

The Makhnovshchina and Anti-Semitism-

Nestor Makhno

For the past seven years, almost, the enemies of the Makhnovist revolutionary movement have wallowed in so many lies about it that one might marvel that these people do not take a red face, once in a while at least. It is rather characteristic that these shameless lies directed against myself and the Makhnovist insurgents, indeed against our movement as a whole, can unite folk from very different socio-political camps: among them one can find journalists of every persuasion, writers, scholars and laymen who place obstacles in their path, mavericks and speculators, who occasionally have no hesitation in putting themselves forward as pathfinders for avant-garde revolutionary ideas. One can also come across supposed anarchists, like Yanovsky, from the *Freie Arbeiter Stimme*. All such folk, folk of every persuasion and every hue, have no shame about employing lies against us, without even knowing us, sometimes without any real belief in their own allegations. Such lies are rounded off with innuendo, which consists of forever and always railing at us, without any attempt to verify the grounds for that ranting and raving. In fact, where are the probable grounds to justify this hysteria in the slightest degree? A little while ago, all these bare-faced lies against us Makhnovists, alleging us to have been pogromists, without offering one shred of evidence or any sort of authentication, led me to address the world's Jews through the good offices of the French and Russian libertarian press, to ask them to spell out the sources of all these absurdities, so as to supply specific details regarding pogroms, incitement or instigation of pogroms carried out or launched by the Ukrainian toilers' revolutionary movement led by me.

The well known Parisian 'Faubourg' Club was alone in replying to my "Appeal to the Jews of All Countries". Through the press, the club managers let it be known that, at a meeting on 23 June 1927, the following question would come up for debate: "Was 'General' Makhno the friend of the Jews or did he participate in their slaughter?" It was added that our French comrade Lecoin would be speaking in defense of Makhno.

It goes without saying that as soon as I learned of the holding of this 'Faubourg' debate, I immediately approached the club chairman, Poldes, requesting him by letter that Lecoin be withdrawn and that I be afforded the opportunity to address the club on my own behalf. Following a positive reply, I appeared before the assembled club on 23 June 1927.

However, the particular manner in which debates were conducted in that club and the fact that the matter of concern to me was dealt with only towards the close of the proceedings meant that I was only able to make myself heard very late on, around 11:00 P.M. and I was not able to go into the matter thoroughly. The best I managed was to broach the subject by dealing with the historical nature, sources and patterns of anti-Semitism in the Ukraine.

Perhaps my enemies will make capital out of this factor which was beyond my control and above all of the fact that I was bound hand and foot by it. In fact, according to French police regulations, I was forbidden to communicate with my like-minded French colleagues: as a result, there was no way that I could have organized a public meeting of my own to put my rebuttal of these slanders. Also, some people have brazenly lied and talked about my having been "tried" in Paris. This is a further lie, which has been taken up by my enemies, hypocritical defenders of the rights and independence of the Jewish people who have suffered so much over the past thirty years in Russia and the Ukraine.

Can the facts be squared in any degree at all with these lies? All of the Jewish toilers of the Ukraine, as well as all other Ukrainian toilers are well aware that the movement of which I was for years the leader was a genuine revolutionary workers' movement. At no time did that

movement seek to divide the practical organization of the deceived, exploited and oppressed toilers on grounds of race. Quite the opposite: it aimed to unite them into a mighty revolutionary union capable of taking action against their oppressors, especially against the Denikinists who were dyed-in-the-wool anti-Semites. At no time did the movement make it its business to carry out pogroms against Jews nor did it ever encourage any. What is more, the vanguard of the Ukraine's (Makhnovist) revolutionary movement contained many Jewish toilers. The Gulyai-Polye infantry regiment for instance had one company made up exclusively of two hundred Jewish toilers. There was also a four-piece artillery battery, the gunners and defense unit of which were all Jews, commander included. And there were lots of Jewish toilers in the Makhnovist movement who, for personal reasons, preferred to blend in with mixed revolutionary fighting units. These were all free fighters, volunteer enlistments who fought honestly on behalf of the joint endeavors of the toilers. These anonymous fighters had their representatives inside the economic bodies revictualing the entire army. All of which may be verified with the Jewish colonies and villages in the Gulyai-Polye region.

All such Jewish insurgent toilers were under my command for a long period, not for days or months, but rather for entire years. All were witnesses to the manner in which I, the Staff and the entire army conducted ourselves with regard to anti-Semitism and the pogroms that arose from it.

Every attempted pogrom or looting from our side was nipped in the bud. All found guilty of such acts were invariably shot out of hand for their misdeeds. This was the case for instance in May 1919, when some peasant insurgents from Novo-Uspenovka, on leaving the front line for some rest in the rear, came upon two decomposed corpses near a Jewish settlement: assuming these to be the corpses of insurgents murdered by members of the Jewish colony, they vented their spleen on the colony and slaughtered around thirty of its inhabitants. That same day, my Staff dispatched a commission of inquiry to the colony. It discovered the tracks of the perpetrators of the butchery. I immediately sent a special detachment to their village to place them under arrest. Those responsible for the attack on the Jewish colony, namely six individuals, one of them the Bolshevik district commissar, were all shot on 13 May 1919.

The same thing happened in July 1919, when I found myself caught in the crossfire between Denikin and Trotsky - Trotsky was then promising his Party that "it was better that the Ukraine be surrendered to Denikin in its entirety than the possibility of the Makhnovshchina's expanding be allowed to arise" and I was forced to cross over to the right bank of the Dniepr. This was when I met with the famous Grigoriev, the ataman of the Kherson region. Misled by the inane rumors circulating about me and the insurgent movement, Grigoriev sought to conclude an alliance with me and my Staff with an eye to waging a concerted campaign against Denikin and the Bolsheviks.

Talks were opened on the condition, which I required, that, within two weeks, ataman Grigoriev furnish my Staff and the Soviet of the (Makhnovist) Revolutionary Insurgent Army of the Ukraine with documents proving that all reports of pogroms carried out by him on two or three occasions against the Jews of Elizavetgrad were baseless, given that, with time at a premium, I was not able to authenticate them for myself.

That condition gave Grigoriev something to think about: then, as a good soldier and strategist, he consented. To prove to me that he could in no way be a pogromist, he boasted of the fact that his retinue included a Ukrainian representative of the Socialist Revolutionary Party. Then, accusing me of having issued an "Appeal" against him, in the name of my Staff, wherein he had been denounced as an enemy of the revolution, in token of his good faith Grigoriev introduced to me several political representatives who attended him: Nikolai

Kopornitsky of the Ukrainian Socialist Revolutionary Party, Seliansky (alias Gorobets) and Koliuzhny of the Ukrainian Social Democratic Party.

This happened at a time when I was on the outskirts of Elizavetgrad with my main combat detachment. I deemed it incumbent upon me as a revolutionary to avail of this opportunity to verify for myself just what the ataman Grigoriev might have done during his occupation of the town. At the same time, some intercepted Denikinist agents revealed to me that, unbeknownst to the toilers of the Kherson region, Grigoriev was preparing to coordinate his movements with the Denikinist headquarters in a build-up to a concerted campaign against the Bolsheviks.

From inhabitants of Elizavetgrad and neighboring villages, as well as from some partisans from Grogoriev's units, I learned that every time he had occupied the town Jews had been massacred. In his presence and on his orders, his partisans had murdered nearly two thousand Jews, including the flower of the Jewish youth: many members of the anarchist, Bolshevik and socialist youth organizations. Some of these had even been taken from prison for slaughter.

Upon learning all this, I promptly declared Grigoriev, the ataman of Kherson - a "Socialist Revolutionary" (sic) - a Denikinist agent and open pogromist, directly culpable for the actions of his supporters against Jews.

At the Sentovo meeting on 27 July 1919, Grigoriev was denounced for what he was and executed on the spot for all to see. That execution and the reasons for it were announced thus: "The pogromist Grigoriev has been executed by Makhnovist leaders: Batko Makhno, Semyon Karetnik and Alexis Chubenko. The Makhnovist movement accepts full responsibility before History for this action." That declaration was endorsed by the members of the Soviet of the Insurgent Army and the Socialist Revolutionary Party members present, including Nikolai Kopornitsky (NOTE: The Social Democrats Seliansky and Koliuzhny had vanished utterly following the execution of Grigoriev.)

That was the sort of treatment I always reserved for those who had carried out pogroms or were in the throes of preparing them. And looters were not spared either, whether from the Insurgent Army's own ranks or outsiders. For example this is what happened in August 1920 when two detachments of Petliurist nationalist leanings, under the command of Levchenko and Matyansha, encircled by us, sent emissaries to us to suggest that they be incorporated into our ranks. The Staff and I received them and agreed that they could be enlisted: however, as soon as we realized that the nationalistic elements from these detachments were engaging in looting and blatant anti-Semitism, we shot them out of hand, in the village of Averski, in Poltava province. A few days later, their commander Matyansha was also shot for his provocative behavior in the town of Zinkov (Poltava province). His detachment was stripped of its weapons and most of its members cashiered.

In December 1920, there was a repeat of this with Red Army troops, when we successfully withstood the onslaught from Budyenny's cavalry and completely routed the XIVth Division of his army, near the village of Petrovo in the Alexandrovsk district, followed by the XIVth Cavalry Division, taking the entire command and Staff prisoners in the latter instance. Many prisoners from the XIth Division expressed an interest in joining the Insurgent Army to combat the autocratic political commissars as they described them. As they were crossing the Kherson region and reached the village of Dobrovelitchka, over half of the population of which was Jewish, certain former Budyennyist or Petliurist cavalrymen, acting on the rumors current in their former units regarding the Makhnovists' hostility towards the "Yids", set about looting the homes of the Jewish villagers. As soon as this came to the attention of experienced Makhnovists, they were all arrested and shot on the spot.

Thus, throughout its entire existence, the Makhnovshchina took an uncompromising line on the anti-Semitism of pogromists: this was because it was a genuinely revolutionary toilers' movement in the Ukraine.

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