

The Makhnovshchina, Nestor Makhno and South Ukrainian Revolutionary Marxism:

Nestor Makhno and his movement are perhaps the greatest examples of Anarchist revolutionary forces in Ukrainian history. The movement saw a massive wave of popular support sweep Makhno to the position of a pivotal and powerful warlord in the region, and provided him with the rank and significance that no other movement in Ukraine during the Russian Civil War could claim. His influence and time as the leader of an Anarchist movement cemented him as one of the most successful Anarchist leaders in history, and his military victories, and ultimate defeat, played a key role in defining how the Russian Civil War played out in Ukraine.

Nestor Makhno:

This section of the assignment will detail the life and times of Nestor Makhno: who he was, how he led, what his politics were, and what ultimately happened to him.

Makhno began his life in Huliaipole in what was then the Russian province of Katerynoslav. He would live most of his life in this part of the world, and it was a pivotal location throughout all his major military and political tactics. His politics defined Makhno first as an ally of the Bolshevik revolutionaries in Russia, and later as one of their more successful adversaries. His early life was a typical one for young Ukrainians, with him finding work in farms and industry, before he began his participation in political movements. Condemned to death by a court following his involvement in the killing of a police officer in 1908, he was spared the noose due to his young age. During his time in prison, he met Petr Arshinov, who brought to him the ideas of anarchism, and the political doctrine that would guide Makhno for the rest of his life. After his release during the first months of the Provisional Government, Makhno returned to Huliaipole and immediately began to organise or join local unions, rapidly rising to become leader in most. He was involved in land seizure and redistribution efforts up until the signing of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, when his attention shifted towards going into hiding and travelling through Russia, seeking a result of the occupation of the Ukraine.

While he wandered through Russia, Makhno met with two titans of the Revolution - Vladimir Lenin and Peter Kropotkin. His meeting with Lenin assured Makhno that cooperating with the Bolshevik forces would only aid in their "paper revolution" (Avrich) that was advocated for by bureaucrats and intellectuals. His return to Huliaipole, now under Austrian occupation, saw the rise of Makhno's real prominence within the Revolution. Makhno was a brilliant military thinker and strategist, employing surprise and partisan tactics in a way that left their enemies powerless to stop the uprising - interestingly, in much the same way as the Vietcong and Vietminh would do in Vietnam decades later. Once the armistice of November 1918 had been signed, and Central Powers forces were forced to withdraw from the previous Russian Imperial territory, Makhno's forces seized what equipment had been abandoned behind by the retreating powers, and launched successful attacks against Ukrainian nationalist forces under the command of Simon Petliura.

During this period, Makhno organised and chaired several meetings on how the state should be reorganised and constructed, in a series of Union meetings that dealt with subjects such as the economic and military matters of the new potential state. Makhno also condemned "discrimination of any sort" (Avrich), and was deeply opposed to anti-semitism, which was a rampant belief among the Russian and Ukrainian Peasantry of the time. Throughout the rest

of his time as leader of the Anarchist movement in Southern Ukraine, Makhno remained the prominent figure in regional politics. However, as the Bolshevik forces began to consolidate power over the entire region, and with the defeat of White Forces in October 1920, the time had come for Makhno, now racked with illness, to flee the region. Bolshevik crackdowns on the Anarchist movement throughout Russia had crippled support for the movement, and ensured that Makhno would ultimately, regardless of military performance, be defeated. Makhno fled through the border of Romania, to Poland, and eventually to Paris, where he would die in 1935, never again returning to Ukraine.

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