, men today prefer the ills they know to flying to others that they know not of. Disillusionment, and disillusionment that extends to the revolutionary periods of our own day, has made cowards of us all.

A hundred years ago men of vision awaited the Revolution expectantly, with determination and hopes high. It is quite otherwise today.
Yet the revolutions of the future must still provide the opportunities for renewed life. They will offer the disintegration of social forms; and hopes can be reposed still less in conservatism, in maintaining the existing social structures than was ever the case in the nineteenth century or even the early twentieth century. More than ever, therefore, we are thrown back on the study of the revolutions of the past, in the search for solutions to problems of the present and future. Nevertheless, the accent has shifted: instead of deriving hope and consolation from revolutionary successes, we have to consider chiefly the failures and omissions which opened the door to defeat.

The history of 1848 is appropriate for us to study, since it was chiefly a political revolution. Yet, although the influence of mass movements was less evident than in the Great Revolution or the Commune of 1871, it was nevertheless present, and the most important factor. No attempt will be made here, however, to study political issues in detail; instead certain broader issues — one might almost call them philosophical questions — will be emphasised.

In its general outlines, 1848 followed the historical lines of all revolutions. As early as 1842, Heine had reported the conscious misery of the workers: ‘Everything is as quiet as a winter’s night after a new fall of snow. But in the silence you hear continually dripping, dripping, the profits of the capitalist, as they steadily increase. You can actually hear them piling up — the riches of the rich. Sometimes there is the smothered cry of poverty, and often, too, a scraping sound, like a knife being sharpened.’ And, as always, it was the sudden action of the anonymous mass which toppled over the bourgeois monarchy of Louis-Philippe. In January 1848, a spokesman of the government had declared in the Chamber that ‘the Ministry will not yield one step’, and it only needed the trivial occasion of the forbidding of the reform banquet arranged in Paris for February 22nd to start the demonstrations which led to the barricades going up in the Paris working class districts.

The fallen ministry and monarchy were succeeded by the Republic and a government of Republican leaders like Ledru-Rollin, and Socialists like Louis Blanc. Such political figures were provided with their opportunity by the mass uprising; but they were not the cause of it. Kropotkin has described the process which leads up to revolutionary situations. Revolutionists of vision, who have a clear view of what human life could be like, are always in a minority. But events gather to their ranks many more who are merely dissatisfied with the existing régime.

This affluence to the ranks of the revolutionaries of a mass of malcontents of all shades create the force of revolution and renders them inevitable. A simple conspiracy in the palace, or of Parliament, more or less supported by what is called public opinion, suffices to change the men in power, and sometimes the
form of government. But a revolution, to effect any change whatever in the economic order, requires the agreement of an immense number of wills. Without the agreement, more or less active, of millions, no revolution is possible. It is necessary that everywhere, in each hamlet even, there should be men to act in the destruction of the past; also that other millions remain inactive in the hope of seeing something arise to improve their future conditions. And it is just this vague, undecided discontent — very often unconscious — surging in the minds of men at the eve of great events, and that loss of confidence in the existing order, which permits true revolutionists to accomplish their immense task — the Titanic task of reconstructing in a few years institutions venerated for centuries. (Kropotkin, Revolutionary Studies.)

The revolutionists of 1848, however, were not equal to the task, for in general they had neither the vision to provide the ideas necessary for a new society, nor the courage to break with and destroy the past. One of them, at least, recognised this from the outset, for on the day after the events of February 24th, Proudhon wrote that the revolution had no plan: ‘It must be given direction, and already I see it perishing in a flood of speeches.’ As D.W. Brogan says, ‘to have written this diagnosis of the Revolution of February 24th, on February 25th, was an astonishing feat of penetration for it was Proudhon who was right — and the naive enthusiasts who were wrong’.2

Proudhon was an intensely practical thinker, despite his many paradoxes, and it is worth following some of his ideas further. In this country he suffers under the rival reputation of Marx, whose answer, entitled The Poverty of Philosophy, to Proudhon’s The Philosophy of Poverty is uncritically accepted by thousands of socialists who have read neither the original nor the reply. In France, Proudhon’s influence powerfully affected the uprising of 1871 and the development of the French Labour Movement. His outlook and his attitude affect the social activity of the French workers even today.

Proudhon was elected to the Assembly by a substantial majority at a by-election in Paris in June, but by that time the initiative had already passed from the hands of the workers into those of timid political leaders. Hence Proudhon’s contribution to the ideas of the Revolution was received with hostility. Alone among the revolutionists of the time, he saw the necessity to destroy the social basis of the past by expropriating the bourgeois class and by the equalisation of incomes. This was no mere socialistic flourish. Proudhon knew from practical experience of life that the obedience of the ruled is chiefly exacted by economic pressures and he saw that the power of the reaction and the social order over which it ruled could only be broken by radical economic adjustments. Expropriation was not merely an act of social justice, it was a severely practical safeguard for the revolution.
Of course, such economic measures against the possessing class had been recognised as necessary by the socialist schools of Saint Simon and Fourier long before Proudhon. Such ideas were part of the accepted ideas of socialism. Yet the Ledru-Rollins and Louis Blancs, far from acclimating Proudhon’s proposition, voted with the majority that ‘the proposition of Citizen Proudhon is an odious attack on the principles of public morals’. Proudhon’s resolution, which he put before the Assembly on July 31st, 1848, received only two votes in favour — his own and that of a Socialist named Greppo.

The interesting point is not that such a resolution should have been put forward, but that none of the prominent Socialists except Proudhon should have supported it. The process is one which has been repeated in succeeding revolutions: in Kropotkin’s words about the day after revolutionary uprisings, ‘when the immense majority of those who yesterday gloried in the name of revolutionaries hasten to pass into the ranks of the defenders of order’. It was in defence of order that the military laid siege to the working class districts and overcame the working-men’s army in June, 1848. It was in the name of order that Thiers massacred in 1871 the Communards, whose very appellantion of ‘Federals’ was a tribute to Proudhon’s federalist conceptions.

This matter of the economic timidity of revolutionary leaders is of immense practical importance, for it has contributed to the failure of the great revolutions of our own time, in 1917 and 1936.

At the Fourth Congress of the First International at Basle in September, 1869, the followers of Bakunin advanced a resolution condemning the principle of hereditary succession to property, and then went on to demand the abolition of private property altogether. Although such a step would seem to be an essential prerequisite for the social ownership of production by the community at large (I do not say by the State), it was fiercely contested by the Marxist section of the International. The resolution was nevertheless accepted by a majority vote, and it was this victory for the ideas of Bakunin that determined Marx on the manoeuvrings which ended with the removal of the General Council to New York and the virtual destruction of the International. That Marx’s hostility to the complete abolition of private property on this occasion was not merely a tactical question is shown by his assertion that in the Communist Manifesto of 1847 he only sought the expropriation of capitalists’ property.5

Despite the success of Bakunin’s resolution in the Fourth Congress of the International, the Paris Commune of 1871 merely advocated a limited collectivism making only large-scale industry socially owned. Where Proudhon had put expropriation of the Banks as the first act which the revolution must accomplish and the only one which could in
no circumstances be allowed to wait, the Communards failed to see the
need to cut away the economic basis of the bourgeois power by
expropriating the Bank of France and all economic undertakings. Hence with his economic powers virtually unimpaired, Thiers was able
to exact his brutal revenge.

And the revolutions in Russia and Spain also left intact a money and
wages system which permitted the new rulers to impose the same
economic fetters on the workers which they imagined they had
destroyed in the uprisings that brought down the old régime. Proudhon’s lesson has yet to be learned.

So far the events of 1848 have been treated only as they relate to
France. But the significant thing about the revolutions of that year was
just the fact that they were not confined to one country; the whole of
Europe was affected by the revolutionary unrest. Beginning in Italy,
the revolution spread to France and then to Germany, Austria and the
Slav countries, while in England the Chartist movement flickered
before going out altogether. It is not, however, true that the movement
‘spread’ from one country to another, certainly not in the sense that it
was consciously carried by revolutionists across national frontiers. For,
as other writers have pointed out, 1848 was notable for the nationalist
character of its uprisings. For the most part, the active revolutionists
had not internationalist conceptions, and the armies of one republic
were used to crush the republican aspirations of another revolution.

Subsequent revolutions have made fully clear the lesson that radical
social changes cannot be made and maintained by a revolutionary people
in isolation. But in 1848 this lesson appears to have been grasped by one
man only. In other directions Bakunin’s social ideas were to mature
considerably in the years that followed. But he was already an
internationalist when he wrote in 1848:

Two great questions were posed from the first days of the spring: the social
question and that of the independence of all nations, the emancipation at once
of people at home and abroad. It was not a few individuals, nor was it a party; it
was the admirable instinct of the masses which had raised these two questions
above all others and which demanded a prompt solution to them. Everybody
had understood that liberty is only a lie where the great majority of the
population is reduced to leading a poverty-stricken existence, where, deprived
of education, leisure, and bread, they find themselves more or less destined to
serve as stepping-stones for the powerful and the rich. The social revolution
then appears as a natural and necessary consequence of the political revolution.
In the same way it was felt that while there was in Europe a single nation
persecuted, the decisive and complete triumph of democracy would not be
possible anywhere. The oppression of a people, even of a single individual, is
the oppression of all, and it is impossible to violate the liberty of one without
violating the liberty of all . . . The social question, a very difficult question, bristling with dangers and big with tempests, cannot be resolved either by a pre-conceived theory or by any isolated system. To solve it, there must be the faith of all in the right of everybody to an equal liberty. It is necessary to overthrow the material and moral conditions of our present existence, break into ruins from below this decaying social world, which has become impotent and sterile and which will be unable to contain or allow such a great mass of liberty. It will be necessary beforehand to purify our atmosphere and transform completely the surroundings in which we live, which corrupt our instincts and our wills, in limiting our hearts and our intelligences. The social question thus appeared from the first as the overthrowing of society.

I have quoted this passage at length because it contains so many points of interest — to some of which I shall return later. But for the moment what concerns us is the breadth of Bakunin's revolutionary conceptions which extend far beyond the boundaries of mere political frontiers. The factors which made 1848 the year of European revolutions were doubtless mainly the economic ones which underlay them all. But the nationalist revolutionists did not recognise this fundamental community of interests. Marx had addressed his peroration in the *Communist Manifesto* to the workers of the world, but twenty odd years later in 1870 he still thought in nationalist terms, for he looked to the victory of Prussia over France as a step forward for Socialism. For the internationalists of that time he had nothing but scorn. French workers in a manifesto to the German workers had declared in 1870: 'Brothers, we protest against the war, we who wish for peace, labour, and liberty. Brothers, do not listen to the hirelings who seek to deceive you as to the real wishes of France.' And German internationalists replied: 'We too wish for peace, labour and liberty. We know that on both sides of the Rhine there are brothers with whom we are ready to die for the Universal Republic.' These men — anonymous workers — had a vision of the human race undivided by war-making frontiers. But Marx and Engels wrote to one another of the 'imbeciles of Paris and their ridiculous manifesto'.

Nor were internationalist conceptions fully grasped by the Russian and Spanish revolutionaries. It is only too clear that even advanced theoreticians in these countries thought primarily of their national problems and considered revolutionary trends in other countries only as possible adjuncts to their own struggle. Absorbed in the local upheaval, they could not see it as a symptom of world unrest which must either spread universally or be engulfed by the reaction. It is a sobering reflection that Bakunin had grasped the universal position as long as a hundred years ago, for internationalism can hardly ever have been at such a low ebb as now.
A radical view of the economic problem of the social revolution, and universalism: Proudhon and Bakunin had understood these questions in 1848 and revolutionary theorists have conceded the correctness of their views. But more important still, because almost unrecognised even today were certain views about the motive force and the directing power behind revolutionary events. Once again the anarchists Proudhon and Bakunin had reached conclusions far in advance of contemporary social thinkers, in the course of those all-night sessions in which they argued about Hegel and listened to the symphonies of Beethoven.

Even today it is regarded almost as axiomatic that revolutions are led. Led by intellectuals, men who have pondered the social questions and in their wisdom instruct the ‘blind masses’ as to what is best for them. Intellectual leaders or military adventurers: these are still the revolutionists of romantic history and propaganda build-ups. And inevitably the ambitious men who seek such roles make use of an instrument suitable for imposing their views on the ‘blind mass’. That instrument is the political party, and its power, its malign power over the lives of millions has already been referred to. Can the ideas of 1848 shed any light for us on these dark places?

The most outstanding characteristic of revolutions is their tremendous energy. As Kropotkin pointed out, this overbounding energy sweeps away old institutions and in a few years transforms the social structure in directions which cannot be reversed.

Such changes cannot be the work solely of parties, for no such changes occur at non-revolutionary moments when initiative rests much more securely in the hands of the political grouping which forms the government. Revolutions emerge from the initiative of masses of anonymous people, from ‘the agreement’, in Kropotkin’s words, ‘of immense numbers of wills’. The dominance of the party requires the exact opposite; initiative must rest in the hands of a comparatively small number of party functionaries and their will must prevail over a more or less docile population. It is to be noted that such docile submission, if not vouchsafed voluntarily, is secured by practical politicians by means of police, secret or otherwise, wielding an immense system of punitive laws and penal institutions. Such structures most certainly do not exist to give free play to the revolutionary energy and aspirations of masses of a population.

It is not perhaps surprising that the power for social change possessed by a mere party is trivial compared to that which a revolutionary population achieves in a few months. Such a conception of the motive force of revolutionary events is not widely current today. Yet Proudhon had grasped it well enough when he wrote: ‘Philosophic reason... does
not admit, with the Jacobins and the doctrinaires, that one can proceed to . . . reform by legislative authority. *It only gives its confidence to reforms which come out of the free will of societies; the only revolutions which it acknowledges are those which proceed from the initiative of the masses; it denies, in the most absolute manner, the revolutionary competence of governments.*

In the passage quoted already Bakunin is seen to have reached the same conception. Regarding the social question and internationalism, he declared: ‘It was not a few individuals, nor was it a party; it was the admirable instinct of the masses which raised these two questions above all others, and which demanded a prompt solution of them.’

With such a conception, it is clear that any move which tends to remove initiative from the revolutionary mass by placing it in the hands of a few individuals or a party will undermine the source of energy for revolutionary change. Such a transference of initiative will bring the revolution to a standstill.

And so it proves in history. In 1848, as in 1789, the revolution came to a standstill when the period of revolutionary motivation gave place to the formation of a strong government. In Russia, the revolution of workers and peasants was overwhelmed by the emergence of a strongly centralised party with its discipline and its secret police. And the outstanding achievements of the Spanish revolution were the work of the anonymous peasants and workers in the collective farms and factories which they organised and controlled independent of the shadow government of Largo Caballero. The function of the party government of Negrin was to dismantle these achievements and inevitably (though apparently incidentally) the anti-Fascist struggle as well.

The reliance on political parties and political leaders is in no small part due to the influence of Marx. He and Engels were capable of regarding even international wars from the point of view of whether or not they advanced their particular theories within the Socialist movement. The following letter from Marx to his collaborator shows this with brutal clarity, and at the same time exhibits the contempt which these leaders evinced for the revolutionary workers, and also their underlying nationalism:

The French need a thrashing. If the Prussians are victorious the centralisation of state power will be helpful for the centralisation of the German working class; furthermore, German predominance will shift the centre of gravity of West European labour movements from France to Germany. And one had but to compare the movement from 1866 till today to see that the German working class is in theory and organisations superior to the French. Its dominance over
the French on the world stage would mean likewise the dominance of our theory over that of Proudhon . . .

The leadership conception is clearly expressed in this passage. It leads directly on not only to Lenin's outspoken opinion that the workers could only achieve a trade-union mentality and therefore require intellectuals to do their thinking for them, but also to the more polite dictatorship of the intellectuals expressed by the Labour Party.

With such a conception it is not surprising that Marx and Engels deplored the initiative of the French workers in 1870. 'If one could have any influence at Paris,' wrote Engels to his friend, 'it would be necessary to prevent the working folk from budging until the peace'.

No doubt it was the same fear of the energy of the revolutionary masses which made Marx continually exclaim: 'Tell the working men of Marseilles to put their heads in a bucket!'

There is no need to idealise or to idolise the 'masses': it is enough to regard the political fiascos of 1848 with a clear eye and to reflect that in this, as in preceding and succeeding revolutions, the revolutionary achievements derived from the spontaneous uprisings of the mass. The leadership conception is the antithesis of this, and its corollary, the emergence of the political party as the would-be controlling force, signifies the end of the revolution, the beginning of the counter-revolution. With all its imperfections, futilities and failures, 1848 contains the seeds whose germination could fructify the social revolutions of the future.

1 This essay was written in 1948 — Editors.
2 Proudhon, page 48.
3 F. R. Salter, *Karl Marx and Modern Socialism*, page 52.
5 F. R. Salter, *op. cit.*, page 61.
Opposing Conceptions of the Social Revolution in 1917

In the course of the crises and failures which followed one another up to the revolution of 1917, Bolshevikism was not the only conception of how the social revolution should be accomplished. Without speaking of the left social revolutionary doctrine, resembling Bolshevism in its political, authoritarian, statist and centralist character, nor of several other small similar currents, a second fundamental idea, likewise envisaging a full and integral social revolution, took shape and spread among the revolutionary circles and also among the working masses: this was the anarchist idea.

Its influence, very weak at first, increased as events widened in scope. By the end of 1918 this influence had become such that the Bolsheviks — who did not allow any criticism, nor any contradiction nor opposition — were seriously disturbed. From 1919 until the end of 1921, they had to engage in a severe struggle with the progress of this idea: a struggle at least as long and as bitter as that against reaction.

We underline at this point a further fact which also is not sufficiently known: Bolshevism in power combated the anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist ideas and movements not on the grounds of ideological or concrete experience, nor by means of an open and honest struggle, but with the same methods of repression that it had employed against reaction: methods of

Voline was the nom de plume of Vsevolod M Eichenbaum born in 1882 in the district of Voronezh in Great Russia and who died in Paris in 1945. His parents were medical doctors and he was sent to St Petersburg to study jurisprudence, but made himself very useful in the labour movement when he was only nineteen, and in 1905 when the first revolutionary rumblings shook the Russian Empire he joined the Social Revolutionary Party and took an active part in the uprising. In 1907 he was arrested and banished to some remote exile but managed to escape and make his way to Paris where he met Sebastien Faure and other French anarchists as well as the small circle of Russian anarchists. In 1911 he abandoned the SRP and joined the anarchist movement. In 1917 he was back in Russia as one of the editors of the daily anarchist paper Golos Truda. In the Spring of 1919 Voline joined the revolutionary army of Nestor Makhno, but he in fact was made head of a department within the Makhno army which had the task of preparing people for a new social order, based on common ownership of the land, home rule of communities and federative solidarity. This important chapter comes from his large scale work The Unknown Revolution first published in France in 1947 and in English translation in two volumes (1954 and 1955) by Freedom Press and the Libertarian Book Club (New York).
pure violence. It began by brutally closing the centres of the libertarian organisations, by prohibiting all anarchist activity or propaganda. It condemned the masses to not hearing the voices of the anarchists, and to misunderstanding their programme. And when, despite this constraint, the anarchist idea gained ground, the Bolsheviks passed rapidly to more violent methods — imprisonment, outlawing, killing. The then unequal struggle between these two tendencies — one in power, the other confronted by power — increased and became, in certain regions, an actual civil war. In the Ukraine, notably, this state of war lasted more than two years, compelling the Bolsheviks to mobilise all their forces to stifle the anarchist idea and to wipe out the popular movements inspired by it.

Thus the conflict between the two conceptions of the social revolution and, at the same time, between the Bolshevik power and certain movements of the labouring masses, held a highly important place in the events of the period embracing 1919-1921. However, all authors without exception, from the extreme right to the extreme left — we are not speaking of libertarian literature — have passed over this fact in silence. Therefore we are obliged to establish it, to supply all the details, and to draw the reader’s attention to it.

Here two pertinent questions arise:
1. When, on the eve of the October Revolution, the Bolsheviks rallied an overwhelming majority of popular votes, what was the cause of the important and rapid rise of the anarchist idea?
2. What, exactly, was the position of the anarchists in relation to the Bolsheviks, and why were the latter impelled to fight — and fight violently — this libertarian idea and movement?

In replying to these questions it will be found easy to reveal to the reader the true visage of Bolshevism.

And by comparing the two opposing ideas in action one can understand them better, evaluate their respective worth, discover the reasons for this state of war between the two camps, and finally, ‘feel the pulse’ of the revolution after the Bolshevik seizure of power in October 1917.

Accordingly we will compare, in a rough manner, the two concepts: The Bolshevik idea was to build, on the ruins of the bourgeois state, a new ‘workers’ state’ to constitute a ‘workers’ and peasants’ government and to establish a ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’. The anarchist idea [was and] is to transform the economic and social bases of society without having recourse to a political state, to a government, or to a dictatorship of any sort. That is, to achieve the revolution and resolve its problems not by political or statist means, but by means of natural and free activity, economic and social, of the
associations of the workers themselves, after having overthrown the last capitalist government.

To co-ordinate action, the first conception envisaged a certain political power, organising the life of the state with the help of the government and its agents and according to formal directives from the 'centre'.

The other conception conjectured the complete abandonment of political and statist organisation; and the utilisation of a direct and federative alliance and collaboration of the economic, social, technical and other agencies (unions, co-operatives, various associations, etc.) locally, regionally, nationally, internationally; therefore a centralisation, not political or statist, going from the central government or the periphery commanded by it, but economic and technical, following needs and real interests, going from the periphery to the centres, and established in a logical and natural way, according to concrete necessity, without domination or command.

It should be noted how absurd — or biased — is the reproach aimed at the anarchists that they know only how 'to destroy', and they have no 'positive' constructive ideas, especially when this charge is hurled by those of the 'Left'. Discussions between the political parties of the extreme Left and the anarchists have always been about the positive and constructive tasks which are to be accomplished after the destruction of the bourgeois state (on which subject everybody is in agreement). What would be the way of building the new society then: statist, centralist, and political, or federalist, a-political, and simply social? Such was always the theme of the controversies between them; an irrefutable proof that the essential preoccupation of the anarchists was always future construction.

To the thesis of the parties, a political and centralised 'transitional' state, the anarchists opposed theirs: progressive but immediate passage to the economic and federative community. The political parties based their arguments on the social structure left by the centuries and past régimes, and they pretended that this model was compatible with constructive ideas. The anarchists believed that new construction required from the beginning new methods, and they recommended those methods. Whether their thesis was true or false, it proved in any case that they knew clearly what they wanted, and that they had strictly constructive ideas.

As a general rule, an erroneous interpretation — or more often one that was deliberately inaccurate — pretended that the libertarian conception implied the absence of all organisation. Nothing is farther from the truth. It is a question not of 'organisation or non-organisation' but of two different principles of organisation.

All revolutions necessarily begin in a more or less spontaneous
manner, therefore in a confused, chaotic way. It goes without saying — and the libertarians understood this as well as the others — that if a revolution remains in that primitive stage, it will fail. Immediately after the spontaneous impetus, the principle of organisation has to intervene in a revolution as in all other human activity. And it is then that the grave question arises: what should be the manner and basis of this organisation?

One school maintains that a central directing group — an ‘élite’ group — ought to be formed to take in hand the whole work, lead it according to its conception, impose the latter on the whole collectivity, establish a government and organise a state, dictate its will to the populace, impose its ‘laws’ by force and violence, combat, suppress, and even eliminate, those who are not in agreement with it.

Their opponents [the anarchists] consider that such a conception is absurd, contrary to the fundamental principles of human evolution, and, in the last analysis, more than sterile — and harmful to the work undertaken. Naturally, the anarchists say, it is necessary that society be organised. But this new organisation should be done freely, socially, and, certainly, from below. The principle of organisation should arise, not from a centre created in advance to monopolise the whole and impose itself on it, but — what is exactly the opposite — from all quarters, to lead to points of co-ordination, natural centres designed to serve all these quarters.

Of course it is necessary that the organising spirit, that men capable of carrying on organisation — the ‘élite’ — should intervene. But, in every place and under all circumstances, all those valuable humans should freely participate in the common work, as true collaborators, and not as dictators. It is necessary that they especially create an example, and employ themselves in grouping, co-ordinating, organising, using good will, initiative and knowledge, and all capacities and aptitudes without dominating, subjugating or oppressing anyone. Such individuals would be true organisers and theirs would constitute a true organisation, fertile and solid, because it would be natural, human and effectively progressive. Whereas the other ‘organisation’ imitating that of the old society of oppression and exploitation, and therefore adapted to those two goals — would be sterile and unstable because it would not conform to the new purposes, and therefore would not be at all progressive.

In fact, it would not contain any element of a new society, inasmuch as it would only alter the appearance of the old. Belonging to an outdated society, obsolete in all respects, and thus impossible as a naturally free and truly human institution, it could only maintain itself by means of new artifices, new deceptions, new violence, new oppression and
exploitation. Which inevitably would lead astray, falsify, and endanger the whole revolution. So it is obvious that such an organisation will remain unproductive as a motor for the social revolution. It can no more serve as a ‘transitional society’ (as the ‘communists’ pretend), for such a society must necessarily possess at least some of the seeds of that toward which it purports to evolve. And all authoritarian and statist societies possess only residues of the fallen social order.

According to the libertarian thesis, it is the labouring masses themselves who, by means of the various class organisations, factory committees, industrial and agricultural unions, co-operatives, etc., federated and centralised on a basis of real needs, should apply themselves everywhere, to solving the problems of waging the revolution. By their powerful and fertile action, because they are free and conscious, they should co-ordinate their efforts throughout the whole country. As for the ‘élite’, their rôle, according to the libertarians, is to help the masses, enlighten them, teach them, give them the necessary advice, impel them to take the initiative, provide them with an example, and support them in their action — but not direct them governmentally.

The libertarians hold that a favourable solution to the problems of the revolution can result only from the freely and consciously collective and united work of millions of men and women who bring to it and harmonise in it all the variety of their needs and interests, their strength and capacities, their gifts, aptitudes, inclinations, professional knowledge, and understanding. By the natural interplay of their economic, technical and social organisations, with the help of the ‘élite’ and, in case of need, under the protection of their freely organised armed forces, the labouring masses should, in the view of the libertarians, be able to carry the revolution effectively forward and progressively arrive at the practical achievement of all of its tasks.

The Bolshevik thesis was diametrically opposed to this. In the contention of the Bolsheviks it was the élite — their élite — which, forming a ‘workers’ government’ and establishing a so-called ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’, should carry out the social transformation and solve its prodigious problems. The masses should aid this élite (the opposite of the libertarian belief that the élite should aid the masses) by faithfully, blindly, mechanically carrying out its plans, decisions, orders and ‘laws’. And the armed forces, also in imitation of those of the capitalist countries, likewise should blindly obey the ‘élite’.

Such is, and remains, the essential difference between the two ideas. Such also were the two opposed conceptions of the social revolution at the moment of the Russian upheaval in 1917.
The Bolsheviks, as we have said, didn't even want to listen to the anarchists, still less to let them expound their thesis to the masses. Believing themselves in possession of an absolute, indisputable, 'scientific' truth, and pretending to have to impose it immediately, they fought and eliminated the libertarian movement by violence from the time the anarchist idea began to interest the masses — the usual procedure of all dominators, exploiters and inquisitors.

In October 1917, the two conceptions entered into conflict, which became increasingly acute, with no compromise possible. Then, for four years, this conflict kept the Bolshevik power on the alert, and played a more and more significant part in the vicissitudes of the revolution, until the libertarian movement in Russia was completely destroyed by military force at the end of 1921.

Despite this fact, or perhaps because of it, and the lessons that it teaches, it has been carefully killed by the whole political press.

From 1917 — The Russian Revolution Betrayed pp 5-11 (Freedom Press 1954)

The Kronstadt Revolt

Editors' Introduction

The crushing of the Kronstadt 'rebellion' in the early part of 1921 is, as Ciliga remarks, of decisive importance. It marks the triumph of the counter-revolution in Russia. The aspirations of the revolutionary workers and peasants found expression in the demands of the Kronstadt sailors which are quoted in the following pages; and the annihilation of the men of Kronstadt marked the final stabilisation of the power of the Bolshevik government, the final hardening of that regime of totalitarian absolutism which Lenin set up, and which has been carried on by Stalin.

By 1921 the civil war and the wars of intervention were over, and the Russian workers and peasants were expecting to be released from the rigours to which they had submitted for the sake of internal unity in the face of the enemy without. Meanwhile, as a result of 'War Communism', i.e. State control of industry and land, the Russian economy was completely disorganised. When therefore Lenin showed no inclination at all towards restoring workers' liberties and control over industry unrest became very widespread.

On the political field, this unrest and dissatisfaction showed itself in
the programme of the Workers' Opposition. In Petrograd, the workers' protest meetings were dispersed by the Government so that they were forced to resort to strike action in order to get their demands heard. Like Kronstadt, like the Makhnovist movement in the Ukraine, the actions of these workers have been misrepresented and subjected to the grossest of calumnies by Leninists of all shades. The strikers' demands are, however, well expressed in the following proclamation which appeared on the walls of buildings in Petrograd on February 27th:

A complete change is necessary in the policies of the Government. First of all, the workers and peasants need freedom. They don't want to live by the decrees of the Bolsheviks: they want to control their own destinies.

Comrades, preserve revolutionary order! Determinedly and in an organised manner demand:
Liberation of all arrested socialists and non-partisan working-men;
Abolition of martial law; freedom of speech, press and assembly for all those who labour;
Free election of shop and factory committees (Zahvkomi), of labour unions and soviet representatives.
Call meetings, pass resolutions send your delegates to the authorities and work for the realization of your demands!¹

Arrests and suppression were Lenin's only answers to these demands. The Government Committee of Defence of Petrograd issued an order: 'In case crowds congregate in the streets, the troops are ordered to fire; those that resist are to be shot on the spot.'

The Kronstadt sailors were disturbed by the events in Petrograd. Sympathy with the strikers was first expressed by the crews of the warships Petropavlovsk and Sevastopol, which in 1917 had been in the forefront of the revolutionary struggle. The movement spread throughout the fleet and then to the Red Army in Kronstadt. The Kronstadt sailors and workers had sent delegates to Petrograd to report on the events there, and it was on hearing the very unfavourable report of this delegation that they presented the Petropavlovsk resolution to a mass meeting of 16,000 sailors, Red Army men and workers. The resolution was accepted unanimously except for three votes.²

Lenin's reply to the Kronstadt resolution was to send Trotsky who gave the famous orders to the Red Army to 'shoot them down like partridges'. It was only then that the men of Kronstadt prepared to resist by force of arms; only then that the peaceful resolution became a 'rebellion against the Soviet Power'. Throughout, however, they abstained from taking the offensive, as they could easily have done.

But in addition to the brutal suppression by the Red Army, and subsequently by the Cheka, during which 18,000 workers were killed, Lenin also instituted a campaign of calumny against the Kronstadt
workers. The delegates to the Tenth Party Congress which was going on at the same time were assured that ‘the White Generals played a big role’, that ‘it was the work of the Social Revolutionarists and the White Guardists from abroad’. The Kronstadt workers had asked that delegates of the workers and soldiers be sent to inquire into these charges. The Petrograd Soviet, under the chairmanship of the Bolshevik leader Zinovieff, refused.

Doing their utmost to deceive the mass of the workers and peasants as to the events at Kronstadt, the Bolshevik leaders knew very well what was going on. In the Krasny Archiv (Red Archive), a monthly magazine published by the Editorial Board of the Supreme Military Council, and intended for circulation only among the upper reaches of the Communist Party — it was marked ‘Not for Publication’ — there appeared in December, 1921, an article on ‘The Rebellion of the Kronstadt Sailors’, which makes this quite clear. While carrying on the most virulent campaign of vilification, the Bolsheviks were quite cynically aware of the true state of affairs, and were only the more determined to maintain their stranglehold over the Russian workers at any cost, and regardless of the bloodshed involved.

The Political Department of the Baltic Fleet found itself isolated not only from the masses but also from local party workers, having become a bureaucratic organ lacking any prestige and standing . . . The Baltic Fleet destroyed all local initiative and brought the work down to the level of clerical routine . . . From July to November, 1920, 20 per cent of the members left the Party . . . The Chief of the Organisation Department of the Baltic Fleet pointed out in the middle of February, 1921, that ‘if the work goes on as it has been going on until now, a mutiny is likely to break out two or three months from now . . . ’ The lack of Party work told heavily upon the organisation. At a mass meeting, numbering 15,000 people, which, of course, was also attended by Communists, no one, save Comrades Kalinin, Kuzmin and Vassiliev, voted against the resolution. And this also had its effect in the grievous incidents taking place in the Kronstadt organisation; the resignation of 381 members who did not grasp the true meaning of the rebellion and its consequences. Nor did the responsible workers heading the work in Kronstadt understand what was going on, and that is why they failed to take the right measures necessary at the very beginning.5

This passage makes it clear that the resolution was a protest against conditions in the fleet for which even the writer lays the blame partly at the door of the Party. There is no mention here of ‘White Guardist generals’, ‘Social Revolutionists’ and so on. It is the clearest denial of the calumnies and lies circulated by the Bolsheviks themselves. The subsequent history of Lenin’s regime shows that the Kronstadt workers saw clearly the future — or rather, the death — of the revolution. Their
‘rebellion’ was a spirited and heroic fight against the totalitarian dictatorship of the Party. In the perspective of the Moscow trials and the Stalinist Terror, Kronstadt is clearly seen, as Ciliga points out, as a turning point in the history of the Russian revolution. A turning point, moreover, which was to be almost exactly paralleled, and with the same dire result, in the crushing of the Spanish workers during the May Days in Barcelona in 1937. On both these occasions power passed definitely from the hands of the workers into those of the government, and the revolution was ended.

The revolutionary workers must not only destroy the bourgeois state: they must also guard against the growth of a new apparatus which may wrest power from them. Any political party seeking to centralise control in its own hands, has to set up instruments to ensure that its plans are carried out; to control not only the defeated bourgeoisie, but also the revolutionary workers themselves. Inevitably, conflicts will arise between it and the economic and social organisations set up by the workers. They can only end in the suppression of one power by the other.

Such a conflict may however be masked by certain aims which both the workers and the ‘revolutionary government’ have in common. Both aim to overthrow the bourgeoisie at home and abroad. In withstanding the counter-revolutionary attacks of the bourgeoisie, the conflict between the workers and the new state is concealed in their common struggle; under cover of which the new state power seeks continuously to entrench itself at the expense of the workers’ organisations, until it finally overthrows them altogether.

This consolidation of the power of the governing minority inevitably involves ruthless suppression, and the workers, their liberty lost and deprived of responsibility in the ordering of their lives and economy, sink back into their pre-revolutionary apathy. The revolutionary opportunity has once more been missed. Meanwhile the new state is forced to go further and further down the road to a bleak totalitarianism. To prevent the initial setting up of such a new governing power is the lesson which must be learnt from the Kronstadt tragedy.

1 Quoted by Alexander Berkman: The Kronstadt Rebellion (1922)
2 Those of Kuzmin, the Commissar of the Baltic Fleet; Vassiliev, the chairman of the Kronstadt Soviet, and Kalinin, now [1942] President of the USSR.
3 Krasny Archiv (‘The Red Archives’) No. 9 December 1921 p.44. Quoted by G. P. Maximoff in The Guillotine at Work p.169
4 See The May Days Barcelona 1937 (Freedom Press 1987 126pp) — Editor
Anton Ciliga

The Kronstadt Revolt

The correspondence between Trotsky and Wendelin Thomas (one of the leaders of the revolt in the German Navy in 1918, and a member of the American Committee of Enquiry into the Moscow Trials) regarding the historical significance of the events in Kronstadt in 1921, has given rise to widespread international discussion. That in itself indicates the importance of the problem. On the other hand, it is no accident that special interest should be shown in the Kronstadt revolt to-day; that there is an analogy, a direct link even between what happened at Kronstadt 17 years ago, and the recent trials at Moscow, is only too apparent.\(^1\) To-day we witness the murder of the leaders of the Russian revolution; in 1921 it was the masses who formed the basis of the revolution who were massacred. Would it be possible today to disgrace and suppress the leaders of October without the slightest protest from the people, if these leaders had not already by armed force silenced the Kronstadt sailors and the workers all over Russia?

Trotsky's reply to Wendelin Thomas shows that unfortunately Trotsky — who is, together with Stalin, the only one of the leaders of the October revolution concerned in the suppression of Kronstadt who remains alive — still refuses to look at the past objectively. Furthermore, in his article 'Too Much Noise About Kronstadt', he increases the gulf which he created at that time between the working masses and himself; he does not hesitate, after having ordered their bombardment in 1921 to describe these men today as 'completely demoralised elements, men who wore elegant wide trousers and did their hair like pimps'.

No! It is not with accusations of this kind, which reek of bureaucratic

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*The Kronstadt Revolt* was first published in French in 1938 and only in 1942 in an English translation in *War Commentary* (January) and a month later as a pamphlet with the Editors' introduction. However in 1940 with the support of Herbert Read we were able to persuade the publishers Routledge to bring out Ciliga's book *The Russian Enigma. Ten Years in the Country of the Great Lie*. We recently learned with much pleasure that Ciliga celebrated his 90th birthday last year; lives in Italy (he was born in a part of Yugoslavia which was handed over to Italy at the end of WW1); and judging by the interview published in the magazine *Istok* (Paris No 15 March 1988) social problems are still uppermost in his mind. We hope to publish extracts in a future issue of *The Raven*. 
arrogance, that a useful contribution can be made to the lessons of the
great Russian revolution.

In order to assess the influence that Kronstadt has had on the
outcome of the revolution, it is necessary to avoid all personal issues,
and direct attention to three fundamental questions: (1) In what general
circumstances the Kronstadt revolt arose? (2) What were the aims of
the movement? (3) By what means did the insurgents attempt to
achieve these aims?

The masses and the bureaucracy in 1920-21

Everyone now agrees that during the winter of 1920 to 1921 the Russian
revolution was passing through an extremely critical phase. The
offensive against Poland had ended in defeat at Warsaw, the social
revolution had not broken out in the West, the Russian revolution had
become isolated, famine and disorganisation had seized the entire
country. The peril of bourgeois restoration knocked at the door of the
revolution. At this moment of crisis the different classes and parties
which existed within the revolutionary camp each presented their
solution for its resolution.

The Soviet Government and the higher circles in the Communist
Party applied their own solution of increasing the power of the
bureaucracy. The attribution of powers to the ‘Executive Committees’
which had hitherto been vested in the soviets, the replacement of the
dictatorship of the class by the dictatorship of the party, the shift of
authority even within the party from its members to its cadres, the
replacement of the double power of the bureaucracy and the workers in
the factory by the sole power of the former — to do all this was to ‘save
the Revolution!’ It was at this moment that Bukharin put forward his
plea for a ‘proletarian Bonapartism’. ‘By placing restrictions on itself’
the proletariat would, according to him, facilitate the struggle against
the bourgeois counter-revolution. Here was manifested already the
enormous quasi-messianic self-importance of the Communist
Bureaucracy.

The Ninth and Tenth Congresses of the Communist Party, as well as
the intervening year passed beneath the auspices of this new policy.
Lenin rigidly carried it through, Trotsky sang its praises. The
Bureaucracy prevented the bourgeois restoration . . . by eliminating
the proletarian character of the revolution.

The formation of the Workers’ Opposition within the party, which
was supported not only by the proletarian faction in the party itself but
also by the great mass of unorganised workers, the general strike of the
Petrograd workers a short time before the Kronstadt revolt and finally
the insurrection itself, all expressed the aspirations of the masses who felt, more or less clearly, that a 'third party' was about to destroy their conquests. The movement of poor peasants led by Makhno in the Ukraine was the outcome of similar resistance in similar circumstances. If the struggles of 1920-1921 are examined in the light of the historical material now available, one is struck by the way that these scattered masses, starved and enfeebled by economic disorganisation, nevertheless had the strength to formulate for themselves with such precision their social and political position, and at the same time to defend themselves against the bureaucracy and against the bourgeoisie.

The Kronstadt Programme

We shall not content ourselves, like Trotsky, with simple declarations, so we submit to readers the resolution which served as a programme for the Kronstadt movement. We reproduce it in full, because of its immense historical importance. It was adopted on February 28th by the sailors of the battleship 'Petropavlovsk', and was subsequently accepted by all the sailors, soldiers and workers of Kronstadt.

After having heard the representatives delegated by the general meeting of ships' crew to report on the situation in Petrograd this assembly takes the following decisions:
1. Seeing that the present soviets do not express the wishes of the workers and peasants, to organise immediately re-elections to the soviets with secret vote, and with care to organise free electoral propaganda for all workers and peasants.
2. To grant liberty of speech and of press to the workers and peasants, to the anarchists and the left socialist parties.
3. To secure freedom of assembly for labour unions and peasant organisations.
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 10th, 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 'politodeli' because no party should be given special privileges in the propagation of its ideas or receive financial support from the government for such purposes. Instead there should be established educational and cultural commissions, locally elected and financed by the government.
8. To abolish immediately all 'zagryaditelnije otryadi'.
9. To equalize all the rations of all who work 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 according to the judgement of the workers.

11. To give the peasants full freedom of action in regard to their 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 ‘kursanti’ 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 artisan production which does not employ hired labour.

These are primitive formulations, insufficient no doubt, but all of them impregnated with the spirit of October; and no calumny in the world can cast a doubt on the intimate connection existing between this resolution and the sentiments which guided the expropriations of 1917.

The depth of principle which animates this resolution is shown by the fact that it is still to a great extent applicable. One can, in fact, oppose it as well to the Stalin regime of 1938, as to that of Lenin in 1921. More even than that: the accusations of Trotsky himself against Stalin’s regime are only reproductions, timid ones, it is true, of the Kronstadt claims. Besides, what other programme which is at all socialist could be set up against the bureaucratic oligarchy except that of Kronstadt and the Workers’ Opposition?

The appearance of this resolution demonstrates the close connections which existed between the movements of Petrograd and Kronstadt. Trotsky’s attempt to set the workers of Petrograd against those of Kronstadt in order to confirm the legend of the counter-revolutionary nature of the Kronstadt movement, comes back on Trotsky himself: in 1921, Trotsky pleaded the necessity under which Lenin was situated in justification of the suppression of democracy in the Soviets and in the party, and accused the masses inside and outside the party of sympathising with Kronstadt. He admitted therefore that at that time the Petrograd workers and the opposition although they had not resisted by force of arms, none the less extended their sympathy to Kronstadt.

Trotsky’s subsequent assertion that ‘the insurrection was inspired by the desire to obtain a privileged ration’ is still more wild. Thus, it is one of these privileged people of the Kremlin, the rations for whom were very much better than those of others, who dares to hurl a similar reproach, and that at the very men who in paragraph 9 of their resolution, explicitly demanded equalisation of rations! This detail shows the desperate extent of Trotsky’s bureaucratic blindness.

Trotsky’s articles do not depart in the slightest degree from the
legend created long ago by the Central Committee of the Party. Trotsky certainly deserves credit from the international working class for having refused since 1923 to continue to participate in the bureaucratic degeneration and in the new ‘purges’ which were destined to deprive the Revolution of all its left-wing elements. He deserves still more to be defended against Stalin’s calumny and assassins. But all this does not give Trotsky the right to insult the working masses of 1921. On the contrary! More than anyone else, Trotsky should furnish a new appreciation of the initiative taken at Kronstadt. An initiative of great historic value, an initiative taken by rank-and-file militants in the struggle against the first bloodstained ‘purge’ undertaken by the bureaucracy.

The attitude of the Russian workers during the tragic winter of 1920-1921 shows a profound social instinct; and a noble heroism inspired the working classes of Russia not only at the height of the Revolution but also at the crisis which placed it in mortal danger.

Neither the Kronstadt fighters, nor the Petrograd workers, nor the ranks of the Communists could summon, it is true, in that winter the same revolutionary energy as in 1917 to 1919, but what there was of socialism and revolutionary feeling in the Russia of 1921 was possessed by the rank-and-file. In their opposition to this, Lenin and Trotsky, in line with Stalin, with Zinoviev, Kaganovitch, and others responded to the wishes and served the interests of the bureaucratic cadres. The workers struggled for the socialism which the bureaucracy were already in the process of liquidating. That is the fundamental point of the whole problem.

**Kronstadt and the NEP**

People often believe that Kronstadt forced the introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP) — a profound error. The Kronstadt resolution pronounced in favour of the defence of the workers, not only against the bureaucratic capitalism of the State, but also against the restoration of private capitalism. This restoration was demanded — in opposition to Kronstadt — by the social democrats, who combined it with a regime of political democracy. And it was Lenin and Trotsky who to a great extent realised it (but without political democracy) in the form of the NEP. The Kronstadt resolution declared for the opposite since it declared itself against the employment of wage labour in agriculture and small industry. This resolution, and the movement underlying, sought for a revolutionary alliance of the proletarian and peasant workers with the poorest sections of the country labourers, in order that
the revolution might develop towards socialism. The NEP, on the other hand, was a union of bureaucrats with the upper layers of the village against the proletariat; it was the alliance of State capitalism and private capitalism against socialism. The NEP is as much opposed to the Kronstadt demands as, for example, the revolutionary socialist programme of the vanguard of the European workers for the abolition of the Versailles system, is opposed to the abrogation of the Treaty of Versailles achieved by Hitler.

Let us consider, finally, one last accusation which is commonly circulated: that action such as that at Kronstadt could have indirectly let loose the forces of the counter-revolution. It is possible indeed that even by placing itself on a footing of workers' democracy the revolution might have been overturned; but what is certain is that it has perished, and that it has perished on account of the policy of its leaders. The repression of Kronstadt, the suppression of the democracy of workers and soviets by the Russian Communist party, the elimination of the proletariat from the management of industry, and the introduction of the NEP, already signified the death of the Revolution.

It was precisely the end of the civil war which produced the splitting of the post-revolutionary society into two fundamental groupings: the working masses and the bureaucracy. As far as its socialist and internationalist aspirations were concerned, the Russian Revolution was stifled: in its nationalist, bureaucratic, and state capitalist tendencies, it developed and consolidated itself.

It was from this point onwards, and on this basis, each year more and more clearly, that the Bolshevik repudiation of morality, so frequently evoked, took on a development which had to lead to the Moscow Trials. The implacable logic of things has manifested itself. While the revolutionaries, remaining such only in words, accomplished in fact the task of the reaction and counter-revolution, they were compelled, inevitably, to have recourse to lies, to calumny and falsification. This system of generalised lying is the result, not the cause, of the separation of the Bolshevik party from socialism and from the proletariat.

In order to corroborate this statement, I shall quote the testimony regarding Kronstadt of men I have met in Soviet Russia.

'The men of Kronstadt! They were absolutely right; they intervened in order to defend the Petrograd workers: it was a tragic misunderstanding on the part of Lenin and Trotsky, that instead of agreeing with them, they gave them battle,' said Dch. to me in 1932. He was a non-party worker in Petrograd in 1921, whom I knew in the political isolator at Verkhne-Uralsk as a Trotskyist.

'It is a myth that, from the social point of view, Kronstadt of 1921 had a wholly different population from that of 1917,' another man from
Petrograd, Dv., said to me in prison. In 1921 he was a member of the Communist youth, and was imprisoned in 1932 as a ‘decist’ (a member of Saponov’s group of ‘Democratic Centralists’).

I also had the opportunity of knowing one of the most effective participants in the Kronstadt rebellion. He was an old marine engineer, a communist since 1917, who had, during the civil war, taken an active part, directing at one time a Tcheka in a province somewhere on the Volga, and found himself in 1921 at Kronstadt as a political commissar on the warship ‘Marat’ (ex ‘Petropavlovsk’). When I saw him, in 1930, in the Leningrad prison, he had just spent the previous eight years in the Solovietski islands.

The Methods of Struggle

The Kronstadt workers pursued revolutionary aims in struggling against the reactionary tendencies of the bureaucracy, and they used clean and honest methods. In contrast, the bureaucracy slandered their movement odiously, pretending that it was led by General Kozlovski.5 Actually, the men of Kronstadt honestly desired, as comrades, to discuss the questions at issue with the representatives of the government. Their action, had at first, a defensive character — that is the reason why they did not occupy Oranienbaum in time, situated on the coast opposite Kronstadt.

Right from the start, the Petrograd bureaucrats made use of the system of hostages by arresting the families of the sailors, Red Army soldiers and workers of Kronstadt who were living in Petrograd because several commissars in Kronstadt — not one of whom was shot — had been arrested. The news of the seizing of hostages was brought to the knowledge of Kronstadt by means of leaflets dropped from aeroplanes. In their reply by radio, Kronstadt declared on March 7th ‘that they did not wish to imitate Petrograd as they considered that such an act, even when carried out in an excess of desperation and hate, is most shameful and most cowardly from every point of view. History has not yet known a similar procedure’5. The new governing clique understood much better than the Kronstadt ‘rebels’ the significance of the social struggle which was beginning, the depth of the class-antagonism which separated it from the workers. It is in this that lies the tragedy of revolutions in the period of their decline.

But while military conflict was forced upon Kronstadt, they still found the strength to formulate the programme for the ‘third revolution’, which remains since then the programme of the Russian socialism of the future.
Balance Sheet

There are reasons for thinking that granted the relation between the forces of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, of socialism and capitalism, which existed in Russia and Europe at the beginning of 1921, the struggle for the socialist development of the Russian Revolution was doomed to defeat. In those conditions the socialist programme of the masses could not conquer: it had to depend on the triumph of the counter-revolution whether openly declared or camouflaged under an aspect of degeneracy (as has been produced in fact).

But such a conception of the progress of the Russian Revolution does not diminish in the slightest, in the realms of principle, the historic importance of the programme and the efforts of the working masses. On the contrary, this programme constitutes the point of departure from which a new cycle in the revolutionary socialist development will begin. In fact, each new revolution begins not on the basis from which the preceding one started, but from the point at which the revolution before it had undergone a moral set-back.

The experience of the degeneration of the Russian Revolution places anew before the conscience of international socialism an extremely important sociological problem. In the Russian revolution, as in two other great revolutions, those of England and of France, why is it that it is from the inside that the counter-revolution has triumphed, at the moment when the revolutionary forces were exhausted, and by means of the revolutionary party itself ("purged", it is true of its left-wing elements)? Marxism believes that the socialist revolution, once begun, would either be assured of a gradual and continued development towards integral socialism, or would be defeated through the agency of bourgeois restoration.

Altogether, the Russian Revolution poses in an entirely new way the problem of the mechanism of the socialist revolution. This question must become paramount in international discussion. In such discussion the problem of Kronstadt can and must have a position worthy of it.

1. This article was written in 1938 (?), at the time of a new outbreak of purge trials in Moscow. — Eds
2. Political sections of the Communist party existing in the majority of State institutions.
3. Police detachments officially created to struggle against speculation, but which actually used to confiscate everything that the starving population, the workers included, brought from the country for their own personal consumption.
4. Cadet officers.
5. Izvestia of the Kronstadt Revolutionary Committee 7th March 1921.
Alexander Skirda

The Rehabilitation of Makhno

In accordance with Gorbachev’s perestroika decree, Soviet historians have set about a profound revision of the regime’s historical past. Until now they have had to confine themselves to the 1930s and the Stalinist nightmare. Western public opinion has been sensitive to the posthumous rehabilitation (juridically though not politically) of the principal opponents of Stalin within the party: Bukharin, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Radek and Trotsky, as well as tens of thousands of party members ‘purged’ by revolver shots in the back of the neck in 1936-1938, and ‘reintegrated’ posthumously into the bosom of the party.

Soviet opinion itself has been far more aroused by the rediscovery of the ‘final solution’ applied to the peasantry — nearly eleven million deaths from an artificial famine and from political repression between 1929 and 1934, — the ‘holocaust of the century’. Inevitably this has provoked a demand for research into the roots of the evil. Until now the death of Lenin in 1924 has served as the crossroads after which everything went wrong. This has been found to be a totally insufficient explanation, and we must start much further back, if we can judge from a current article in the influential weekly published under the direction of the Writers’ Union of the USSR, the Literary Gazette, of which several million copies are printed. Its issue of 8 February 1989 has this article on ‘Batko Makhno or the “Werewolf” of the Civil War’.

A Russian joke asks ‘who can tell what is going to happen yesterday’. It is more than a joke. Last year’s secondary school leaving examination in history had to be cancelled because, with the arrival of glasnost and perestroika, and the message from above that the official version of the Soviet past consists of distortions, omissions and lies, new school histories have to be written. They can’t be written yet because the amount of historical truth it is permissible to teach keeps on expanding.

This article appeared in the issues of the French anarchist weekly Le Monde Libertaire for 6 April, 13 April and 20 April 1989.
The strange and provocative title has to be understood in the context of the article. Makhno, presented until now as a wolf, has now been rediscovered with a human face. The author, Vassily Golovanov, draws a portrait which is distinctly positive, even elegiac and idyllic in terms of revolutionary hagiography. Even though it is embellished with many factual or biographical errors, the article stresses equally the errors of the communist party leadership of that time both with regard to Makhno and towards the revolutionary peasantry in general.

Given the importance of this first historical revaluation, and indeed, rehabilitation, and considering all the rubbish published in the USSR on this subject right up to the present day, it seems important to make known to French, and Western readers generally, the overall tenor of this text and to translate the essential passages in extenso, and to follow them with some analysis and comment on the significance of this event.

**Trotsky’s responsibility in the rupture with Makhno**

Golovanov’s article, although it appears in the history section of the *Gazette*, is presented in a journalistic way, in that it has almost no bibliographical references. All the same, to give it official status, a guarantee of seriousness and some kind of undeniable historical certification, it is preceded by a foreword by N. Vasetsky, doctor of historical sciences, presented here in its entirety:

The editors of the *Literary Gazette* have asked me to write some kind of preface to a text dedicated to a man most of us know under the name ‘Batko Makhno’. When this name is mentioned what appears before our eyes is a half-comic, half-tragic figure we have all seen in films dealing with that period. But in spite of all this, Makhno, by now, deserves a more serious consideration. In fact, it is very important to be able to produce a reply to the question of why movements like those of the makhnovists found themselves on the other side of the barricades?

This article rightly reveals that this was due to an under-evaluation of the peasantry — allies of the proletariat not only in the struggle against the great Russian landowners, but equally in a society newly liberated from all exploitation. The author of the article sees in an absolutely factual way that the main cause of Makhno’s tragedy was due to the anti-peasant attitude of Trotsky, president of the revolutionary military Soviet of the republic, and above all, in his direction of operations. The original character of Makhno seems to me to have been appropriately caught in this article: the conflicting programmes that obliged him to struggle against both the forces he faced in the revolution — the Whites and the Reds — are well illustrated.

We will see how far Golovanov’s article justifies Vasetsky’s opinion.
Anti-Makhnovist stereotypes

Golovanov begins by recalling the circumstances of Makhno’s return to his native Ukraine, then occupied by Austrian and German armies, in July 1918, disguised as a teacher and supplied with false papers by the Kremlin, which is how, three months later, he was able to launch the formidable peasant insurrection, and on 22 September 1918, disguised this time as a captain of the Varta (the Ukrainian ‘national guard’ formed by the occupying forces), intercepted a punitive detachment aimed against the peasants. On this occasion Makhno revealed his true identity as ‘the revolutionary Makhno’. Golovanov goes on to enumerate the many rumours and legends which have followed this ‘figure, unique in the revolution because of his obscure and contradictory aspects’.

Among these are the story that when he was baptised, the priest’s hood caught fire, a clear omen of his future as a bandit. Another tells how he was sent to prison for killing his own brother. Yet another explains that, having duped and robbed the peasants of his own locality in the first months of the 1917 revolution, he went to live a life of luxury in a private hotel in Moscow. Even though this last story emanated from the Austro-German authorities at the time when Makhno was mounting a partisan action against them, Golovanov writes that, alas, it is ‘facts’ of this kind which until now have dominated the Soviet view of this already mythological figure.

Moreover, and this may give the reader a certain pleasure, Golovanov declares that ‘there has never been any serious historical study of the Makhnovist movement in the USSR’. Everything published until now has been nothing but empty lies. This reveals, Golovanov concludes, ‘the bias and the methodological weakness of the Soviet school of history between the 1920s and the 1930s, retrospectively presenting history in black and white’. Only the review The war and the revolution which paid careful attention to ‘the tactics of partisan war brought almost to perfection by Makhno’ finds grace in the view of Golovanov. He goes on to say that no other work has seen the light of day in the Soviet Union which analyses the Makhnovist movement as a social phenomenon.

It is astonishing to read such a mea culpa in an official Soviet organ, the more so since Golovanov drives home the point even more forcibly in declaring that Soviet scholarship has been ‘content to stick the label “bandit” on Makhno and to relegate him to the archives in the hope that time would efface from the memory of future generations the image of the storm-centre of the peasant war in the Ukraine’.
The author also cites the ambiguous or unfavourable presentation of Makhno in Soviet literature, like the work of the poet Bagritsky which attributes to him bestial traits. Alexis Tolstoy (the ‘proletarian count’ and one-time émigré who returned to place his pen at the service of Stalin) also distinguished himself in his Stalin Prize-winning novel *The Road to Calvary*, with its ‘unflinching’ depiction of Makhno which attributes to him the words, ‘In the Tsar’s prison they swung me, sometimes by the head and sometimes by the feet, before throwing me on to the concrete floor . . . That is the way that popular leaders are forged’.

After these specimens of the edifying and ridiculous stories on which the Soviet reader is fed, Golovanov moves to serious matters and traces the biography of Makhno, this time in conformity with the main historical outlines as already known in the West, even in the absence of serious documentation. (See below).

**The real Makhno**

Golovanov gives a brief account of Makhno’s origins in the poor peasantry, his childhood of toil, his membership at the age of 16 of an anarchist group in Gulyai-Polye, his participation in ‘expropriations’ from the local rich in the name of ‘the starving’, his attack on a mail-coach, during which people were killed, his arrest in 1908, the accusations against him by four ‘repentant’ accomplices, his resistance to interrogation, and the sentence of 20 years in a convict settlement, commuted to detention in the Butyrki, the political prison in Moscow. In passing, Golovanov rectifies the legend of Makhno as a ‘teacher’. We must correct him too: it was the death penalty which, in view of his youth, was commuted to 20 years of imprisonment, and it was his political convictions that made it desirable to send him to the Butyrki, where the three thousand prisoners considered the most dangerous in the country were concentrated.

Arshinov is considered by Golovanov as Makhno’s intellectual mentor, even though Makhno later rejected him, just as he sees Makhno wandering aimlessly around Moscow for a week after his liberation in February 1917 whereas the Ukrainian anarchist was delaying his return in spite of the pressing desire to do so, the better to breathe in the free air of revolutionary Moscow, and trying to seize the chance to be useful. Golovanov jumps too rapidly from these facts to the conclusion that Makhno ‘neither liked nor understood urban life’. It is much more likely that he understood all too well the deleterious and sectarian atmosphere of the big cities he disliked, by comparison with the small
towns and villages of the Ukraine. (We shouldn’t forget that at that time Gulyai-Polye was a town of between fifteen and twenty thousand inhabitants.)

Putting this aside, Golovanov is correct in writing that his years in prison had turned Makhno into ‘a fanatical anarchist’, something which, paradoxically, didn’t stop him from being elected at Gulyai-Polye as president of the peasant union, or to the social committee, or from being the delegate to the soviet of peasant deputies. (Makhno himself writes in his Memoirs that this was to avoid these places being taken up by the representatives of authoritarian or political parties and organisations).

Briefly he describes Makhno’s revolutionary activities in a way that has never, ever, been presented to Soviet readers:

As an anarchist, a partisan of extreme revolution, Makhno took up a stance for radical and immediate transformation, well before the convocation of the Constituent Assembly. On the first of May 1917 an envoy was sent from Gulyai-Polye to demand the removal from the provisional government of the six capitalist ministers. In June, workers’ control was installed in the factories of Gulyai-Polye, (Makhno proposed to the workers that they should discipline the bourgeoisie by expropriating the local bank, but this they refused to do for fear of attracting repression). Besides the soviet of workers’ and peasants’ deputies a committee of poor peasants was born, directed against the big landlords and local kulaks.

In August, at the time of General Kornilov’s march on Petrograd, Makhno organised a committee for the defence of the revolution which disarmed the bourgeoisie and the landlords in the region. At the regional congress of soviets the anarchist group from Gulyai-Polye called to the peasants to ignore the inclinations of the provisional government and of the Ukrainian central Rada and proposing ‘the immediate seizure of the lands of the church and of the big proprietors, there to organise free communes, allowing the possibility of participation to these same big landlords and dispossessed kulaks’. By October this redivision of land had been accomplished, and the land was being worked, in spite of threats from government agencies.

Golovanov cites the intimidatory threats by an agent of the provisional government following the disarming of the local bourgeoisie. Makhno raised the matter before the committee for the defence of the revolution and ‘gave him 20 minutes to get out of Gulyai-Polye and two hours to get out of the whole revolutionary territory’. It was thus that this ‘foreign soviet region’ (in the language used by Golovanov) was able to live peacefully until the German invasion several months later.

He goes on to describe Makhno’s journey to Moscow and his meeting with Lenin who was interested in his account of the agrarian transformations at Gulyai-Polye. Three times Lenin asked him to describe how the peasants had understood the slogan ‘All Power to the Soviets!’
Makhno replied that the soviets elected by them had been entirely responsible to them for the path taken by local political events. 'In that case', Lenin told him, 'the peasantry in your region has been contaminated by anarchism'. 'What's so bad about that?' asked Makhno.

'That isn't what I want to say', Lenin replied. 'On the contrary, it is a matter for rejoicing, since it hastens the victory of communism over capitalism and its power', and he went on to say that he thought peasant anarchism to be a passing malady, quickly healed.

Here, in its entirety is the revealing commentary by Golovanov on the impressions Makhno brought back from Moscow:

Makhno left Moscow with contradictory feelings. He had been a specifically 'soviet' anarchist (other anarchists were opposed, not only to the soviets, but to all other hierarchical structures), but his conception of the revolution was strongly distinct from that of the Bolsheviks, Makhno not recognising any political party, whatever it might be. For him the basic regional soviet was a self-sufficient organisation through which alone the will of the people could be expressed. The hierarchy of soviets was an absurdity; proletarian government a dangerous fiction, just as Arshinov wrote: 'The State is embodied by its functionaries: they become everything while the working class remains nothing'.

Golovanov goes on to describe Makhno's experience as a member of the Commission of Inquiry of the revolutionary commission of Alexandrovsk, charged with the task of examining the cases of people arrested at the end of 1917 (after the October coup). 'Meanwhile' Golovanov comments, 'this work was little to the taste of Makhno. More than this, when the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries were arrested, Makhno decided to open the gates of the town jail.' He was equally irritated by all the fuss that surrounded the elections for the Constituent Assembly, which he described as a card game among the political parties. 'It is not parties which serve the people, but people who have to serve the parties. Already today . . . they don't talk about names any more, it is only parties that decide', he prophesied to his new comrades. But, not having been supported by them, he left the revolutionary committee of Alexandrovsk and returned to Gulyai-Polye, far from 'the temptations of big politics'.

Back in his own town he took part in a commune set up in a former landed estate taken over by landless peasants and workers. Golovanov is interested in the efforts of the Gulyai-Polye Soviet to establish a direct exchange with the town: they sent flour to the workers of the Prokhorov and Morozov factories with a request for textiles in return. The consignment from the factories was blocked by the organs of the Soviet state, as the 'authorities repudiated it as too "petite-bourgeoise" a solution to the problem of provisioning the towns'.

According to the author, the accumulation of experiences like this
contributed a heightening of the contradictions between the 'proletarian model of socialism and its peasant alternative, which could have been managed with some kind of compromise, a sort of advance version of the New Economic Policy. The German invasion allowed no one to see how this contradiction could have been resolved.'

The author thus reaches the question that seems to him to be essential: 'Why did Makhno separate from the Bolsheviks? To this "absurd" question there is no simple answer, since there was a time when his alliance with the Reds was not only openly declared, but seemed to be durable'. According to Golovanov, Makhno returned from Moscow in July 1918 extremely disenchanted with those groups of his ideological comrades who had slept through the revolution. Lev Cherny, a well-known anarchist, had been given the task by the Bolsheviks of maintaining the furniture and halls of their palace, and had become for Makhno a symbol of the decline of anarchism. While not sympathising with Bolshevism which had 'monopolised' the revolution, Makhno understood that 'none of the opposition parties, including the left Social Revolutionaries had leaders of the calibre of Lenin' nor sufficient strength to 'reorganise the direction of the revolution'. Taking this into account he concluded an agreement with the Bolsheviks when they arrived in the Ukraine, where he had organised an insurrectionary army and liberated most of eastern Ukraine. Meanwhile it was 'details' which were to render this alliance precarious: for example the 'famous partisan spirit which was dominant among the insurgents (election of commanders, a not very certain "self-discipline" and a not very coherent anarchism'.

We must, at once, correct these false and hasty conclusions. In the first place it was not Makhno personally who took decisions on his own, but the general assembly of the rebels, and the revolutionary military soviet of the movement in the case of military decisions. Political decisions had been taken by the council of workers and peasants in the region. The military accord reached with the Bolsheviks was not a 'political alliance' as Golovanov presents it, it was undertaken for urgent reasons: the lack of weapons and ammunition. (There was one rifle and six cartridges for one in four of the rebels, consequently they had to refuse to accept thousands of volunteers.) This agreement did not envisage any political dependency: the front held by the Makhnovists extended over 150 kilometres. Finally, that 'famous partisan spirit' belonged to local Cossack traditions: the selection of regimental commanders (corresponding to the places of origin of particular insurgent groups) in the light of their ability and of the confidence that they inspired.

Furthermore, the insurrectionary army depended upon its voluntary
nature and had nothing in common with the Red Army, composed of soldiers who were forcibly ‘mobilised’ and run by former Tsarist officers doubled with Bolshevik political commissars. There lies the whole difference from the ‘coherence’ of Makhno and his comrades.

Golovanov is nearer the truth when he specifies how, with the agreement of the Red Army command in March 1919, the Makhnovist forces retained their name, their black flags and their own principles of internal organisation. All the same, they had to accept political commissars and were provided with arms (very few in fact), and were obliged to operate under the directives of the Red Army command in the struggle against Deniken. ‘After four months’ the author writes, ‘this idyll came to an end: according to the generally accepted version, Makhno opened the front to the Whites’.

Here Golovanov is depending on the testimony of an ex-anarchist, Teper, who wrote a denigratory work against Makhno (to be precise, he may have had a revolver in his back) which attributed responsibility for the break between Makhno and the Reds, to the ‘common law’ elements mixed up with the anarchists, when, after October 1917, it seemed that the whole of Russia had joined Makhno. It is said that they flattered Makhno endlessly, calling him ‘the second Bakunin’, and that this turned his head, enabling him to cover up his own misconduct, drunkenness and plundering. Golovanov thinks that here are the reasons, never precisely explained, why Makhno, turning against the Bolsheviks, hadn’t ‘rejoined’ the Whites. And he asks why Makhno was thus obliged to fight on two fronts.

**The anti-peasant policy of the Bolsheviks**

To explain this sudden antagonism, Golovanov reminds us that the Makhnovist movement was essentially a peasant uprising. From this point of view the Bolsheviks had brought them nothing that they hadn’t already conquered for themselves in 1917. In spite of this the Bolsheviks issued their land nationalisation decree, set up ‘committees of poor peasants’, sent out forced requisitioning detachments, and tried to found Sovkhozes or State Farms. The peasants responded by cultivating all the land, leaving no space for these Sovkhozes. ‘Conflict became latent between the capital, Kharkov and the countryside.’

The attempt to inaugurate a new society from the Marxist point of view led to the necessity of applying state control to every sphere of economic activity, right down to the exploitation of individuals. For this reason many communists in 1919 saw the peasantry as a ‘bourgeois class’, raw material expendable as the proletariat realised its historic
mission. Alexandra Kollontai realised at that time that the ‘petit bourgeois peasantry was entirely hostile to the new principles of the national economy preached by the communists’.

Thus Golovanov explains the ‘severity’ of the policy of agrarian confiscations, and the tendency for all peasants who opposed them to be called ‘kulaks’. A whole series of peasant insurrections followed right across the country, and it was only after three years that the Bolsheviks began at last to understand that they had to take into account the interests of the ‘petit bourgeois class’ of peasant farmers. Above all they were chastened by the Kronstadt Revolt with its slogans of ‘Free Soviets and Freedom of Commerce’, coming no longer from ‘poorly armed regiments of peasants but from regular units of the Red Army’.

In consequence Makhno sabotaged the government’s agrarian measures, not allowing the requisitioning detachments into the region and not permitting the ‘committees of poor peasants’ to be set up. Three congresses of several dozen Makhnovist districts, representing the ‘liberated region’ were held between January and April 1919, with Bolsheviks and Left Social Revolutionaries present. But, Golovanov notes, there was an overwhelming majority of anarchists and non-party people. These congresses confirmed the mobilisation of the insurrectionary army, and expressed a lack of confidence in the soviet government of the Ukraine ‘which had in no way been chosen by the people’. The position the congresses took up was of ‘equal exploitation of the land, on the basis of personal labour’.

All this was obviously not to the liking of the Bolsheviks. Eminent party figures were despatched to visit Makhno, among them Bela Kun, Antonov-Ovseenko and Lev Kamenev. They expressed to him their dissatisfaction with the way the insurgent revolutionary military soviets were ‘elected as the executive organ of the local congress’ and ‘did not subordinate themselves to the central Soviet power’.

Having set the scene for everything that could separate Makhno from the Bolsheviks, Golovanov discusses the responsibility of the latter. To this end he cites an astonishing report from the commander of the 2nd Red Army, Skatchco:

Little local Chekas are undertaking a relentless campaign against the Makhnovists, even when they are shedding their blood at the front. They are hunting them down from the rear and persecuting them solely for belonging to the Makhnovist movement... It cannot continue like this: the activity of the local Chekas is deliberately ruining the front, reducing all military successes to nothing, and contributing to the creation of a counter-revolution that neither Deniken nor Krasnov (Hetman of the Don Cossacks) could have achieved...
Note that this indictment supports everything that the Makhnovists themselves denounced at the time about the crimes of the Cheka. Golovanov does not stop there: he recounts that for Antonov-Ovseenko, commander of the front,

a fragile alliance would have been far preferable to a rupture with Makhno. His standpoint justified itself amply when the Hetman Grigoriev, until then an ally of the Reds, turned against them and abandoned the front, while on the contrary, Makhno not only gave his troops orders to regain those positions, but also published a denunciation of Grigoriev, holding him responsible for an anti-Jewish pogrom at Elisavetgrad.

And he adds, after this weighty affirmation that ‘Makhno ordered that anyone involved in a pogrom was to be shot’. This contradicts the most precise among all the diffuse accusations against Makhno in the regime’s official records until now. This revision of history goes still further concerning the personal responsibility of Trotsky, at that time the top man responsible for the Red Army.

**Trotsky’s disastrous role**

To go back to Golovanov’s words:

In the evolution of relations with Makhno it was Trotsky who played a disastrous role. Being an enemy of the ‘soft line’ of coalitions with ‘fellow-travellers’, and holding colossal power in his hands as president of the republic’s military soviet, Trotsky was a supporter of extreme measures against those who were hesitant or unruly. Arriving in the Ukraine and learning that Makhno had summoned a fourth congress of various peasant soviets which were independent of the Bolsheviks, Trotsky saw in this an open appeal for rebellion. External events showed that neither Makhno who had convened the congress, nor Trotsky who had decided to ‘finish off’ this ‘anarcho-kulak debauch’, were able to envisage the vast force of troops that Deniken was, at that moment, concentrating at the front.

Not content just to show Trotsky’s hostility to Makhno, to the peasants and to their independent congress, Golovanov enumerates the ‘extreme measures’ Trotsky adopted with these hesitants and malcontents, and the catastrophic results that followed.

On the 4th of June 1919, the 2nd Ukrainian army, of which Makhno’s two brigades were a part was disbanded. The same day the Kharkov *Izvestia* published a violent article by Trotsky attacking the ‘Makhnovchina’. On the 5th of June there was an editorial ‘Once more down with the Makhnovchina!’ with an appeal for the use of the ‘Red Fire’. At that moment the red front was already being driven back, Makhno’s troops were bled white and half encircled.
Communications with Makhno himself were broken. Trotsky’s order of the 6th of June on the liquidation of the Makhnovists, the interdiction of the congress, its delegates arraigned before field courts-martial, turned Makhno into an outlaw. The White cossacks over-ran the liberated region and, not far from Gulyai-Polye pinned down the peasant regiment hastily formed by B. Veretelnikov, a worker from the Putilov Works (in Petrograd, who was a native of the area). On the 7th of June the Reds sent Makhno a message via an armoured train, urging him to hold out to the last. On the 8th of June Trotsky issued his order number 133, ‘Whoever rejoins Makhno can expect execution!’ On the 9th of June, finally hearing of Trotsky, Makhno sent a telegram to him, and also to Moscow, indicating his wish to leave his post as brigade commander, ‘in the light of the insupportable and absurd situation that has been created’. He explained, ‘I believe in the inalienable right of workers and peasants to organise their own congresses to make their own decisions both in general and in particular’.

That same day several Bolshevik regiments invaded the ‘liberated region’, attacking and sacking the Makhnovist soviets and communes. On the 11th or 12th of June, in the armoured train in which the general staff of the Makhnovists and that of Voroshilov, commander of the 14th army had once collaborated, the members of the Makhnovist staff were arrested, and on the 17th June were charged as traitors at Kharkov. It was precisely in these days that the papers published a communiqué about Makhno’s ‘opening’ of the front, and even of his agreement with Chkouro (Cossack general from Kuban allied with the Whites). It was thus easy to attribute the lack of military success to this ‘treason’.

In support of this astonishing denunciation of Trotsky and the Bolsheviks, Golovanov cites the opinion of Antonov-Ovseenko, master-mind of the seizure of the Winter Palace in October 1917, who had become the commander of the Southern front before being demoted by Trotsky for his ‘indulgence’ towards the partisans. Analysing, in July 1919, the reasons for the lack of military success, Antonov-Ovseenko wrote:

Above all, the facts witness that the affirmations about the weakness of the most contaminated region — that from Gulyai-Polye to Berdiansk — are without foundation . . . It is not because we ourselves have been better organised militarily, but because those troops were directly defending their native place . . . Makhno stayed at the front, in spite of the flight of the neighbouring 9th division, followed by the whole of the 13th army . . . The reasons for the defeat on the southern front do not rest at all in the existence of ‘Ukrainian partisans’ . . . above all it must be attributed to the machinery of the southern front, in not having kept its fighting spirit and reinforced its revolutionary discipline.

The indictment concludes with an accusation: it was Trotsky and his ‘machine’ who deliberately provoked the collapse of the Southern front against the Whites! To complete the tale it is necessary to recall that
Trotsky declared at the time that he preferred to hand over the region to Denikin and the Whites rather than to Makhno and the ‘independent’ soviets, because he thought it would be possible to eliminate the first later on, while the second seemed to him more dangerous and difficult to push out of the way. Golovanov goes no further than this, certainly for lack of information, but all the same this is the first time that an official Soviet journal has underlined the ‘disastrous’ responsibility of the man whom the Kronstadt sailors were later to nickname The Field-Marshal.

Between the Reds and the Whites

The author assumes that Makhno’s subsequent ‘anti-Soviet’ period is more or less well-known. Indeed, he writes, ‘many details are omitted’. For example the ‘role of Makhno in the struggle against Denikin has not yet been clarified’, even though the Makhnovists had been alone in confronting him after the Red Army’s evacuation of the Ukraine, when their numbers rose considerably — from fifty to eighty thousand — as well as the residue of the 2nd Red Army and the Red Army of the Crimea, at the same time as soldiers of the Hetman Grigoriev, himself unmasked before an insurgent congress on the 27th of July, and shot because he had betrayed the revolution.

Golovanov goes on to describe the long retreat of the Makhnovists, followed by the White elite troops, as far as their victorious turning-point at Peregonovka and their deadly raid on Denikin’s rear. These are ‘omitted details’ even though Lenin and the Bolshevik power structure were ready to evacuate Moscow because of the advance of the Whites.

Finally he discusses the encounter between the Makhnovists and the Reds towards the end of 1919. He cites, in particular, a telegram from Ordjonikidze to the central committee of the communist party, where Stalin’s compatriot and friend foresaw that ‘the popularisation (in the press) of the name of Makhno, still hostile to Soviet power, attracts undesirable sympathy towards him in the ranks of the Red Army . . .’

When the revolutionary military soviet of the 14th Red Army ordered Makhno to go back to the Polish front, the similarly named Makhnovist soviet refused, since their ranks were ravaged by typhus, and Makhno himself was a victim. Beyond this, Makhno feared being ‘cut off from his own region’ and preferred to ‘help’ somewhere ‘closer’. The Makhnovists were thus declared ‘outlaws’. Makhno demobilised his army and disappeared.

In the spring of 1920 the reorganised Makhnovists, numbering six to
eight thousand, submitting to a ‘hard’ discipline, mounted some audacious attacks against the Red troops, annihilating their supply lines (and their Chekas, another omitted detail). The Reds devoted great efforts to repulsing him. Makhno had the advantage of being able to move rapidly throughout the region, changing horses. (An interesting ‘detail’ here: the Makhnovists changed three weary horses for one fresh horse among the peasants.) In spite of everything, the peasantry was grimly determined to continue fighting on two fronts, and this was why an agreement was concluded between Frunze, the Red Army commander on that front as well as Jacovlev, representing the Ukrainian Soviet government, and the Makhnovists.

According to Golovanov this agreement had many advantages from Makhno’s point of view, sustaining the autonomy of his ‘liberated region’ in which Makhno ‘believed fanatically’. But, according to the author once more, this was nothing more than a ‘political ruse’ by the Reds, aiming at making use of Makhno in the capture of the Crimea. (There is an inexactitude here: the author affirms that the Makhnovists entered the Crimea following the Red Army troops across the Sivash Strait, while it is well-known that it was they who forced this passage against powerful White opposition). Having served this purpose ‘they were surrounded and disarmed under some pretext or other’. To sustain this hypothesis, Golovanov recounts how after the capture of Simferopol by the Crimean Makhnovist army, in violation of the ‘autonomy’ offer, they were ‘ordered to disperse and disarm’. The ‘commanders who had been at their head were arrested and shot’, with the exception of Martchenko and two hundred horsemen who were able to force their way across the Perekop isthmus, eventually rejoining Makhno. He, encircled in Gulyai-Polye, and knowing nothing about the order by Frunze which provoked this ‘massacre’ succeeded ‘as much through a miracle as through his own fury’ in escaping the ‘trap’.

The treachery of the Bolsheviks in their relationship with the Makhnovists is already well-known to us, but it is here spelt out in detail by Golovanov, for the very first time in an official publication. It all casts a dark shadow on the Soviet leaders of the period, but Golovanov leaves this issue to his readers. In an inconsequential way he characterises Makhno’s subsequent actions against the Bolsheviks as ‘political banditry’, even though this term, according to his own analysis is more applicable to the Bolsheviks!

Makhno pursued his struggle against the Reds with ‘the sang-froid of a madman: with neither fear nor hope’. He threatened Poltava (an important town in the northern Ukraine) with a detachment of 600 cavalry in January 1921, until Frunze’s command succeeding in ‘unravelling the logic, at first sight chaotic, of his strategy’ and attacked
on a broad front. Pursued relentlessly for three months, wounded for the twelfth time, he and a small group escaped across the frontier and took refuge in Romania.

Free soviets: totalitarian party

The author believes that ‘one day the historians will reconstruct the details of the episodes in the civil war connected with Makhno’. But the whole affair cannot be limited to ‘details’. It brings to light far more important questions like the ‘degeneration’ of popular power, because Makhno had acted, from the beginning, as a convinced anarchist, adopting the position of ‘self-management’, of ‘free soviets’, and for political liberty. He cites here the case of the occupation of the town of Ekaterinoslav in the autumn of 1919, where the Makhnovists, as well as their own organs, allowed the publication of those of the social revolutionaries, of the left social revolutionaries and even those of the Bolsheviks. According to him this expression of ‘popular power’ later changed to a ‘military dictatorship’, which moreover was ‘all the more clumsy since the Makhnovists recognised no law limiting the exercise of power’, since they ‘considered nothing to be an exercise of power, but simply as the execution of the will of the people’.

This is absolutely true, historically, but it applies to the Bolsheviks rather than to the Makhnovists! There is nothing wrong about his observation, but we have to add in deploiring Golovanov’s lack of comprehension, that it must be the result of seventy years of Lenino-Stalinist brainwashing! The ‘degeneration’ seen everywhere in the exercise of so-called ‘soviet’ power, was the result of the totalitarian dictatorship of a party convinced that it was ‘following the path of history’.

The author concludes his study by attributing the situation created by the Bolsheviks to the ‘intoxication’ of society after the violence of the civil war period. This situation consisted of ‘the almost complete suppression of previously proclaimed revolutionary political liberties, the creation of an unseen but powerful repressive apparatus, the institution of total controls in the interests of solving economic problems, the creation of a gigantic State machine (four million civil servants in 1921), the marginalisation of any democratic institutions’.

Soviet society was obliged to forget ‘for a long time the priority of generally accepted human values’ . . . ‘replacing them by the concept of class. This generated a whole stratum of mutants, people who used ideology as a justification of their own moral misconduct.’ These were the mutants upon whom ‘Stalin later depended’.
An advance towards historical truth

After taking careful note of this long and exhaustive study of Makhno, let us repeat the main points. First that everything said about Makhno in the Soviet Union until now has been fantasy or plain lies. Secondly that his real personality was that of a revolutionary anarchist; as such his activities began in 1905, culminating in 1917 and 1918.

Thirdly that in 1919 and 1920, he was allied with the Reds, who every time treacherously broke the agreement that had been concluded. On the first occasion it was Trotsky who took on the role of betraying and destroying the 'independent soviets'. On the second occasion the responsibility lies collectively with the Bolsheviks. Finally, and overwhelmingly, Makhno was a 'fanatical' partisan of free and autonomous soviets, direct organs of popular wishes.

Despite this, we now have a clear and precise rehabilitation of the Ukrainian anarchist. Foreseeably this first study is only a prelude to other analytical revisions of the history of the founding years, 1917-1921 of the regime. It must be stressed once more that this sensational article appeared in a journal with millions of readers — a sign of its importance — not in a local paper or a confidential historical review. Despite important reservations and disagreements on many points, we must, none the less, welcome this important advance towards historical truth.

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1 Editorial note: On the jacket of the first English edition of Peter Arshinov's History of the Makhnovist Movement 1918-1921 (Freedom Press 1987, £5.00), the publishers comment that 'Until the Russian archives are available to historians, Arshinov's history of the Makhnovists is undoubtedly the most important source work available'. The article above indicates that the archives are beginning to open.