Nestor Makhno (1888–1934) is famous for his efforts to build an anarchist society in south-eastern Ukraine during the Russian Civil War (1918–1921). Before becoming a folk hero, he served a long and difficult apprenticeship in the revolutionary movement, described in memoirs he wrote in the 1920s and presented here in unabridged form.

Voldemar Antoni (1886–1974) founded the Union of Poor Peasants, a revolutionary anarchist group in the Ukrainian village of Gulyai-Polye in 1906, one of the members of which was Nestor Makhno. He survived a number of dangerous adventures and escaped abroad all the way to South America, returning to Ukraine in the 1960s and writing his memoirs.

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Young Rebels Against the Empire

The Youth Memoirs of Nestor Makhno and Voldemar Antoni

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Young Rebels Against the Empire
The Youth Memoirs of Nestor Makhno and Voldemar Antoni

Translated from the Russian and edited by Malcolm Archibald.

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Cover illustration: "Dawn of the year 1906" by Stanisław Masłowski. Scene depicted shows young revolutionaries being led away by a Cossack patrol, contrasting the hopeful image of spring with oppression.

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Nouns without an exact equivalent in English are typeset in italics and defined in the Glossary (p. 156).

Translator's Introduction to Nestor Makhno's Memoirs of his Early Life

The Ukrainian anarchist Nestor Makhno (1888 – 1934), the eponymous hero of a revolutionary movement in southeastern Ukraine (1918 – 1921), spent the last years of his life in France, where he intended to write the history of his movement. As a prequel to this history, he wrote a two-part memoir explaining his origins and the sources of his beliefs which is presented here in an English translation.

Makhno's account of the earliest years of his life is short on detail, except for a few colourful incidents. It's quite possible that in adulthood he was embarrassed by his youthful behaviour and found some episodes too painful to recount. Although very bright, he was too undisciplined to spend much time in school and grew up in the street, with all the attendant consequences. From an early age he was well known in Gulyai-Polye as an unruly and impulsive boy who terrorized the shopkeepers along the town's market square. Small for his age, he once took revenge against the kids who bullied him by hiding in a tree under which they gathered and dropping rocks on their heads.[1]

In the 1960s, the local historian F. I. Kushch recorded the following information from Yerofey Nahumovich Krat:

"I went to a two-class school[2] together with Nestor Makhno. Nestor, although he had ability, was a poor student—he played pranks a lot and didn't listen to the teachers. He went to the second class for six months, then he was expelled for goofing off. After that, he often wandered around outside

1 V. N. Chop, **Nestor Ivanovich Makhno**, (Zaporozhye, 1998), p. 13.

2 This was the First Gulyai-Polye Ministerial Public School. It was a two-class school, but with a four-year curriculum (usually for ages 8 to 12) with each class divided into two sections with a single teacher. The purpose of such schools was to impart basic, sustainable literacy skills. Schooling was free, available to both sexes, and there were no restrictions based on social position or religion.

the school, threw stones at the windows, and picked fights with the guys."[3]

At the age of 11, he started working as a hired hand on one of the Mennonite-owned estates near Gulyai-Polye, and was engaged in agricultural work until he was 17, when he became an industrial worker. The Ukrainian researcher V. M. Chop has discovered that the adolescent Makhno worked in vineyards owned by ethnic Bulgarians in Tavria (a district close to the Sea of Azov) and acquired a proficiency in their language which allowed him to give speeches in Bulgarian during the civil war period.[4] Clearly Makhno was well-versed in the geography and culture of the region in which he became a renowned political and military figure.

As an example of the sort of material left out of his autobiography, consider this incident described in an undated letter by Vasiliy Yefimovich Kolesnik, a resident of the village of Pologi, near Gulyai-Polye:

> **As a young man, my Granddad[5] worked as a hired hand for a German in a village now known as Podorozhne. He recalled that Nestor was brought to work for this German by his aunt.**
>
> **Nestor was put to work looking after the pigs, and my Granddad (who was 20 years older than Nestor) was assigned to supervise him.**
>
> **Nestor was a smart kid. He always had a whistle, made from a willow branch, in his mouth, and the pigs responded to his whistle.**
>
> **But in his third year, during the Christmas season, when the**

3 Krat's letter to Kushch was found by V. M. Chop in the Gulyai-Polye Local History Museum. See V. M. Chop, ed., **Записки гуляйпільського анархіста Волдемара Антонія** [Notes of the Gulyai-Polye Anarchist Voldemar Antoni], Publication № 15 of Antiquities of Southern Ukraine, (Zaporizhzhia, 2006).

4 V. M. Chop, *"Приазовська Болгарія" в історії махновського руху (1919–1921) рр.* ["Priazovska Bulgaria" in the history of the makhnovist movement (1919–1921)], ***Музейний вісник*** [Museum bulletin], №15/2 (2015), pp. 259-270.

5 Korney Zakharovich Kolesnik.

> German was getting ready to go to church, Nestor harnessed three pigs to a sled and drove out of the barn with them. The German looked out the window of his carriage and couldn't believe his eyes. He ordered the overseer to flog Nestor. Granddad drove the carriage, carrying the German and family, to the church in Kinski Razdory.
>
> More than 20 people witnessed the beating endured by Nestor. The overseer removed his trousers and whipped him so hard that blood spurted a meter away. As if that wasn't enough, the overseer struck him with the whip on the cheeks from ear to ear, and his face was covered with blood.
>
> People were really upset. Women were crying. Grandma came running from her little room in a loft and punched the overseer in the face, while sobbing bitterly. Nestor was carried to Grandma's room (this was a room near the barn where harnesses were stored which the German owner had allotted to my grandparents). Grandma and other women began to bathe his wounds. Thus was born in Nestor his hatred for the rich. He spoke about this to my grandparents while convalescing at their place for more than two months. Nestor was so fond of my grandparents that he addressed them like his parents, as tato and mama. His wounds suppurated for a long time, and when his mother heard that he was laid up, she sent her sister to fetch him.
>
> Nestor was 16 at the time.[6]

It's hardly surprising that Nestor grew up a "nervous and vindictive teenager," according to his biographer V. M. Chop, who adds:

> Vengeance became inherent in his character throughout his life. One has the impression that Makhno never forgot any of his grievances beginning with his childhood years. He forgave, apparently, many, but could not forget.[7]

At age 17 Nestor became one of the hundreds of workers employed at the Krieger factory in Gulyai-Polye. This factory, which produced farm machinery for wealthy landowners in

6 B. Yalansky and L. Verovka, ed., **Нестор і Галина: Розповідають фотокартки** [Nestor and Galina: What the Photocards tell], (Kyiv & Gulyai-Polye, 1999), pp. 291-294. According to V. M. Chop, the scar on Makhno's face as a result of this beating was noted in his prison file.

7 V. N. Chop, **Nestor Ivanovich Makhno**, (Zaporozhye, 1998), p. 13.

the region, was also home to an active anarcho-communist group, the Union of Poor Peasants (UPP). Founded in April, 1906, the Union soon spread its influence throughout the young workers of the town. This was by no means a small organization: 69 members have been identified by name, and there may have been three times as many people who participated to some extent.

Like other Russian revolutionary organizations of the time, the Union was divided into *boeviks* and *massovik*s. The *boeviks* were the activists, the militants, willing to sacrifice their lives, if necessary, to carry out "exes" (expropriations) and armed attacks on oppressors—either individuals or institutions. The *massoviks* attended classes held by the group's leading members, took part in discussions, distributed proclamations, provided shelter for "illegals," and carried out various kinds of auxiliary work. They did not take part in terrorist acts or exes and were not required to observe group discipline. According to various sources, the number of *massoviks* in the Union in 1906–1906 was between 200 and 250. Much of the Union's program was educational: meetings were held almost daily to discuss the works of Proudhon, Stirner, Bakunin, and Kropotkin; and to study political economy, cultural and general history, astronomy, etc., as well as develop critiques of current events.

The Union had two outstanding figures: the fearless, charismatic Alexander Semenyuta, and the cool-headed strategist Voldemar Antoni. Members were predominately of Ukrainian ethnic origin, but the Jewish community was also well-represented, while Antoni himself had a Czech father and Ukrainian mother. Only one or two *boeviks* were women, but a substantial number of women were *massoviks*; a photograph of a group of "revolutionary youth" taken in 1907 includes 11 women.

The Union of Poor Peasants was soon engaged in a life-and-death struggle with its natural enemy, the local branch of

the Union of the Archangel Gabriel, a "Black Hundreds" organization sanctioned by the Russian state to crush the revolutionary movement (the Gulyai-Polye senior police officer Anton Karachentsev was the head of this branch). By 1910 these two "Unions" had managed to destroy each other, but the anarchists certainly got the worst of it. The most dreaded weapon used by the police in battling the anarchists was the ***shpik***, an activist who had been captured by the police, had betrayed comrades (usually under torture), and was then released to act as an informer and provocateur. There was no mercy for *shpiks* from their former comrades; their elimination took precedence over all other tasks.

A manuscript from the local history museum in Gulyai-Polye gives a picture of social relations in the town in 1907:[8]

> **[The activities of the Union of Poor Peasants] caused an uproar in the ruling circles of the *povit* and *guberniya*. Presently the Vice-Governor arrived in Gulyai-Polye.**
>
> **At the railway station, where he arrived in a special railroad car, the Gulyai-Polye industrialists and other wealthy persons had sent their fanciest carriages.**
>
> **The "high" guest apparently chose the Kerners' phaeton, harnessed with light bay trotters. Accompanied by many other carriages, he arrived in Gulyai-Polye. The Gulyai-Polye industrialists, the other rich people, and the religious authorities met the Vice-Governor with bread and salt, while church bells pealed.**
>
> **But this was not a happy encounter. Literally on the day before the Vice-Governor's arrival in Gulyai-Polye, a nasty event took place—the destruction by fire of the huge wooden barracks which provided shelter for poor workers from the Poltava, Kiev, and Chernigov regions. It was here that the *pomeshchiks* found their main source of cheap labour.**
>
> **A meeting was held in the courtyard of the government building, at which the Vice-Governor spoke. He bullied the peasants and workers, telling them not to oppose the authorities and not to**

8 I. K. Kushnirenko and V. I. Zhilinskiy, **Нестор Махно і "Союз бідних хліборобів"** [Nestor Makhno and the "Union of Poor Peasants"], (Zaporizhzhia, 2010), pp. 54-56

give in to "evil".

They say that the whole courtyard was teeming with police—both the local ones and a detachment from Yekaterinoslav—who were guarding the person of the Vice-Governor.

Aleksandr Semenyuta was also present at the meeting, intending to kill the Vice-Governor. But he had second thoughts. Afterwards, he said that he was worried about the local populace. Many innocent people could have been injured.

Let me describe an incident which shows how much the police feared Semenyuta.

In the evening, when Aleksandr Semenyuta was visiting at Grishchenko's place,[9] the security guard who boarded at the house came in and started talking excitedly:

"They saw Semenyuta at the meeting. Terrible! They wanted to arrest him but were afraid to go near!"

The Vice-Governor got the luxury treatment again when he departed. Church bells were rung and the rich people competed with one another to demonstrate their devotion to the monarchy.

He was carried to the railway station in Vasilko's carriage, drawn by three grey trotters.[10]

The police made every effort to apprehend the anarcho-communists. They arrested their relatives, beat them bloody, and tried to find out where the revolutionaries were hiding.

Paraska Levadny described how she was arrested along with her two-year-old daughter, because there was no one to hand the child over to. Paraska was beaten so badly that her blouse was soaked with blood and she passed out from the beatings.

But eventually they had to let her go when the child started crying.

In the wake of the failed revolution of 1905–1906 most of the Russian empire was under martial law and the anarchists especially were subject to draconian punishment. Nestor Makhno was arrested in August, 1908, and charged with

9 Grishchenko was a member of the Union of Poor Peasants.

10 Vasilko was the *pomeshchik* Wilhelm Janssen. He and his brother Abram owned the Silberfeld estate near Gulyai-Polye.

taking part in several robberies. Almost the whole core of the Union of Poor Peasants was arrested at this time, although several key players were able to avoid capture. The 29 arrests which occurred were due to the *shpik* Nahum Althauzen. Makhno and other "ringleaders" spent over a year in prison in the district capital of Aleksandrovsk before being transferred to the prison in the provincial capital, Yekaterinoslav, where some of them, including Makhno, were sentenced to death. Makhno's account of how he survived this ordeal and subsequent years of prison is the main subject of his memoir. Antiquated prisons staffed by incompetent and often demoralized personnel made escape a real possibility. Makhno describes several such attempts, including one in the massive Butyrka Prison in Moscow.

An authoritative history of the Gulyai-Polye Union of Free Peasants has yet to appear,[11] but it is perhaps appropriate to mention one problem that begs for solution, and that is the role of Nazar Zuichenko in the organization's demise. Like the *shpiks* Nahum Althauzen and Ivan Levadny, Zuichenko betrayed all the leading figures of the Union. But Makhno was surely aware of this (he shared a prison cell with Zuichenko for extended periods) and yet it didn't seem to bother him, as he consistently refers to Zuichenko as "comrade." In fact Makhno suggests that Zuichenko's confessions were part of an elaborate scheme to get the anarchists moved to a different prison. Zuichenko was tried separately from the other anarchists of the Union; Makhno believed that was due to his illness, while other commentators (Alexandre Skirda for one) believed it was necessary to conceal Zuichenko's role as an informer.

Zuichenko was the only one of the Union's *boeviks*, other than Makhno, to return to Gulyai-Polye in 1917. He was active in the anarchist underground under the Ukrainian

11 Ukrainian researcher Yuriy Kravets is preparing such a work, with his customary rigour.

Hetmanate of 1918 and then held responsible posts in the Makhnovist movement in 1918–1921. In April, 1921, he took advantage of an amnesty and voluntarily surrendered to Soviet authorities, but was soon sentenced to one year in prison for stealing grain. On August 12, 1926, he was arrested by the Ukrainian GPU on the grounds that "in 1908–1909, as a member of the Gulyai-Polye Group of the Party of Anarcho-Communists [*sic*], after his arrest he gave incriminating testimony to the Yekaterinoslav police administration about the activities of N. Makhno and other members of the Group." On October 27, 1927, Zuichenko was sentenced to a term of 10 years in prison, but this was soon reduced to three years plus four months. It is perhaps not a coincidence that around this time an article appeared in the Soviet press, based on the court files relating to the Gulyai-Polye anarchists, that revealed that Zuichenko had betrayed Makhno and his associates in the Union not once, but twice.[12]

Zuichenko was arrested in 1930 by the NKVD for belonging to an organization of former Makhnovists preparing armed action against Soviet power, and received a five year sentence to the Gulags. He survived this term and returned to Gulyai-Polye, finding employment in a local machine shop. His final arrest came in February, 1938, and he was shot on July 7 of the same year.

* * * * *

Prison did not destroy Makhno's spirit, but it did undermine his health. On October 14, 1911, he was diagnosed with tuberculosis in Butyrka Prison. The examining doctor noted that the disease had been contracted during custody. An operation was performed in the prison hospital and one lung

12 G. Novopolin, ***Махно и гуляйпольская группа анархистов*** [Makhno and the Gulyai-Polye Group of Anarchists], ***Каторга и ссылка*** [Katorga and exile], Moscow, (1927), pp. 70-77. In the early Soviet Union, it was not unusual for former activists to be arrested on the basis of incriminating material that turned up in the archives.

was removed.[13] And yet this traumatic event does not receive a mention in Makhno's account.

Prison memoirs are a staple of anarchist literature; Makhno's contribution to this genre is of special interest because of his miraculous survival and subsequent career. Once he was in a position to do so, he destroyed every prison he could get his hands on.

Malcolm Archibald
May, 2021

13 Thanks to Yuriy Kravets for this information from Makhno's prison file.

Note on sources

This English translation uses the texts serialized in the relatively obscure Russian-American newspaper ***Rassvet*** (Dawn) in 1926; references are given in an appendix. It would not have been possible to prepare this translation without the assistance of Ukrainian researcher Yuriy Kravets, who tracked down the precise newspaper citations; and Canadian historian Sean Patterson, who located and ordered the necessary issues from the U. S. Library of Congress.

Makhno's text was also serialized in French (***Le Libertaire***, 1927) and German (***Der freie Arbeiter***, 1927) and was published in book form by Alexandre Skirda in Russian in 2006. (Skirda later published a new French translation.) All these versions are not only translations (including Skirda's Russian version) but also abridgements—the English translation presented here and translated from the ***Rassvet*** edition has roughly 15 per cent more material. Partly this is due to the inclusion of Makhno's poems, but also because of a couple of incidents not included in the earlier translations.

My Autobiography

by Nestor Makhno

My Early Life

I am a peasant by origin. I was born in the village of Gulyai-Polye, Yekaterinoslav province.

My parents were former serfs. According to my mother's stories, their life was horrible. While still a girl, Mother was flogged twice: the first time because she resented the beatings she received from the wife of the steward of the estate and refused to clean the rooms of their home; and the second time when she refused to bind sheaves for three kopecks a day on what was supposed to be her day off, declaring that the pay was too low.

On both occasions, the steward reported her to the master of the estate, who supervised her punishment of 15 strokes of the whip.

I did not know my father. According to Mother, he was a former serf who had belonged to the same master as her, a certain Shabelsky, who lived on one of his estates near the village of Shagorovo (today Marfopil), about seven *versts* from Gulyai-Polye.

After his marriage, my father spent most of his life working as a *batrak* for this same landlord.

At the time I was born (October 17, 1889),[1] he had left this job and worked as a coachman for Kerner, a wealthy Jew who owned a factory in Gulyai-Polye. My father died when I was only 11 months old.

During the previous two years, Mother had been collecting bricks to build a house, but had only made a start at building it. She had put up some walls but there still wasn't a roof when my father died.

Orphaned, my four brothers[2] and I were left in the care of my grieving mother.

Waifs were we then—

Who knew not what Mother said to us,

1 According to church records, Nestor Makhno was born in 1888 (he was baptised on October 27, old style). Makhno was apparently unaware of 'the true date of his birth.

2 Nestor's brothers were Karp (1870–1919), Savva (1872–1920), Yemelyan (1876–1918), and Grigoriy (1885–1920).

When she hugged us—
As she was wracked by sobs.
How she suffered,
Trying to feed her sons
In poverty, never knowing
Rest or sweet dreams . . . .
Hard it was for us to live:
Knowing neither hope nor freedom,
We were taught only to pray
To God for a better fate . . . .
And we were submerged in
Poverty, shame, and servitude,
As we experienced the nastiness
Of the people over us . . . .

And our sweet, wonderful mother went to pieces. She said "I don't know what to do, where to start, whom to listen to."

At that time she was approached by a childless woman, a petty *pomeshchik* [landlord], who pestered Mother to give me up to her. My oldest brothers—Karp and Savva—were already working for estate owners as herdsmen.

Mother later told me: "I could hardly bear to listen to her, but there was nothing else to be done . . . . Listening to her talk about the hopeless situation of our family, I finally gave in . . . ."

My older brothers had listened on many occasions to my mother's stories about the lives and morals of the *pomeshchiks*—especially about their cruelty in relation to the peasants. This had made a strong impression on them.

Once on a Sunday, when they came to visit us and learned that Mother was prepared to hand me over to the rich woman, they begged her not to do it. Mama told me that she held me in her arms that whole day and wept and groaned along with my older brothers as they decided whether to hand me over to the landlady or hold on to me and try to feed me themselves.

My brothers were too young to be giving advice to Mother. They could only weep and implore Mama not to give me up . . . .

Mama made up her mind and promised her children that she would hold on to me, at least for a time.

A year passed. My brothers were a bit wiser, but our family life remained difficult. Then my godmother pressured Mother to let her take care of me and Mama didn't think twice—she handed me over.

I spent several weeks as the son of my godmother, but then Mother took me back. She couldn't reconcile herself to the reality that I was being treated poorly: I seldom received any affection and was fed separately from the rest of the family, and not in a very timely fashion.

Mother visited every day and suffered a great deal from seeing the situation I was in.

Once, she told me later, when she visited my foster mother, she found me crying, completely alone, while the rest of the family was eating supper. She protested in the strongest terms about my being treated in this manner. My oldest brothers—Karp and Savva—also insisted that Mother bring me home, otherwise, so they said, they would stop visiting her.

Mother took me back and looked after me affectionately to the best of her abilities until I was 18.

* * * * *

I retain only the vaguest recollections of my early childhood. I remember that I was eight when Mother sent me to school. I was a good pupil. The teacher was pleased with me, and Mother was proud of my achievements. At least that's how it was at the beginning of the school year. When winter set in and the river froze, I succumbed to the influence of some friends and, instead of going to school, I began to skip class to go skating. Skating with a group of playmates was so much fun that I was truant for whole weeks at a time. Of course Mother knew nothing about this. She went on thinking that every morning I took my books and went to school, and every evening I came home from school.

But the truth was I was going to the river every day for frolicking and skating with a bunch of other truants. I would return home in the evening with an excellent appetite.

My activities on the river continued almost the whole winter. One especially memorable day, just before Lent, I was on the river with my friends. I and one of the others fell through the ice. Clinging to the ice, we cried at the top of our lungs: "Help! Help!"

Some of our friends, terrified, ran away, while others yelled "Help!" And when grown-ups came running and pulled us out, I was afraid to go home, since it would become apparent that I had been spending more time on skates on the river than sitting in class with books in hand. Instead I ran to my uncle's place. On the way there, my wet clothing froze. I arrived at my uncle's place in such a state that he feared for my health. They undressed me, rubbed me with spirits, and laid me on the stove. Meanwhile my aunt told my mother what had happened.

When my distraught mother arrived, I was already rubbed down with spirits and was lying on the stove. After learning all the details of what had happened, Mama laid me across a bench and began to "treat" me with her own remedy—a twisted piece of rope . . . .

For a long time after this "treatment," I could barely sit on a school bench. However, the main result was that from that day onward I became a diligent scholar again. Unfortunately, my serious studies did not last long. Two weeks before Easter, several pupils from our school, including myself, got into a fight with students from a parish school. In the course of the scuffle we broke off several saplings next to the *volost* administration building.

The following day the *starosta* visited the principal of our school in order to find out the names of the combatants and compel their parents to pay for the damage.

The principal carried out an investigation. At first no one wanted to confess, but when the principal announced that he knew the names of the perpetrators, I admitted everything, and so did the

others. My reward for being honest was three blows with a ruler on my hand and having to spend a whole hour on my knees in a corner of the classroom.

Because of this incident, I felt shame and humiliation. Some comrades and I agreed to cut classes and told our parents some rubbish about the principal. However, our parents asked the principal about the reason for our being expelled and the answer they received didn't reflect well on us.

Several days later, our parents brought us back to the school. But I was no longer interested in studying and, just like any boy of eight or nine, I could hardly wait for the summer holidays.

When summer arrived, I was hired as an ox drover on the estate of the landowner Jansen.[3] I was paid 25 kopecks per day, in other words, one-and-a-half rubles for a six-day week. Every Sunday after receiving this sum, I went home, running most of the seven *versts* and clutching the money in my fist with a big grin on my face. Running into the house, I handed over the money right away to my mother, just as I had seen my older brothers do with their pay on earlier occasions. Now I was also earning money and, just like them, passing it on to Mother . . . . It gave my young heart great joy to hand over my pay to Mama.

I recall that once I failed to water the oxen in time, and so, when they were pulling a wagon full of sheaves, they dragged me to a pond and began drinking water. Just then, the steward's assistant came driving by on an ox cart. (We called him Flycatcher because his mouth was always hanging open.) He struck me twice with a whip. I was so angry, I almost ran home and was restrained from doing so only by the memory of Sundays and the joy I found in bringing money home for Mama.

And so I kept working the whole summer and earned a total of 20 rubles. These were the spectacular earnings of my first job.

Autumn arrived. Mother insisted that I go back to school, but I stubbornly resisted. She compromised, and instead of the

3 This 1,000 hectare estate, owned by Abram Yakov Janzen, was part of the Silberfeld Mennonite colony. See Sean Patterson, **Makhno and Memory**, (Winnipeg, 2020), pp. 101-102.


T. S. Perederiy

Gulyai-Polye school, sent me to the school in the *khutor* of Andreyevka, where the teacher was her nephew, Timofey Perederiy.[4] There I again applied myself diligently to my studies. My obvious desire to study earned the praise of my cousin. He expressed the hope that I would come first in the class on the final examination. As a result, I doubled my efforts and began to study outside of class time, at the home of my cousin, who gladly gave me encouragement. It was expected that by finishing first, I would have the prospect of continuing on to a four-class gymnasium; my cousin really believed this would happen.

Alas, soon a stupid and banal event destroyed this dream. I was acting up in class and my cousin ordered me to leave so that I could come to my senses and recover my composure. I went to the room where I lived with my cousin and his wife, opened the cupboard, and took out a bag of plums. Placing it on the sewing machine, I sat down, started sampling the plums, and ended up eating the whole bag!

Just as I had finished eating the last plum, my cousin and his wife entered the room. Seeing what I had been up to, my cousin slapped me in the face several times, and shoved me in the corner on my knees. When his wife begged him to stop punishing me, he let me go. I immediately went to my friends from school and wrote a note to Mama in Gulyai-Polye, asking her to come and take me away because they were beating me here.

As I've already noted, my mother, when she was a serf, was beaten on more than once by her masters, and she couldn't reconcile herself to the notion of anyone other than herself striking me. She believed that she was the only person authorized to beat me,

4 Timofey Semenovich Perederiy was born between 1875 and 1880, and died of typhus in 1909 or 1910. His wife Maria was also a teacher.

an office which she exercised on occasion . . . .

That's why, as soon as she received my note, she rushed to her nephew's place and took me home without even bothering to listen to his version of events.

Upon returning to Gulyai-Polye, she did not allow me to remain free, but enrolled me again in my old school, where, in spite of my past history, I was given a test and assigned to the second class.

Soon I excelled among all the students in the class, in particular, in arithmetic and reading. I graduated from the second class, but didn't move on to the third. My family situation forced me not only to be a farm labourer for the summer, but also for the winter. But my older brothers—Karp, Savva, Yemelyan, and Grigoriy—especially the first three, who hadn't been able to finish their own schooling, insisted that I stop working for the *pomeshchik* and continue my studies. Finally, in November, 1899, I left my job and returned to school, but it was too late and there was no place available for me. So I had to go back to working as a *batrak* again.

All these mishaps, not to mention the precarious situation of my family, forced me to wonder which was more important: school or the sort of job which gave me 20 roubles for six months work? Back then I couldn't come up with an answer, but I recall my anger towards the *pomeshchik's* sons, and the *pomeshchik* himself, when they passed by—sleek, well-dressed, and scented, while I was filthy, clad in rags, barefoot, and stinking of manure from cleaning the calves' barn.

The injustice of this state of affairs was staring me in the face. My only consolation then was my childish reasoning that this was the natural order of things: they were the "masters" and I was a worker whom they paid so they wouldn't have to handle manure themselves.

Two years passed like this and I made progress in my career, moving from calves to horses. Here I often saw how the master's sons cruelly beat the stablehands, in particular because "the horses were not washed properly." However, I remained an ignoramus,

capable of reconciling myself to the worst abominations.

I saw how the master and his sons beat people like me, and I not only kept quiet, but tried, in the manner of all slaves, to turn away in order not to see.

Another year passed; it was 1902 and I was 13. The stablehands were, for the most part, decent people with excellent common sense. Because of my youth, they went out of their way to be nice to me.

Once, in the summertime, after we had finished eating supper, with the exception of the senior stablehand who was busy clipping the horses' tails, two of the owner's sons entered the kitchen along with the steward and a caretaker. They began to chew out one of the older stablehands. At first the conversation was civil, but then the tone changed. The bosses began to scream and insult the stablehand. Then they threw themselves on him and began to beat him. All the other stablehands sat paralyzed with fear before the brutal bosses. I alone bounded from the kitchen, sped across the courtyard, flew into the stable, and cried to the senior stablehand: "Uncle Vanya! The bosses are beating Filipp in the kitchen!"

Uncle Vanya, as if possessed, rushed into the courtyard still wearing an apron with scissors in his hand. Without uttering a word the two of us ran across the courtyard and into the kitchen. Probably I should have been crying, but in fact I couldn't help laughing when Vanya, seeing his assistant being beaten, hurled himself like a lion at one of the master's sons and knocked him off his feet. After kicking him a few times, he seized the overseer and began to pound him, peasant-style, in the side.

Both of the owner's sons and the caretaker made their escape only after removing two window frames in the kitchen. The overseer was confronted with a mass of rebellious slaves. All the *batraks* had abandoned their work to run to the aid of the stablehands, crying:

"How long do we have to put up with the bosses beating us?"

The senior stablehand gathered all the other stablehands and led

Peasant hut in pre-revolutionary Gulyai-Polye.

them to the landlord's front porch, where he demanded that they be paid out.

The elderly owner came out on the porch himself to bargain with us. He begged the stablehands not to quit and urged them to forgive the stupidity of his sons. He promised that such behaviour would not happen again. Then the stablehands decided to stay; they contented themselves with the realization that on this estate there would be an end to beatings once and for all.

As for me, although I was still a child, this incident produced a lasting impression. For the first time I heard seditious words, spoken to me by Batko Ivan [Vanya] afterwards:

"Nobody here should ever allow themselves to be beaten . . . . And if some day, my little Nestor, one of the bosses tries to hit you, grab the nearest pitchfork and skewer him!"

At my young age, these words were perceived by me as terrible, but at the same time I instinctively found them innately sane and just. Subsequently, more than once when I was spreading or picking up litter in the stable and saw one of the bosses, I imagined him trying to hit me, and myself stabbing him with my fork on the spot. But the bosses were now more wary of throw-

ing their weight around. They had to exercise caution about how they acted and whom they were going to attack and beat.

* * * * *

Another year went by and my life as a *batrak* was suspended. The situation of my family had changed substantially over a period of three or four years. All my older brothers got married. One of them built a house and operated as an independent farmer. The others followed the more traditional path and began to farm their communal allotments.

On the advice of my brothers, I got a job at a foundry in Gulyai-Polye, working under one of the most skilled foundrymen, P. Velikiy. He taught me how to cast wheels for seeding machines.

But I soon quit the foundry and remained for some time at my mother's place. Then I got a job as an assistant to a wine merchant. After three months, I found the work so boring that one day, while accompanying the boss to the bazaar in Gulyai-Polye, I simply took off without saying anything, and disappeared for two whole weeks, both from my job and from my family. I returned home only when my boss had left town.

When I returned home, my brothers told me their prospects for the immediate future were dim. The harvest was predicted to be poor, two of their horses had died and had to be replaced, and that meant going into debt. In addition, the *telega* had fallen apart and there was nothing to haul grain with. I made up my mind then and there to help them and got a job at a dye-works where I made a deal with the owner that he would order a nice *telega* for me in exchange for my labour. That's how it worked out, and as soon as I had paid for the *telega* in this manner, I quit the job so I could help my brothers work the land.

One of my brothers—Savva—was conscripted for the Russo-Japanese War. All of us together built a separate dwelling for my brother Yemelyan; he then settled there with his own family to live independently. When Karp left, there remained only myself and Grigoriy, both youths. Soon matters got worse again, and Grigory got a job as *batrak*. So I found myself alone with

one horse and four hectares of land which had to be cultivated. The national uprising of 1905 was imminent. I began to read any illegal literature that I could get my hands on.

* * * * *

Then 1905 arrived. In the last months of the year, when there were large-scale uprisings throughout the country, I was under the influence of the social-democrats. Their socialist phraseology and their phony revolutionary fervour both attracted and deceived me. Fearlessly I distributed a huge quantity of social-democratic leaflets calling for struggle against the tsar and the establishment of a republic.

At the beginning of 1906, I joined a circle of the Gulyai-Polye group of peasant anarcho-communists. This group functioned under very hazardous conditions. Martial law had been applied to the whole country, which meant drumhead courts, punitive detachments, and shootings. All this made the activities of our group extremely difficult—even study circles. Nevertheless, once a week, sometimes two or three times a week, circles of from 10 to 15 people would meet.

Those times when we got together (it was usually at night) were the light of my life. In the wintertime we met in someone's home, and in the summer in a field, beside a pond, on green grass, or, upon occasion, while taking a walk. We discussed questions which interested us, although we didn't possess a lot of knowledge.

The most outstanding comrade in the group was Prokop Semenyuta. From a peasant family, he was employed as a machinist in a factory. He was the most knowledgeable of our group and one of the first in Gulyai-Polye to study anarchism seriously. He had organized the circle along with Voldemar Antoni. After six months of studying anarchism, I moved on from the circle to an action group of anarcho-communists. Having acquired a good understanding of the goal of the group, I got to know its founder and began to integrate myself into its active work.

The founder of the Gulyai-Polye Group of Peasant Anarcho-Com-

munists was Comrade Voldemar Antoni, known in our anarchist ranks under the pseudonym "Zarathustra." His parents, Czechs by origin, were workers who had emigrated from Austria. Antoni worked as a lathe operator. He was, to the highest degree, an honourable and sincere revolutionary. (I don't know what he is doing now since I haven't had any correspondence with him for 17 years.)

At the time I'm describing, his nickname in Gulyai-Polye was "Jesus," especially among the wives of the men who came to our study circles, where Voldemar valiantly presented his own propaganda.

He was the one who exerted a decisive influence on me, cleansing my mind once and for all of the slightest trace of the slave mentality and the desire to submit to any authority whatsoever. From that moment, I set out at last on my journey of struggle for the social revolution.

In September, 1906, the police came to arrest me for the first time, but I was able to escape. Six weeks later they managed to catch me. I was accused of taking part in an "expropriation," and also in a failed attack on a policeman. Thanks only to a stroke of good luck, I wasn't shot and was released.

At the end of 1906, Voldemar Antoni returned from a trip to Moscow. Aleksandr Semenyuta, Prokop's brother, had deserted from the army and returned to Gulyai-Polye. Our group then became more active. The terror unleashed by the government was answered from our side by terror, while at the same time carrying on with our propaganda work in the study circle, which was generating outstanding, energetic, and dedicated revolutionaries. During the course of the struggle, many of them were to perish by bullets or on the scaffold. But their thoughts and their actions did not disappear without a trace, since anarchist ideas acquired strong roots among the Gulyai-Polye peasantry.

In 1906 the group reacted to arrests and beatings of revolutionaries by terror and the publishing of leaflets explaining the goals and actions of the anarchists.

Activists of the Union of Poor Peasants: sitting (left to right): Nestor Makhno, Voldemar Antoni, Petr Onishchenko, Yegor Bondarenko, Ivan Levadny; standing (left to right): Filipp Krat, Luka Kravchenko, Ivan Shevchenko, Prokop Semenyuta, Luka Korostylev, Nazar Zuichenko. 1907. The photo was made at the Evinzon studio in Gulyai-Polye on May 1, 1907.

In 1907 the group's activities broadened in scope: we answered the persecutions and executions of revolutionaries with assassination attempts. To publicize our views, we published and distributed leaflets in both Russian and Ukrainian.

Our level of activity reached a peak in reaction to the notorious Stolypin laws,[5] which eliminated communal property in land: we waged "Black Terror" against the *pomeshchiks* and *kulaks*, who had their own organization. Propaganda tours through the countryside had been organized by this organization to encourage people to drop out of the village communes, convert communal land to private property, and become members of the General Association of Landowners.

5 Starting in 1906, a wide range of agrarian reforms were carried out under the direction of Russian Minister of Internal Affairs P. A. Stolypin. These reforms were aimed at replacing the collective ownership of rural communes by private ownership, thereby creating a class of peasant proprietors that would support the monarchy,

Lacking the possibility of exposing this propaganda openly and legally, our group of anarcho-communists decided to publish leaflets and hold information sessions in order to explain to the peasants the real intentions of Stolypin and the negative aspects of the new law. And finally, since this activity was by itself insufficient, the group decided to set fire to the *pomeshchiks*' property and fields wherever possible—this was the so-called "Black Terror."

It happened that *pomeshchiks*' estates burned for whole weeks and no one put out the fires . . . . And it also happened that the peasants rose up in struggle with their enemies, fearlessly taking on the Cossacks when the latter raided their villages, scourging and slashing with their whips and sabres on behalf of the authorities who were paying for their services.

The *kulaks* in the *khutors* and villages were dealt with in the same way. The anarcho-communist group spared their lives if they had not been using strong-arm methods in their proselytizing for the Stolypin system. But their farmsteads were burned—and neither the peasants nor the workers would lift a finger to put out these fires. There were some social-democrats who helped the police and the fire brigades put out fires, in order to "preserve capital," as they put it . . . . This worked to our advantage, since it showed the peasants what the social-democrats were really about. Pretty soon it became impossible to find even one peasant social-democrat, not only in Gulyai-Polye, but also in a huge region around it. Those who had joined the social-democratic party hastened to leave it.

At that time Antoni, Levadny, Prokop Semenyuta, and myself were forced to go underground, while continuing to live in Gulyai-Polye.

In September, 1907, I got arrested because of the folly of the Socialist-revolutionary Party member Mickey Makovsky. He asked me to lend him my revolver on the pretext that he was going to shoot a police officer in the head because he had been badly beaten by the police.

I knew that the police had stopped him on the street and beat

him and I was glad that he had decided to stick up for himself. I passed him my revolver, and then, as we were walking together, we ran into his fiancée, Varya Bulat. He shot her twice (fortunately the wounds were not mortal) and then shot himself in the forehead (also not fatally).

Believing it would be dishonourable to leave them in such a state, I tried to render first aid. Then the police arrived and arrested me.

Three or four days later, Voldemar Antoni, the leader of our group, was arrested for trying to arrange a meeting with me with the help of a guard.

On this occasion, Antoni and myself were tortured, but managed to hold out.

Later I learned that the police chief Karachentsev declared to our postmaster:

"I've never seen such a tough bunch. I've got plenty of evidence that they're anarchists, but, in spite of the application of physical force, they wouldn't admit to anything. Makhno gives the appearance of being a dim-witted *muzhik*, but I know that it was he who shot at a constable on August 26, 1907. But in spite of all my efforts, I can't get a confession out of him. On the contrary, he insists that he wasn't in Gulyai-Polye on that day. As for Antoni, when I beat him, he had the nerve to tell me: 'You'll never get anything out of me, pig!' And so I used the rubber truncheon on him."

This is how Karachentsev bragged to the Gulyai-Polye postmaster I_shin.

At this time the court investigator was trying to pin the responsibility for several "expropriations" and political assassinations on me. However, in the end he had to conclude that at the time these events took place I was nowhere in the vicinity. Several witnesses confirmed this, without budging in their testimony. In spite of this, I had to sit in prison for four or five months waiting for the results of the investigation.

As for Comrade Antoni, the authorities weren't able to charge

him with anything, so they tried to deport him to Austria under the pretext that he was an Austrian citizen. However, the case was referred to the Governor, who carefully reviewed the case. He sentenced Antoni to a month in jail for no particular reason, followed by release. Antoni moved to another *guberniya* but continued to provide assistance to our group from time to time.

Once set free, I returned by train to Gulyai-Polye. Hardly had I set foot in the railway station when I was arrested again, and, without being told anything, was taken to the chief of police Karachentsev. He interrogated me on the spot, claiming he was in possession of new evidence against me. Then he turned me over to the court investigator, who sent me back to prison.

This time I spent another four months in prison until a Gulyai-Polye factory owner, Josif Danilovich Vichlinsky, posted bail of 2,000 rubles. The court investigator then ordered my release.

Vichlinsky, whom I shall honour until my dying day, immediately advised me to leave Gulyai-Polye. He swore that he had information from the court investigator about the intentions of the Gulyai-Polye authorities in regards to me.

"If you don't want to leave Gulyai-Polye," he told me, "at least don't stay at home. Find yourself a place where you can live quietly without attracting attention."

At this time, none of the active members of our group could live openly under their own name. It was the opinion of Aleksandr Semenyuta, whom we respected and listened to most of all since he was the most devoted, courageous, and steadfast member of our group, that I should remain in a "legal" situation for two or three months. So, while continuing to take part in the struggle, I got a job at a dye-works.

During 1907, the funding of the Gulyai-Polye authorities was increased, and they now had a squad of secret police at their disposal. These two-legged curs in human form posed a threat to our study circles. *Shpiks*, those two-legged lice, began their filthy work. Our struggle became a little more dangerous. Nevertheless, I was soon able to organize another anarchist study group in

Bochansk, on the outskirts of Gulyai-Polye, which was attended by 20 to 25 young peasants. We met once a week and most of the members were also involved in other group projects.

A month later, all our comrades who were living underground held a conference in order to work out our position on urgent and important questions having to do with armed struggle.

On June 2 [1908] we executed the *shpik* Kushnarev.[6] He had been introduced into our ranks by our comrade Ivan Levadny. Already at the time of my arrest, Voldemar Antoni had detected something suspicious in Levadny's behaviour and shared this information with me when they were taking us to prison. When I got out of prison, I made my own observations of Kushnarev's behaviour. But he remained a member of our group, despite the friction caused by his presence. One of the goals of our conference was to discover the truth of the matter. Levadny, of course, was well aware our distrust towards him and announced that he wished to prove his sincerity and dedication to the group, and also his devotion to the ideal of anarchism, by committing a terrorist act assigned to him by the group.

In order to have a thorough discussion of this proposal, the Semenyuta brothers, myself, and several other members of the group got together after the conference in the home of Levadny himself. The building was soon surrounded by a squadron of Cossacks who had been stationed in Gulyai-Polye for some time for the purpose of suppressing our group.

As soon as the chief of the secret police called on us to surrender, Levadny cried out:

"Comrades, let's surrender!"

All the comrades unanimously and resolutely refused. We took cover and offered armed resistance.

When the shooting broke out, every one was able to escape in the confusion, except our outstanding comrade Prokop Semenyuta,

6 Actually Solomon Kushner. He was attacked by Aleksandr Semenyuta and Ivan Levadny, the latter disguised as a young woman, at about 11 pm on June 1, 1908. Wounded by two bullets, Kushner died two days later.

who was killed. His brother Aleksandr and Levadny were slightly wounded. The Cossacks and police also suffered casualties.

Several days later, I visited Aleksandr Semenyuta at his hideout in order to tell him about the funeral of his brother, which he was unable to attend. Then we talked about the impending visit to Gulyai-Polye of the provincial Governor. We worked out a detailed plan for his assassination. (The Governor's visit was for the sole purpose of eradicating our group.)

On August 6, Filipp Onishchenko and myself, armed with bombs and revolvers, headed for our appointed positions. Aleksandr Semenyuta, his face made up to be almost unrecognizable, also took up a position. Nevertheless, we weren't able to do anything because we weren't allowed near the road along which the governor would be travelling. Young people especially were discouraged from attending. Police agents droved them away from the appointed route.

Only *stariki* were allowed into the courtyard of the *volost* administration. The governor delivered a fiery speech to these *stariki*, urging them to inform on the bandits. The peasants answered him in unison:

"We're not bandits and we have no knowledge of such people."

In the evening Filipp and I, dejected because of our failure, met with Aleksandr Semenyuta. I proposed to blow up the local office of the secret police with whatever bombs we had available, since I was quite familiar with the layout of the place, having been summoned there on three occasions during the previous month. Semenyuta and Onishchenko said:

"We're together with you on this."

Aleksandr went to Yekaterinoslav to fetch an infernal machine.[7]

Filipp and myself continued to keep the secret police branch under observation. This required spending a certain sum of money, but the results were well worth it. Within a week to ten days, Aleksandr returned, not with an infernal machine, but with

7 An "infernal machine" refers to a package of explosives designed to be delivered to a target by various means, including by a suicide bomber.

two good 9-lb and 14-lb bombs.

He told us he had been in contact with other members of our group in Yekaterinoslav: Shevchenko, Zuichenko, Levadny, and Althauzen. All of them except Althauzen had taken part in the skirmish in Gulyai-Polye and wanted to take part in the attack on the secret police office, but Semenyuta considered this unnecessary.

Actually he was right. The three of us were quite sufficient for the task at hand.

Now we made all the preparations necessary. I rarely got together with the others. Comrade Khshiva from the Jewish circle, an honourable and stalwart revolutionary who took on the most important assignments of the group, left Gulyai-Polye for a while and went to Yekaterinoslav.

During the night of August 24-25, Aleksandr Semenutya and myself got together at Comrade Filipp's place and made a final decision to blow up the secret police branch in a day's time. If we were fated to die, at least our sacrifice would not be in vain . . . . When we emerged from the Onishchenko home, several Cossacks on horseback were waiting by the gates and yelled: "Stop!" But we answered with a salvo of shots from our Mausers and took off into an adjacent courtyard.

During the shooting, Aleksandr was wounded slightly in the hand, while Filipp Onishchenko was arrested that very same night.

I met with Aleksandr again the next day, and we decided not to change our plan in any way.

On August 26, several hours before we were due to blow up the secret police branch, and possibly ourselves as well, I was arrested, handcuffed, and taken to the secret police branch without being told anything.

On the morning of August 27, I was transferred from the secret police branch to the main police station. Here I met Comrade Filipp. We were bitterly disappointed because of our arrests and the collapse of our plan. It was only four days later that we found

out that our comrades in Yekaterinoslav had been arrested and that Nahum Althauzen had betrayed us.

At the time of his arrest, Althauzen knew that there was an Onishchenko in the group, but he was not personally acquainted with him.

"Makhno I know. He's a member of this group. According to Ivan Levadny [arrested at the same time as Althauzen, along with Nazar Zuichenko and Ivan Shevchenko], he is currently one of the most dangerous terrorists in our group, after the Semenyuta brothers."

That's why the police arrested me and did not charge me until the other prisoners had been brought to Gulyai-Polye from Yekaterinoslav: Ivan Levadny, Ivan Shevchenko, Nazar Zuichenko, and Shmerko Khshiva from our group; and Comrade Shcherbin and the provocateur Nahum Althauzen from the Amur group.[8] Then Karachentsev sent for me and said:

"Well, Makhno, we've got you now, you won't be able to deny the facts any more."

Shortly afterwards, the investigator presented me with a charge sheet listing various crimes against the government and its laws. In particular, he charged me with committing expropriations and the murders of policemen.

I have to admit that the investigator had some success in pinning these accusations on me. The case was then handed over to the court.

A year later, the court investigator came to the Aleksandrovsk prison, where we had been transferred, to tell us about the winding up of the investigation. In connection with this, he explained in great detail how he had put together the charges against us and who had given him information about our group and its activities.

8 Amur was founded as a village in 1875 on the left bank of the Dnieper, across from Yekaterinoslav. There does not seem to be any consensus as to why it was named after a river in the Far East. In the 1890s it became an industrialized suburb.

Aleksandrovsk prison in present-day Zaporizhizhia. Built as a stable in 1882, it was later converted to a remand prison. Cell windows are visible along the upper level.

On the very same day, the provocateurs Althauzen and Levadny were removed from our cell to a special cell where the prison administration segregated and protected all the provocateurs. In prisons these cells are called "bitches' cages."

It was no longer safe for the provocateurs to remain with us—they knew that we were sworn to kill any provocateurs found to be among the members of our group.

* * * * *

From this time on, all the comrades in prison were geared up to search out the possibility of a collective escape. A plan was quickly hatched. It was my task to establish contact with Aleksandr Semenyuta, still at large, and work out all the details of the operation with him.

Our provocateurs were able to continue their Judas activities and betrayed two more of our comrades—Klim Kirichenko and Yegor Bondarenko. The governor sent them to Arkhangelsk *guberniya* to serve terms of exile.

We saw that matters were taking a serious turn, so we worked out

a plan of escape from the prison. On the day of the escape, we would either take the provocateurs with us or shoot them in their cells. But, unexpectedly, the authorities began to break up our group into fours in preparation for sending us from the Aleksandrovsk prison to Yekaterinoslav.

Our plan had to be changed. Our comrades on the outside—led by Aleksandr Semenyuta—proposed to attempt to free us on the way from the prison to the railway station. We accepted this proposal . . . . We devised a signal code which was passed to a certain woman, a member of the Aleksandrovsk anarcho-communist group, who walked below the windows of our cell every Monday. This would allow us to signal if we learned the exact date of our being moved to Yekaterinoslav.

On January 4, 1910, we learned that on the next day at dawn, eight of us were to be taken to the railway station and sent to Yekaterinoslav. We succeeded in communicating this information to our group, now based in Aleksandrovsk. The group had been forced to leave Gulyai-Polye following the killings of the police chief Karachentsev and another officer, a supervisor of constables, at Pologi Station. Our comrades waited for a propitious moment to spring us from the hands of our escort.

On January 5, 1910, we were awakened at 3 a.m. and ordered to get ready for departure. We got up feeling a jumble of emotions about our impending liberation. We had 100 per cent confidence in our intended plan of escape.

An hour later we were led out into the courtyard of the prison, where our escort was waiting. The eight prisoners were shackled together in pairs. Then we left the prison, surrounded by soldiers with sabres drawn, and headed along the streets of Aleksandrovsk towards the railway station.

It was very cold: 27° below zero. We walked down the middle of the streets so quickly that we didn't even notice our comrades who were following us on the sidewalks. When we reached the station, the soldiers ordered: "Halt!"

Only at that moment did we hear the prearranged words, pro-

nounced by one of our own, which informed us of their presence. One of the soldiers went into the railway station to check on when our train would arrive.

I knew more than my comrades about the plan of attack, so I listened attentively to every sound. In particular, I wanted to hear everything the guards said to one another and what civilian onlookers were saying, although we were still some distance from the point of attack.

We had decided that at the moment when we went out on the platform to board the train, each of our comrades would point their weapon at one of the soldiers of the escort and demand that he throw down his weapon. In the case of resistance, the soldiers would be shot on the spot, as well as the provocateur Althauzen.

While listening to every sound, I heard Semenyuta's voice, speaking to his cart drivers in a typical peasant drawl,

"Well, we'll wrap this up within half an hour, then we'll leave."

All these details were clearly impressed on my memory. I was fastened by handcuffs to Comrade Yegor Bondarenko. He couldn't budge his big hand in the handcuffs, but I could release my own hand with a minimum of effort. Therefore he said to me:

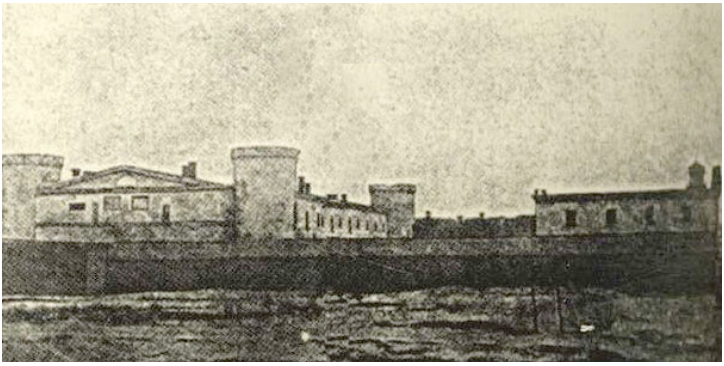
"As soon as your hand is free, take a revolver and kill the provocateur Althauzen, because in the scuffle the comrades might forget about him and let him get away. For my own part, I will try not to lose sight of him."

Suddenly we overheard a soldier, returning from the station:

"The train from Melitopol has been delayed 40 minutes; it's actually uncertain when it will arrive . . . . There are big snowdrifts blocking the track . . . . We'll know more in 10 minutes . . . ."

We were all shivering. Dawn was approaching, and the moment of our escape. But everyone remained calm.

They led us into the third class waiting hall. Benches had been set aside to keep us separated from the regular passengers. Nevertheless, the latter bought bread and *kolbasa* for us and passed them to us through the guards.



Yekaterinoslav Prison, early 1900s. The Makhnovists destroyed it in 1919.

I recall that none of us touched the food because we were so stressed out. Each of us was concentrating on the plan of escape, and each of us had heavy thoughts about the success or failure of that plan.

Suddenly a shrill cry resounded in the hall:

"Guards! Police! Look out! Semenyuta is here. Seize him, he's going to shoot!"

The reaction of myself and my friends at that moment is impossible to describe . . . . It was our provocateur Althauzen screaming his head off. He knew Semenyuta well since he had lived in the same apartment with him in Yekaterinoslav. So even though our comrade was dressed as a peasant, with a white sheepskin overcoat and a peaked cap on his head, Althauzen recognized him and assumed that Semenyuta had come specially to kill him.

When several soldiers and policemen rushed towards Semenyuta, he coolly pulled out two revolvers and fired while retreating towards the doors, and then disappeared. Shots were heard at the other end of the waiting hall. Many of the people in the hall, including some of the prisoners and guards, threw themselves on the floor to avoid the bullets. There was no longer any possibility of escape, and the prison guards and soldiers soon vented their emotions on us.

Within ten minutes, the railway station was surrounded by sol-

diers, police, plain-clothes detectives, and secret agents. They interrogated Althauzen, who convinced them that he had really seen Aleksandr Semenyuta. This was a surprise for the authorities, including the governor, since they were under the impression, based on official information, that he had found political asylum in Belgium. Aleksandr Semenyuta, our unforgettable friend and comrade, was completely devoted to his revolutionary ideals. And for this he was pursued relentlessly by the nefarious agents of the government in 1907–1908 and the first half of 1909. Thousands of rubles were allocated for the head of this anarchist and he was maligned in the press as a common brigand.

But he was a titan of the revolution because of his moral stature, his devotion to the cause of anarchism, and his personal bravery. His daring was legendary. He feared neither the scaffold nor the butchers. He was always ready for the worst that could happen and he helped others to be ready as well.

From December, 1906, when he deserted from the 56th Infantry Regiment in Odessa, he occupied a difficult and dangerous post in the revolutionary anarchist struggle and he never left this post. From 1906 to 1910 he never gave a moment's peace either to the governor or to his lackeys—the officers of the secret service and the regular police.

For each imprisoned revolutionary who was killed or tortured, he exacted retribution by killing one of the oppressors, while calling upon the oppressed to rise in revolt.

Those anarchists who knew him in Russia or abroad always remembered him as someone with outstanding qualities, a person who was honourable and dedicated to the anarchist cause.

Mind you, there are many contemporary anarchists, especially those who have never experienced the tribulations of underground existence, who disdain militants like Aleksandr Semenyuta and probably would disown him. But their opinions do not interest me.

His courage more than once saved his life. Neither the soldiers nor the police could catch him.

Just when the brass had finished interrogating the *shpik* Althauzen, the train arrived. They loaded us on a railway car and we headed for Yekaterinoslav. The Yekaterinoslav authorities had prepared great "honours" for our arrival: an entire regiment of soldiers and a large number of policemen (both uniformed and plain-clothes) awaited us at the railway station. We were surrounded by this menacing escort and conducted to the prison.

At the prison they beat us pretty thoroughly. Then they put Yegor Bondarenko, Klim Kirichenko, and myself in a special cell for condemned prisoners. One of our comrades, Martinov, was tossed into the women's prison. Comrades Lisovsky, Chernyavsky, and Orlov were placed in a normal common cell.

As for the provocateur Althauzen, he was put in a special cell for secret agents, spies, and such. Such cells are found in every prison.

We didn't stay in the condemned cell very long. By order of the Inspector of Prisons, the warden transferred us to Remand Cell № 2, which held about 140 persons slated for court martial.

The provocateur Althauzen was moved from the special cell for *shpiks* to the tower block, where he had to put up with the company of a certain Prostotin, a hangman. Prostotin was an ordinary criminal who had offered his services to hang condemned prisoners in exchange for money.

Nahum Althauzen, a sales clerk by profession and an aspiring businessman, found this arrangement to be in his own interest. Having been first placed with other *shpiks*, he realized what he had to do to avoid getting bumped off. He asked the captain of the guard, a certain Belokoz, to transfer him to the hangman's cell, because he didn't feel safe among the other *shpiks*, any one of whom might regret their past activity and kill him. Belokoz moved him to the hangman's cell.[9]

9 The prisoners would be familiar with an incident that took place in the Minsk Prison on April 25, 1907. Three death row political prisoners set a trap for the hated warden Butkevich, stabbed him to death, and took his keys. But instead of trying to escape, they headed to the cell of the *shpik* Mikhail Kavetsky and killed him. The killers were hanged three months later.

The other traitor, Ivan Levadny, expressed his remorse to us and, by way of expiation, proposed to kill the hangman Prostotin as soon as the possibility presented itself. Of course our group angrily rejected this proposal. Subsequently, he found himself in the prison hospital together with one of the Yekaterinoslav anarchists who found a convenient moment to smother him.[10]

Thus our first serious attempt to escape ended in failure.

The Trial and My Experiences

For our trial they concentrated our group in a special cell, where we sorely missed our dear comrades Ivan Shevchenko and Shmerko Khshiva. They had been tried separately for armed resistance, found guilty, and hanged. Another comrade, Nazar Zuichenko, received a death sentence which, in view of his illness, was changed to life imprisonment at hard labour; he was transferred to a different cell. Finally, there was one comrade of our group, Shcherbin, who was acquitted by the court.

To our moral suffering was added the harsh experience of the prison regime of the Yekaterinoslav Prison. Ever since the failed escape attempt by condemned prisoners on April 29, 1908,[11] this prison was known throughout the world as a living hell. Never a day passed when some prisoner was not cruelly beaten, sometimes resulting in broken ribs.

In 1908 the Yekaterinoslav anarcho-communist organization answered this horrendous treatment with an attempt on the life of the governor of the province. Terrified, he rushed to the prison that very evening and ordered a change in regime. However, several days later the governor died of natural causes, and the former regime was re-established.

There was nothing we could do. We were helpless and, like all

10 According to official records, Ivan Levadny died of typhus on May 30, 1909.

11 During this horrific event, 32 prisoners were killed (a number of whom were not part of the escape attempt) and 50 wounded. The guard supervisor Belokoz was especially active in slaughtering prisoners.

the other prisoners, were compelled to endure the tyranny of the screws . . . .

In March, 1910, we appeared before the Yekaterinoslav court martial. According to the indictment, there should have been 16 defendants in the dock, headed by Nestor Makhno and Nazar Zuichenko. But there were only eight of us; Comrade Zuichenko was absent due to illness and the rest were still at large. They were being searched for, but in vain.

Up until 1917, the Gulyai-Polye peasant anarcho-communist group was distinguished from other organizations by persevering in a high level of activity throughout the 11 years of its existence. The group maintained regular contact with Russian organizations abroad, where many of its members, who had been compelled to flee the country, supplied it with literature and weapons. Without drawing attention to itself, the group carried on significant propaganda work, especially among the peasants. This work was to bear fruit, as will be shown subsequently.

Thus on March, 1910, our judges knew what they were dealing with and did everything possible to finish off these "bandits who want to overthrow the existing order by force of arms." If it was really bandits they were dealing with, they would have had nothing to worry about, since no one would come to their defense. But that's not the way things stood; therefore the judges and police were uptight and worried the whole time the court was in session.

Most of all they were worried about the presence of Aleksandr Semenyuta and his comrades—not just in the countryside, but in Yekaterinoslav itself. That's why, when we were taken to court or back to prison, there was no traffic by automobiles, streetcars, or pedestrians allowed in the vicinity.

Time and again, the most senior police officials, and even the chief police himself, were present when we were exiting the prison. They never tired of reminding their subordinates that in the event that even one bullet was fired or one bomb thrown, they were to shoot us down at once without hesitation . . . .

All eight of us accused were drawn up in ranks in military fashion, surrounded by concentric rings: first there were prison guards on foot, then mounted guards with revolvers drawn, and finally a whole pack of police and plain-clothes detectives spread out on all sides. We were taken to court each day in this manner.

However, on the fourth day of the session (the court martial was held in the Feodosia Barracks), we heard the sound of shots being exchanged—at first faint and intermittent, then louder and more frequent. The session was interrupted, and the judges disappeared. At the time I had a bad cold which caused deafness. Our public defender, Citizen Pudry, came up to me and said there was some sort of gun battle going on outside and that this could be bad for us.

What was happening? Security was even tighter as they took us back to prison.

While we were being taken back, we overheard soldiers mention the name Semenyuta, but didn't find out any more.

The guards were reinforced. On the following day we were advised that the next court session would probably be the last one, and after it was finished we would not be returned to our usual cell but to special individual cells in the basement from which we would emerge only to be taken to execution.

We said goodbye to each other, without allowing our agitation and anxiety to show. We were cheerful, we joked . . . .

During the roll call, I asked the captain of the guard Belokoz to give me a new pair of prison footwear as mine were quite worn out. Scarcely were the words out of my mouth than the voice of the *shpik* Althauzen was heard, saying:

"Why do you need new footwear when they're going to hang you in two weeks?"

Bondarenko lunged at him, but a soldier blocked his path with a rifle butt.

We all yelled: "Get that scum out of our sight!"

Someone shouted:

"Quiet, or I'll give the order to open fire!"

At the same time another command sounded: "Attention!" followed by the military salutation "That's great, lads!" The gates of the prison flew open and someone from the city's top brass of the city entered the courtyard. We didn't know who it was; some said the chief of the regular police, others claimed it was the head of the secret police.

This high official came up to the provocateur Althauzen and spoke with him at some length, while glancing in our direction. Finally he approached us and asked:

"Which of you is Makhno?"

When I answered: "It is I," the stranger looked me up and down from head to foot. There was something soft, almost tender, in his gaze, but I felt a strong hatred towards me in his words and gestures.

The stranger addressed himself to Althauzen again:

"You say Semenyuta writes only to Makhno?"

"Yes," replied the provocateur, "he enjoys the complete trust of Semenyuta and any illegal correspondence to the prison passes only through Makhno . . . ."

The official looked at me once more with his tender gaze, then turned to the captain of the guard and said:

"Outwardly he appears harmless, but they say he is extremely dangerous."

I seethed with anger, but remained silent.

This was the prelude to the final session of our trial.

We barely concealed our anxiety as again we were surrounded by a close ring of nervous soldiers and heard the vile order to shoot all of us in the event of an attack. Then they escorted us to the court session.

This was the fifth day of our trial under Judge Batog, who held the power of life or death over us. Seven years later, after the February Revolution, he became the chief revolutionary advocate

general at the Front. I tried very hard to meet with him then, but did not succeed.

I don't know how that would have turned out, but on this, the final day of our trial, the sentences were pronounced: Comrades Maria Martinova, Kazimir Lisovsky, and Sergei Ziblidsky were sentenced to six years at hard labour.

Klim Kirichenko, Yegor Bondarenko, Yefim Orlov, myself, and the provocateur Nahum Althauzen—were sentenced to 15 years of *katorga* for taking part in a "bandit" organization. And for terrorist acts and expropriations which had been attributed to us by provocateurs, we were sentenced to execution by hanging.

After reading this vile sentence, Judge Batog shouted to the escorts:

"Take them away!"

In the courtyard of the prison, the five condemned prisoners were shackled hand and foot. Four of us were led to the death row cells in the basement, while Althauzen was returned to the cell he shared with the hangman Prostotin. He made a fuss, claiming that "his morals would not allow him to stay in the same cell with the person who might be hanging him." So they put him in an adjacent cell.

In our cell in the basement, we encountered Comrade Kotsur, who told us that he was the cause of the shooting on the fourth day of the trial.

He was sitting in the park, waiting for some comrades to show up, when the police mistook him for Semenyuta and tried to arrest him. He was defending himself by firing his revolver when another comrade, the sailor-deserter Tsimbal came running up. A real battle ensued which lasted half a day.

Seven guards and policemen were wounded and one of the secret police agents was killed. Both comrades managed to get away, but Tsimbal suffered a number of wounds at the hands of the secret police. During the night, a doctor was summoned; he treated the wounded man but soon reported him to the police.

Both comrades were apprehended; Kotsur was sleeping at the time. Now one of them was in the prison infirmary and the other with us on death row. They now awaited trial, and expected to be hanged, just like us.

We spent the first night of our new life trying to concentrate on new thoughts and new feelings so as to forget about our situation. On the next morning we were led to the tribunal again for a second reading of the sentence. There we found our lawyers (they defended us free of charge, with the exclusion of Althauzen's lawyer). Downcast and distressed, they rushed to us and implored us to listen to them carefully.

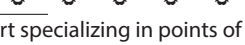
One of them, Pudry, acting as their spokesman, proposed that we appeal the court's decision to the Court of Cassation.[12] We refused.

Then the lawyers proposed that we sign a petition for clemency addressed to Tsar Nicholas II, asking that our death sentences be changed to some other sentence. When he proffered the text to me, I stated that I did not want to ask for anything from that villain and that since they had condemned us to death, then nothing remained but for them to hang us.

Then the lawyers queried the other comrades individually, and each refused to sign the petition. I can't say whether the provocateur Althauzen signed anything because I couldn't see what he was up to. He conferred with his hired lawyer separately from us. Soon General Batog appeared, read the sentence for a second time, and in a harsh voice ordered:

"Take them away!"

And back we went to prison . . . .[13]



12 A central appeals court specializing in points of law or procedure.

13 Despite the anarchists' determination to kill Nahum Althzuzen, he survived until at least 1935, when he was sentenced to five years exile in Kazakhstan as a "socially dangerous element." Major-General Sergei Alexandrovich Batog (1863–?), a judge of the Kiev Military District Court, gravitated to the White movement (Makhno's mortal enemies) in 1919 and was forced into emigration the following year.

52 Days on Death Row

Our stay on death row began on March 26, 1910. The cells there had a vaulted ceiling and were two metres wide and five metres long; there were four such cells in the basement of Yekaterinoslav Prison.

The walls of these cells were covered with inscriptions left by revolutionaries—anarchists and socialists, known and unknown—who had anxiously awaited the hour designated for them. It seemed as if their spirits flitted along these walls, walls which had been erected by the oppressors to imprison the oppressed. Or, in some cases, the spirits of militants who came from the ranks of the oppressors themselves, but had honourably rejected their criminal world. These spirits stayed with us as we in turn awaited our premature deaths—deaths at the hands of a hangman . . . .

Locked up in these cells we felt ourselves already with one foot in the grave. We had the sensation that we were frantically clinging to the edge of the earth but were unable to keep from falling. Then we thought about all our comrades on the outside who were keeping the faith and still hoping to achieve something worthwhile in the struggle for a better life. Having sacrificed ourselves for the sake of the future, we experienced especially tender feelings towards these comrades still in freedom.

With the exception of these sentiments, which were still linked to the living world, the condemned, without even noticing it, severed any connection with the outside. Whether sitting, standing, or moving around, their thoughts were only about one thing: their own execution. They sought in themselves the strength to remain steadfast and brave until the last minutes before the executioner. Such was the last wish, the dream, the greatest consolation for all those who consciously set out on the path of revolutionary struggle, only to fall into the hands of their enemies and be subject to retaliatory justice.

However, there were others, not only among the criminals but also among the revolutionaries, who began to regret their actions

as the final minutes of their lives approached. They could not recover their former courage, and could not accustom themselves to thoughts of death; they began to weep and lose their composure. Although there were few of these among the revolutionaries, it was impossible to judge them harshly because of the enormous stress they were under. We had to support them morally and not just leave them on their own.

In the spring of 1910, there were many condemned prisoners in the Yekaterinoslav Prison. Just in our Cell No. 23 besides Bondarenko, Kirichenko, Orlov, and myself there were eight more prisoners. Our days were spent in anticipation of when they would come for us and take us to the gallows. What a tragedy! . . . We were all young! . . . And so we suffered overwhelming grief at the thought of what little we had accomplished on behalf of our ideal in aid of the oppressed. We had not lived much; we had not completely understood the purity and sublimity of the anarchist ideal. We had not been able to assert this wonderful ideal in our own labouring families. We had only just started to find our way, guided by our faith in the ideal of anarchism, as we fought with those who prevented us from getting together freely with our oppressed brothers for the purpose of discussing and developing this ideal. We were betrayed by our own, our enemies sentenced us, and their servants were coming—if not today, then tomorrow—to take us away and hang us . . . .

For what did we need to die? For whom? For no one except for the executioners? Such were the thoughts and answers that we exchanged among ourselves, sitting on death row.

But not one of us feared either the hangman or the scaffold, because we had always known it might come to this. Sooner or later, we would be arrested and then either hanged or shot. Our propagandist and organizer—Voldemar Antoni—had prepared us for this.

My comrade Bondarenko told me he was convinced they would hang him soon, but he said:

"Listen, Nestor, there's a chance the executioners will change your death sentence to life imprisonment at hard labour. Then

the revolution will free you and I'm deeply convinced that once you obtain your freedom, you will raise high the banner of Anarchy which our enemies have snatched from us, and you will raise it very high indeed . . . . That's the premonition I have about your future, Nestor, so don't worry about the hangmen."

Then Klim Kirichenko and I interrupted him, and for whole hours scoffed at his predictions. We spoke to him about my lack of intellectual preparation and about my physical weakness, all the more evident in that I was suffering from stomach pains and was almost unable to eat the prison food.

"In that case, if you don't do this, you will be a complete scoundrel," continued Bondarenko. "The fact of the matter is that keeping the faith and having the inner strength to hate the butchers and to act—this doesn't require great intellectual or physical abilities. You just need will power and dedication to the cause."

Our objections to Bondarenko were then seconded by Comrade Orlov, and we succeeded in getting the upper hand. Then Bondarenko quietly pondered for some time and finally expressed his unshakable conviction:

"Nonetheless, Nestor, if it happens that you become free and refuse to struggle against that band of parasites—the tsar, the bourgeoisie, and their lackeys—you will be a major villain."

Such conversations often started up and went on for hours at a time.

So passed the days of our lives on death row. We talked about the past and the future, but not about the present. However these discussions did not allow us to forget the one thought which outweighed all the rest: the anticipation of our execution, which came closer with each passing day.

* * * * *

Once, during one of our usual evening discussions on a completely abstract topic, we were suddenly united by a single thought. We said to ourselves: what folly it is to sit and wait to be hanged, when we could attack our guards in the corridor while they were taking us to the exercise yard, disarm them in the blink of an eye,

shoot the ones who beat prisoners, and try to make our escape! And if we failed, then we should commit suicide rather than stupidly waiting for them to finished us off. Everyone approved of this scheme with enthusiasm. Why endure insults and indignities, with shackled hands and feet, while waiting every night (in Yekaterinoslav executions were carried out at night) in expectation of a loathsome death ordered by those who were committed to destroying the new, emerging order? We would cheat death!

"As a matter of fact," said Vasya Tyulenev, one of the anarchist comrades, "we can use the last minutes of our lives to take revenge on our own executioners, and we can even take care of the hangman Prostotin! He often runs into us while we are taking exercise."

"What a wonderful thought," I replied, almost screaming, "We shall drag him behind us to the grave!"

Someone added: "And besides, we've had enough of these guards who are convinced they have complete power over hapless and shackled prisoners. They're used to coming into the cells and beating everyone indiscriminately. We must show them once and for all that we're not servile sheep."

We made up our minds. While they were taking us from the cell to the exercise yard, we would seize Prostotin and the guards in the corridor, disarm them, kill those known to us as our sworn enemies, and tie up the rest. Then we would let ourselves into the prison courtyard where we would have to disarm some more guards, kill the prison warden Fitisov and his deputies (in particular, the afore-mentioned Belokoz), and then try to break out onto the street. Once outside and armed, we would take off in pairs in different directions. In the event of failure, there would be nothing else to do but make an end to ourselves. None of us would surrender alive—we would shoot ourselves.

Of the 12 prisoners in the death row cell, I was physically the weakest, but even so I was assigned a task. Finally everything was ready—all the roles were distributed. We only had to wait for the beginning of the exercise period the next morning to carry out our plan.

As usual at 9 p.m. we lay down to sleep. But we had hardly laid down when the chief warder Belokoz (a former hangman) burst into the cell, followed by a guard detail for taking prisoners to be executed.

They took one of our cellmates away. This was a fine, outstanding comrade, easy to get along with although he did not share our ideas. He was a person with confidence in his own abilities who respected each of us, but particularly those who could honourably assert their own rights before the administration of the prison, which tried at every step to trample the rights of prisoners, especially the rights of prisoners who were not prepared to assert those rights.

What anguish, what anger we felt at that moment! He had just been talking with us and now he had been snatched from our midst without even a chance to say good-bye. He was only able to utter a few words of farewell:

"Good-bye comrades, whoever remains alive must not forget about our struggle with injustice . . . ."

Overwhelmed with anxiety, our nerves stretched to the limit, we were unable to sleep after he was taken to be executed. I experienced an insane desire to inflict terrible suffering on all those who had condemned us to death and forced us to await the fatal hour. But my hands and feet were shackled; I could think, but I couldn't act. I tried to impress all these reflections in my memory so that I could take my revenge on the culprits responsible, should I remain among the living.

On the next day at dawn, we got up and moved about the narrow cell, bumping into one another and avoiding eye contact. They brought us hot water for tea. Talking in whispers, we went over our plan one more time. If we ran into the hangman Prostotin on the way to exercise, we would kill him, along with all the other hangmen from the prison administration, and either die ourselves or escape through the gates of the prison. And anyone who escaped was to tell the world what was happening in the Yekaterinoslav Prison, how condemned prisoners were treated, and how they were forced to resort to acts of wanton violence

which were, nevertheless, just.

"So, friends, today we shall seek death for ourselves. We can't put things off any longer," said Comrade Tyulenev. "No more postponement!" we all agreed.

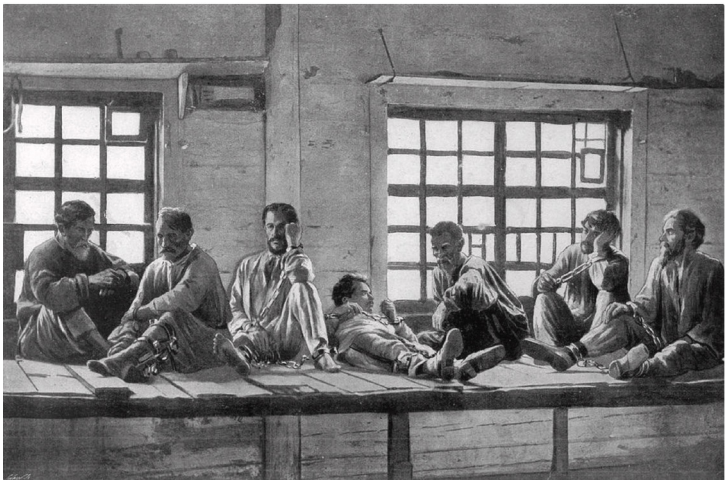
After tea we were led out for exercise but, unfortunately, neither in the corridor, nor in the courtyard including the enclosure where the exercise yard was located, did we encounter anyone. Because of this we were hesitant about what to do and were seized with disappointment.

However, while walking in the exercise yard, one of us engaged a guard in conversation and managed to ask him in what corridor and what cell the hangman Prostotin was now staying. The guard explained that the hangman was now alone in the tower. He never left his cell except once a week to go for a bath. Our hopes of killing the hangman on the day of our own deaths completely evaporated . . . .

We understood then that our plan had failed. We spent long hours trying to come up with another plan. Unexpectedly, we discovered that one of the guards was a sympathizer and through him we sent a letter to the local anarcho-communist group.

This sympathetic guard, standing outside the window of our cell, agreed to escape along with us. We quickly worked out a new plan: after the evening exercise, we would saw through the grill in the window with a hacksaw, and at the first opportunity—the absence, inattentiveness, or snoozing of the guard—would let ourselves into the courtyard, where we would be joined by our friendly guard. Then we would make our way across the courtyard to the women's block, where anarchist women were being held. They would open windows and we would use the frames of these windows to climb to the roof of this two-storey building. From there we would jump into the yard of the winery next to the prison, where our comrades would be waiting for us. And so we would be saved.

We immediately began to exchange notes with the outside group and make preparations. Within a few days, we had acquired



Interior of a tsarist *katorga* prison (1898).

metal files. We could work on filing and removing the window grille for a quarter of an hour at a time. Everything went splendidly, and we were very happy. Even the most discouraged among us regained hope.

Two or three more days and everything would be ready. And if our escape attempt did not succeed, at least we wouldn't die at the hands of the executioner. That's how our thinking went.

The more we thought about what we would be doing in a day or so, and the possibility that we would find ourselves in freedom, the more we condemned prisoners were inclined to act gaily, to laugh at almost anything. One of our weaknesses was bellyaching during times of high anxiety. Now we found time for any kind of useful occupation. I recall that one of the guys made a bong (this consists of a glass with water and two pipes; the glass is stopped up and you smoke through the two pipes). Our friend argued that it was better for the lungs if we smoked using this device. When our friend was explaining and demonstrating this to us, the guard in the corridor noticed this and reported us to his supervisor, who came with his underlings and conducted a search of our cell. He discovered the bong and the hacksaws—nothing could be less innocuous than hacksaws. So to some de-

gree it was our own fault that we were found out. They started carrying out searches more often and our plan for escape now seemed almost totally unrealizable under conditions of such close supervision. But we didn't entirely give up hope. The outside guard still remained committed to our escape. And we set about new preparations.

But hardly a day had passed when they took another from us for execution. The outside guard—our guard—was transferred to another post and he, when our comrade was led past him to the place of execution, shot himself. Our hopes for escape collapsed.

Over us again hovered the spectral shadow of death—death at the hands of the hangman, which most of us wished to avoid at all costs.

Now we had nothing better than execution to look forward to and we contacted the comrades in the women's section and got them to forward our letter to freedom, a letter in which we asked our comrades to send us strychnine. Our request was fulfilled—we received the strychnine. But once we had it, all of us were against poisoning ourselves.

Earlier, many of us had said:

"If we had poison, we wouldn't have to suffer any more . . . ."

But now they said:

"We want to live" . . . and everyone was silent about taking poison—why? No one could answer.

I recall that once in the evening, around April 20, 1910, I said to my comrades:

"Friends, today's Friday and that means one of us could be executed tonight. [In accordance with the laws of Church and State, executions could not be carried out on Saturday evenings or Sundays.] Let's sit at the table and have a proper meal. Then at least whoever they hang will die with a full stomach, will lie in the ground longer, and will feed the worms more!"

That evening we were all in a good mood and my gallows humour provoked laughter. We set the table in the middle of the

cell and with good appetite ate *kolbasa*, cheese, and herring; in other words, a little of everything that each of us had on hand. And we had quite a bit, because prisoners on death row were allowed to meet daily with family members and receive unlimited quantities of food. Moreover, some of us had money to order from the prison canteen.

After our hearty supper, we spread out the mattresses and lay down to sleep. By nine o'clock, some of us were already asleep, while others were talking with the new arrivals (the authorities always saw to it that any vacancies in the cell were filled in short order).

Suddenly the door of the cell flew open with such force that the table was knocked over, as well as the kerosene lamp that was sitting on it. In total darkness, the order rang out not to budge from our places. One of the guards lit a lantern and illuminated the cell. At the entrance stood guards and soldiers with unsheathed sabres and revolvers in their hands.

The senior warden of the prison—Belokoz—barged inside and grabbed one of our comrades by the shackles. It was not the prisoner he wanted. We were all lying motionless, some with heads covered, some uncovered. Then Belokoz bellowed:

"Shanayev! Shanayev!"

This was a Circassian who wasn't sleeping because he suspected it was his turn to go to execution. When he heard Belokoz utter his name, he pulled a blanket over his head, swallowed a dose of strychnine, and answered:

"I am Shanayev!"

Belokoz grabbed him by the shackles, gave him a pair of mules, and began to drag him towards the corridor while stepping over our feet. Shanayev staggered and Belokoz tried to hold him up . . . . Shanayev regained his feet, and cried to us half in Russian, half in his native tongue:

"Good-bye, comrades! I'm dying!"

They dragged his body into the corridor.

Those who came to see him hang were cheated of their enjoyment: these included the executioner, paid three rubles for each execution; the procurator, who was there to provide one more spiteful reading of the death sentence; the doctor, whose "duty" consisted in waiting for the prescribed quarter of an hour after the hanging, and then solemnly approaching the condemned and, taking the pulse of the left arm, saying "Ready!" Or if the condemned was still alive, the doctor would say:

"Hangman, pull some more on the condemned prisoner's legs!"

And then there was the priest, who was present to take confession if the condemned so requested. But Shanayev died a whole hour before the time when he was due to be mocked by the Church and the State. All for nothing they rubbed soap on the rope—Shanayev preferred to avoid all this "ceremony."

As soon as Shanayev was dragged away, the prison brutes conducted a search for strychnine, but found nothing.

After this tumultuous night followed two or three days of terrible moral torment. We again lost any interest in talking or eating.

A few days later, during the evening of April 26, 1910, the guards again appeared at our cell and removed my best friend Yegor Bondarenko.

Belokoz did not enter the cell, but summoned the condemned from the doorway. Bondarenko was sleeping just next to me and, hearing his name, he turned to me and said:

"Nestor, my brother, I know you're going to go on living. Farewell. I'm going to die without regrets, knowing that you will regain your freedom."

He gave me a kiss. My heart beat furiously as I seized his hand and kissed him on the cheek.

Belokoz spoke impatiently:

"Bondarenko, it's time to go!"

My friend got up and answered: "I'm ready!" Then he addressed all the comrades in the cell:

"Good-bye, friends! Be calm, because I am calm."

The door closed behind him, and many of my cellmates rushed to me, congratulating me and hugging me:

"Makhno, your life is saved!"

Another of my comrades, Kirichenko, who was sick, was taken away the same evening to the prison infirmary. One of the orderlies warned him that they were coming to hang him. Kirichenko knew that even though sick they would take him to be hanged, on a stretcher if necessary. So he made up his mind to take poison and died on his cot.

On the following day the parents of both comrades came to visit them. No words can describe the grief of the fathers and mothers when they learned of the deaths of their children. They had travelled a long way and brought with them my own mother. This was inexpressibly sad. Mother asked how much money she should leave me. I answered that it wasn't necessary to leave anything:

"I don't know what's going to happen to me. It might even be my turn this evening."

She replied: "Don't lose courage, be strong. You are not the first, nor will you be the last, to die here."

Choking on her words, and with tears streaming down her cheeks, she parted from me.

After this I waited for a long time in that same cell for my execution. However my patience ran out, and I wrote a letter of protest to the procurator, asking why I had not been sent to the gallows. My comrades had been hanged, but I had not been hanged and nothing was told to me.

I received a response from the Chief Warden of the prison. Through him I learned that a document had been receiving replacing my death sentence with *katorga*, but the length of the sentence had yet to be determined. On the very same day, I, along with my last comrade—Yefim Orlov, was transferred to the building set aside for *katorzhniks*.

Within three or four days, I became very ill with typhoid fever.

I had to spent two months in the prison infirmary. From there I corresponded with my mother, and learned that she had gone to Odessa to the Commander-in-Chief of the region, who had signed my death sentence. She found out from the governor (it was his job to give final approval to all death sentences) that because of my youth a life sentence at *katorga* had been substituted for execution.

So now the long, drawn-out nightmare of death row was replaced by the new nightmare of perpetual *katorga*.

My Life in Prison

by Nestor Makhno

I.

After my death sentence was replaced with life imprisonment, I spent two weeks in a common cell before coming down with peritoneal typhus and being transferred to the infirmary.

My illness showed certain symptoms of respiratory typhus, which had the authorities worried because with that diagnosis they would have to move me to a barracks outside the prison, which they did not want to do.

They were concerned about carrying out such a transfer because they were afraid of Aleksandr Semenyuta, although everyone knew about his tragic end. On May 1, 1910, he had committed suicide after putting up nine hours of heroic resistance when his apartment was surrounded by soldiers and he realized that he had no chance of escaping alive. But his fame was such that the authorities were sceptical about his death, despite all the evidence. The legends about his invincibility were more powerful than reality. That's why they decided to put me in a hospice ward for terminally ill prisoners. This is where they brought prisoners who were expected to last no more than five or ten hours and then disappear for good.

Everyone—the doctors, the administration, and even my own comrades—was convinced that I would expire in this ward. They were mistaken. In a week's time, I came to myself and demanded that the doctor establish a final diagnosis and, if I didn't have respiratory typhus, transfer me back to the general ward of the infirmary. The doctor was embarrassed about holding me in this ward for the dying, and besides, I was protesting vigorously. I made a row over and over again, insisting that whoever was responsible for treating patients in this manner should be punished. Finally I was moved back to the general ward with a firm diagnosis of peritoneal typhus.

It was two months before I was back on my feet and discharged from the infirmary. When I was originally sent to the infirmary, my shackles had been removed, as was customary with prisoners who had lost consciousness. But now they put the shackles back

on and put me in a special quarantine cell for three days to make sure the typhus didn't flare up again.

There were 10 or 12 prisoners in the quarantine cell. In the evening, one of the comrades communicated through the back wall with another cell holding women prisoners. These women, in turn, were able to speak with recently arrested prisoners in another cell to get the latest news: news about who had been sentenced to hang, who had already been hanged, and about other prisoners—any kind of interesting news.

However, in Yekaterinoslav Prison it was forbidden to show oneself at the windows, let alone carry on conversations with other prisoners. Noticing our efforts to communicate with other prisoners, our corridor guard, a certain Mamai, opened the cell, lined us up in a row, and began to beat up on us. Shackled hand and foot, our only means of resistance was to scream at the top of our lungs. Our cries were heard in the other cells. The whole prison shuddered. The soldiers who guarded the outside perimeter responded by discharging their guns along the windows. Then everything quieted down, but we were so worked up that we could not sleep that night. The next morning we were told what our punishment was to be: we were deprived of tea and lunch.

After a three-day quarantine, they returned us to the regular cells where both political prisoners and common criminals were kept. The regime was strict, and the customs crude and senseless. For example, the criminals passed the time playing cards. Some of them lost everything they had and were forced to hide from those to whom they were indebted—in another cell on the same corridor. In order to gain the favour of Belokoz, these unfortunates had to tell him what was going on in the cell they had left. They snitched on their own erstwhile comrades, slandering them, and occasionally accusing them of stealing clothing and property. Then Belokoz would burst into the cell, grab shoes, clothes, and pillows and take them away. Those who dared to object were summoned out into the corridor, threatened with a revolver, and slammed into the wall, resulting in broken ribs.

That's why—when Belkoz stormed into the cell and grabbed

someone's things and cuffed people in the head or slapped them in the face—the slaves were silent . . . . Observing this submissiveness was worse than the humiliations themselves.

However, Belokoz decided to make changes: he went around to all the cells and sorted out the prisoners—political and criminal. He collected all the political prisoners in one cell: all the anarchists, SRs, and social-democrats.

But the regime of our confinement did not become any easier—on the contrary, there was something suspicious about the whole affair. Actually, they transferred us into the notorious Cell № 10, on the main corridor, where an escape on April 29, 1908, had been organized. Despite two years having passed, the authorities could not remain indifferent regarding this cell.

In Cell № 10 were deposited people with a variety of ideologies and goals, but the authorities took no account of these differences. The guards looked at it differently and hated those who were incarcerated there. A special regime was in force—something like a punishment cell. Those who were in this cell had to submit with unquestioning obedience. There they locked up the most refractory and most dangerous prisoners and treated them accordingly. For the smallest sign of protest they were told:

"Shut up! This isn't April 29 anymore. You won't be having any bombs or weapons, and your friends are far away. Times have changed, etc."

For the slightest infraction, punishments rained down: within a week we had been deprived on two or three occasions of supper and toilet break. We were beside ourselves and began to protest against all the injustices directed against us. Criminals in other cells supported us. Then Belokoz did some more sorting. He transferred to our cell all the criminals who were in solidarity with us.

Right away the card playing started up again with the same consequences as before: debts, flight, squealing. This was Belokoz's little game. One morning, two hours before roll call, he entered the cell with a bunch of guards. Many of us had figured out how

to open the locks of our shackles so we could remove them at night. Catching us red-handed, Belokoz ordered us out into the corridor and subjected us to a beating.

We demanded to meet with the Governor. The latter sent the public prosecutor to see us with the chief inspector of provincial prisons. The public prosecutor listened to our complaints, wrote them down, and promised to draw the necessary conclusions. As for the chief inspector, he also listened to us, but didn't write anything down, and promised to flog us. The prison administration won.

We were able to secretly send a detailed and well-substantiated letter of protest to the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Petersburg. Soon we learned that they intended to transfer us to another prison.

II.

During the time that I was lying in the infirmary, Comrade Nazar Zuichenko recovered his health and was waiting for a third judicial review of his case. We had conferred about his case with the comrades in freedom.

We had agreed among ourselves that he would admit to taking part in an armed attack and identify me as his accomplice so that they would move us to a different, smaller prison. Then our comrades would have a chance to free us during the transfer. The investigator subjected us to a detailed interrogation and photographed us. He also did not conceal his personal satisfaction that we would soon be on the scaffold. After several weeks, he reappeared, conducted another very thorough interrogation of Zuichenko, and said finally that we were not fooling him: he had studied Makhno's case carefully and had figured out why Zuichenko was falsely taking credit for this attack. Consequently, the case against Makhno was closed and he would not be transferred anywhere. Our whole plan collapsed. Our comrades on the outside tried many times to contact us and somehow trigger my removal from Yekaterinoslav. But to no avail . . . .

In August, 1910, all the inmates of Cell № 10 were transferred to the prison in the city of Lugansk and subjected to the same cell regime. On board our prison train, there were numerous brave, honourable, and outstanding comrades. We had fantasies of attacking the guards, tying them up, and escaping. Alas! They locked us up in so-called "Stolypin wagons."[9] The prisoners and the guards were separated by a grill.

Mind you, that wasn't necessarily an insuperable obstacle, since there were women prisoners travelling with us who sat in the same section of the railway carriage as the guards. Among them were Comrades Olga Taratuta and Olga Minayeva.[10] In principle they could help us when the guards were being changed, for then the door was unlocked. But from Yekaterinoslav to Lugansk, we were accompanied by policemen who were stationed in the wagon behind ours and stood guard at the doors of our wagon at each stop. Under such conditions escape was impossible.[11]

And so we arrived at the Lugansk prison without incident. We stayed there for about a year and had to endure much unpleasantness. One of the comrades from the Mariupol group, Gorbanenko, unable to endure the oppressive regimen, tied himself to his cot, covered himself with a mattress soaked in kerosene from a lamp, and set fire to it. He was dragged from the fire still living but with terrible burns. His eyes had already burst from their sockets. He died a few hours later.

Such events took a heavy toll on all of us lifers, cut off from

9 Stolypin wagons were originally developed to transport peasant families from European Russia to Siberia. The wagons had two sections: a normal passenger section, and a section for tools and livestock. Modified for transporting prisoners, the passenger section was for the guards, the livestock section for the prisoners.

10 Olga Taratuta (1876–1938), the "little grandmother" of Russian anarchism, was arrested nine times and served a total of 17 years in prison under the tsarist and Soviet regimes. Olga Minaeva (1885–after 1934) was sentenced in 1910 to a long term of *katorga* for anarcho-communist activities.

11 Such an escape took place on December 6, 1906, on a train carrying convicted prisoners from Slonim to Grodno, in the western part of the Russian empire. Several political prisoners, mostly anarcho-communists, attacked their guards, killing seven, and escaped.

the outside world. We sustained ourselves with the help of two hopes: the hope of escape and the hope of revolution. Each of us wished to live and wished the same of our fellow-prisoners, among whom there were many fine, honourable people, totally devoted to the cause of revolution. Such comrades were found in the ranks of both the anarchists and the socialists. At that time I was still a youth and I tried to be on the lookout for mentors in whom I could find a modicum of that strength that I had found in my closest and dearest friends—Voldemar Antoni and the Semenyuta brothers—Profkofiy and Aleksandr.

At the beginning of July, 1911, my brother Grigoriy came to visit me. He had not seen me for four years, and wanted determine my state of mind. I said to him:

"Struggle with all your might, just as we did. Do not fear death—despise it. Your work among the peasants will make a giant step towards revolution. The revolution will bring about the true liberation of many, including me."

My brother could not hold back his tears, although he was already attending anarchist study circles in Gulyai-Polye and was a pretty decent comrade.

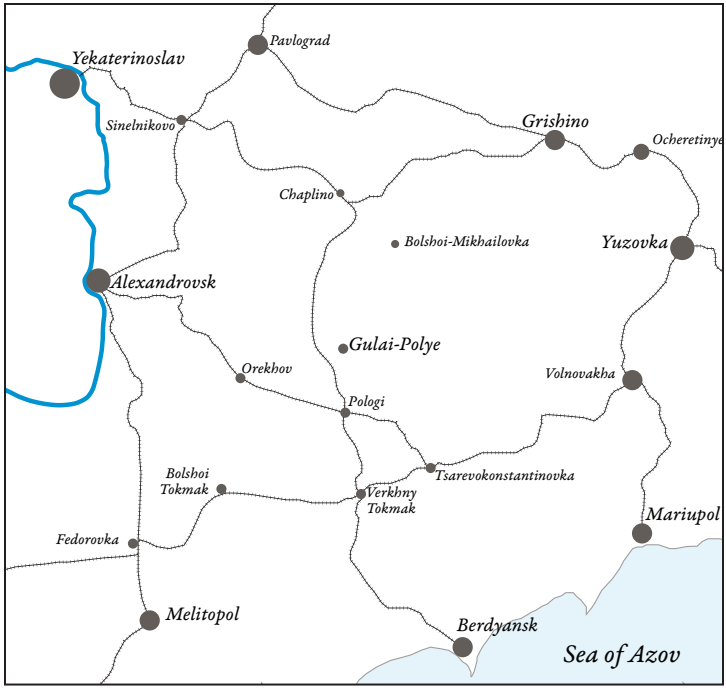
I told him that if we had been wimps, we wouldn't be in shackles, but would be wretched slaves, grovelling before the bosses. Languishing in prison was the price we paid for being rebels against the system.

My brother wanted very much to pass on information from the comrades of the group, but was too distraught. He asked the warden for permission to meet with me again the next day, since he had travelled a considerable distance.

On the following day, he came again to give me news about my comrades, and now it was my turn to try to hold back tears . . . .

On July 22, 1911, all of us who had arrived in the Lugansk isolator in 1910 were assembled for a journey in stages to the central prison in Moscow via Yekaterinoslav.

This development was so unexpected that we—*katorzhniks*—



Railway map of the region around Gulyai-Polye. The north-south line passing near Pologi dated from 1898, while the east-west line dated only from 1904.

did not have time to discuss the possibility of escape during the transfer from Lugansk to Yekaterinoslav.

However, en route we managed to confer one on one and hatch a plot. Roles were distributed. Those comrades who were supposed to seize the guards removed their handcuffs. This was a feat they had already practiced while in solitary confinement and each of them was prepared.

But the Yekaterinoslav guard detail was experienced in moving prisoners, and were very much on the alert. During the trip they hardly spoke to us, and if they did so, it was only through the grille separating their compartment from ours. Hot water and bread were issued to us when the train stopped at a station. We could only dream about breaking out and escaping. And so we

arrived in Yekaterinoslav.

At the prison, our old acquaintance Belokoz met us with curses and ill will. According to the regulations, *katorzhniks* didn't have the right to wear their own underwear or shoes, but in Lugansk we got away with this. But now Belokoz stripped the underwear and shoes off of each of us and threw them in the garbage.

He checked our shackles and handcuffs, decided some of them were too loose, and ordered the blacksmiths to adjust them as tight as possible. Blacksmiths in prisons are generally prisoners, and most of them are scoundrels kept separately from the other prisoners, especially in those prisons that don't have a real forge but only need blacksmiths for prison duties.

So now we found ourselves immersed again in a nightmarish situation. At least there was a new Chief Warden.

During the time we were in Lugansk, our protests to the Ministry of Internal Affairs had led to some consequences. An investigation of conditions at the prison had been carried out by an official with special powers who familiarized himself with the way the prison was being run and laid charges against the Chief Warden in the local court. The latter shot himself while the Inspector of Prisons for Yekaterinoslavskaya *guberniya* was forced to resign and hand his position over to his deputy.

However, the new Chief Warden, a certain Shevchenko, wasn't any improvement. Previously he had been Deputy Chief Warden of the Kharkov Central Prison. He was stupid, pigheaded, and brutal—qualities which he shared with Belokoz.

Because of this situation, some comrades embarked on a desperate escape attempt, which only served to further provoke the administration. Zuichenko, Chernyavsky, Kotsura, Tsimbal, and other death row prisoners were isolated in one cell. Their sentences were commuted to life imprisonment at hard labour (*katorga*), but the prison authorities deliberately delayed telling them. One night they broke open the door of their cell, tied up the two guards who were in the corridor, and then went up to the first floor. There they tied up one of the guards, but a second one

got away and started shooting. The comrades didn't panic—they went back down to the basement, barricaded themselves, and demanded a meeting with the Governor. The Governor arrived and began negotiations: he gave them his word of honour not to remand them to a military tribunal if they would surrender without resisting. In order to convince them, he showed them through a slot the official announcement about the commutation of their death sentences.

The comrades surrendered, with the exception of Tsimbal, who had shot himself.

In the presence of the Governor they were asked the reason for their desperate actions; they told about everything. Then the Governor ordered that the document replacing their death sentences with life imprisonment, a document that had been lying in the prison office for a long time, be read out to the prisoners. The prison administrators were reprimanded by the Governor, who kept his word to the prisoners by turning their case over to the civil prosecutor. As a result, each prisoner was given eight months of solitary confinement.

We remained in the Yekaterinoslav Prison for 22 weeks; then, after a two-day journey, arrived at the Moscow prison. The boss of the *katorzhnik* section, a certain Druzhinin, leafed through my file, stared at me intently with his penetrating eyes, and whispered:

"Here you won't be amusing yourself any more with escape attempts."

I made no response.

They brought us to the armoury, removed our manacles which had locks, and replaced them with shackles with rivets, which *katorzhniks* were required to wear for the first eight years of their imprisonment. After this diversion, we were placed in a quarantine cell for two weeks.

Here we began to learn about the Moscow prison system. We met the *starosta* of the political prisoners, the SR Vidinyanin.[12]

12 Possibly Mikhail Aleksandrovich Vedeniapin (1879–1938). Makhno's

He was recovering from an illness, which required being placed in quarantine before being returned to his own cell. He gave us an introductory course on the prison routine, told us about the other political prisoners, and procured for us tobacco, margarine, bread, and *kolbasa* since we were hungry after fasting on the road.

I recall that I asked him about the anarchists incarcerated there. He answered rather diffidently, and I sensed a certain hostility towards them.

About a month later I learned that on the corridor populated by our political "big shots," the anarchist Kirillovsky[13] had given some kind of talk in which he called Viktor Chernov, the leader of the SR Party, a "cop." In response Vidinyanin gave him a punch in the mouth. Since that incident there was a certain amount of tension between the anarchists and the SRs in Corridor № 3.

This tension was restricted to one section of Corridor № 3 and soon dissipated, since Kirillovsky did not get much support from his own comrades. Already during this period he was wavering between anarchism, individualism, and Judaism. As a result, the anarchists, especially the workers, didn't want to hear anything about him. Some considered him a windbag—a phrase-monger, of no interest at all. The upshot was that Vidinyanin was not condemned for punching him.

After the quarantine was over, I was placed in Cell № 4 of Corridor № 7. The cells held two or three prisoners each, but the Southerners, because we were considered rebels, were separated from each other.

I found myself in the same cell as the SR Osip Adir, a Jew from

sketchy handwriting, plus his habit of spelling names phonetically, plus his editors' guesswork sometimes leads to strange results.

13 Kirillovsky is better known under his pseudonym Novomirsky. He was the author of the important texts: ***The Anarcho-Communist Mannifesto*** (1904) and ***The Program of Anarcho-Syndicalism*** (1907), which had a definite influence in their day. Later his career veered in a different direction: he supported Kropotkin's line on the war with Germany; then, in 1918, he joined the Bolshevik Party where he held important posts. Subsequently, he left the Party and was executed in 1937.

Butyrka Prison, Moscow.

Kovno. Our temperaments were perfectly compatible, and we stayed together as brothers right up until the Revolution.

From the window of the Cell № 4, I had a good view of the prison courtyard. Butyrka Prison occupied an entire block; in the middle was a broad courtyard enclosed by four large buildings which were surrounded in turn by a second courtyard. Around the outside of this complex was a very high wall with towers on each corner. These towers were famous for having at one time or another confined Pugachev, Gershuni,[14] and many others, including Tolstoyans who suffered abuse for refusing to take up arms in the war with Japan in 1904–1905. Oh, how they suffered . . . .

There were trees growing in the inner courtyard, mostly lindens. In the summertime there were flowers.

The prison at that time held 3,000 prisoners and several hundred two-legged curs—the guards. There was a special building for prisoners subject to a punishment regime.

I arived in Butyrka Prison on August 2, 1911. At that time the

14 Yemelyan Pugachev (1742–1775) was the leader of a popular insurrection during the reign of Catherine the Great; Grigory Gershuni (1870–1908) founded the Socialist-Revolutionary Combat Organization, which carried out political assassinations.

regime had become a little less severe than previously. According to stories told to me by comrades, conditions had been nightmarish: it was forbidden to pace in the cells, and prisoners were beaten with fists or knouts.

Once I had settled in to my cell on the corridor for lifers, I immediately committed my time to reading. I devoured book after book; I read all the Russian classics from Sumarokov to Lev Shestov, with particular attention to Belinsky and Lermontov, whose works delighted me.[15]

These books were found in the prison thanks to the efforts of a long succession of political prisoners who had served time at Butyrka. The library was better-stocked than the libraries of many of provincial cities. The section of scientific books was particularly outstanding.

While reading Russian classics, I simultaneously studied Russian history according to Klyuchevsky's "Course."[16] I also familiarized myself with the programs of the socialist parties and even with the reports of their underground conferences. Later I got hold of Kropotkin's book **Mutual Aid**. I found it entirely absorbing and kept it with me constantly in order to discuss it with comrades.

I followed as best I could the course of events on the outside. Thus, I was greatly disturbed to learn of the declaration of the Minister of Internal Affairs Makarov concerning the bloody massacre at the Lena gold mines:

"That's the way it is and that's the way is always will be."

Because of this, I plunged into a deep depression. The murder of Stolypin on September 2, 1911, on the other hand, restored my fighting spirit, although I was aware that he was not killed by a revolutionary and not in the name of the revolution . . . .

15 Aleksandr Sumarakov (1717–1777), poet and playwright; Lev Shestov (1866–1938), existentialist philosopher; Vissarion Belinsky (1811–1848), literary critic; Mikhail Lermontov (1814–1841), writer and poet.

16 V. O. Klychevsky's five volume **Course of Russian History** shifted attention away from social and political issues to geographical and economic forces.

Alas! My passionate excursion into higher learning was soon interrupted by a prolonged and serious illness—inflammation of the lungs—as a result of which I ended up in the hospital. Initially I was diagnosed with moist pleurisy, then, three months later, with tuberculosis of the lungs. This was very serious, and I remained in the hospital for eight months. After receiving treatment, I eagerly resumed the study of my three favourite subjects: the history of Russia (Klyuchevsky) and the World (Vinogradov);[17] geography; and mathematics . . . .

I soon made the acquaintance of Comrade Arshinov,[18] whom I had heard of previously. Meeting him was a joyous event for me. He was one of those rare anarchists who preferred to engage in practical work, even in prison. He regrouped and organized the prisoners, while keeping in touch with the outside world. I used to pester him with notes about all sorts of things—both serious and frivolous. Comrade Arshinov was an introvert, but he showed great patience and always found time for me. Our relations were close so long as we remained in prison, and after we got out our alliance became even stronger.

All the political *katorzhniks* received financial aid from the Red Cross. We thus had the means to buy stuff from the prison stores. The sums which we received were modest, but sufficient so that we could feed ourselves normally. The administration was completely unaware of this, for the money reached us "under the table," and was provided to the SRs, the SDs, and, partially, to the anarchists.

Already, because of my illness, I received better food than usual. In spite of all this, I had to spend two or three months out of each year in the hospital, resting and recuperating, which was necessary, in particular, after "punishments." These occurred frequently: for corresponding with the outside world or for violating the prison rules. The punishments were of two types: isolation cell or penalty cell. Once I had to sit in a penalty cell for a whole month;

17 Pavel Vinogradov (1854–1925), Russian-British historian, specialized in medieval history.

18 Peter Andreyevich Arshinov (1887–1937) collaborated with Makhno for many years—in prison, in freedom, and in exile.

when I came out I had to go straight into the hospital. As for punishments lasting one or two weeks—I had lots of them.

Here it's necessary to mention a sad fact regarding myself and my comrades: our suffering was of no interest to anyone. That's the way things were. If I had been some kind of "big shot," things would have been different. But I was only a worker-peasant like the rest of my friends. Always and everywhere we quietly bore our own cross, without making a fuss and not demanding privileges. We struggled and, without flinching, we faithfully defended our cause. We assumed that other comrades who shared our ideas would think the same way. Alas, this turned out to be far from being the case. I cite as an example the "gods" of the central committees of the socialist parties receiving permission to set up a sewing centre in Corridor № 3, adjacent to the wall where the senior guard Komisarov (subsequently shot by order of Dzerzhinsky[19]) used to beat our comrades half to death with the knout. This did not prevent some of these "gods" from shaking his hand and then, at another time and place, making fiery speeches about the strict prison regime.

Thanks to the funds supplied by the Red Cross, the political *katorzhniks* developed a system whereby they were allowed to have their shackles removed and work in the prison workshops, at the same time as other comrades, lacking such financial aid, did not even have enough money to buy a few lumps of sugar. Those who protested against such uses of financial aid were deprived of it simply on the say-so of the *starosta* V. In order to justify this measure, the *starosta* quietly spread the rumour that according to the information he had received, this person or that person were actually "non-politicals." (This happened with comrades Potapov and Sheiderov on the lifers' corridor.) Of course this information came from the same individuals who had purchased the right to remove their shackles while working in the workshops, which provoked contempt towards them on the part of the named comrades.

Thus I finally understood that this was a normal manifestation

19 Feliks Dzerzhinsky, head of the first Soviet secret police organization.

of the thought processes of intellectuals, for whom the ideas and resources of socialism were only a means to install themselves as bosses and rulers. These gentlemen had ceased to understand that it is not permissible to shake hands with or give presents to butchers who immediately afterwards are going to beat their ideological comrades. This negative moral image was imprinted in my memory, and in the memories of many of the comrades among the Moscow political prisoners, where it remained for the rest of our lives.

III.

In 1912 I underwent a profound internal crisis, as a result of which I lost my previous respect for so-called "outstanding political activists" and their views. I came to the conclusion that in practice—in real life—all people are the same, and those who consider themselves on a higher level do not deserve the attention paid to them.

As I regularly continued my studies, I didn't spend a minute thinking about escape, especially after a visit in the summer of 1912 from my mother, who brought lots of news about my comrades.

In every prison there are always dreamers who pass the time by naively devising plans of escape. On rare occasions their plan is implemented and the escape proceeds successfully; most often what happens is the plan falls apart without ever getting off the ground.

I soon learned that a few of the comrades had long been preparing an escape by means of a tunnel dug under one of the prison walls. They had already made up their minds. All that was left was to start the work; they still were lacking necessary tools: flashlights, hacksaws, and factory screws to replace the rivets in the shackles. To achieve this goal, they wanted the prison administration to segregate the prisoners who worked in workshops from those who did not. This wish completely corresponded with the intentions of the administration. Accordingly, the prison bosses implemented this scheme as follows: those who did

not work (including myself) were transferred to Cell № 3. A large ventilation duct passed under the floor of this cell and went down to the basement. There the entrance to the basement was barred with a heavy grate. That's why we needed hacksaws—to saw through this grate.

As soon as we got hold of the necessary tools, a group was created for tunnelling. The leader chosen for this group was the SR N. Zhukov, who possessed the necessary experience and know-how. On September 5, 1912, we began to penetrate the wall of our Cell № 3, on Corridor № 3 of the 3rd Floor. Everything proceeded splendidly: the hole was punched through right to the duct and the hole was skillfully covered from the outside by a slab consisting of four bricks held together by iron brackets.

By means of the tunnel and the duct, we could reach the basement, pass under the prison offices, then under the lane adjacent to the prison, and emerge finally in a neighbouring courtyard.

The digging went on for one month and eight days. Only one small piece of work remained, and on an autumn night, dark but filled with joy for all of us, the *katorzhniks* of cells № 3 and № 4 would escape to freedom! Once beyond the walls of the prison, we had reliable help lined up.

What unforgettable nights we had, nights full of happiness and crazy dreams, as we dug our way. It was my job every evening to make up dummies out of bed sheets and clothes to put on the cots so that the guard who looked through the peephole in the door from time to time wouldn't notice anything. I put a lot of effort into creating realistic dummies, and was constantly asking my comrades for their opinions about my efforts.

While the work was ongoing, there was only one incident, which fortunately did not have any consequences. One evening at 8 p.m., we opened the hole as usual. Zhukov and another comrade climbed down into the tunnel. Comrade Znamensky took the slab and placed it so that it couldn't be seen from the door. Another comrade, Vatin, began to stick the plaster back on where it had been peeled off when the slab was removed. I had just

finished my own regular chore, consisting of arranging manikins on the cots, and had approached the comrades hiding the slab to ask them to look and see if my manikins looked sufficiently like sleeping prisoners. At that moment there was the sound of a key in the door lock, and in a flash the door was opened. We were all shaking with fear: two of our comrades were in the tunnel and the slab was removed. We quickly shielded Vatin and Znamensky, who were fussing with the slab. This was a really crucial moment; the commander of the night watch stood on the threshold! Without entering the cell, he asked us to lie down and make less noise.

"Of course you are aware," he said, "that the Prison Warden and the Chief Inspector of Moscow prisons are strolling along the corridors!"

After these words, he closed the door.

When our anxiety attack had passed, we were chuckling the whole evening. For the time being, we didn't say anything to the comrades working underground. Only when they returned to the surface, washed up, and lay down, did we tell them what had happened. This amused them to no end.

The days and nights passed swiftly. We were full of energy and life. The slightest success in advancing our project filled us with joy. The hour of our liberation, upon which we had pinned our hopes, quickly drew near. Nothing must stop us . . . .

Alas, an unforeseen event put an end to our hopes and our plan. A Russian proverb says that every family has a black sheep. Among us lifers there was also a black sheep. It was obvious that while the escape was being prepared, none of us should have been writing about it to anyone or even dropping a hint. However, one of the comrades in our cell, a social-democrat from the Caucasus, wrote a note to one of his countrymen who was in a cell for sick prisoners. He encouraged him to get moved to our cell without delay, as freedom was at hand.

Instead of the intended recipient, the note fell into the hands of a guard, who hastened to turn it over to the prison administra-

tion. Of course the higher-ups were concerned and became suspicious. Searches were carried out in all the corridors and in all the cells. There was one search after another, including in our cell of non-working prisoners.

We decided to temporarily suspend work in the basement, because of which we fell behind schedule. Then another event took place which was fatal to our scheme. We were just preparing to resume work, when the administration accidentally discovered bags of construction rubble in the drain of one of the toilets on our corridor. We needed to crush the rubble into powder and flush it through the sewer system into the Moscow River, but didn't have time to do this properly. Meanwhile, the administration realized that the third corridor was the place to search.

The Warden of the prison in person, along with his deputies—senior guards—knocked themselves out looking for the exact location where it was possible to breach the wall and from there gain access to the basement passage. In vain. The warden had to bring in the chief inspector of the Moscow prisons, a certain Zakharov, who in turned brought in a whole detachment of guardsmen. They concentrated on our cell in particular. The floor was half torn up, the walls were probed in many places, but all their efforts were futile. Furious at not being able to discover the secret, the key to which was in their hands, these gentlemen from the high command continued their searches from October 15 to 25, 1912. A total waste of effort.

There was only one thing left for them to do: make use of the services of stool pigeons, i.e. prisoners who had spent time in our cell and were now locked up elsewhere. And this they did, as we found out later from one of the guards. The senior guard Komisarov summoned prisoners from the special hidden cell for informers and asked them for advice—what needed to be done to find the hole in the wall? And based on the advice he received, 10 or 12 steel rods with sharp points were brought into our cell. By this means they discovered the slab of bricks held together with iron brackets which covered the opening of the passage and which was now removed.

Thus, in the evening of October 25, 1912, our preparation for an escape through the underground passage was discovered.

All during the time the search was going on, we were kept locked up in the lavatory, anxiously listening to everything that was said in the corridor. Our thoughts kept repeating: "They've found it!" followed by "No, no! They'll never find the hole." . . . And we could hear the guards moving around in our cell, probing, banging . . . .

And so the time slowly passed. Each of us began to think that the authorities would not be able to deprive us of happiness by thwarting our bid for freedom. Freedom, freedom! How we thirsted for it! To feel ourselves free, able to struggle with all our strength for the rights of mankind, rights subject to so much abuse in our society. Many of us involuntarily groaned as we contemplated such notions.

"Hush!" whispered one of the comrades (I don't recall which one). There was quiet in the lavatory. Two or three comrades went to the door and listened, each extending an arm towards us with an open palm, their fingers nervously twitching:

"They've discovered it, yes, they've found it," . . . and they retreated from the door.

I don't know how the others felt at this moment, but I began to tremble and cried "No!" and ran to the door.

Comrade Zhukov said:

"They found it. You can hear the screws talking abut it!"

I listened, and also heard the supervisor come out of the cell into the corridor and repeat:

"Good work … excellent work . . . ."

Then we heard the voice of the boss of the *katorzhnik* section Captain Gursky:

"Bring them all out immediately!"

They divided us up by fives and led us out of the building. I recall that I was in the first group with the SR I. Panferov, a person

who was "as mischievous as a cat, but as timid as a hare" [Russian proverb]. . . . They led us out of the main *katorzhnik* section across the courtyard, along the path to the building where the baths were located. All five of us were overwhelmed with depressing thoughts, in fact Panferov put these into words when he whispered:

"They're taking us to the baths for *porot* [flogging]." . . .

This was a horror for *katorzhniks—porot* was prescribed for a whole range of infractions.

Fortunately, no such thing happened. We entered the building through a dark passage known as "Sakhalin,"[20] because the sun never penetrated there, and led into Corridor № 45. There our shackles were carefully examined. (It's worthy noting that the wrist shackles weighed four pounds, the ankle shackles eight pounds.) Some of us were beaten a little, in particular by the chief guard Komisarov, who was especially zealous in this matter. Then we were placed in a cell where the cots had no mattresses. It was clear to us that this was a punishment cell.

Moving all our comrades from one section of the prison to another took a fair amount of time. Those of us in the first group managed to retrieve a coil of wire from the *parasha* which we threaded through a hole in the wall to the neighbouring cell (this was the wall to which the bunks were attached). This allowed us to pass on information about our transfer to all the other cells of the *katorzhnik* section, as well as receive cigarettes for those of our comrades who were smokers. Soon we had already received some cigarettes.

Finally the door of our cell stopped slamming. All the comrades were together again.

Then we began wondering what sort of fate was in store for us. It could mean punishment by caning—at the maximum 99 blows—stipulated for crimes of a similar type.

But if the Chief Warden was so inclined, we could be turned over to the courts for punishment under Article 309 of the Criminal

20 Island in the North Pacific, location of a Russian penal colony,.

Code, which could result in an additional sentence of from two years eight months to four years of *katorga*. And what could this mean for us, who were already serving life sentences? In any case, we decided not to confess under any condition and to declare, if necessary, that the passage was made before our appearance in that cell.

Such an explanation was advantageous not only for us but also for the prison administration. But this only became apparent to us later. First we had a visit from the Chief Warden Kudrikov and his gang of deputies. He spoke to us in such an angry fashion that we all thought for sure that he was going to order us caned. He left our cell in a cold fury. But the fact is Kudrikov hoped at all costs to avoid a scandal that would involve his own disgrace. So our punishment didn't involve caning, although we didn't realize that at the time and were plunged into gloom in thinking about our immediate future.

After Kudrikov left, the comrades in the cell above ours began lowering necessities to us on a string: bread, *kolbasa*, herring, and tobacco. It seems that they already knew that we would be going on a bread and water diet. They also sent us a note that they had learned from their supervisors that the head of the *katorzhnik* section, Captain Gursky, didn't agree with the Chief Warden's conclusion about the tunnel. According to Gursky, there was strong evidence that the tunnel dated from two years earlier . . . .

Gursky's behaviour was understandable to us. He was a military person. Mild-mannered by nature, he wasn't an expert on prison life and wanted to avoid discrediting himself. He didn't enjoy punishing prisoners. Often, when one of us had broken the rules, he would summon them to his office and try to get them to agree not to commit the offence in the future. If he obtained such agreement, the punishment was cancelled.

Of course, he never doubted for a second that we were guilty of digging the tunnel, but he preferred to turn the page on the matter, being convinced that we would never succeed in repeating a similar attempt. The investigating commission which was set up was also inclined to this opinion. Such a result put a damper

on the wrath of the higher-ups—Inspector of Moscow Prisons Zakharov and Chief Warden Kudrikov.

On the following day, we were all hauled into the office of the prison warden, the entrance to which was on one side of the courtyard. We were alarmed, because this office was next to the room where the trestles were located that prisoners were tied to for beatings. We tried not to show our anxiety to the guards.

But this nightmarish atmosphere soon dissipated. There were 25 of us in total, and we were called into the Warden's office one at a time. There we were interrogated by a court investigator, who told us that the case was being referred to a prosecutor who would forward it to a court. This information was communicated by the first comrades interviewed to those of us waiting.

Consequently, we avoided punishment by caning, which made some of us very glad despite our discouragement at the failure of our escape attempt. Others were depressed by our failure and greeted the investigator's information listlessly.

Nevertheless, we received a week of punishment cell. On the fifth day, the guards caught us receiving food through the window from a neighbouring cell by means of a string. This was food that had been collected along the whole corridor to be passed on to us.

They immediately hustled us off to our old Cell № 3, which had been completely refurbished; the opening to the passage was sealed up with cement.

For this new violation, the Chief Warden added on another week of punishment, i.e. an extra week on dry bread and water. Then, in order to keep us further away from the duct leading to the basement, they transferred us to Cell № 1, which was further away from the vent. This was the final chapter of our escape attempt.

Here I resumed my studies of history, geography, and mathematics, interspersed regularly by the reading of Russian literature.

I soon became ill and had to go to the hospital. However, I didn't have to spend much time there; after a brief spell, I felt well again and was glad to return to my comrades.

III.

The year 1913 was notably uneventful, but for me very productive. I devoted my time completely to study and debates with comrades. The following year was similar up until the events which happened on Friday, July 19 (August 1, new style): on that day, late in the evening, news spread throughout the whole prison that the Germans had declared war on Russia. This was the beginning of a new life for the prisoners, and, for some, a very difficult, in fact harrowing, one.

On the following day all the prisoners sentenced to life imprisonment were turned out into the corridor. The new Chief Warden of the prison (Kudrikov had been transferred elsewhere because of our escape attempt), a certain Von Eben, addressed us. He delivered a bombastic, patriotic speech about the declaration of war, claiming that it was "forced on us by Germany," and added that he had submitted a request to enlist as a volunteer.

"I am German by origin and I asked them to send me to the Caucasus front; I'm a colonel and I can be of service to our homeland," he declared.

His speech was disgusting, and yet quite a few "patriots" among us listened to it approvingly.

Von Eben was accompanied by some kind of lady from high society, who handed out gospel tracts and asked us to pray to God to help our tsar emerge victorious from the war.

Then Von Eben told us that,

"In three days time you will start receiving a daily newspaper about the war."

This was welcome news, as we would now have the possibility of reading a newspaper openly, rather than furtively. Up to this time, such reading material reached us only by illegal means.

A week later we began to receive ***Russian Invalid***[21] on a daily basis. According to this newspaper, the Russians were laying a shellacking on the Germans and Austrians, who were turning tail and howling for mercy.

Among the prisoners, groups of "patriots" and "defeatists" were formed. The former fervently wished for the defeat of the Germans and the annexation to Russia of new provinces.

The Polish comrades took up an openly hostile position in relation to Russia. Between them and the Russian "patriots" quarrels erupted, which occasionally became violent. Used as weapons in these scuffles were stools and benches. Mind you, this fighting was between short-term prisoners. The lifers didn't go so far, but even so the atmosphere became quite toxic.

This split was a very unfortunate development, because our lives as *katorzhniks* really demanded solidarity. We, the lifers, began receiving notes from all the corridors about fights taking place. The patriots always had the upper hand, for the administration supported them even when they were the ones initiating hostile action. Their opponents were often thrown into punishment cells. I looked on all this with revulsion and felt a deep shame.

In our corridor, where the lifers were placed, we formed a group of "internationalists" which included anarchists, SRs, and social-democrats. It condemned the war in no uncertain terms but, unfortunately, its influence was weak as the group included only workers and peasants. A few representatives of the intelligentsia, who had joined it originally, soon scurried to the camp of the patriots. The worker-revolutionists who remained were unwavering in their attitude towards this tragic phenomenon.

One time at the end of August, 1914, we were reading ***Russian Invalid*** out loud. One of the patriots, a teacher-SR from Voronezh, Anton Shevtsov, who had been quiet up to that point, suddenly exclaimed mischievously:

"Well, and now let's read something nice for the internationalists!

21 ***Russian Invalid*** was the official newspaper of the War Ministry. "Invalid" is used here in the sense of "veteran"—the newspaper was founded back in 1813 to support war veterans.

Let them listen attentively and take notes!"

From under a flap of his jacket he pulled out an issue of the liberal daily ***Russkie vedomosti***[22] and began to read: "An Open Letter from Peter Kropotkin" (dated August 18, 1914, from Brighton, Great Britain).[23]

I came closer and began to listen attentively. Then I took the newspaper myself, and read the article again with my closest comrades from beginning to end.

Then I lay down to rest and, without saying a word, began to ponder the content of the letter. My friends, including Lazar Shamus and Vasya Gulyakin, noticing my thoughtfulness and weariness, left me alone. Half an hour later, I got up and announced to the patriots:

"Do you want to know my opinion? Well, here it is: like always we consider Kropotkin our great teacher, but we completely disagree with him on this issue."

They tried to make me change my mind, to get me confused, but I stood my ground and wrote a note to Comrade Arshinov, asking his opinion on Kropotkin's position. At the same time, I wanted him to tell me what Bakunin's position would have been in a similar situation. He responded by trying to set my mind at rest.

Soon I was thrown into a punishment cell when they found on me the very powerful verses of ***The Summons***, written in 1912 and calling upon all the exploited to join together under the black banner against all the exploiters.[24] Here is the poem:

Let us rise in revolt, brethren, and with us the people
Beneath the black flag of Anarchy will revolt.
We will surge boldly forward, under the fire

22 ***Russkie vedomosti*** (Russian Gazette) was a liberal Moscow newspaper.

23 The letter was published in the September 7, 1914 (old style) issue of ***Russkie vedomosti***. A further letter from Kropotkin was published on October 5. These letters were published as part of a brochure edited by Kropotkin's friend Vladimir Burtsev in Moscow in 1916.

24 "The Summons" was first published in an anarchist newspaper in Astrakhan in 1918, as described in Volume 2 of Makhno's memoirs: **Under the Blows of the Counterrevolution**, (Edmonton, 2009), pp. 85-86.

of enemy bullets in the battle
for faith in libertarian communism,
Our just regime.
We shall cast down all thrones and
bring low the power of Capital.
We will seize the gold and purple sceptre
And pay no more honour to anything.
Through savage struggle
We shall rid ourselves of the State and its laws.
We have suffered long under the yoke
Of chains, prisons and teeming gangs of executioners.
The time has come to rise in rebellion and close ranks
Forward beneath the black flag of Anarchy,
on to the great struggle!
Enough of serving tyrants as their tools,
That is the source of all their might.
Insurrection, brethren, labouring people!
We will sweep away all carrion.
That's the way we shall reply to the lies of tyrants.
We free workers, armed with our determination.
Long live freedom, brethren. Long live the free commune.
Death to all tyrants and their jailers!
Let us rise, brethren, on the agreed signal,
Beneath the black flag of Anarchy,
against every one of them, the tyrants.
Let us destroy all authorities and their cowardly restraints,
that push us into bloody battle!

During the week I spent in the punishment cell I composed another poem in the same vein. As soon as I was back in my old cell I wrote down the verses, which read:

Brothers, our credo is deliverance from the rule of the tsar,
Of presidents of republics and their hangmen,
Hangmen and the leaders who create the chains.

For us, brother workers, these are mournful days!
Our doctrine—to annihilate all who create authority over us,
All those who swallow up our labour,
And who trust in the Lord, as they command us to fight,
In order that we can spill our blood
for their shameful social order.
So let's drink up, and let the enemy come on,
Let the people's sorrow be drowned in blood!
Let the eternal canons of fate and prison
Be destroyed in a flash, everywhere, as harbingers of darkness!
Gather together, brothers, when you hear the signals:
When you hear explosions and gunfire,
and the clank of cold steel,
As we fire our rifles at those predators—
The bosses—the creators of our vile chains!
They are content, brothers, to execute us,
Everywhere and always they cause us to be cut down
Either with the Cossack's sabre, or the Cossack's lash,
Or with steel bullets unleashed upon us,
Inflicting mortal wounds indiscriminately.
Strike back, slash without pity, no more mercy
For the whole bourgeoisie, for the masters
—from the hangman to the tsar!
Strike down the careerists—students seeking sinecures . . . .
For the masses of people, there will be no obstacles,
In their search for happiness and freedom.
For us it's never too soon, or too late,
To hack, to kill, and despoil
All these greedy predators,
The debauched bourgeoisie,
Living only at the expense of miserable working people . . .

These verses I hid in a book, but during a search they were found. For this I was given the punishment cell, followed by solitary confinement.

While sitting in the hole, I was kept apprised by my friends of news about the war as well as the concomitant conflicts going on in the prison world.

In 1915 many prisoners petitioned the tsar to be permitted to volunteer for the army so they could fight for the "fatherland."

Many of these patriots were genuine, but there were also many who were not sincere. However, the tsar decided, apparently, to get along without patriots from the ranks of the *katorzhniks*, and none of the applicants (at least from our prison) were accepted. Internal scraps over the war effort continued to take place, with no end in sight.

Towards the end of 1915, I returned very much weakened from a spell in an isolation cell and again immersed myself passionately in my studies. The internal regime in the prison became more and more onerous: special cells were prepared for punishing convicts for the least infraction. In them it was impossible to smoke, or write to relatives, etc. One time the prisoners of cell № 33, gypsy-expropriators, became so frustrated that they seized several guards and killed them, made their way to the main floor where they killed some more guards, and broke out into the courtyard. But they didn't succeed in capturing so-called "Holy Peter" (the main guard post at the entrance of the prison) and getting out into the street.

They were discovered and forced back into their own cells, where the authorities were able to pacify them. Nine of them were thrown into punishment cells, then condemned and hanged a month later.

This event made a huge impression on me and exerted a profound influence on my convictions and character. I thought a lot about the root causes of such situations and who the possible culprits might be.

I often argued with comrades about imprisonment and was more and more convinced that the anarchists were correct in ascribing responsibility for it to the State system, which forces people to forget about humanity and facilitates such savagery. This system

must perish along with those who defend it. I had formed a very clear notion about this, and I constantly spoke about the issue with my comrades. I made plans about how to struggle with the State should I ever attain freedom.

IV.

The war dragged on and one got the impression that it would continue for years. We began to pay close attention to the speeches of the politicians in the *Duma*, although previously we had never read accounts of its sessions. Now we were keen to follow its activities in order to understand the real situation at the Front and the internal situation in the country.

In connection with this, we spent whole weeks arguing among ourselves. But the truth is that we were completely cut off from the outside world, which existed only in our imaginations.

Patriotism among the inmates began to abate somewhat, and soon there remained only a handful of fanatics who wished to divide up Germany between the Allies, instead of concerning themselves with the internal transformations necessary for Russia. If you tried to engage the patriots in discussion of this theme, they responded only with trite phrases:

"Of course once Germany is defeated, the Russian people will create a republican system for themselves."

The position of the patriots became ludicrous as the situation at the Front worsened, according to the newspapers. Often they refused to acknowledge the military failures, even when they were common knowledge. They tried absurdly to justify the defeats, explaining them as strategic manoeuvres on the part of the high command. It was painful to observe these people refusing to acknowledge reality.

And of course among them were socialists—educated people, intellectuals—who dreamed of taking the fate of Russia in their own hands some fine day.

Often we, the workers and peasants, after listening to their speeches, answered by saying that it was too bad that the tsar

didn't send them to the Front when they wanted to go. And this precipitated a new round of arguments. And while we, behind bars and under lock and key, continued to argue, life went its own way, setting its own limitations and dragging along behind it all those who tried to avoid its consequences.

In 1916, even among us lifers, vague musings about Ukraine began to surface.

I recall that in our cell, one of my closest comrades ordered Vinnichenko's novel **Khochu** [I Want].[25] This novel was read out loud in our cell in the evenings, and everyone listened with rapt attention.

In fact we did discuss Ukrainian issues. Although I mostly stayed out of these debates, I couldn't always restrain myself and would sometimes intervene on the side of my countrymen.

I couldn't really explain where I got my sympathies for Ukraine. Of course, I had read a lot about the history of "Little Russia," in particular in the books of Klyuchevsky and Kareev. My mother often told me about the lives of the Zaporozhian Cossacks, and about their free communes in the old days. Then I read Gogol's novel **Taras Bulba** and was thrilled with the customs and traditions of those times.

But it never occurred to me that the day would come when I would feel myself their heir, and that they would become for me a source of inspiration for the rebirth of our free country. My convictions forced me to distance myself from separatist tendencies and did not allow me to give in to the temptation of contemplating an independent Ukrainian state, despite the sense of kinship I felt towards my Ukrainian prisoner comrades.

The events of 1916 gave us—*katorzhniks*—a presentiment of the imminent fall of tsarism and the approach of the Revolution. This presentiment became stronger towards the end of the year, when the government of Protopopov[26] decided to dissolve the *Duma*.

25 The novels of the Ukrainian writer and politician Volodymyr Vinnichenko (1880–1951) were crafted to inspire nationalist sentiments in his readers. **Khochu** was published in 1915.

26 Aleksandr Protopopov (1866–1918) served as Russian Minister of the In-

The government was in such desperate straits that we could unhesitatingly predict the onset of the Revolution. Jubilantly we told ourselves: the collapse of the tsarist autocracy is inevitable. The Revolution would finish it off. It would be starting soon, when winter set in at the Front. Alas, winter came, but there was no Revolution, to our great disappointment. But only temporarily, for events quickly followed, one after another.

The first two months of 1917 were noteworthy for the famous speeches of Milyukov, Chkheidze, and Kerensky,[27] which we became aware of clandestinely.

Protopopov's attempt to dismiss the *Duma* confirmed our belief that the Revolution was near. Towards the end of February, its hallmarks appeared. Even the "patriots" themselves sensed that great events were in the offing. They shed a lot of their arrogance and their patriotic pronouncements became illogical: if, on some occasions, they insisted that Russia had to have the Dardanelles, on others, they completely forgot about this and abandoned any hope of accomplishing anything with such a despotic regime. In the end, they gradually relinquished their "patriotism" and began to envisage the possibility of establishing a republican system.

Some of them even spoke of a separate peace which could be concluded after the fall of tsarism.

Many lost their illusions about the war and declared that they had grown wiser. This included those individuals who had earlier announced their wish to donate blood for wounded officers. They admitted that they were no longer as stupid as they had been two years earlier.

Discussions about the war were replaced by discussions about the Revolution. Some said that the Revolution would depose the moron "Nick" from the throne and establish a republican form of government. But would a republic keep the prisons—weren't they necessary for criminals? Surely releasing all the prisoners didn't

terior in 1916–1917, despite suffering from mental illness.

27 Prominent politicians of the 4th *Duma* (1912–1917), Pavel Milyukov (1859–1943), Nikolai Chkeidze (1864–1926), and Aleksandr Kerensky (1881–1970) became key figures in the Russian Provisional Government of 1917.

make sense! And so the arguments raged . . . . The latter question was the subject of disputes with the "criminals," who objected to such a limitation, calling those who supported it "scoundrels."

"You don't intend to release us from tsarist despotism," they said, "and allow us to be free citizens like you."

The SRs, in contrast to the social-democrats, declared that if their party came to power, all convicts, without exclusion, would be released. Fortunately, this discussion soon came to an end, for the State *Duma* took power into its own hands and soon the doors of the prisons swung open—at least for those of us on the lifers' corridor. And a few hours later all political prisoners were released.

This happened on March 1, 1917. The Deputy Warden of the prison, an Armenian by origin, visited the lifers. He was occupying his post temporarily, as he was slated to become an Inspector of Prisons. He was a decent person, in comparison to his colleagues, and often stopped by to talk to us about current events. But this time the Deputy Warden was less talkative than usual; he looked worried and couldn't stop glancing from side to side. Upon leaving our cell, he said:

"Gentlemen, I can't tell you everything, for there are chatterboxes among you. But be aware that in Petrograd great events are being prepared about which you will learn soon enough."

Then he turned abruptly and left. We were well aware that something was happening in Petrograd, but we didn't know just what.

We prepared for our afternoon tea. One of us, I don't remember who but it may have been Ivan Znamensky, climbed up to the window and told us that he was getting a message from the north tower that there were demonstrators in the streets with red banners . . . .

This raised a storm in our midst. Some shouted:

"Comrades, the Revolution has broken out! We're about to gain our freedom!"

But others replied:

"You fools, this isn't the Revolution, it's the patriots and priests

demonstrating with red banners, trying to convince the workers to go off to war against the Germans, leaving their wives behind to starve while working in factories making guns and shells for this wretched cause."

And again the quarrels raged between the patriots and the anti-patriots, and again there was a row, but at least no fisticuffs. Among the lifers this would have been considered dishonourable, although it sometimes happened.

It was 5 p.m. We were having tea. From the prison courtyard we heard shouting and saw guards running with revolvers in their hands. This didn't surprise us, as we had seen this before when there was a serious incident, such as a guard being attacked.

But this time the state of emergency went on too long, which seemed to us incomprehensible. Then we were brought our supper at the usual time, and we waited for roll call. But an hour passed, then two, and still no roll call. Finally, instead of roll call, an order was issued to our cell:

"Samis and Kulizen! Gather your things and come out into the corridor right away!"

What did this mean? Why these two and not others? Surely it wasn't for punishment, because Kulizen, for one, was considered a model prisoner by the senior guard. (He had long worked in the workshops and apparently had saved up some money.) The defeatists had their own theory: the Germans had broken through the Front and were advancing on Moscow, so now the government had decided that the evacuation of the *katorzhniks* was a top priority.

From each cell they pulled out two or three prisoners and assembled them at the gates. And then they took three more from our cell.

The patriots answered the defeatists:

"You scoundrels! You want the Germans to take Moscow! And you are fantasizing about a breakthrough at the Front."

They speculated that the prison was being downsized by moving

prisoners elsewhere.

But all of us were on pins and needles. By 1 a.m. only 13 prisoners remained of the original 25 in our cell. What had happened to the 12 who were taken away?

We got in touch with the other cells on our corridor—they were all connected by "telephones" from window to window—but nobody knew where the prisoners were being taken.

Then we heard from the neighbouring cells: only the "politicals" were being removed!

Well, that had to mean evacuation. That's the conclusion everyone in the cell arrived at. And those who were "political" got ready: got their things together, poured tea and sugar into little bags, and got completely stressed out—and all for nothing.

At 1 a.m. the whistle blew and we heard a command from the corridor:

"Get ready for roll call!"

We got up. Our cell was the first one on the corridor. The Chief Warden's deputy entered, along with an unfamiliar military person. I asked the deputy:

"Sir, could you be so kind as to tell us where they took our comrades?"

He quickly turned to me and announced:

"Don't get excited, there's no cause to be alarmed. God has sent changes to our country. It's my job to put these changes into effect here . . . . Prisoners who were convicted under Statute № 102 will be released tomorrow without fail . . . ."

Having said his piece, the deputy politely took his leave.

"The storm has burst! The doors of the prisons will soon be opened! Long live the Revolution!"—some of the comrades were carried away.

And suddenly there was a fear that the counter-revolution would prevail and we would remain behind bars.

We couldn't sleep—we tossed and turned all night. We waited for morning—and freedom. And it seemed as if we waited for an eternity.

We paced back and forth along the length of the cell, not exchanging a word with one another.

Suddenly we heard the shouting of a crowd of people, and in the courtyard of the prison shots rang out. We all rushed to the windows. (The windows of the cells on the 1st corridor, where the lifers were held, looked out on the courtyard of the prison, in which there was a chapel and a square surrounded by linden trees.) We saw a large number of soldiers in black overcoats, which meant they were from the escort squad of the Moscow region.

These soldiers cried to us:

"Comrade prisoners, come on out! Everyone come on out, everyone is free!"

They were answered by voices from the windows of the cells on our corridor as well as from "Sakhalin" (the unit where the sun never penetrated was known as Sakhalin).

"The cells are locked!"

Then the soldiers called back:

"Smash the doors and come out—everyone!"

Under other circumstances we would have interpreted this advice as a provocation, but on this occasion, after only a little thought, all 30 of us prisoners seized the heavy tabletop of our table and, using it as a battering ram, smashed the door.

Once in the corridor, we saw that the inmates of all the other cells had done the same, and all the doors were lying on the floor. The inmates from these cells were already mingling with the soldiers outside. We rushed into the courtyard, and ran towards the gates opening onto the street.

There were close to 1,500 *katorzhniks* milling about at the gates.

Everyone was trying to elbow their way through the crowd into the street, and the thuggish ones were quite aggressive. But voices

of protest were heard from the rear and order was soon established at the exit. We emerged onto Dolgorukovskaya Street, where the soldiers arranged us in files four abreast. Then all of us, including the soldiers, set out towards Theatre Square and the City Council chambers to register and receive official documents, as the soldiers explained to us.

Along the way we ran into representatives from the City Council, a mix of civilians and soldiers, who stopped our column and berated the soldiers for their actions:

"What do you think you're doing. Take them back to prison. Their release will take place in an orderly fashion."

The soldiers were confounded. Some of them cried:

"We can't take the released prisoners back to prison. We believe that the Revolution is the liberator of everyone from the bonds of slavery. These starved and tortured prisoners are our brothers who must live in freedom, and their prison be demolished stone by stone . . . ."

But while they were discussing the matter back and forth, the "new masters of the destinies of the people" issued an order to two detachments of Cossacks and a regiment of infantry which were in the vicinity. These troops surrounded us and led us back to the prison, although a few prisoners had already succeeded in making their escape.

It's difficult to describe the mental anguish resulting from this turn of events. Some of the prisoners were driven to despair: some suffered heart attacks, while others hanged themselves.

V.

The prison seemed completely different to us: the guards had disappeared, and the broken doors of the cells were lying about. The prison canteen, where the convicts could buy food, was wide open, and anyone could take what they wanted without paying.

It was already 4 p.m.

I walked around through the prison buildings with a group of

comrades, not losing hope of being released. We visited all the towers, all the *katorzhnik* units, and the transit section. Finally we returned to our old cell. Someone boiled water and made tea and we sat around two small tables. I immersed myself in an algebra textbook by Davidov, studying Newton's theorem.

Suddenly in the corridor steps were heard and a voice called: "Makhno!"

I was scarcely able to get up when an officer of the army reserve entered the cell, greeted everyone in a friendly manner and, reading from a sheet of paper which he held in his hand, asked:

"Which one of you is Makhno?"

I raised my hand.

He rushed up to me, extended his hand, and said:

"Let me congratulate you, you're free! Follow me!"

I quickly distributed some of my textbooks to my comrades, decided what to take with me as mementos of prison, and said good-bye to everyone. My closest friends hugged me, begging me not to forget them and to remind the Commission about their release.

Momentarily, I became quite emotional, but quickly regained my composure. While we were making our way to the prison gates, my escort—Lieutenant Ivanov, as he introduced himself—called out other prisoners and asked them also to follow along with him.

We went to the gatehouse, where soldiers used an anvil to break our shackles; then we moved on to the main office.

Here I was met by one of the Polish comrades, who had been released the day before. He had formerly been a member of the Polish Socialist Party, but had distanced himself from the Party in prison. He said only that he had mentioned my case to the Commission.

I stood before the Commission, which was composed of six or seven people.

They told me that on the basis of such-and-such an article, I was

Political prisoners released from Moscow's Butyrka Prison thanks to the revolution of February, 1917. Makhno, in the lower left corner of the photo, emerged from prison on March 2.

eligible for release; they congratulated me and said that I could go.

I went out into the street with some other comrades, stumbling a bit because the shackles which I had worn for eight years had destroyed my natural way of walking. At the exit, a huge crowd was waiting, welcoming us with the cries of:

"Long live the freed political prisoners!"

We were conducted to the City Council, where everyone was registered and issued documents. Then we were sent to a former hospital which was reserved for ex-prisoners who weren't able to find lodgings in Moscow.

This took place on March 2, 1917. I was overwhelmed with emotion on this first day of freedom which marked the end of my sufferings. I was faced with a whole series of questions: what sort of work should I take up? what could I do that would be useful for the cause of anarchism? . . .

VI.

Released "politicals" could stay in the hospital until the Red Cross and the Special Commission provided us with clothing, footwear, and funds to return home. The Commission was also empowered to send those released prisoners who were sick and required medical treatment to sanatoriums in Crimea. I was advised to apply to the Commission, since I fell into that category. But I was convinced that the only cure for me was the revolutionary storm, and I resolved to commit myself to the cause unreservedly.

It was at this time that I went over in my head all the reflections I had accumulated during the eight years of my incarceration. I wanted to get together with Comrade Arshinov, but he was too tied up with the Commission for the release of prisoners, of which he was a member. The Commission was busy, in particular, with releasing those political prisoners who had been classified as "criminals." It often required a major effort to identify these people, as the tsarist government was in the habit of imprisoning as ordinary criminals those who offered armed resistance at the time of arrest.

Four days after my release, I made contact with an anarchist group of the Lefortovo district, and joined it along with some of my prison comrades. Enthusiastically, we prepared for an All-Russian demonstration of workers in which anarchists would take part.

Thus I got to know Comrade Vladimir (known today as Khudoley).[28] At the time he was a great fan of the anarcho-syndicalist Novomirsky-Kirilovsky. There I also met Comrade Barman, who showed up at one of the meetings of our group and handed over a contribution of a thousand rubles for our organizational efforts.

However, the workhorse of the Lefortovo group was a certain Aleksey, who exerted great efforts to make the demonstration a success. The two comrades who preceded him disappeared, but

28 Vladimir Semenovich Khudoley (1890–1937) was a leader of the anarchist underground in Moscow before the February Revolution. In the 1920s he continued to be active in the anarchist movement in Moscow, becoming one of the main supporters of "The Platform" of Nestor Makhno and Peter Arshinov.

Aleksey took a firm hand organizationally and prepared matters with military precision.

And so we demonstrated at this special event. Neither Khudoley or Barman showed up.

At first I intended to remain in Moscow and establish myself there, but my mother and my comrades from the old anarcho-communist group in Gulyai-Polye bombarded me with telegrams asking me to return. They told me some of the group had survived and wanted to continue the struggle among the peasantry.

I made up my mind. On March 20, 1917, I said goodbye to the Moscow comrades and left for Gulyai-Polye. With me I took some literature, including the Declaration of the Lefortovo Group, half of which I disagreed with (it was written by Khudoley when he was still a syndicalist).

(Two points from this Declaration were reproduced with insignificant changes in the Declaration of the Gulyai-Polye Peasant Group, which subsequently was adopted by the labour organizations of Gulyai-Polye.)

On March 22, I arrived in Gulyai-Polye. I found my mother weak and stooped with age (she was already 70). She welcomed the Revolution and told me about my comrades there who had died under the bullets of the tsarist butchers.

I also met with many comrades—strong people infused with a sincere desire to continue the struggle on a broad front for the ideal of downtrodden humanity: the struggle for anarcho-communism.

MEMOIRS OF A GULYAI-POLYE REVOLUTIONARY

by Voldemar Antoni

Translator's Introduction to Voldemar Antoni's Memoirs

I was fortunate while still a youngster to fall under the influence of the anarchist-revolutionary Voldemar Antoni (known in revolutionary circles as "Zarathustra").

—Nestor Makhno[1]

Voldemar Genrickhovich Antoni (1886–1974), two years older than Nestor Makhno and a fellow villager of Gulyai-Polye, had a very different life course than his protégé. Antoni's father Genrikh, a Czech emigrant from Bohemia, was a skilled mechanic, and his mother was of German origin. Voldemar's mother died when he was nine, and he lived off and on with an uncle who had a shop on the village's market square. Voldemar's work life began at 13 in the Krieger plant in Gulyai-Polye; at 16 he moved to the provincial capital Yekaterinoslav where his father was already well-established. Voldemar then began a progression, common at the time, from the social-democrats (his father's tendency), to the socialist-revolutionaries, to the anarchists. Eventually he made his way back to Gulyai-Polye, where he started the anarchist group ***Soyuz Bednykh Khleborobov*** (Union of Poor Peasants—UPP) in 1906.

Like other anarchist groups in Ukraine at that time, the UPP had a very young membership, mostly 17 to 20 years in age. Although the organization was destroyed within three years, with its leading figures either killed or dispersed, the UPP can be credited with significant achievements. Its multi-ethnic, multi-cultural membership opposed the rampant chauvinism of the ruling circles, and protected their village's significant Jewish population from the pogroms that ravaged other population centres in Ukraine at the time. The reactionary elements confronted by these young people enjoyed the full backing of the State with its punitive organs. And a decade later, the movement sprang to life again under more favourable conditions.

Antoni avoided the fate of his comrades by escaping abroad, not once but twice. Like many European anarchist refugees, he

1 N. I. Makhno, **The Ukrainian Revolution: July – December 1918**, (Edmonton, 2011), p. 193.

ended up in South America and although he always wanted to return to his homeland, he didn't manage to do so until 1962. By that time Antoni had acquired a large family, only half of whose members were willing to relocate to a country that was entirely foreign to them.

The USSR did not turn out to be quite the promised land anticipated by Antoni. Although he landed in Odessa, he and his family were sent to distant Kazakhstan to live in a cotton-growing region. (Apparently being deported to Kazakhstan had something to do with Antoni's German heritage on his mother's side.) Fortunately Antoni had a sister living in Nikipol, close to his old stomping ground in Ukraine, who was well-connected with the Communist Party. She arranged for Antoni to move to Nikipol, where he spent the rest of his life.

But Antoni was still without a pension, which he believed he was entitled to as a revolutionary who had fought against tsardom. Making matters even more frustrating was the fact that he had given up a pension in Uruguay to return to the USSR. He initiated the lengthy process of applying for a pension, which required, in part, the preparation of an autobiography which met official requirements. In the meantime, like other senior citizens of the USSR who were not eligible for a pension, he found employment as a night watchman. Finally, in 1967, he was awarded a pension (40 rubles a month, about $44 USD at the official exchange rate), but, more importantly, was also assigned a rent-free apartment in the centre of Nikipol.

In the meantime, Antoni, who had been using the name Grigoriy Andreyevich Lyapunov while living in South America, was sought out by the journalist and local historian Fyodor Kushch. Antoni was a crusty individual in old age, and had no wish to be sent back to Kazakhstan where he had hurt his back working in the cotton fields. So at first he was reluctant to deal with Kushch. But the latter's enthusiasm soon won him over, and apparently it was through Kushch that Antoni was able to meet another survivor from the old days—Marfa Piven, who had miraculously survived the shoot-out in 1910 in which Aleksandr Semenyuta perished. Although Kushch soon died,

Antoni continued to work on a detailed autobiography which was donated after his death, along with other papers, to the local museum in Gulyai-Polye, where it sat undisturbed for many years on a shelf in the "supplementary collection."

Like any document generated during the Soviet era, Antoni's memoir must be approached with caution. He describes the young Nestor as reckless and unreliable, susceptible to drunken binges, which is consonant with the picture of Makhno in Soviet historiography. Antoni is also concerned to downplay his own involvement in the anarchist movement, which extended much longer than he is willing to admit. Although Makhno and Antoni parted for good in 1908, they were able to re-establish connections after Makhno's escape to France in 1925. Unfortunately, their correspondence has not survived, but we know that Antoni was able to raise money for Makhno, chronically short of funds. Antoni's letter to Viktor Yalansky, a great grandnephew of Makhno, included in this volume, gives a somewhat different picture of his relationship to his famous protégé than the one implied in his memoirs.

* * * * *

The climax of the history of the Union of Poor Peasants was the killing of the *pristav* Anton Karachentsev in And yet Makhno and Antoni make only passing mention of this event; Makhno was in prison at the time, while Antoni was on an ill-fated mission to Yuzovka to assassinate another police official. The Karachentsev murder was sensational enough to be written up in a St. Petersburg newspaper:

A Victim of Duty

On November 21 [1909] in the village of Gulyai-Polye the local *pristav* A. Z. Karachentsev was killed on the street. The circumstances of this bloody crime are the following: on November 21 in the Wiens House a play was performed at which Karachentsev was present. At 1:30 a.m., at the end of the play, Karachentsev set out for his home, telling his deputy and bodyguards not to bother escorting him.

After walking a few steps along the sidewalk, Karachentsev met an unknown person who fired a single shot at him. Karachentsev

fell, and the unknown person cried "Death to the hangman," and proceeded to fire two more shots into his victim. Then, jumping over the ditch that runs along the street, the murderer fired a few more shots in the air and disappeared into the night.

When the first shots were fired, the theatre-goers exiting the building rushed back inside, obstructing the deputies and guards, who were unable to reach the scene of the crime in a timely fashion, and therefore lost sight of the murderer.

The deceased possessed tremendous skills in detective work and in general was an outstanding police officer.

In August of last year, he exposed a gang of 15 persons operating in 1905—1908 in Aleksandrovsky *uyezd*. This gang had committed a whole series of serious crimes over a period of four years, including robberies and murder.

For his outstanding service, Karachentsev was awarded the Order of St. Stanislav of the 3rd degree.

His murder was undoubtedly committed out of revenge for his exposure of this gang.

M e s t n y [A Local][2]

Rather than being the act of a lone assassin, the murder of Karachentsev in fact required the coordinated efforts of a rather large group of people. The anarchists learned that the *pristav* loved to attend plays, and they used this information to set a trap for him. The local theatre group put on a play in the local theatre, the "Coliseum." The author of the play was Yelisey Karpenko, a local playwright; he was regarded by the authorities as politically unreliable, so the censor refused permission for the performance. But Karachentsev made a fateful decision to overrule the censor and the production went forward.

It turned out that most of the actors in the play were anarchists; to avoid trouble, their parts were performed by understudies—members of the local intelligentsia—for the performance that Karachentsev attended. He showed up with an entourage that included deputies and as many as 30 guards and occupied the

2 ***Vseobshchaya malen'kaya gazeta*** [Everyone's Little Newspaper], (St. Petersburg, 1909), quoted in I. K. Kushnirenko and V. I. Zhilinskiy, **Нестор Махно і "Союз бідних хліборобів"** [Nestor Makhno and the "Union of Poor Peasants"], (Zaporizhzhia, 2010), pp. 39-40.

Members of the theatre group associated with Gulyai-Polye's "Kolizey" (Coliseum) Theatre. They are in costume for the play "One Hundred Thousand" by Ivan Karpenko-Kariy, which satirizes excessive thirst for enrichment. The photo dates from the early 20th century. The theatre group was thoroughly infiltrated by anarchists associated with the Gulyai-Polye Union of Poor Peasants.

front rows. Aleksandr Semenyuta and his "date," the anarchist Maria [Marusya] Prodan, sat further back.

Semenyuta, armed with two revolvers, realized that shooting Karachentsev inside the theatre would cause a panic, so he left before the play ended and waited outside. After the performance, Karachentsev decided to walk home alone, but immediately encountered Semenyuta who felled him with a shot, then, crying "Death to the executioner!" shot him twice more. The theatre crowd was panicked in reverse, streaming back into the building and obstructing the guards from leaving. Semenyuta leapt over the ditch that ran along the street and disappeared.

A few days later, the anarchists distributed a leaflet in Gulyai-Polye taking credit for the murder:[3]

3 A. V. Dubovik, ***Мария Продан и анархисты Екатеринославщины в 1900-х годах*** [Mariya Prodan and the anarchists of the Yekaterinoslav region in the 1900s], ***Юго-Запад. Одессика: историко-краеведческий научный альманах*** [South-West. Odessika: almanac of scientific local history], Issue № 26, (Odessa, 2019), pp. 241-259.

"Fight—and you shall conquer"—Shevchenko

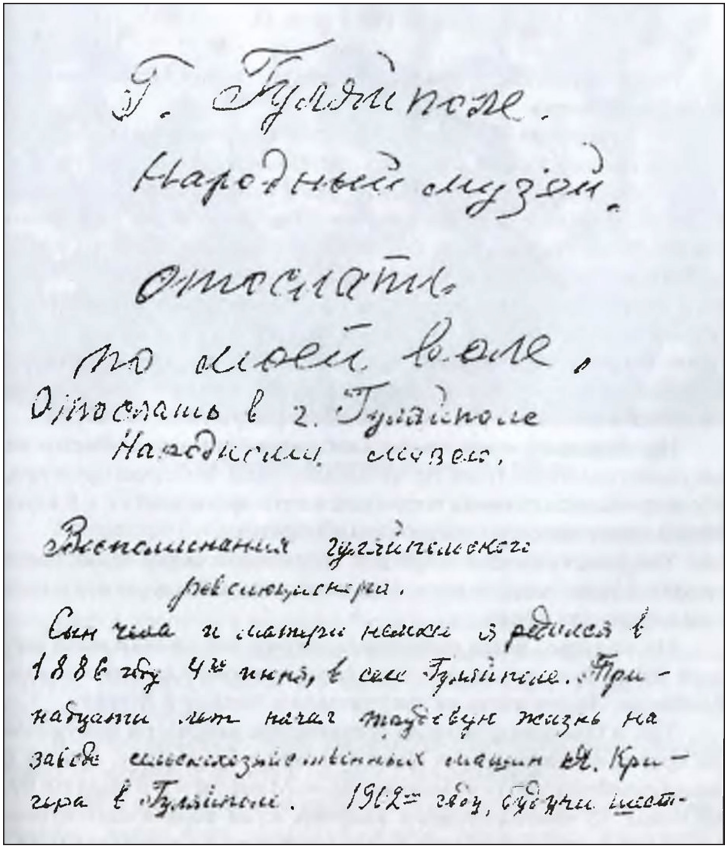
The *pristav* Karachentsev of the 4th police district, village of Gulyai-Polye, who was also a bloodhound and organizer of provocateurs, was killed by us—anarcho-communists—on November 22, 1909.

He was killed because he brutally tortured anarchists and in fact anyone who fought for freedom and a better life for the working class.

* * * * *

The existence of Voldemar Antoni's writings was known to scholars but little used until transcribed, edited, and published by V. M. Chop, along with copious annotations (see p. 155 for reference). Anyone working in the field of Makhnovist studies owes a debt of gratitude to Professor Chop for his efforts to shed light on the movement.

Malcolm Archibald
May, 2021



г. Гуляйполе.
Народный музей.

Отослать
по моей воле.
Отослать в г. Гуляйполе
Народный музей.

Воспоминания гуляйпольского
революционера.

Сын чеха и матери немки я родился в
1886 году 4-го июня, в селе Гуляйполе. Три-
надцати лет начал трудовую жизнь на
заводе сельскохозяйственных машин Вл. Кри-
гера в Гуляйполе. 1912-го году, будучи мате-

The first page of Voldemar Genrikhovich Antoni's manuscript "Memoirs of a Gulyai-Polye Revolutionary," which he directs to be sent to the Public Museum in Gulyai-Polye.

My Early Life

The son of a Czech and a German mother, I was born on the 4th of June, 1886, in the village of Gulyai-Polye. When I was 13 years old I started my working life at Jacob Krieger's agricultural machinery plant in Gulyai-Polye.[1] In 1902, when I was a 16-year-old youth, I went to the city of Yekaterinoslav and worked as an apprentice machinist at the Lange plant in Amur.[2] Here I began to study proclamations I got from my father, along with packets to be distributed at the plant and through the Amur settlement. When I learned that my father was going to secret workers' meetings for social-democrats, I started asking him to take me with him, but he refused. Later my father began giving me ***Iskra***,[3] which I would read to young workers like myself during meal breaks. Soon a circle of comrades was formed around me, which helped distribute proclamations—of both the SDs and SRs—to us they were all the same.[4] They were socialists, so they were on our side. The SRs took advantage of this and inducted me and my friends into an SR circle.

During this period the tsarist government, in order to give vent to popular rage, organized Jewish pogroms. The police and the Black Hundreds spread rumours: "Soon there'll be a pogrom of the Zhids . . . ." On the Sunday designated by the pogromists, we—dozens of young lads from the Lange pipe rolling plant—headed to the centre of the city. Yekaterinoslavsky Prospect and the Ozerny Market were overflowing with a dense crowd. The pogrom was in full swing. Jewish stores were being smashed. We began to shout:

1 The population of Gulyai-Polye in the early 20th century was around 10,000. It was the second-largest town in Aleksandrovsk *uyezd*. The Krieger plant was the largest industrial enterprise in the town.

2 Amur was a working class suburb of the provincial capital Yekaterinoslav. The Lange mill, which manufactured steel pipe, was founded by Belgian engineers in the 1890s. The workday at the plant was at least 12 hours.

3 ***Iskra*** [The Spark] (1900–1905) was the organ of the Russian Social-democratic Labour Party. Published in Western Europe, it was illegal in Russia.

4 SD = social-democrat; SR = socialist-revolutionary.

"Smash all the stores! Is it really only the Jews who are to blame, while our own kind are angels?"

But as soon as people started breaking into non-Jewish stores, the police and mounted Cossacks appeared and drove the crowd back.

When the crowd started beating up a 12-year-old Jewish boy, we saved him by yelling:

"That's enough, why are you hurting him, what has he done?"

And the crowd obeyed us. Then there was some kind of Black Hundreds speaker stirring up the crowd against the Jews, spewing spiteful nonsense about them. There was a sturdy chap from our shop with us. We made our way through the crowd to the speaker and our tough guy, the 20-year-old Gorokhov, whacked the Black Hundreds instigator on the head with a stick, drawing blood. Confusion ensued which we used to our advantage and, following the order of our leader, went back to Amur.

In the summer of 1903 a general strike broke out in Yekaterinoslav.[5] Soldiers fired three volleys into a meeting of workers. At this site of mass murder there were 53 corpses and 200 to 250 wounded. It was through measures like this that the tsarist government tried to avert the nascent revolution. In the settlement of Amur, there were two rolling mills and one plant manufacturing machine tools, all large-scale operations.

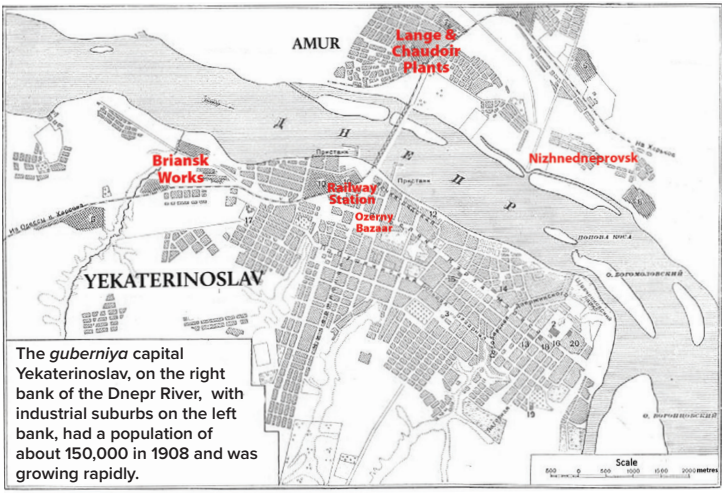
First workers at the Lange mill went on strike. They piled out into the street, headed to the machine tool plant, burst into the yard, then into the furnace room, sounded the whistle, and together with the machine tool workers took off for the Chaudoir rolling mill.[6] There, next to the iron gates with their big lock, was the little house of the police guards. We demanded that they hand over the key. They refused. We shouted:

"Let's push on the gates, we'll open them ourselves."

And we began to push. The police hurried to open the gates and

5 The general strike started at the Briansk plant on August 7, 1903, and then spread to Amur.

6 The Chaudoir plant was also founded by a Belgian engineer.



The *guberniya* capital Yekaterinoslav, on the right bank of the Dnepr River, with industrial suburbs on the left bank, had a population of about 150,000 in 1908 and was growing rapidly.

we streamed past a dozen police into the inner courtyard, then up into the furnace and boiler rooms. The factory whistle was under lock. We found a drift to break the lock. Downstairs they yelled:

"Don't break it, we've got the key!"

And the whistle sounded, letting the Chaudoir guys know that the strike had begun.

A couple of days later people gathered for a meeting. A speaker criticized tsarist decrees and arbitrary rule. Then the chief of police showed up with a regiment of mounted police on one side, and on the other—a regiment of soldiers, and sealed us off against some houses. The chief asked:

"What is it you want?"

Our speaker squatted down so he wouldn't be so noticeable, and began:

"We demand the eight-hour-workday; freedom of speech, association, and assembly; freedom of the press; direct and equal voting rights and the secret ballot."

The chief asked:

"Anything else?"

"Down with the autocracy!"

The chief made a hand signal . . . . The mounted police began to hit people with whips, the soldiers with rifle butts. They hemmed us in from two sides and forced us up against the high fence of a garden. I found myself being pushed above people and fell face downwards into the garden, but my feet got caught in the fence. People fell or jumped on my back and ran away. Finally some kind soul pulled my feet out of the fence. After this experience I was spitting blood for 11 months.

In 1904 the SR circle which I belonged to made the transition to anarcho-communism. The mood among the workers in those days was very militant-revolutionary and a lot of social-democrats and socialist-revolutionaries were attracted to the anarcho-communists because they attacked the capitalist system with great vigour, skipping the minimum program and the bourgeois revolution, and promised communism already on Day 2 of the Revolution. While I was still a member of the SR circle, I had a fervent desire to read Karl Marx's **Capital**, but wasn't able to. Although I did see the book, I couldn't borrow it because of its rarity. And so I stayed an anarchist.

The war with Japan broke out. The Lange plant where I worked shut down, and I found myself in Pologi, in the depot of the Berdyansk branch of the railroad, where I worked as an apprentice machinist. Here I was swept up in the November and December nation-wide general strikes of 1905. And it was here that I put together a circle of young lads which prepared for the coming revolution.

During the December strike, the depot continued to function by order of the revolutionary committee (which operated out of a school), turning out cold weapons: sabres, pikes, and (the specialty of us lathe-operators)—hand grenades. My lathe was the closest to the wide-entry doors. The disarmed railway police were not lying low—they roamed about the whole settlement in groups of four, observing everything that was going on. They

took a good look and committed it all to memory. They were bold enough to come up to the depot, step inside the gates, and stand in a row, watching what the machinists were doing. At my machine there was a rather large pyramid of cast-iron grenades. They noted this and committed it to memory. They also dropped in at other shops and looked at everything that was going on. The depot was preparing for battle. We intended to travel to the *uyezd* capital of Aleksandrovsk to help the workers there who had occupied the railway workshops and were exchanging gunfire with the tsarist forces. I should mentiohn that both revolutionary strikes of October and December, 1905, were carried out by us, the workers, by order of the Soviet of Workers' Deputies.[7] In Moscow the workers fought battles with tsarist troops. We were stoked with enthusiasm. But then arrived sad news from Debaltsevo,[8] and from Aleksandrovsk,[9] that the uprising had been suppressed. And finally a dispatch came from Moscow telling us that there as well the revolution had suffered defeat. And on December 25, a punitive detachment of Don Cossacks arrived in Pologi and

Young Voldemar Antoni.

7 This seems to be a reference to the Soviet of Workers' Deputies in Moscow.

8 Debaltsevo was an industrial town and railway centre in the Donbas region. A workers' committee took power there from December 9 to December 21, 1905.

9 An armed uprising took place in Aleksandrovsk from December 10 to 14, 1905. It was suppressed by government forces, including Cossacks and local Black Hundreds formations.

began arrests, searches, and beatings. The commander of the detachment ordered that the depot resume work on December 26. The whistle blew and we all went to work.

At the depot they called us together to a meeting to hear the order of the commander read out. The senior foreman Zubchenko began to read out the names of those who were ordered to report to the station for questioning. He read out 93 names, including mine. Eighty-nine people did not report for questioning, but took off and went into hiding. Four of us young, inexperienced guys—Muratov, Ivan Chernogor, myself, and a Komi-Zyrian[10] domestic servant—decided to go, even though we knew we would be arrested. On the way we sang "Comrades, let's bravely march"[11] and "Boldly, friends, do not lose your courage in an unequal battle; you are saving our mother-homeland, honour and freedom."[12] We entered the station.

The police sergeant addressed me directly: "Where are your grenades?" I replied: "I don't have any grenades."

Then he gestured to the Cossacks to beat us up. Between the door and the wagons there was a double row of Cossacks. We went between them and the beating began. Some hit us with fists in the face, others with rifle butts in the back, others with the muzzle of a rifle in the side. Then they formed a circle and began beating us with rifle butts, driving us from one side to the other. Tiring of this exercise, they began knocking our feet out from under us, then kicking us when we fell down, and rolling us along the platform. Finally they drove us into a passenger wagon which already held many prisoners who had been beaten like us. Two days later they conveyed us to the Berdyansk prison.

After three months I was released. I was quite astonished, and convinced that, after all the prisoners from the depot had been

10 The Komi-Zyrians are an indigenous people whose homeland is in northeastern Russia.

11 Famous revolutionary march; the lyrics were composed in a Moscow prison in the 1890s. The last line reads ". . . and we will raise above ourselves, the red banner of labour," but the anarchists often changed "red" to "black."

12 Hymn of the Narodovoltsy (People's Will movement of the 1870s–1880s)..

interrogated and sentenced, I would be arrested again. Therefore, I wanted to get far away. Soon I ran into another released prisoner who said he had been asked to tell me that my presence was required at an interrogation in Yekaterinoslav as a "witness." But I didn't give any witness testimony; instead I tried to leave for Moscow. If they wanted me they would have to find me. Besides, I had already attended an "interrogation" at the station . . . .

Then a certain well-informed comrade told me that when I had been taken to prison, the depot physician, the superintendent of equipment, and the rail transportation superintendent had organized a tea at the doctor's apartment. They invited the police sergeant, sucked up to him, and explained to him that all the machinists had turned out grenades, but the burden of guilt had fallen on one under-aged worker—Antoni. The sergeant agreed and removed the serious charge from my case. But what the sergeant didn't know was that the doctor and both superintendents were supporters of the revolution of 1905. I also didn't know. So after three months, I and two of my young comrades were freed from the Berdyansk prison.

Not being able to work at the depot, I took off for Gulyai-Polye. Here I immediately began to agitate among the young people I had known from school. They propagandized the social revolution and hectographed[13] several proclamations signed by the "Union of Poor Peasants." Our group adopted this name with enthusiasm. That's how a revolutionary anarcho-communist group got started in Gulyai-Polye.

After being unemployed for two months, I left for Moscow. There I worked in the Zamoskvorechye district[14] at the Schmeil plant. I was a delegate from the workers to the factory-plant committee and joined a propaganda circle led by Comrade Bonch-Bruyevich.[15] At the Schmeil plant I organized a one-day strike de-

13 The hectograph was a primitive duplicator favoured by revolutionaries of that time. Up to 100 copies could be produced at a time.

14 The Zmoskvorechye district was a proletarian neighbrouhood just south of the Kremlin on the right bank of the Moskva River.

15 Vladimir Bonch-Bruyevich (1873–1955) was one of the original members of the Bolshevik Party. In the 1900s – 1910s, he started a number of news-

manding the release of the shop steward and Bolshevik Sergey Metelkin, who had been arrested at the whim of the owner. He was freed, but I was summoned to the police station and given a choice: travel to Gulyai-Polye in a prisoner transport or clear out of Moscow within 48 hours. I took off for Gulyai-Polye on my own.

While I was in Moscow, I read in a newspaper that two small expropriations had been carried out in Gulyai-Polye.[16] This worried me quite a bit. I realized that the organizing and propaganda work which I had initiated with such enthusiasm, preparing the population for the future revolution, was now hanging by a thread. And one more detail. When I left for Moscow, I issued a strict order to the comrades: under no circumstances was Nestor Makhno to be accepted into the group, because he was a pugnacious, hard-drinking fellow, and if we included him in our organization, it would cost us dearly. When I arrived back from Moscow, I asked them:

"Why did you accept him, didn't I warn you?. . . ."

"But we couldn't get rid of him . . . ."

I was worried about him because I knew him from school. He was always ready to fight, and by age 16 he was drinking and still fighting. The police always had their eye on him and he got into fights even with them. His behaviour was a liability to us. Mind you, after these exes, there was nothing much for us to look forward to other than the gallows.

As before I remained unemployed. I lived with my uncle and helped him a bit with his business. I travelled far and wide look-

papers and publishing houses for the Bolsheviks.

16 In the evening of September 5, 1906, Aleksandr and Prokop Semenyuta, along with the anarchist Ivanov, their faces smeared with soot, robbed Berka Plishchiner, a Jewish business owner. Threatening him with revolvers and a grenade, they relieved him of 163 rubles, a gold watch, and two rings. On October 14, 1906, the Semenyuta brothers, Nestor Makhno, Ivan Levadny, and Filipp Chernyavsky (or the aforementioned Ivanov), wearing paper masks and armed with revolvers, demanded 500 rubles from the Jewish businessman Isaak Bruk. In the event, they had to be satisfied with 151 rubles. This was Makhno's initiation into the activist section of the UPP.

ing for work, but always in vain . . . . When I was in Gulyai-Polye, we had meetings almost every evening. I tried to propagandize the group, so they would be conscious revolutionaries. I tried to restrain them from carrying out exes, but when I was absent, they started the exes again, since some of them had nothing else to do. They were all in a hurry to arm themselves, and bought old-fashioned miniature revolvers. This was frightening to me. I felt that it would all end badly. Our proclamations got the *pomeshchiks* and the *kulaks* stirred up. An association of "Genuine Russian People"[17] started up, headed by the *pristav* Karachentsev. They began to trick the peasants into joining. They also began to summon peasants one by one to try to find out from them who was distributing the proclamations, and what was this "Union of Poor Peasants."

Clearly it was just a matter of time before they found us out and arrested us. We got together and decided, before it was too late, to break up this mob of "Real Russians." I wrote up a proclamation in block letters and ran it off on the hectograph. In the name of our organization, it warned that "We will fight you with fire and sword." And since the *pomeshchiks* were the chief organizers, we encouraged our activists to burn out the most fanatical ones. At the top of the list was the estate of Chernoglazova,[18] who was playing first fiddle in their association. After her estate went up in flames, so did those of other *pomeshchiks*, both near and far. Fires were starting up all over the place. It was an awe-inspiring sight to see these great fires at night.

We set fire to the cottage of one peasant in the village who was a very zealous member of the "Real Russians." People came running to the fire, but no one wanted to help him put it out. Then he asked them:

"Why are you standing around? Help me put out the fire!"

But his neighbours laughed at him and said:

"Get your Georgy to help!" [I can't remember if it was George or

17 A Black Hundreds organization.

18 The *khutor* of the noblewoman Olympiada Porfirivna Chernoglazova was located five kilometres east of Gulyai-Polye.

the Archangel.][19]

Then the peasant ripped his badge from his chest and threw it in the fire.

"OK, now you're one of us, so we'll help you."

And they helped him put out the fire.

The association of "Real Russians" was no more. Victory was ours. Then the *pristav* began to hunt us down with the help of *shpiks* and provocateurs. He thought of a way to come after us, and sent a provocateur to Nestor Makhno. Just to him, and not to anyone else from our group. This person just "happened" to turn up at Makhno's cottage, approaching it from the direction of the steppe as if he was coming from the railway station. He asked for a drink of water, and said he was looking for work, that he was an electrician. He and Nestor became friends . . . . Soon he told Nestor that he had found a job: wiring electric lamps for the *pomeshchik* Hiltz.[20] Somewhat later he said that Hiltz had received 20,000 rubles from the bank. The lads decided to carry out an ex. I restrained them with difficulty, warning of a trick on the part of the "electrician." I only met this character once and immediately suspected that he was up to no good. Eventually we learned that on those days when we were expected to show up at the Hiltz estate, two dozen members of the rural militia were waiting for us. Quite a trap the *pristav* set for us! I predicted that Makhno would readily trust and befriend someone he had just met. Otherwise how would the provocateur be able to talk to him about the 20,000?

From time to time, I brought proclamations and other kinds of propaganda literature from Yekaterinoslav. I brought a whole sack of anarchist literature from Moscow and sold it quite freely in book stores. I did not ask for and did not receive any expropriated money from the group, especially since the exes were always

19 One of the Black Hundreds organizations was known as the "Union of Archangel Michael."

20 The Lutheran Karl Hiltz (1854–1912) owned large tracts of land near the village of Varvarivka, a 10 kilometres north of the centre of Gulyai-Polye. His estate included a steam-powered mill for processing grain.

carried out in my absence and I was not even informed about them. How did I live and get money for trips to Yekaterinoslav? My older brother worked at the Krieger plant,[21] and helped me a lot with clothes and money, and I got room and board from my uncle. I had a very negative opinion of the exes. I considered them a great hindrance to revolutionary work. They had a chilling effect on propaganda and were catastrophic for the organization. The Yekaterinoslav anarcho-communists, as a result, were all sitting in prison on death row and almost all of them were hanged. The survivors got *katorga*.

One time I accepted five rubles from the Yekaterinoslav group when I travelled to Moscow, since I was unemployed and had only enough money for the fare. This was at the end of May, 1906. Returning from Moscow in November, I led study groups until October, 1907. We studied political economy, cultural history, the natural history of mankind, astronomy, the origin of the Earth and life on it, and the origin of the human species. I critiqued the agrarian politics of Stolypin,[22] who was trying to destroy the remnants of communalism among the peasants. This kept me busy through the autumn of 1907.

Now Nestor created a new mess which ended fatally for us. A certain Mickey (if I remember his name correctly), from some neighbouring village, worked in the hospital.[23] Makhno made his acquaintance and spent a lot time proselytizing him. One fine day, they both got drunk and went to the edge of the village to the home of a girl to whom Mickey had proposed. They called her out of the cottage. Mickey asked her:

"You're going to marry me, right?"

21 The Mennonite-owned Krieger plant was the largest industrial enterprise in Gulyai-Polye in the early 20th century. It specialized in the manufacture and repair of agricultural machinery.

22 Pyotr Stolypin, Minister of Internal Affairs (1906–1911), whose career ended in assassination. Stolypin's decree of November 6, 1906, on the land question encouraged peasants to leave their communes and receive a plots of land in private ownership.

23 Mickey Makovsky, an orderly in the Gulyai-Polye Zemstvo Hospital, was one of the Union's *massoviks*. Makhno had recruited him as a member of the Union.

"I've turned you down several times, what more do you want from me? I said I won't, and I mean it!"

"Damn you then!" . . . and he fired the revolver he had borrowed from Makhno, evidently for this very purpose. The bullet passed through her hand and into her chest. After this he shot himself in the head, but the wound was not serious. Then Mickey and Nestor were seen driving a buggy towards the centre of the village. All the while Mickey was screaming:

"I spilled my own blood for freedom!"

Mickey ended up lying on straw in the *volost* police station; as for Makhno, I don't know where he went. Then a priest came to Mickey and took his confession. Several days later, Nestor was arrested and, shortly after, me. We were both held in solitary confinement. In the evening two policemen led me to the *pristav*. I entered the room and said

"Good evening."

"Good evening," answered Karachentsev, and struck me hard in the face twice. But he didn't know that we had made our own rule to put up with being arrested, convicted, and hanged as along as there was no physical indignity. That's why I mentally said to him (not out loud): "You're dead!" For according to our rule, those who remained in freedom were to exact a deadly revenge for his blows. And perhaps he did know this, for he seemed to know everything about us: he knew how many weapons we had, the calibre and type of our revolvers, the number of our incendiary devices, etc.

Next I was taken to the basement of the police station. The *pristav* himself came along. He ordered: "Undress him!" They removed my outerwear and boots. I was left with an undershirt on my naked body with bare feet . . . .

And he began whipping me across the shoulders in a criss-cross pattern with an officer's whip, all the while saying:

"Confess to everything!"

I replied: "I know nothing." The whipping continued.

"Confess!"

"I don't know anything."

Two policemen grabbed my arms and pinned me with my back against the wall. Karachentsev backed off six steps, clenched his fists, extended them in front of him, then rushed forward and struck me in the groin. Once, twice, and after the third time, I lost consciousness and collapsed. They poured cold water on me, and sat me on a chair:

"Confess where you were on the 26th?" [Whether it was August or September, I'm not sure. – V. A.]

"I don't know anything and I don't remember anything."

"Now I'm going to make you remember."

They knocked me on the floor, spread my legs, and the two policemen held me while Karachentsev stood over me and began beating me on the heels with a rubber truncheon as hard as he could. Again I fainted. Again they poured cold water on my face. Again the whip. They sat me on the chair:

"Well, are you going to confess?"

"No."

"Look, we're going to wring a confession out of you if it takes two weeks. We'll kill and bury you and nobody will know what happened to you. Confess. Who took a shot at Zakharov?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know anything? Well then, listen," and he began to read a police report:

"V. Antoni is the *ataman* of a gang of anarcho-communists, robbers, and arsonists who are armed with revolvers and three bombs . . . ."

He also read out the names of all the activists of the group. I was horrified at how much he knew about us. The sweat was pouring off me, but he was trembling. His hands and knees were shaking and he began:

"Do you think I enjoy beating you? Give up your *khokhols* to me

and I'll let you go. Well, not right away, you'll have to sit in jail for a while before we let you go, but you can stuff yourself, get drunk, and smoke. Confess?"

I screamed: "No!"

He flew into a rage and spat in my face.

"Take him away and but leave him alone."

The policemen Subbota and Parfomenko, who were armed with all sorts of guns and knives, led me away while holding my arms in a firm grip. I was trembling uncontrollably. They took me to the *volost* lockup. And when I, in a weakened state, stumbled across the threshold of the solitary confinement cell, Parfomenko drove his boot into my back. The *pristav* did not get to torture me any more. The investigator, who was the *zemstvo* chief, ordered the *starshina* (of the *volost*) to put an end to night-time interrogations of prisoners.

In the morning I was taken to the investigator for questioning. This interrogation was brief and conducted in a polite manner. He said:

"I'm ordering your release, but this doesn't mean you are free to go. The *pristav* has the right to hold you administratively for up to two weeks, the *ispravnik* for a month, and the governor for three months."

I passed a note to my comrades, letting them know that we had been betrayed and were all facing the gallows. I ordered them to go into hiding in Siberia or the Caucasus, and not to write letters to their families. But none of them listened to me. After ten days, we, namely Nestor and I, were sent to the № 2 police station lockup in Aleksandrovsk, in a cart with two armed policemen as guards. Nestor was sent on to prison, as he had incriminated himself in his testimony to the investigator.

After a month, they released me, which I had not expected. I really needed to flee as far away as I could get, but instead I returned to Gulyai-Polye, risking falling again into the clutches of the hangmen. I thought I would get a revolver and settle accounts with the *pristav* once and for all. But it was impossible to

obtain a revolver because everyone with weapons had already been arrested and were locked up in the Aleksandrovsk prison. While I had been sitting in the № 2 lockup, expecting either prison or exile in distant Siberia, my comrades, instead of getting as far away as possible from Gulyai-Polye, had carried out a nighttime attack on a postal wagon out on the steppe. They had killed a policeman, but the horses along with the wagon got away. I was told they hid their weapons in ponds.[24]

I stayed with my brother and was able to get work at the Krieger plant just like before I was arrested. It was wintertime. In the evenings, after work, I used to go out and return at 10 p.m. One night when I came home at 10, my brother was standing on the street waiting for me. Worried and impatient, he said:

"You need to leave right away because the police will be coming for you. Run to our uncle, borrow 10 rubles, and get out of Gulyai-Polye as quickly as possible."

My sister decided to go with me. The train from Aleksandrovsk to Yekaterinoslav was due at our station at 1 a.m. At 12:30 a.m. we showed up at the station. When we entered, whom did we see? Why Constable Zakharov and the same policeman who had come after me before. Zakharov said:

"And where are you planning to go?"

"My sister is going to Yekaterinoslav and I accompanied her to the station."

"We were at your place looking to tell you that the *pristav* wants to talk to you and requests that you come see him. You won't be arrested, we only need something explained."

"Fine," I said, "Tomorrow morning I'll go see him."

Going up to the ticket counter, I said rather loudly: "One ticket to Yekaterinoslav," and then softly: "And one more . . . ."

24 *Boeviks* of the Union made an unsuccessful attack on a mail wagon on the road from the Gulyai-Polye railway station to the village on October 19, 1907. The postman and a police guard were killed. Taking part in the attack were Prokofiy and Aleksandr Semenyuta, Yegor Bondarenko, Ivan Levadny, Kli Kirichenko, and Nazar Zuichenko.

Thinking that I was trapped, Zakharov said: "We're waiting for Nestor. He's out on bail and arriving on this train."

The train approached. After conducting my sister to a coach, I passed by the policemen, saying to them: "Tomorrow morning I will go to the *pristav*."

Then I opened the doors to the street and yelled: "Who can drive me to Gulyai-Polye?"

"Me, me, me!" several voices yelled back.

Closing the doors behind me, I whispered to the drivers: "Hang on a minute" and, quickly walking around the water tower, approached the train from the locomotive end, entered the first coach, climbed into an upper berth, lay facing the partition, and pretended to sleep. The police probably believed that I had departed for Gulyai-Polye.

After half an hour the train began to move. I breathed a sigh of relief. How long this half hour had seemed. As a precaution, I didn't travel all the way to Yekaterinoslav, but got off at the Nizhnedneprovsk station and walked on foot to the settlement of Amur. Again I was saved by a lucky break, namely, that Zakharov wasn't smart enough to arrest me. No doubt he got in trouble with Karachentsev because of this.

In Amur I stayed in a succession of different homes, and all the neighbours were well aware of who I was. This made my refuge in Amur very insecure. The comrades provided me with a Browning, which made me feel better.

Soon I hooked up with Aleksandr Semenyuta and we went to Gulyai-Polye to exact revenge on the *pristav* Karachentsev, but he wasn't there. He and some *strazhniks* had gone looking for me in Yekaterinoslav and other cities close to Gulyai-Polye. Staying any length of time in the village was impossible—reaction was in full swing. Those comrades who still hadn't been arrested lived in fear of searches.

In the evening we left, skirting the village and crossing the steppe to the station. It was bitterly cold, and we had to wait a long time for the train. We couldn't go into the waiting room, because

we would be recognized. Therefore we sat under the water tower and froze. Our fingers became like sticks and we couldn't move them. We talked quietly about how if the police jumped us, we would be in no condition to hold a Browning. And just then a cop startled us:

"And why are you sitting here? This is kind of suspicious . . . . Get into the station!"

Bessarabia guberniya prior to World War I.

As we passed the station we started to run. The cop overtook us in the steppe. And he yelled from his patrol wagon:

"Turn back to the station!"

Then with our frozen fingers we pulled out our Brownings and fired at him. The peasant driver turned the horses and dashed back to the station with the policeman. We quickly went back to Gulyai-Polye, again skirting the village. While crossing the Gaichur River, we broke through the ice and were up to our waists in water. We dried out at the home of our comrade Ivan Shevchenko and, towards evening, we took off again across the steppe to Gaichur Station[25] and returned to Yekaterinoslav.

It was also very dangerous for us in Yekaterinoslav. The *pristav* and his *strazhniks* had shaved off their moustaches and were prowling the streets, looking for me. Searches were carried out every night. It was dangerous to spend the night with acquaintances, because the penalty for harbouring us was 16 years of *katorga*. In order not to expose our friends to this peril, we walked outside the city and slept in peasants' haystacks. Actually

25 Gaichur Station was 22 km north of Gulyai-Polye on the Chaplino-Beryansk railway line. It was a major shipping point for large estates in the area, belong mainly to German colonists.

we slept under the haystacks in dens used by dogs. I lived the life of a starving dog until March, 1908.

It so happened that a comrade arrived from Kamenets-Podolsk with a request for a propagandist. I was chosen to go. I started off with a very small group of Kamenets-Poldolskans. They brought me to Khotyn. Here there was also a small group, but this was the centre of the so called "anarchist frontier." Here we had our own smugglers, who continually conveyed people illegally crossing the border into Austria; and, in the reverse direction, conducted people returning from Western Europe. The smugglers also transported weapons and literature. The border at Khotyn was the Dniester River – on the other side was Austria. The population on both sides was Ukrainian. Our smugglers received revolutionary contraband and transported it on skiffs to our side of the river and hid it by night in a prearranged location. We hired a carter and, also by night, we picked up the shipment from Chernovtsy and transported it seven kilometers to Long Hair. This was our conspiratorial name for an elderly family man, a former *Narodnik*, on account of his almost priestly locks. At his place in the forest, there was a pit which was the repository of our revolutionary contraband.

The way things worked out for me in the city of Khotyn was that I was a propagandist and issued weapons and literature (upon receiving a password) to revolutionary workers arriving from various cities of Ukraine and Russia. Soon there arrived some students from the other side of the Dniester (but still in our territory, not Austrian) who were looking for a propagandist. Grabbing a couple of Mausers, I crossed the Dniester by ferry with the students. The ferry ran till midnight. The arrangement was that the students would have me back at the ferry by midnight. In our group there were four students around 18 years old, and a 24-year-old *muzhik* with eyes that were deep blue but shifty, like those of a thief, who rummaged in all corners of the room and frequently darted out into the courtyard on some pretext or other. The first time he slipped out, I asked:

"Who is this guy? He seems suspicious?"

"Don't worry. He's one of ours."

During the discussion, a father of one of the students was also present. After a sufficient time spent in discussion, I began to demand that I be taken back to the Khotyn side. They didn't want to break off and procrastinated; there's still time, there's still time, they said, an:d then, finally

"It's already late—the ferry won't be running."

Then the *muzhik* with the shifty eyes announced that an *uriadnik*, a ***pristav***, and six policemen had arrived in the village from Kamenets-Podolsk. And then he left. I began to insist that they transport me to the other side in a skiff.

"That's dangerous by night—there's ice floating in the water. What are you afraid of? The police have their own affairs to worry about . . . ."

"Listen guys," I said, "there's going to be trouble and I will shoot."

"Don't worry, nothing will happen. And don't be afraid of this . He's one of ours."

"Fine," I said, "but even so I don't trust him."

So when they smashed in the door, I was only able to pull on my trousers. I was in my bare feet, without a jacket, and one of the students, sobbing, said:

"Jump out the window."

"OK," I said, and jumped out with two Mausers in my hands. One of the Mausers, I put in a gun belt over one shoulder, while the other one, without the wooden butt stock, I held in my left hand.[26] The student also jumped out. I shoved the Mauser into his hand and ordered:

"Follow me!"

But he began to get hysterical and, weeping, placed the Mauser against his forehead.

"Stop it! Pay attention to what's happening."

26 The semi-automatic Mauser pistol could be fitted with a butt stock that allowed the weapon to be fired more accurately.

The bazaar in pre-revolutionary Khotyn.

And I began firing at the *uriadnik*. The latter was not able to take shelter in the porch and fell wounded by bullets in both shoulders. The policemen dragged him into the porch, and everyone else took off. One cop, in trying to jump over the fence, got caught and hung upside down with his legs dangling in the air. The ones who had taken shelter in the porch were pointing Berdans[27] at me. I approached them, thinking to have it out with them, but they screamed:

"Back off, man, for God's sake, what are you doing?!"

I left them alone, went back to the student, and said:

"I've got to get to the other shore in a boat before they come to their senses and re-organize!"

We went to the home of one of the four students from the previous day. He gave me a pair of boots and a jacket and something as well for my companion. We approached the Dniester where there was a canoe.

"Auntie, give us the canoe, we'll leave it on the other side upstream."

"No! No! No!"

27 The Berdan was a Russian army rifle decommissioned in 1891.

My companion began pleading with her, begging. But auntie, still a young woman, would not give it to us! Then I went up to her, pointed to the Mauser in my holster, and told her:

"Back off!"

"Take the canoe," she said to the comrade. "Go ahead, take it—just leave it upstream."

Crossing the Dniester was dangerous even in the daytime. The water of the rapidly-flowing river was covered with floes, each of which threatened to dump us in the icy water at any moment. And that stretch of the river was 300 metres wide. It's a good thing that my "pilot" turned out to be an experienced oarsman. When we sat in this tub, its sides were almost at the level of the water. Floating between ice floes, we reached the far shore safely, and made our way through the woods to the village of Rukhshin, where I knew some people. I sent the comrade to Yekaterinoslav. The chap with the shifty eyes was rewarded for his treachery with a job in the Kamenets-Podolsk police force.

In October, 1908, we were joined by Comrade Vladimir Varfolomeyevich Rarenko, a country clerk from a village two kilometres from the Larga railway station.

"Come with me to the town of Brichany," he told us. "People there want you to hold some meetings."

We travelled half way in a small boat, and other half on foot through corn fields after it had been raining. It wasn't easy—everything was wet and muddy. We were starving, so we broke off corn cobs and chewed on them the whole way.

At dawn we arrived in Brichany. Rarenko led me to his godfather, a shoemaker.

"Don't be afraid of him. He's my godfather, he's one of our own."

This 'one of our own' said to us:

"Give me your weapons, and I'll hid them in a trunk."

Vladimir handed over his Browning, and I my Mauser. I didn't let him see my Webley pistol and kept it under the pillow on my cot. In the evening, when it got dark, the shoemaker's wife brought us

supper, but she herself went to her husband in the other half of the cottage. It seemed strange to me that she didn't have supper with us. Vladimir didn't notice anything. Our table stood very close to the door. I sat off to the side from the doors and, hearing some whispering coming from the porch, was on my guard. We were plainly visible through the window from the courtyard. We had scarcely touched our food when the door opened suddenly. A sheaf of bayonets were pointed at us:

"Stay where you are! Hands up!"

In a flash I jumped from my chair and rushed to the cot for my pistol, but one of the guards tripped me and I sprawled on the floor. But my extended hand pulled the pistol from under the pillow and I quickly twisted myself around. But I wasn't able to stand up and remained in a sitting position. The Webley wasn't broken in properly—its safety catch was very tight. Then they were on top of me, trying to take away the pistol. Seeing that it was game over, I cocked the gun with my right hand, and with my left I placed the barrel firmly against my right temple, determined not to be taken alive. With the middle finger of my right hand, I was trying to unlatch the safety catch, but it wouldn't give. And the whole bunch of them were trying to tear the pistol out of my hand. The *uriadnik* struck me in the face and on the head with his revolver, then began shooting. There were blinding flashes with each shot. A rifle shot also rang out, wounding Rarenko for no apparent reason, since he was sitting with his hands raised. Finally the barrel of the pistol got twisted around so that it was pointed at my assailants. Someone screamed:

"He's going to shoot, he's going to shoot!"

Then one of them thrust a bayonet under my left arm and would have stabbed me if my left hand, now free, had not suddenly unlatched the safety catch.

With my first shot I felled the one who intended to stab me, and with my second – the *uriadnik*. The rest of them fled. Jumping to my feet, I fired a shot at one of them who standing stiffly as if he were on sentry duty. Stumbling over three bodies, I rushed into

The ancient fortress city of Khotyn, situated between two major rivers (the Prut and the Dniester) near the borders of Russia, Austria-Hungary, and Romania, was a convenient base for smugglers.

the kitchen and began searching for a way to open the trunk and grab the weapons, but nothing was available. I shifted the trunk and laid the Webley on the table. Suddenly I noticed that the lamp was lit. I blew into the glass, and the flame died. Rarenko was sitting in a stupor with a wounded arm. I said to him:

"Why are you sitting? Run."

He left, but I didn't realize that I needed to follow him. I was still fussing about the kitchen, looking for something with which to open the trunk. The *uriadnik* wheezed:

"Cuff him!"

Suddenly I remembered that I had to run, before the guards came to their senses. Forgetting the Webley on the table, I darted out into the courtyard. It was so dark, I felt like I was blind. I stumbled to one side, then lurched in another direction, and I kept going like that. I reached the back of the courtyard, where there was a fence two metres high. I climbed on top and jumped down the other side, landing in a deep pit. It was drizzling rain. Feeling my way along the sides of the pit, I finally found a way out. Finding myself in open country, I wandered about. Since I had been shot at five or six times, I decided that I was wounded in the face and head, and that my life would soon end. I walked quickly, barefoot, without a jacket and wearing only a thin shirt. Soon I was soaked and shivering, but felt a warm liquid flowing

on my right forearm, on my left hand, and along the left side of my chest. Realizing that this was blood, I tore off some material from my long underwear, tightly bound up my left hand, and proceeded further. I emerged onto some kind of road, and plodded along in the mud. There were several carts travelling along the road. These were Jews hauling wheat. I asked them where the road led. They said, to the Romanian border. By dawn we were in a small village. One of the Jews said:

"There's an inn here, go see the innkeeper. Maybe he can get you across to Romania."

I went to see him. He asked:

"How come you got beat up?"

"Some guys in one village beat me, then they took my shoes and cap."

"And who are you?"

"I'm a deserter and I want to get to Romania." I was keeping my left hand out of sight. It was coated with dried blood so I had to keep it in my pocket, although this made me appear suspicious-looking. "How much?"

"Three rubles."

I turned away from him, got out the money, and gave it to him.

"And what are you hiding from me?"

I didn't say anything.

"Follow me."

We went to a cowshed.

"Climb up in the loft and stay there. Sit quietly."

I sat and shivered from the cold. He came back around 10 a.m. He was a huge fellow.

"Get down!" I climbed down.

"Oh, you're a piece of work. Take off, I don't want to see you again. Into the steppe and don't come back. Move!"

I left and set out walking, not knowing where I was going, and

regretting that I didn't have a pistol. Any policeman I ran into could arrest me and then there would be more torture, followed by the gallows. With a pistol, I could fight back or shoot myself —I would have a way out. The whole day I walked westward.

Towards evening I arrived as some kind of Moldovan village. I headed to the first hut on the edge of the village and found myself surrounded by five or six men. They stared at me curiously. Only one of them spoke Russian. They began to ask questions: who was I? where was I from? what was I doing?, etc. I had to lie again, but this time I reversed my story. Now I was a native of Khotyn, and my uncle there was a butcher. I was employed as a cabinetmaker in Austria.

"And why are you coming from Romania?"

"I was told that was the shortest route. My father has passed away and I'm in a hurry."

"And why is your arm bloody?"

"My chisel slipped when I heard the news that my father had died."

They engaged in an animated conversation among themselves. I kept hearing the word *uriadnik*. I realized that they wanted to take me to an *uriadnik* . . . . More heartache—how could I escape without a weapon? Then a woman of about 30 years of age entered the discussion and began heatedly demanding to know if they intended to turn me over to the *uriadnik*. She referred to me repeatedly as a "sarak" (Moldovan word for "an unfortunate person"). The men wouldn't budge for a long time. Finally they gave in to her. They asked me:

"What do you want to do?"

"Take me to Khotyn."

"No, but we can take you to such-and-such a town, and from there you can hitch a ride to Khotyn with a Jewish waggoner."

"How much do you want?"

"Ten rubles and a bottle of vodka," said one.

"Add more, ten is not enough," said another.

"I can't," I said. "I'll add another half bottle." They agreed.

The woman called me inside where a table was prepared with feta cheese and cornmeal mush. I ate, while all the men watched me. Soon a *brichka* arrived. Fearing that they had had second thoughts and were going to turn me over to the *uriadnik*, I got up from the table and crossed myself devoutly in front of the icons. I thanked the hostess warmly, not so much for the supper, as for saving me from the *uriadnik*.

I left with two Moldovans. It was dusk. As we travelled along, I thought:

"Here's where they turn into the *uriadnik's* post."

I relaxed only when we began to leave the village. Around midnight, we stopped near an inn, in order to rest and feed the horses. I passed out half a litre of vodka. They invited me into the inn. I declined. Before dawn they emerged from the inn and talked together quietly; evidently they had learned something about the drama in Brichany.

We followed the river, which meant we were going along the border with Romania. There were sentries with rifles stationed along the river. The border—I understood . . . . Here I could run into another situation where the Webley would be needed, but I didn't have it any more. My heart began to beat faster. Finally we reached our destination. I said goodbye to the drivers.

In the bazaar I bought a pair of over-size boots. I stuffed them with straw and quickly went around to a bunch of Jewish dwellings, asking where I could find a *balagula* going to Khotyn. I sat in the vehicle while the *balagula* driver went into a Jewish restaurant to have supper. I sat there, glancing around and waiting impatiently. Suddenly two police officers approached from behind. I got out of the *balagula* and slipped into the building:

"Please give me a drink of water."

The waitress went to the kitchen, and I followed her, so that the cops wouldn't notice me. The corridor ran all the way through

to the back. I wasn't at all thirsty, but I began to drink slowly. The mug was large, and when I finished, I asked for another one to drink. Then I slowly walked back to the front. The cops had moved on. I sat in the *balagula* and waited for my driver. Finally we moved out of this border town.

Now I just had to avoid running into some kind of *uriadnik*. Towards evening we arrived in Khotyn. I paid for the trip and walked through the whole city at nightfall to our "headquarters." When I took off the over-size boots, which I no longer needed, my feet were completely raw. I asked a comrade to bring me a Browning right away, and only then, when I had a revolver, did I calm down.

In the morning I went to see Granddaddy Long Hair (his real name was Kirnichny). Vladimir Rarenko was already there. The next day we were in Czernowitz, and a day later in Switzerland. We both needed urgent medical attention for our wounds. My left hand was swelling rapidly. In Geneva our comrades exerted themselves to find a solution. They asked Plekhanov's wife.[28] She conferred with a surgeon, who refused, saying:

"I can treat them, but according to our laws, I must inform the police."

Two days later my whole left side was inflamed from shoulder to foot, and I was already running a fever. Then the surgeon extracted one bullet. A second bullet he found didn't need to be extracted. Rarenko was also treated. The surgeon told me:

"Another two hours and you could not be saved."

Vladimir Rarenko wrote a letter to his village—to his godfather, a *uriadnik*. As a result he was arrested and imprisoned at the request of the Russian government. The Genevan trade union movement came to his defense. But Rarenko told the union lawyer that he wanted to go back to Russia. And he was deported to Russia. He was released from prison at the time of the October

28 The Marxist philosopher Georgi Plekhanov's wife, Rozalia, was a physician, a graduate of the medical faculty of the University of Geneva. She had a private practice in Geneva, the main source of income of the Plekhanov family.

Revolution. During the Civil War he was in charge of requisitioning horses for the Red Army.

I didn't wait to get arrested in Geneva, and left for Paris. There I became a member of the Russian group Burevestnik—an anarcho-syndicalist tendency.[29] In the Latin countries, labour unions are called "syndicates." The group provided assistance to me and other members temporarily residing in Paris, to the tune of 100 francs per month. In Russian money at the time this was 33 rubles, and sufficient to live on. And once my wounds had healed, I went to work at a distillery as a casual worker.

In the evenings, I audited courses at the Russian public university. I also went to talks put on by the Bolsheviks and other parties. When I was sound again, I decided to return to my homeland in order to settle accounts with Karachentsev. At that time Aleksandr Semenyuta was in Paris. Approximately in February, 1909, we had a group business meeting. I announced to the comrades that the Gulyaipolyans had a rule: when there are beatings and torture, those remaining in freedom must exact mortal revenge on the police. Therefore I had decided to return to Russia. Following me, Semenyuta said: "I also shall go." They gave us 300 rubles and we left.

In Vienna we couldn't make a train connection right away and had to spend the night somewhere. We checked into a small hotel. In the morning we were awakened "in the name of the law," taken to the closest police station, and then to prison. Two or three days later they sentenced us, right there in the prison, to be deported from their State. And for disrespectful behaviour we were remanded into custody for three days. After this they transported us by train to the German border and released us into Bavaria. We went back to Paris. After some time, we travelled again through Vienna, reached Czernowitz safely, and continued on to the border with suitcases crammed with literature.

We stopped in Yekaterinoslav . . . .

29 The Burevestnik (Stormy Petrel) group published a journal of the same name (1906–1910). Members of the editorial board included Nikolai Rogdaev, Mendel Dainov, and Maksim Raevsky.

Revolutionary women of Aleksandrovsk and Gulyai-Polye. Marfa Piven is standing on the left.

"Why did you come back? Here there are a dozen spies for each revolutionary. You will be betrayed!"

There was a family of revolutionaries named Kravets, well known to me, with a daughter (I don't remember her first name) who was not more than 16 at the time. I asked her:

"Are you willing to be our secret agent?"

She agreed with enthusiasm. I sent her to Gulyai-Polye in the guise of a student of the fashionable milliner Tatarintseva. Semenyuta and I went to Aleksandrovsk. After three weeks she went to Marfa Piven[30] and explained that she only had time in the evenings to "take a walk" on the square, where young people strolled up in down. On two occasions, she had seen the *pristav*, but at the sewing workshop they suspected her of being involved in prostitution and her life had become unbearable.

Then Aleksandr and I went to Gulyai-Polye and found out that there was a reward of 500 rubles for the capture of Semenyuta;

30 Marfa Piven, Aleksandr Semenyuta's lover, lived in Aleksandrovsk where she maintained a conspiratorial apartment. She was closely connected with the Gulyai-Polye anarchists.

for me the ***zemstvo*** had set a reward of 10,000 rubles.[31] It was also reported that the *pristav* had said in strict confidence:

"I know that they are here and that they have come to kill me, but I have spun a web such that they will inevitably fall into my hands."

And so we lived under constant danger until autumn. On one occasion we almost fell into a trap set by the traitor Sharovsky (first name Omelko, if I remember correctly), the brother of Grigoriy Sharovsky, a member of our group.[32] This Omelko and his wife put us in a room to sleep, and they began whispering and frequently moving back and forth between the entrance hallway and the courtyard. We lay down for an hour or so, but couldn't sleep.

"Are you sleeping?" I asked Aleksandr.

"No . . . ."

"I'm worried," I said.

"Me, too."

"Let's leave," I said.

"Good idea."

We got up and took off. We went to the home of the group mem-

31 Probably closer to 1,000 rubles for Antoni. In fact a banner was hanging in front of the local theatre offering 2,000 rubles to anyone assisting the police in the capture of both Antoni and Semenyuta. (V. M. Chop, **Записки гуляйпільського анархіста Волдемара Антонія** [Notes of the Gulyai-Polye Anarchist Voldemar Antoni], Publication № 15 of Antiquities of Southern Ukraine, (Zaporizhzhia, 2006).)

32 In fact there were three Sharovsky brothers—Prokop, Grigory, and Peter—who had connections with the UPP. Prokop and Grigory were active anarchists, while Peter was an agent of the police. On May 1, 1910, Peter reported to the authorities that one of his brothers was providing shelter for Aleksandr Semenyuta. The hut was surrounded by police and Cossacks and Semenyuta killed himself rather than surrender. Some time later, Peter was the target of an unsuccessful attack in which one of his brothers took part. After this, Peter left Gulyai-Polye and settled in Aleksandrovsk. He was arrested there by the revolutionary authorities in January, 1918, tried by a special commission, and executed.

ber Krat (in our group photo, he is the first on the left).[33] He told us:

"You must leave. They are carrying out searches. These are very troubled times."

We left. We went first to Pokrovskoye, then to Pavlograd, just surviving and marking time, then returned to Gulyai-Polye by way of Aleksandrovsk. Our headquarters was in a silo belonging to a Voznesensk peasant. In May Aleksandr and I decided to carry literature brought by us from Paris into Berdyansk *uyezd*.

We got off at Lozanovka station and went further on foot. I was feverish—as a child I had suffered for four years with malaria. We reached the outskirts of one village and sat down in the shade of trees to look around and get our bearings. Five hundred metres distant was another village, the native village of our comrade Vasily Kirilchenko.

"We'll wait till this guy passes, then we'll go."

But 'this guy' didn't pass, he stopped and asked:

"Where are you going?"

"To Martens. We're looking for work."

"Let's have a look at your bags."

In mine he found a 10-kopeck postage stamp.

"Aha!"

Then he pulled out a bullet for the Browning. He handed back the bags.

"Take your things, we're going to the station. There we'll sort things out."

It was 10 a.m. We bent over our bags and cocked our Mausers.

33 See photo on page 15. Filipp Krat was active in the UPP from 1907 to 1917. From 1917 he was a member of its successor organization—the Gulyai-Polye Group of Anarcho-Communists (GGAK) in which he held the position of secretary. He was also a member Gulyai-Polye Soviet of Peasant Deputies and was frequently elected as a delegate to congresses of Soviets at the *uyezd* level. In the Makhnovist movement he served in the economic arm of the Revolutionary Insurgent Army.

The young anarchists of Gulyai-Polye ranged all over the southern and eastern region of what is now Ukraine.

The cop was waiting, holding the bullet in his hand. I walked up to him and shouted:

"Give back the bullet!"

And I struck at the bullet, sending it flying far away, and shot him in the head. Aleksandr shot him also, and then I shot him again. Of course, we didn't go to Vasily's place, but stopped in at a neighbouring homestead for a drink of water. We thanked the girl there and walked into a field, passing Vasily's cottage. I asked Aleksandr:

"Are we going to die today?"

He replied: "We're going to die."

Hearing a commotion in the village, we lay down in the rye. Soon we were surrounded by peasants on horses, in buggies, and on foot—fully armed. Someone fired two shots from a rifle. I said:

"Let's go into the village, Aleksandr. We'll find a nice house to hole up in and defend ourselves."

When we stood up, the crowd surrounding us started screaming, whistling, and hooting. We went back into the village with the whole bunch behind us. More and more buggies were turning up. There was one *brichka* full of people, including someone with a white cap, that came towards us at a trot.

We began tossing packets of brochures and proclamations in the air. The hubbub stopped. People ran around grabbing the literature and reading it. They began to beckon us with their hands. We calmly went to meet the *brichka* that was rolling towards us. When it got close, we dashed forward and grabbed hold of the horses by the reins. I yelled:

"Everyone get off!"

We jumped into the *brichka*, and I said:

"Aleksandr, keep the Mauser on the driver!"

At the same time, I kept my Mauser pointed at the crowd and we took off in the direction of Berdyansk. The driver was a youngster. I told him to spare the horses. We noticed *brichkas* moving on both sides of us.

"They're chasing us," said the kid.

It was May 25 [1909]. The sun was beginning to set as a *brichka* full of people appeared in front, while two mounted Ingushes[34] were also bearing down on us. We speeded up a bit. I ordered:

"Straight at them."

"They'll kill me," said the kid.

"No, they won't. You'll see—they won't shoot."

34 Ingushes—members of an ethnic group with a warlike reputation indigenous to the Caucasus, often employed as security guards.

The Ingushes, levelling their Nagants at us, yelled:

"Surrender!"

The horses began to rear. Restraining the horses, the kid jumped off and ran to the side of the road. Standing up, we exchanged fire with the Ingushes. My Ingush collapsed to the ground along with his horse. He got up and ran away, limping. Aleksandr's Ingush galloped off with his cap shot off. Aleksandr took off after the wounded one. I gathered up the reins and held the horses steady. I yelled:

"Don't waste time, Aleksandr!"

We picked up the kid again and took off. The kid began to groan:

"My horse is wounded!"

Blood was flowing from its mouth. Now I asked the kid who the horse belong to.

"It's the *pomeshchik's*, used by the mounted patrol."

"Fuck him."

We jumped down. Aleksandr quickly removed the water flask, and bridled the horses. We mounted them, said goodbye to the kid, and galloped off. We could hear the Ingushes howling behind us. We rode on quickly.

Late at night we came to a small river. We wanted to drink and water the horses, but it wasn't a good place to stop. I found some kind of pool and lay down and drank something smelling of horse urine or manure.

When the sun came up, we unsaddled the horses near Pologi, and walked 12 *versts* to a neighbouring village. There we found a peasant whom I knew. He took a look at us, opened his barn, and let us in. Then he brought us buttermilk, bread, and lard. Around 4 p.m., a thunderstorm broke out and rain came pouring down.

The farmer advised us to leave and we took off for Pologi. We lost our shoes in the mud and decided to go barefoot, rolling up our trousers. It was dusk when we arrived in Pologi. Suddenly we looked into a courtyard and saw a bonfire, stacks of rifles,

and lots of guards. They had been searching for us all day in the fields, but the pouring rain saved us, otherwise we would have fallen under their bullets out in the open. Realizing that they were going to stop us, I said quietly:

"Let's pretend we're railway workers."

We began to talk loudly about how railway sleepers should be tamped and how our foreman didn't understand anything about the work. All the guards turned their attention to us, but as we were barefoot, with trousers rolled up to our knees, talking loudly to each other, they took us for railway workers.

Having passed through the village, we crossed the railway embankment, but a sentry on the embankment took a shot at us. We had to run five kilometres, and then keep moving at a fast pace. We arrived at Gulyai-Pole to the Semenyuta family. We slept or, more accurately, shivered all night in the loft in the calves' barn. Upon learning that searches were underway, we skirted the town towards evening and walked to the Giltsevo estate.

At dawn we went to the hut of one of the landlord's servants, who had been in jail with me in Gulyai-Pole. Seeing that his wife was upset, he gave us the address of his father-in-law in Orekhov and we left. Exhausted and famished, we sat down to rest along a steppe road at about 10 a.m. We fell asleep and slept for a long time.

In Orekhov we holed up in a barn for a couple of hours, then caught the night train to Yekaterinoslav. We went to the bazaar and found the wife of one of the condemned prisoners, who was selling potatoes and plums. She was glad to see us. She closed her stall and took us to her home. She fed us, and when it got dark, she said:

"Now climb over the fence to the 'gypsy' (that's what they called a dark-complexioned person), for my place may get searched."

The 'gypsy' had a husband in prison and was looking after two small children. She fixed bedding on the floor for us. Just before dawn, I woke up and went out into the courtyard. I saw that our good neighbour was being searched. Not wasting any time, I told

the 'gypsy':

"Wrap up lunches in bandannas just like workers take with them to work."

And quickly we left, for a search could have befallen the 'gypsy' as well. After passing a couple of yards, we noticed that the area was surrounded by cavalry. We found a yard where the gates were open and hid in the outhouse until 8 a.m. We were dressed like peasants. We had been carrying revolutionary literature to Vasiliy Kirilchenko, a comrade from the study circles in Pologi, but we had to toss it all away. We needed to get rid of our clothes. We went to see a comrade who was still in freedom and were able to acquire jackets. He told us:

"Leave right away."

What were we to do?! I had a comrade in Kremenchug whom I had lived with in Pologi and who had been in prison in Berdyansk at the same time as me—Ivan Chernogor. He kept weapons for us. Only there, in the suburb of Kryukov, would we be able to feel safe. The police, the detectives, and the rural mounted police were raised against us from Berdyansk to Yekaterinoslav. We had been made aware that everyone we had visited in the settlement of Amur, even if only for five minutes, had been arrested and sent away. But we dodged the pursuit because our jackets and the lunches we were carrying made us blend in. We quickly crossed a sandy wasteland to the railway bridge and walked over to the port, where we lay down among the sleeping dock workers, and pretended to be sleeping as well.

The steamboat trip ended up providing us with a safe refuge. We rested with Comrade Chernogor for a few days Disguised as carpenters with hammers, saws, and planes in our hands, we also carried shoulder bags with weapons and ammunition when we went to the pier to wait for a boat. We had a long wait. The pier was right next to the largest police administration centre in South Russia. We felt like we were sitting in a trap . . . . The other passengers waiting were three peasant girls, a guy who was heading south for seasonal work, plus two *shpiks* from the admin-

istration centre, who were eyeing us suspiciously. One of them brazenly sat down next to my knapsack and began trying to feel the contents in it before our eyes . . . . Our blood was boiling: "Don't touch!" . . . We needed better camouflage with such zealous *shpiks* around.

It was Wednesday. We placed our fish, onions, and black bread on the table and, like Orthodox people, prayed and crossed ourselves before the icon in the corner. Then we sat down to eat, while the *shpiks* kept their eyes on us all the time. A poorly-dressed, rather stout man, about 45 years old, came in and began to handle some old, dried-out pieces of bread on the table. He sniffed and fingered them with his white, chubby, clean hands. His actions indicated that he was hungry, but he didn't eat. We had the impression that he sensed that we were class-conscious workers, even though we were trying to pass ourselves off as stingy, selfish, ignorant workers, hoarding bread like misers. We got up and each of us crossed ourselves and whispered the prayer:

"We thank thee, O Christ our God, that thous hast satisfied us with they earthly gifts . . .," devoutly staring at the icon.

Convinced that we were totally reliable adherents of the monarchy, one *shpik* departed, leaving his colleague to put us to one more test. And the one who had been feeling for a weapon in my backpack said:

"So, do you guys still believe in God?"

We answered:

"Whether a person believes or not—that's up to them. But we are believers."

He responded:

"There were some other guys here, but not your kind. They went to Martens and grabbed twenty thousand!"

Our nerves were really on edge. And we needed to be completely calm and disinterested. I pulled myself together and said:

"Well, now you know we are different people."

The steamer was approaching the dock. We got up and, while we

were standing, fully expected that we had failed the test and the police would soon show up. But it all worked out.

Taking the train from Yekaterinoslav, we passed through Gulyai-Polye Station and arrived at Aleksandrovsk. Here we took out our cartridge belts. Each belt had 100 bullets: we wore two over our shoulders and the other around the waist.

We made our way to Gulyai-Polye again, but all options seemed closed to us there. Finally I remembered the group member Maria Prodan,[35] who had been a classmate of mine in the second and third class of the *zemstvo* school.[36] We went to see the Prodans. The whole family agreed to help us. The daughter Marusya, a girl of 17, agreed to be a scout. Even today I'm amazed that her father allowed her to take part in an affair fraught with danger for him and his family. They put us up in the attic. The door to the attic was on the street side, so we could come and go only at night.

After about a week, Maria told us some good news, that there would soon be a show at the theatre. And Karachentsev always attended these shows. So we made a decision: I was well known in the centre of town, especially by the police, while Aleksandr Semenyuta was virtually unknown. He had worked for a *pomeshchik* since childhood, and his family's hut was in Gurevka,[37] on the edge of town, far from the centre. Thus he would go with Marusya to the show, and they would sit in the last row, in the corner, near the door. They would stay there until the end, and when the *pristav* was leaving, they would follow him.

Meanwhile Petr Onishchenko[38] and myself would go to Yuz-

35 Maria Prodan (born 1891), a native of Gulyai-Polye, had moved to Yekaterinoslav to attend a trade school. She acted as a liaison between groups in the two centres.

36 Public (non-parochial) elementary school.

37 One of the seven neighbourhoods of Gulyai-Polye.

38 Petr Semenovich Onishchenko (1885–1910). was a *boevik* of the UPP who took part in many expropriations and terrorist acts. He was born in Gulyai-Polye to the family of a poor peasant. He was arrested in early 1908, but managed to escape and found refuge in France in 1909. In 1910, while returning home to continue the struggle, he was ambushed and killed while trying to cross the border near Khotyn.

ovka[39] right away and kill the executioner Mikhailovsky, a so-called "detective *pristav*." He beat political prisoners so badly that not only the walls, but the ceilings were covered with blood. He had already been attacked on two different occasions, but the would-be assassins had failed, and in fact had fallen into his clutches.

Upon arrival in Yuzovka, we went with one comrade before evening to search out this executioner. We covered the whole town, visiting clubs and many other places. Finally we found him on the street. I had a Mauser in a holster in my belt and both of us had Brownings in our pockets. When we got close to him, I shot him in the chest. He remained upright. Petr also shot—poorly—and wounded him in the leg. But he just stood there like a statue. Then the shooting stopped—I pulled the trigger again and again, but the Browning remained silent. I held the gun in my left hand and ejected the cartridge case with my right . . . . Again I squeezed the trigger. The Browning was still silent. A real nightmare. I pulled out another cartridge . . . . Finally Mikhailovsky realized what was going on. He darted away, crossing the street, and pulled out both a Browning and a Nagant, firing both weapons at us. There was nothing else to do but get out of there. This incident had such a sobering effect on me, that I immediately was overcome with apathy.

From Yuzovka to Rudnik[40] was around four to six kilometres. At first we ran. The steppe was lightly covered with snow. We expected a pursuit; Mikhailovsky had seen where we were running. For me running away was a humiliation which I couldn't bear. I lay down on the snow and began asking Petr why he didn't shoot, but he didn't respond.

"Get up, Volodya, for they may send horsemen after us."

I pulled out my Mauser, set it on its stock on the ground, and said:

39 Yuzovka derived its name from the Welsh entrepreneur John James Hughes (1814–1889), who established several mines and a metallurgical plant in the area. The city was renamed Donetsk in 1924.

40 One of the districts of Yuzovka which, like many Russian industrial centres, was a collection of discrete settlements. The total population of Yuzovka at the time was about 30,000.

"Tell me, why didn't you shoot? After all, you were there to punish an executioner, and you saw that my Browning had jammed."

"Yes, but I thought we had done enough damage."

"How could we have done enough if he was still standing?!"

I became indifferent to everything and didn't get up. Petr began to beg me to get up and keep going. We moved on, and suddenly he noticed that I had left my Mauser behind. He ran back, retrieved the Mauser, and caught up with me, urging me to go faster. When we arrived, our guide was already at home. Without losing any time, all three of us went to the railway station and left for Aleksandrovsk.

Aleksandr was already there. I told him:

"Now that Karachentsev has been finished off,[41] my obligations to our imprisoned comrades are fulfilled. We have nowhere to live. The reaction will be stronger than ever. If we don't leave Russia, we will perish in vain."

I couldn't persuade Semenyuta. He had made up his mind to remain. Myself, Onishchenko, and the guide from Yuzovka (his nickname was Apollo), set out in December, 1909, for Konotop. Ulyana Kravets, sister of the girl I had sent as a secret agent from Yekaterinoslav to Gulyai-Polye, was in hiding in Konotop. She had to leave Yekaterinoslav, where she was in danger of being arrested and put on trial. Our arrival raised her spirits, and all of us left for Khotyn on the next train.

We crossed the border at night, illegally, into Austria and travelled to Paris. Five months later, Petr Onishchenko and Chernozem, the oldest revolutionary of Amur (he had been a boilermaker in the railroad workshops), left Paris for Russia, crossing the frontier illegally. But the smuggler who was their guide sold them out. The comrades of this smuggler whom we had previously used had already been arrested, and the new one turned

41 Anton Karachentsev was shot and killed by Aleksandr Semenyuta following a theatre performance that both attended in Gulyai-Pole on the evening of November 21-22, 1909. The incident was written up in the anarchist journal ***Burevestnik***, published in Paris. Karachentsev left a wife and two small children.

out to be a traitor. Transporting our guys across the Dniestr in the dark of night, he told them:

"Sit tight, and I'll be back shortly."

He stepped away from the boat, which was then exposed to a massive volley of rifle fire from a squad of soldiers. Onishchenko was killed, while Tikhon Zhirkov (Zhirchikov) received eight bullet wounds, but survived. Zhirkov sat in prison until 1917. Freed by the Revolution, he didn't quarrel with the Bolsheviks, but began to help them, and was appointed a commissar in the city of Kursk, his hometown.

* * * * *

Now I have to go back to Gulyai-Polye again, at least in thought, and think about who, and what, we were, what I wanted to do there, and what was done against my will, and why.

The dominant program in the working class in Russia was that of the Leninist-Bolshevik Social-Democratic Party, which called for the overthrow of the autocracy, followed by the establishment of a bourgeois republic. Only then would begin the struggle for the maximum program—victory over capitalism and the inauguration of socialism. The Socialist-Revolutionaries also had minimum and maximum programs with a final goal of socialism. This was a very revolutionary epoch. Working class youth burned with the fire of revolution. Everyone wanted to proceed to the end without transition periods. In fact the anarchists promised communism "on the day after the revolution." This was very seductive! Thus, with hundreds of other revolutionary workers, I fell in with the anarchists. All of us, in that distant era, revelled in the anarchist idea, as immediate liberation from our everyday sufferings—from need and the oppression of capital. But the big mistake of the anarchists was their basic tactic—expropriation. It seemed to them that by expropriating, they were hitting the target, whereas it soon turned out that they were shooting themselves in the foot. The most developed workers, capable of producing propaganda and conducting study circles, ended up on death row in prisons. While visiting Yekaterinoslav

to pick up literature, I received an invitation from Sergei (from Sevastopol) and Misha (from Simferopol) to take part in the expropriation of a cashier's wicket at some railway station not far from Yekaterinoslav.

"I have a peasant group and I attach greater importance to propaganda and organization than to expropriation," I said. They did not insist.

After my release from the Berdyansk prison, I spent two months in Gulyai-Polye with my group. Every evening we would hold study sessions that lasted till midnight and later. Upon receiving a letter from Ivan Chernogor in Moscow with the promise of work, I left, without ever hinting about the necessity of any kind of expropriation for our organization in Gulyai-Polye. Therefore I was astounded to read about exes carried out by the Gulyai-polyans in the ***Moskovskiye vedomosti***.[42] I mean, just think: engaging in armed robbery in a town where we were conducting revolutionary agitation, organization, and propaganda—and growing our revolutionary ranks. This was a blatant failure that reflected on the whole organization, on all of our work. The best we could expect was *katorga*, the worst—the gallows. In December, 1906, upon arriving back from Moscow, I again engaged in group cultural-educational work. From time to time, we hectographed leaflets in the name of the Union of Poor Peasants. Exes were not repeated. But I realized that we had already failed, that we were already "on the ropes." It was too bad for the guys, but nothing could be done. The fact remained: we were dead in the water.

The government promulgated a law allowing peasants to leave their commune and establish themselves on independent farms. We regarded this as undermining our vision of socialism, of communism. We published a leaflet attacking this law, which we regarded as inimical to the peasants. Soon the "Union of Genuine Russian People" made its appearance. This organization of Karachentsev and the *pomeshchiks* was a reaction to the Union of Poor Peasants. Again we issued a hectographed leaflet attacking

42 ***Moscow News***, the Moscow newspaper with the largest circulation.

them and busted up their get-together where the German *pomeshchiks* were proposing "to build more churches for the Russian peasants." But then Nestor and Mickey, both drunk, created a public spectacle in which a shot was fired at a girl, imagined by Mickey to be his finance. That was the beginning of the end of the Gulyai-Polye Union of Poor Peasants.

It should be emphasized here that Mickey was not a member of our organization, but was probably well informed about us through Nestor. After Nestor was arrested, it was soon my turn to fall into their hands. Then the attack on the postal wagon in the steppe took place. After that there were many arrests. But they released me, hoping, apparently, that I would lead them to the rest. The pressure was so intense that I didn't contact anyone and they didn't try to contact me. I continued to work at the factory and waited for someone to bring me a weapon so that I could settle accounts with Karachentsev.

Nearly falling into his clutches again, I left for Yekaterinoslav, Khotyn, etc. So after December, 1907, I was no longer a resident of Gulyai-Polye and have only dim memories of events as they were described to me by Aleksandr Semenyuta. Zuichenko and Petr Onishchenko were exiled to Arkhangelsk *guberniya*, from which they soon escaped. They went into hiding not far from Gulyai-Polye.[43]

Ivan Levadny, who regularly performed in amateur performances both as an actor and a dancer,[44] left for Aleksandrovsk where he fell in with the theatre crowd. There he became friends with a person who was a *shpik* (spy or a provocateur). They travelled together to Gulyai-Polye. The *shpik* familiarized himself

43 Antoni's memory failed him here. Onishchenko fled to France in 1909 and was killed trying to cross the Russian border in 1910. Zuichenko was sentenced on March 19, 1911, to 25 years of *katorga*, which he served in the *katorga* prison in Saratov until released by the 1917 revolution.

44 Ivan Levadny belonged to the theatre group which started at the Kerner farm machinery plant in Gulyai-Polye, members of which were *massoviks* in the Union of Poor Peasants. The theatre group later became associated with the Kolizey, the town's auditorium. The group managed to exist until 1927, despite ongoing repression of its members.

Gulyai-Polye, and began to patrol the centre of the town with the police, carrying out arrests in the evening. Then Levadny, disguised as a girl, along with some of his comrades, attacked this jerk, wounding him.[45]

Once there was an evening meeting at Levadny's hut attended by the Semenyuta brothers—Prokofiy and Aleksandr—and some other comrades.[46] They were followed, and late at night a police officer knocked on the door:

"Open up!"

The comrades opened the door and shooting began. Prokofiy was seriously wounded in the stomach, while the *uriadnik* Lebedchenko also fell. The latter addressed Levadny:

"Vanya, don't kill me."

But, unfortunately, Vanya finished him off, so I was told by Aleksandr Semenyuta.[47]

Then a gun battle commenced with the police. The comrades attacked the police several times and tried to harness horses to someone's *brichka*. This effort ended in failure and they had to carry the wounded Prokofiy in their arms. It was starting to get light out . . . . Prokofiy said:

"Leave me behind, or we will all perish."

So they left. When the sun rose, Prokofiy was lying on the street surrounded by peasants. He told them what had happened during the night, told them that he was a member of the Union of Poor Peasants, and that the Union was fighting against capitalism for freedom and communism. He asked the peasants to step

45 The police agent Kushnarev was attacked by Ivan Levadny and Aleksandr Semenyuta on June 1, 1908. Wounded by two bullets, he died two days later.

46 This meeting took place on July 28, 1908.

47 The *uriadnik* Savely Lebedchenko may have been a secret sympathizer of the UPP, according to historian V. M. Chop. His eldest son Aleksandr became a member of the group in 1907. Thinking that his son might be present at the meeting, he burst into the hut, shot Prokofiy Semenyuta, and was seriously wounded himself before being finished off by Ivan Levadny. Lebedchenko's two sons and daughter were active participants in the Makhnovist movement.

aside and then he shot himself. A heroic woman, the wife of Prokofiy's older brother Andrey, completely fearless, rushed to Prokofiy to try to save him, but he was already dead. Soon the police showed up. They carelessly tossed the corpse in a cart and took it away. Apparently it was forbidden to bury him in the cemetery since he was a suicide. So he was buried beside the cemetery. This is from my vague memory of the story I heard from Aleksandr, who tried to save his brother by carrying him on his back. But at the time I was already in Khotyn.

Now it's necessary to give a little description of the members of the Union of Poor Peasants. They were all good guys, morally pure, non-drinkers, and enthusiastic about communism. I recall once Prokofiy said to me:

"I don't want to die, I want to get married and live a quiet life."

I told him: "If that's so, then leave us. Don't socialize with us and get married and live quietly. We won't judge you."

He replied: "But I don't want to give up the fight either . . . ."

So who was this Aleksandr? He hardly ever showed up at the study circles because he was working for a *pomeshchik*. In the autumn of 1906 he was called up for military service. He served until winter.[48] In front of the doors of the barracks in large letters was written:

"Praying to God—and service to the Tsar—are not lost."[49]

"Semenyuta! Pay heed to what is written there."

"This is all a lie," Aleksandr responded, "prayer will disappear, and the service too!"

Realizing that he was now threatened with transfer to a disciplinary battalion, he waited until darkness and deserted from the tsarist army. Making his way stealthily to the second floor of the barracks, he climbed through a hatch onto the roof, and then

48 Aleksandr Semenyuta was called up for military service (to Odessa) in November or December of 1907, not 1906. His stint in the armed forces lasted a mere nine days. (Thanks to Yuriy Kravets for this information.)

49 An aphorism by the 18th century statesman Grigory Potemkin that became a motto of the Russian military.

down a drainpipe to the street. He exchanged garments with the first worker he met: an old jacket for a military overcoat, and a workman's cap for army headgear. Aleksandr then returned to Gulyai-Polye. Repeated searches forced him to move to Yekaterinoslav, but he frequently returned to visit his family (he had a wife and two children).

In Yekaterinoslav there was a deputy marshal named Mrachek. The whole population hated him. He would show up late at night, throw a whole family out of their beds, turn everything upside down, and shout to the men:

"You want a piece of me? Just say when!"

And he would toss a three-kopeck coin into the air and hit it with a shot from his Browning.

Aleksandr and another comrade shot him in the middle of the afternoon on a busy street.

Aleksandr's favourite poem was "The Nymph" by Maxim Gorky. He would often declaim:

A nymph lived long about a stream . . . .

And he would finish the poem with emphasis and fervour:

And you who safely live on land
Where poor blind worms belong,
***Your** deeds will move no poet's hand,*
***Your** name inspire no song."*[50]

His older brothers were killed in the civil war: the oldest—Andrey,[51] and the second—Yakov. I no longer remember the circumstances, and I wasn't around when it happened. There were 40 *boeviks* in our organization: Yamarkivtsi, Gurivtsi, and Verbivtsi.[52] There were 200 *massoviks*.

50 Translated by J. Vital DePorte and Roy Temple House.

51 Andrey Konstantinovich Semenyuta was actually younger than Aleksandr and Prokifiy. He belonged to the Gulyai-Polye Group of Anarcho-Communists in 1917–1918, and is mentioned in Makhno's memoirs.

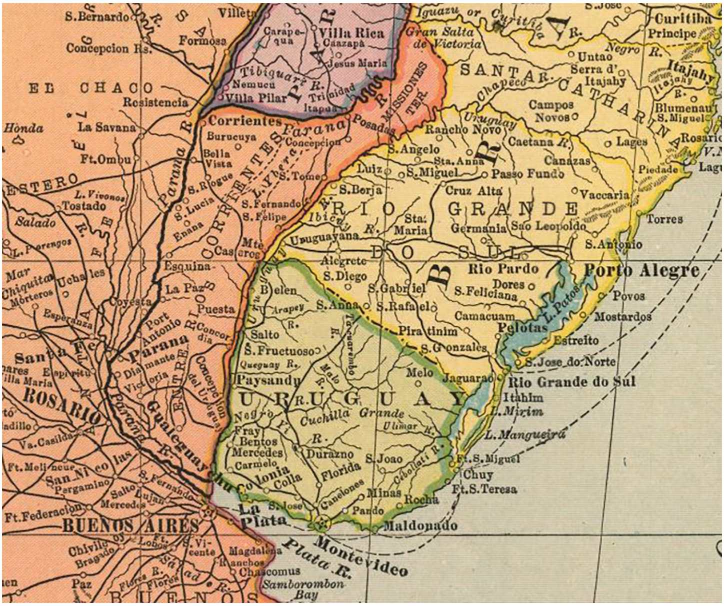
52 Inhabitants of three of the sotnias (neighbourhoods) of Gulyai-Polye: Yamarochnaya, Guryanskaya, and Verbovskaya.

South America

After the failure in Yuzovka with Mikhailovsky, I sank into apathy, my nerves completely shot. I decided to go to South America for six months. On October 10, 1909, I arrived in Buenos Aires. After working as a labourer for miserable wages, I moved to Rio-de-Janeiro. The immigrant reception centre gave me free passage to the cooler southern state of Paraná to work on railway construction. The pay was low, while the grub was dry, salty meat. We used it to make soup with black beans, but it was so salty that crystallized salt appeared on our lips, shoulders, and shoulder blades. We broke up the ground with pickaxes, loaded wheelbarrows, and wheeled them to the place marked by the private contractor. A layer of mosquitoes covered our faces and hands. Even though I was not a smoker, I had to smoke a pipe with strong Brazilian tobacco, which had to be cut with a knife. I had to puff on the pipe from morning to night. You received money for your labour when the contractor transferred his section of the road to the railroad company.

After reviewing my situation, I left for a less isolated location. I worked for a sawmill, dragging logs and boards all day. Then more earth-moving work, building railway embankments, with no prospect of earning more than dry, salty meat with black beans and strong, black coffee. Working my way from the wilderness eastwards, I found myself in the state of Santa Catarina, at the construction site of a very large, North American-owned sawmill. Here I worked as a stevedore, building the railway with pick-axe and wheelbarrow, hauling sleepers and rails, and pounding spikes with a hammer. I ended up becoming a stoker, then operating a steam-powered crane.

Here there were Russians and many Austrian Ukrainians. I taught them to sing revolutionary songs, propagandized them, then invited them to help imprisoned women in Yekaterinoslav—among them Marfa Grigorevna Piven. I collected 50 milréis, added 50 of my own, and sent it off. From correspondence with the prisoners I learned that the money had been received.



Voldemar Antoni spent 52 years in South America, where he lived in Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay.

A denunciation took place. Myself and the Potemkin veteran Makhota[53] were arrested. A few days later I left for Argentina. There were a lot of Russian workers and peasants there who, upon seeing the American paradise of millionaire-landlords and their own hell of "gringo" greenhorn labourers, working for a paltry wage, and facing unemployment when the War came, were easy to revolutionize. That was my main concern until my return to the Soviet Union.

I worked as a handyman in construction, as an electrician's helper, dug ditches for electrical conduits, and paved roads. Every summer I went into the fields to harvest wheat.

Then 1914 came and World War I broke out. Factories and production shut down in Brazil and Argentina. From Buenos Aires alone 500,000 workers dispersed throughout the coun-

53 Stepan Grigorievich Makhota, (1883—?) took part in the mutiny on the battleship Potemkin in June, 1905.

try. I hitched rides on freight trains, travelled about the Pampas on foot, and spent two months under pouring rain in Santa Fe province. In the city of Rosario, I worked as a labourer in the construction of railway workshops and at the port loading wheat onto European steamships. I got to the border with Paraguay. Went to the department of Misiones on foot. I traversed the Misiones Plateau twice, then crossed the Uruguay River and again found myself in Brazil, where I visited a settlement of Guaranis, where there were also some Siberians. I helped them hunt wild boars. From Paris I received V. I. Lenin's newspaper (I don't remember the name), which he published first in Paris, then in Switzerland.

Using this newspaper, I taught a boy from one Russian family to read in Russian. And six months later, I left for Argentina again, for the wheat harvest. Then I went to Tucumán province. There I worked at a hydro-electric station. A strike took place and I and some others were fired. I went to Paluga again to harvest wheat.

Then I worked in the province of Entre Ríos in a cold storage packing plant. Back to the Pampas harvesting wheat with pitchforks. And so it went until the revolution of 1917—harvesting corn, wheat, and potatoes. Then I found out from newspapers that the *Duma* had removed Nicholas II from the throne. I rushed to Buenos Aires in order to leave for revolutionary Russia. In Buenos Aires, at the May Day demonstration, I met with a group of Russian workers. They persuaded me to go to the settlement of Berisso, where there were many Russian workers, employed in two American-owned cold-storage slaughterhouses, and organize a cultural-educational society. This I easily managed. Every evening I led discussions about the Russian Revolution. Subsequently, this became the largest Russian labour organization in South America. The money which I had saved for travelling to Russia was gradually used up. Every morning I stood in the crowd of unemployed at the gates of first one, then the other, slaughterhouse, hoping for work. But I didn't get any, thanks to my activity in the Russian labour organization.

Under the influence of the Russian Revolution, strikes broke

out in both slaughterhouses. The Americans panicked. The government provided some kind of naval vessel. Sailors with machine guns were stationed on the roofs of both plants and for two nights, from sunset to dawn, without any cause, fired on the whole settlement, the buildings of which were constructed of one-inch boards. Every now and then an ambulance raced about the village, picking up wounded. It was impossible to go outside. A searchlight would immediately pick you out and the machine guns would commence firing.

I didn't wait for the third night. Instead I went into the country to look for work so that I could at least feed myself, but couldn't find anything for two months. Then I spent the summer harvesting grain, before returning to Buenos Aires. I was sent to organize Russian workers into a cultural-educational society in the town of Zárate. I organized. I wanted to go home. The only possibility was to travel to England, on English steamships transporting live cattle, and pay for my passage by looking after the cattle. But for this to happen, you first of all had to go to an Orthodox church, make a confession to Deacon Izraztsov, take communion, kiss the cross and the hand of the priest, and then go to the consul for permission to go to England. Otherwise, the English wouldn't take our people on their ships. So my travel plans foundered.

In 1918 the Federation of Russian Workers' Organizations in South America was established. The task of finding a name and declaration for the organization was entrusted to Aleksandrovsky (the only Bolshevik in the upper ranks of the Federation), Sigal, and myself. I was the chair of the first congress of the Federation, and a delegate to subsequent congresses. In 1920–1921, I was editor of the Federation's newspaper ***Golos Truda***.[54]

In the Federation of Russian Workers' Organizations in South America, my job was administrator. The Federation had an anarcho-communist orientation. At that time, throughout all the Latin countries of Europe and America, there was a strong an-

54 The newspaper ***Golos Truda*** [The Voice of Labour] was published fortnightly with a monthly supplement from 1919 to 1930. It was closed by the Argentine government in 1930 after publishing 322 issues.

archo-syndicalist movement, but after the Great Soviet October Revolution this movement went into decline. The Russian Civil War and the intervention by capitalist countries played a role here. People understood that without Marxist teaching, without the dictatorship of the proletariat, the victory of the workers' revolution was inconceivable. The anarchist movement died out, as if by the wave of a magic wand. It was replaced by the Marxist-Leninist, Communist movement.

After a year and a half of work in the Federation, and recognizing my complete disagreement with the direction of the newspaper ***Golos Truda***, as determined by the editorial committee, I left the Federation and it collapsed. ***Golos Truda*** fell silent. People realized that things don't happen as fast as in a fairy tale.

After dropping out of the Federation, I went to Uruguay. In Montevideo I worked as a labourer in a cold storage slaughterhouse. Here, in Montevideo, there was a cultural-educational society, which I joined. We met every evening. A good choir was formed. The meetings ended with the singing of revolutionary songs. There was a Russian library, and we often staged theatrical performances. Money raised was used for the library. We organized a Russian school for children with a paid teacher, financed through member dues. Every evening I informed the comrades about happenings in the homeland. I also spoke at indoor mass meetings and outdoor rallies for the Russian public, in Russian.

Here I must say that I was a great enthusiast of the October Socialist Revolution from the very beginning. It was the realization of my dream from the age of 16.

The civil war in Soviet Russia, with its victorious, albeit difficult, course—foreign intervention, everything that happened at that fateful time in Russia—convinced me every day that without the dictatorship of the proletariat, without the Leninist Bolshevik Party, our socialist revolution would be easily crushed by the reactionary Whites and the intervention of the capitalist countries.

At that hour, news began to arrive from England that the British authorities were not allowing Russians from South America

into Russia; they were being diverted to work in coal mines. Having decided that the internationalist does not care where to fight for the world social revolution, I temporarily abandoned the thought of repatriation. Because of my obvious dedication to the revolutionary cause, it was hard to hold a job. I was a foundry worker, a construction worker, and I removed the rust from steamships—in other words, I wasn't picky. In 1924, lack of employment forced me to leave Montevideo and move to the department of Paysandú. There, in the forest along the Uruguay River, I took up beekeeping. My family was growing and it was no longer possible to put up with chronic unemployment.

Coming to the city for groceries, I always visited the labour union local with a communist orientation. I helped the Party with its fundraising efforts and took away Party literature and newspapers. Having acquired Uruguayan citizenship, I began to vote for the Communist Party. So I lived in sync with the Communist Party of Uruguay until I left the country. During the Second World War, I even spoke from the rostrum of the Communist Party on Constitution Square of the city of Paysandú on behalf of the city's Slavic groups, in Spanish, praising the CPSU that saved humanity from Nazi extermination and slavery.

In 1931 my landlord evicted me from his estate. I settled with my bees near the city—the location of the apiary was not important. I occupied myself with market gardening and moved the apiary: first 25 km away on islands in the Uruguay River, then 65 km away in the forest. In other words, a difficult struggle for existence began. The only advantage was that, living in a settled area, the children could go to school. Then the bees began to die off due to epidemic diseases. These were the conditions when 1941 arrived.

The insidious attack of the Nazi invaders on my socialist homeland! . . . I couldn't worry about my own welfare. I went to the city and pulled together 15 Russians. I told them about the inhuman character of the Nazi invasion. I organized a Committee for Assistance to the Soviet Red Army. Soon there were 70 of us. At my suggestion, we imposed a large membership fee, organized celebrations, collected funds. In 1943 I was a delegate to

Voldemar Antoni with his family prior to returning to his homeland.

the Slavic Congress of Latin America from the Slavic population of Paysandú. Subsequently, for a number of years, I was a delegate to the Slavic assemblies of the Republic of Uruguay, held in Montevideo.

After the war, our Committee was converted to the Maxim Gorky Club. I occupied the positions of either chairperson or secretary, and, in fact, generally steered the orientation of the Club in a socialist direction. I delivered speeches on the occasions of holidays (of course, we observed only Soviet ones). During meetings I defended the dictatorship of the proletariat, and unceremoniously attacked American imperialism, which was a major force in Uruguay. I proved that the bourgeois state is nothing more than the dictatorship of capital, oppressing the working class.

All my life abroad I was drawn to my homeland. But my wife, Nadezhda Ivanovna Zabelina, always managed to delay the time of departure. Finally, she agreed, but when the time approached, she again refused. Then I asked the consul if I had the right to go

along with those of my sons who agreed to leave. The answer was affirmative. The Soviet embassy in Montevideo knew me as a reliable patriot. In 1962 the Soviet embassy allowed me, with three sons, a daughter-in-law, and two grandchildren to go home—to the Soviet Union, on the whaling vessel "Slava."

On May 5, 1962, the Consul and the TAS agent hugged us, said goodbye, and we sailed to the sacred shores of my homeland.

On June 5, the "Slava" reached the port of Odessa. On June 6, 1962, in a state of profound agitation, I set foot on my native soil, in the land of the world's first socialist state.

I don't miss South America, with its capitalist unemployment.

—*Voldemar Genrikhovich Antoni*

Letter from V. G. Antoni to V. I. Yalansky[1]

February 2 1974

Dear Viktor Ivanovich,

I've read all your letters and I've come to the conclusion that you are a fine person, with a firm convictions.

Your ancestor, Nestor Makhno, beyond any doubt, was a gifted person. It's probably a little awkward to hear this from me, but according to one of our Ukrainian proverbs: "Love God and the truth." Nestor was dear to me, like many others in my Gulyaipolyan peer group.

I'm now bedridden. And it appears that very soon I will remain chained to the bed "until the bitter end." When I feel a little better, I will get some fresh air and may even go to the grocery store . . . .

I knew Nestor from childhood, when he was seven and I was nine. He and I made snowmen on Yarmorochnaya Square in the winter, and in the spring we played a game with sticks and chasing a ball around [*lapta*]. There still wasn't any football [soccer] then—the English invented it much later. But our games were more intelligent and interesting, so it's strange that football has erased *lapta* from people's memory and children have forgotten how to play it. Football, when it takes an official form, is no longer a children's game, but a way for professional athletes to earn big money.

Nestor and I were students in the same school—the *zemstvo* one. It was located on Tserkovnaya Square; the bazaar was on the same square—it operated on Wednesdays and Sundays.

Nestor was in the first class, and I was in the second. We skated together with other kids on the Gaichur River, not far from the bazaar. A year later, as I recall, he fell through the ice at a spot where horses used to bathe in the summer. The river was just barely covered with thin ice. We were skating at midday, and

1 Viktor Ivanovich Yalansky was a grandson of Nestor Makhno's older brother Karp.

there were a lot of us on the ice. We should have been more careful, because the ice was starting to crack. And Nestor just fell through. He clutched at the edges trying to get out of the water, but the sheet of ice kept breaking. All of us looked on in horror. Finally he managed to climb out and run home. And his home was two km away.

In the autumn of 1908, the two of us were arrested and taken in a wagon to the *uyezd* capital of Aleksandrovsk, accompanied by two policemen armed with Berdan rifles. We were locked up at the #2 police transit unit, and there we parted ways forever. Nestor was sent away to prison, while I was left in the unit for a month, then released in the custody of my sister.

I'm looking at the portrait of Galina Andreyevna[2] that you sent me, and I think of how much she suffered, how difficult was her bitter life. Her daughter looks a lot like Nestor. The era of revolution had a tremendous impact on our destinies—on the destinies of hundreds of thousands of people.

* * * * *

[Voldemar Antoni never regained his strength and died on May 15, 1974.]

2 Galina Andreyevna Kuzmenko (1892–1978), Makhno's widow.

In the early 1990s, Voldemar Antoni's family left Ukraine because of the drastic deterioration in the standard of living and returned to South America. Then there was no one to look after Voldemar's grave in Nikopol, which became overgrown with weeds. In the 2010s the grave was discovered by local enthusiasts of the Makhnovist movement, who arranged to have it refurbished, ironically at the expense of the State.

Photos: from the ***Nikipol News*** (May 14, 2020). Standing next to the monument is journalist Vladimir Shak, who has written about the grave and also published a an online work **The Unknown Makhno** (2018).

SOURCES

N. I. Makhno, ***My Autobiography*** *//* ***Rassvet***, 5 January 1926 № 493, pp. 2–3; 6 January 1926, № 494. pp. 2–3; 7 January 1926 № 495, pp. 2–3; 8 January 1926 № 496, pp. 2–3; 9 January 1926 № 497, pp. 2; 11 January 1926 № 498, pp. 2–3; 12 January 1926 № 499, pp. 2–3; 13 January 1926 № 500, pp. 2–3; 14 January 1926 № 501, pp. 2–3; 15 January 1926 № 502, pp. 2.

N. I. Makhno, ***My Life in Prison*** *//* ***Rassvet***, 23 March 1926 № 559, pp. 2–3; 24 March 1926 № 560, pp. 2–3; 25 March 1926 № 561, pp. 2–3; 26 March 1926 № 562, pp. 2–3; 29 March 1926 № 564, pp. 2–3; 30 March 1926 № 565, pp. 2–3; 31 March 1926 № 566, p. 2; 1 April 1926 № 567, pp. 2-3; 2 April 1926 № 568, p. 3; 3 April 1926 № 569, p. 4.

The memoirs of V. G. Antoni were published in:

V. N. Chop, ed., **Notes of the Huliaipil Anarchist Voldemar Antoni**, Publication № 15 of ***Antiquities of Southern Ukraine***, (Zaporizhzhia, 2006).

Antoni's letter to F. I. Kushch is also found in this collection.

GLOSSARY

ataman	gang leader
balagula	covered wagon
batrak	rural day-labourer
boevik	member of revolutionary organization willing to sacrifice their life, if necessary, to carry out expropriations ("exes") and armed attacks. Subject to group discipline.
brichka	long carriage with four wheels, folding top over the rear seat, a rear-facing front seat, and a seat in front for the driver. Pulled by two horses.
Duma	lower house of the Russian state legislature (1906–1917), elected on the basis of limited suffrage.
guberniya	province
ispravnik	chief of police of a *uyezd*, subordinate to the governor (gubernator).
katorga	the Greek word for "galley slavery," used to describe the tsarist system of penal servitude. Prisoners subject to this regimen were known as *katorzhniks*. During the late tsarist period, political prisoners sentenced to terms of *katorga* often enjoyed special privileges, such as access to reading and writing materials.
khutor	hamlet, a small rural settlement built around one homestead
kolbasa	smoked sausage
kulak	small landowner, especially one who had left a rural commune to take up private ownership.
massovik	member of a revolutionary organization engaged mainly in low key activities such as attending study circles, distributing leaflets, and providing shelter for "illegals." Not required to observe group discipline.
muzhik	peasant

Narodnik	member of political conscious movement of the 1860s – 1870s aiming to arouse the rural population against tsarism.
parasha	a wooden stool containing a covered chamber pot
pomeshchik	landowner, member of the rural gentry
porot	corporal punishment
povit	Ukrainian for *uyezd* (see below)
pristav	senior police officer, subordinate to an *ispravnik*
shpik	informer working for the police.
starik	old man; plural: *stariki*
starosta	in Russian prisons, a prisoner elected by political prisoners to represent them in dealings with the administration; also, an appointed official in charge of a Ukrainian village, similar to the British "reeve."
starshina	the appointed chief of a *volost*, the smallest rural administrative unit of the Russia empire
strazhnik	literally "guard"; lowest rank in the tsarist police system
telega	four-wheel, horse-drawn wagon designed to carry heavy loads
uriadnik	junior police officer, subordinate to a *pristav* and supervisor of *strazhniks*
uyezd	administrative division of a guberniya. Gulyai-Polye was located in Aleksandrovsky uyezd of Yekaterinoslavskaya guberniya.
verst	unit of distance equal to 1.1 km.
volost	administrative division of a *uyezd*. Gulyai-Polye was the administrative centre of a *volost* of the same name.
zemstvo	a council elected to administer local affairs in rural areas of the Russian empire, concerning itself with general education, public medical service, road maintenance, and economic development.