

## The Tumultuous Last Months of the Anarcho-syndicalist Peter Rybin



Photo of Peter Rybin with Makhnovist commanders taken in October–November 1920; from left to right: Petrenko(?), Rybin, Chubenko(?), Viktor Belash, Fedor Shchus, Lepetchenko(?).

The anarcho-syndicalist Peter Rybin took part in the revolutionary labour movements of Russia, Ukraine, and the United States and played an important role in the later stages of the Makhnovist movement. Yet he has remained a shadowy figure, known mainly through a brief biographical sketch in Peter Arshinov's history.<sup>1</sup>

The recent discovery of Rybin's Ukrainian Cheka (secret police) case file from 1921 has shed light on his life, particularly the last few fateful months.<sup>2</sup> The file was started shortly after Rybin was arrested by the Cheka at the end of January 1921, and closed on February 24 1921 when he was sentenced by a military court.

Rybin's interrogators were mainly interested in what he could tell them about the Makhnovist movement (the resilient Makhnovist Insurgent Army was still a threat to Soviet power), but also recorded details about his earlier life. The information in the file makes it possible to refute certain rumours about Rybin found in the historical literature, namely that he had joined the RKP(b) [Russian Communist Party (bolsheviks)] and that he was a Cheka agent.<sup>3</sup>

Some of the items in the file make for unpleasant reading, e.g. denunciations, including attacks on his character and sanity, by people he trusted and considered his friends. There are also personal letters by Rybin, mostly written in the summer and fall of 1920 to the woman he was in love with, which provide a rare window into his emotional state during this turbulent period.

This material was collected by the secret police to destroy Rybin – not just physically, but historically, by tarnishing his reputation. But it can also be put to another use: to show how a revolutionary overcomes personal failings and seizes the historical moment when the occasion presents itself.

\* \* \* \* \*

Peter Antonovich Rybin was born in 1885 in the town of Yelets, about half-way between Moscow and Kharkov, to working class parents. He finished elementary schooling, then graduated from a trade school. Later he would continue his studies in the U.S.A., but, judging from his letters, never achieved a high level of literacy, although this did not prevent him from carrying on responsible teaching and editing duties.

Rybin’s political career began with participation in the Russian Revolution of 1905–1907, resulting in a sentence of some kind in 1906 for being a “political”. Exactly what brand of “political” isn’t clear, but by 1908 he was calling himself an “anarcho-syndicalist”. After serving his term, Rybin emigrated to the U.S.A. in 1907. Since he took an eastern route, through Nome (Alaska) to Seattle, it’s likely that he served his sentence (prison or exile) in Siberia.

In Seattle, where he settled temporarily, he became friends with another Russian emigrant, Vasily Iziurov, and they both became active in the Union of Russian Workers of the USA and Canada (URW). Iziurov, an engineer, later returned to Russia and was arrested in Kharkov at the same time as Rybin in 1921. He told the Cheka:

“I remember getting into a big argument with him in 1912, mainly on ideological grounds, concerning the organization of a Russian library.”<sup>4</sup>

One of the main activities of the URW was organizing libraries for emigrants from Russia. At the time of its founding in 1908, the URW was anarcho-communist in orientation, but by 1914 had become strongly anarcho-syndicalist, with a membership close to 10,000. Rybin was a major figure in the URW, and at the federation’s congress in September 1915 he was nominated for the post of secretary of the URW. However, he declined the nomination, saying he preferred to work for the organization as a roving agitator. Since 1914 he had been calling himself “Zonov”, a name associated exclusively with his American phase.

In Pittsburgh, where Rybin settled in 1916, the URW had five locals with a membership of about 300. His day job was working as a machinist at the Westinghouse Electric Plant. Rybin-Zonov and two other Pittsburgh activists, Grigory Dvigomirov<sup>5</sup> and Robert Erdman<sup>6</sup>, started a rival federation to the URW called the New Federation of Unions of Russian Workers with the goal of resurrecting the revolutionary movement “among the Russian masses in America”. The organ of this New

Federation was the journal *Vostochnaya Zarya* [Eastern Star], which put out only two issues before collapsing in late 1916.

When revolution broke out in Russia in 1917, Dvigomirov and Erdman, like many other Russian anarchists in the USA, hurried back via the eastern route through Vladivostok. Rybin was not part of this first wave of returnees, and may have been in prison, for he was deported later in the year.<sup>7</sup>

Once he reached Russia, Rybin headed for the Ukrainian city of Yekaterinoslav where he got a job at the huge Briansk rolling mill.<sup>8</sup> It's not known why he chose this destination; possibly he had worked there before, or perhaps it was part of a deliberate strategy by the Russian anarcho-syndicalists to make the industrialized Donets Basin (Donbas) and its neighbouring regions a focus of their activity.

Rybin's militant background and organizational skills quickly brought him to the forefront of the revolutionary milieu. First he was elected to represent the Briansk plant workers on the local soviet of workers' deputies; then, in August 1917, he was elected to the local executive of the powerful Metalworkers Union. At the All-Ukrainian Conference of Metalworkers in December 1917, his proposal for unifying industry on a national level and restoring the transportation system was adopted.<sup>9</sup> Afterwards he accepted an invitation from the Bolsheviks to move to Kharkov (the capital of Soviet Ukraine), where he was a member of the Regional Bureau of the Metalworkers' Union and served as an assistant to the head of the council for the national economy of Soviet Ukraine.

But Rybin had not abandoned his anarcho-syndicalist views and remained active in the anarchist movement. He was a member of the Bureau of Anarchists of the Donets Basin, and spoke at a conference of Donbas anarchists held February 1 1918 in Yekaterinoslav. Here he met several future participants of the Makhnovist movement, including Peter Arshinov, Ivan Kabas, and Max Chernyak. At that time Arshinov was editing the organ of the Donbas anarchists - *Golos anarkhista* [The Voice of the anarchist].<sup>10</sup>

The spring of 1918 saw the invasion of Ukraine by German and Austrian armies following the Treaty of Brest Litovsk, forcing the Bolsheviks and their allies to evacuate to the east. Rybin went through a personal crisis when he realized the anarchists were not strong enough - or competent enough - to pose a serious alternative to the Bolsheviks. He withdrew from the anarchist movement and, like many anarcho-syndicalists at the time, went to work with the Bolsheviks because he believed their "dictatorship of the proletariat" was an intermediate stage in the transition to full communism.

Rybin described this new period of his life as follows:

"When the Germans attacked, I was evacuated to Taganrog together with the Regional Bureau of Metalworkers. In July [of 1918] I returned to Kharkov together with the rest of the Bureau. From that time until October 1920 I moved about South Russia carrying out organizing and teaching as-

signments for the Metalworkers' Union. ... During this time I did not formally belong to any party."<sup>11</sup>

But Rybin was glossing over heroic events. In the summer of 1919 he organized 20,000 Kharkov workers to repel the White invasion of General Denikin, and accompanied them to the front. After only two days, he was wounded and had to return to Kharkov where he was trapped when the Whites captured the city. During the White occupation Rybin led several strikes of metalworkers.<sup>12</sup>

After the Whites were defeated, Rybin carried out a series of responsible assignments from the Soviet authorities. According to documents in his case file, in 1920 he worked as an instructor for the Regional Union of Workers' Consumer Co-operatives of the Donbas, as an instructor for the Southern Bureau of the Central Committee of the All-Russian Union of Workers and Employees of the Chemical Industry, as a member of a sub-committee of the executive of the All-Russian Union of Metalworkers charged with organizing the manufacturing industry, and as an instructor for the Southern Bureau of the All-Russian Central Soviet of Trade Unions. And yet, all through this period, Rybin retained his anarchist convictions. According to the Communist Party official Yakov Plugin:

"I got to know Rybin in 1919 at the Donetsk-Yurievsky plant<sup>13</sup> as part of my official duties. I had frequent arguments with him of a political nature, in the course of which Rybin defended the point of view of the anarchists."<sup>14</sup>

During his stay in Taganrog in April 1918, Rybin made the acquaintance of a fellow-refugee, Pavlyna Danylina. Fifteen years younger than Rybin, and with a high school education, Danylina was embarking on a career in the fledgling Soviet institutions. Rybin formed an attachment to her which can only be described as an infatuation. Upon their return to Kharkov, he took care of her in various ways - she was virtually dependent on his support. Two years later, he summed up their relationship as follows:

"For two years I have loved and cherished you, and taken care of you like a sister. But for two years you have tried only to give me a hard time and hated everything I did for you, always looking upon me as someone who is disposable."<sup>15</sup>

Besides finding Danylina a job in the Soviet bureaucracy, Rybin helped her sister Maria by finding her a job and introducing her to the communist Plugin, who married her.

In the summer of 1920, Danylina tried to break off their relationship, saying she did not wish to be a "Soviet baryshnya" [Soviet debutante]<sup>16</sup>. Rybin reacted badly, showering her with letters and becoming extremely depressed. Danylina later told the Cheka that he threatened to kill both her and himself, and in fact choked her on three occasions. Rybin's letters to Danylina, carefully preserved in the Cheka file, detail his mood swings during this period (August - September 1920).

On August 11, he wrote:

“My goal is to disappear for good and go join Makhno. So long as this doesn’t completely contradict my principles.”<sup>17</sup>

But a month later he was complaining:

“I’ve vacillated my whole life, and don’t have solid foundations.”<sup>18</sup>

On September 22 1920 he was still depressed:

“I want to live, to work for the people. I tried to bring good to the people, but what am I doing now? Wallowing in filth and nastiness, trampling all that is fine and beautiful in life. One must work! One must save the Russian working people, but as for me – I sit and do nothing.”<sup>19</sup>

A few days later he continued in the same vein:

“I want to live, I want to do something good, something healthy for society. But I don’t have the strength, I don’t have the energy. I want to get a hold of myself and do what they are proposing. But I don’t have any strength, I don’t have any hope that I can carry through this thing which they have put in my hands.”<sup>20</sup>

Rybin didn’t spell out the proposition which had been put to him, but in fact he had just been swept up in the whirlwind of political events which had enveloped Ukraine.

In September 1920, the Soviet Republic found itself fighting wars on two broad fronts: against the Poles in the west, and the Whites under Wrangel in the south. Neither war was going well. Furthermore, the Soviet rear was being ravaged by various peasant forces, the largest of which was the increasingly powerful Revolutionary Insurgent Army of Ukraine (makhnovists) [RPAU(m)] organized by Nestor Makhno. To defeat Wrangel, the Red forces needed cavalry, but their cavalry was tied up fighting the Poles. Under these conditions, it made sense to make an alliance with the Makhnovists to throw their cavalry against the Whites.

Such an alliance had been discussed by the Reds since June 1920, but by September it had become an urgent matter. In the Makhnovist camp, there were also elements interested in such an alliance, as the White forces conquered more and more of the anarchist heartland. But how to bring about a rapprochement between these two forces which had been slaughtering each other for many months?

Kharkov, the capital of Soviet Ukraine, was also the headquarters of Nabat – the Confederation of Anarchists of Ukraine – which enjoyed a quasi-legal existence. The government of Soviet Ukraine approached the leaders of Nabat to use their influence to bring about the necessary alliance with the Makhnovists. With a mandate approved by Christian Rakovsky, head of the government of Soviet Ukraine, three Nabat leaders – Yan Alii, Yosip Gotman, and Ivan Safian<sup>21</sup> – set out for the Makhnovist headquarters in August 1920. They were never heard from again – a terrible loss for the Nabat organization.

But this tragedy opened up exciting possibilities for Rybin. As someone with credibility with the Soviet government as well as with Nabat and the Makhnovists, he was an ideal intermediary between the two sides united only by their hatred of the Whites. According to Rybin, he was especially pressured by two high officials of the government, Vasyl Mantsev and Yakiv Yakovlev,<sup>23</sup> to use his influence to bring about a fusion of the Makhnovist forces with the Red Army in the interests of furthering the revolution.

Rybin was provided with credentials by the government in Kharkov and set out on his own journey to find the Makhnovists on October 5. Six days later, he arrived safely in the town of Iziium, 125 km southeast of the capital, where Makhno had his headquarters from October 8-13. On the date of his arrival, the Makhnovists reached an agreement with the Soviet government of Ukraine on a military alliance, which involved numerous concessions to the anarchist-inspired movement. However, the Makhnovist army was never assimilated into the Red Army as the communists had wished; on the contrary, there was an ongoing movement of troops in the opposite direction - soldiers deserting the Red Army to join the Makhnovists.

Prior to his arrival in the Makhnovist camp, Rybin had held out little hope for the peasant anarchist movement. But within days, his attitude changed. On October 14 he was writing to Pavlina Danylina :

“It’s the third day of my stay with Makhno’s forces. The life of the Makhnovists is one of constant tumult reminiscent of the Russian freemen and the Zaporizhian Sich.<sup>23</sup> There is much that is interesting and attractive about their life-style [...]. The main thing about the Makhnovist troops is the interesting types one finds and their dauntless courage.”<sup>24</sup>

A short time later he left a colourful description of the Insurgent Army on the move:

“Today our army set out for the front. This involves a great movement of people. The cavalry gallops off, the tachankas, harnessed with three or four horses each, rush past loaded with machine guns and partisans. Everybody sounds happy and one hears harmonic playing.”<sup>25</sup>

But at the same time, he realized his work was cut out for him:

“Among the Makhnovists ignorance and superstition are rampant. I have decided to devote myself to cultural work and to start publishing a newspaper.”<sup>26</sup>

Rybin later claimed he was put in charge of the army’s cultural-educational section, although it is more likely that Peter Arshinov held that position at the time. Both Isaak Teper<sup>27</sup> and Viktor Belash<sup>28</sup> mention Rybin as having responsibility for propaganda. Thanks to the agreement with Soviet power, the Makhnovist camp was soon inundated with anarchist intellectuals from Kharkov and other cities, as many as 100, most of whom were put to work on the cultural front.

Rybin threw himself into this work, organizing courses on propaganda in Guliai-Polye soon after it was liberated from the Whites on October 26. Almost 170 of the most qualified partisans went

through his training courses to satisfy the army's growing need for propaganda cadres. Despite his duties in educational work, Rybin found time on two occasions to travel to the front and take part in the fighting against the Whites.

On November 11, Rybin was elected secretary of the army's Revolutionary Military Council (RMC), replacing Dmitry Popov<sup>29</sup> who was in Kharkov negotiating with the Bolsheviks. This was an important position and indicates the respect Rybin enjoyed among the Makhnovists. The council's secretary was not only responsible for the army's chancery, but also traditionally dealt with external relations. Rybin was considered especially suitable for this post because of his connections with the Soviet higher-ups. But in spite of these connections, or perhaps because of them, he had become one of the most radical opponents of Soviet power in the movement. On November 15 he told the RMC:

"The Bolsheviks will never allow us self-rule, never allow a place contaminated with anarchy within the confines of the state organism. Therefore we must prepare to defend by force of arms the independence of our region and the further development of our anarchist system."<sup>30</sup>

This was in tune with Makhno's own views. Although admitting his movement was too weak to seize the whole of Ukraine, he hoped to rectify this situation:

"The Bolsheviks also started small, but they managed to win; we can also manage to win."<sup>31</sup>

In the last days of November, having used the Makhnovists as shock troops to overcome the Whites, the Reds turned on their allies, destroying the main part of the Insurgent Army. At the same time mass arrests of anarchists in Kharkov and other cities took place, and Makhno was declared an outlaw. It was under these crisis conditions that Rybin became a full member of the RMC on November 29.

The next few weeks were spent in almost continuous fighting, as the Insurgent Army tried to avoid annihilation by the vastly superior forces of the Red Army. Driven from their base in Yekateroslavskaya province, the Makhnovists roamed across Left Bank Ukraine in search of a safe home for their anarchist experiment. In a typically bold move, Makhno crossed the Russian border on January 20 and invaded Kursk province.

The anarchist army which crossed into Kursk province was possibly 8,000 strong but poorly armed. Only a few hundred partisans had rifles; the rest were equipped with revolvers, sabers, and grenades. According to Red Army intelligence, the army had 55 machine guns and one field gun, but very little ammunition.<sup>32</sup>

On January 24 the Makhnovists seized the town of Korocha, where they stayed for three days. Goods from the government warehouse were distributed to the population, and thousands of copies of the proclamation "The Situation of Free Soviets" were printed. The RMC, which seems to have been well informed about social unrest in the Soviet Republic, decided that Rybin and Arshinov should go to Kharkov to engage in underground work. The two anarchists reached their desti-

nation safely, but separated. Arshinov, who had been assigned the task of writing a history of the movement, never saw his colleague again and never found out how he had been captured.

Kharkov was very dangerous for Rybin as the anarchist milieu was saturated with informers and provocateurs and there was no safe house where he could find refuge. Even in this early stage of its history, the Soviet regime had all the trappings of a totalitarian state which exercises tight control over the everyday lives of its citizens. Rybin's best option was to stay with his old friend the engineer Iziurov, even though the latter was hostile to the Makhnovist movement, having got it into his head that the Makhnovists were opposed to modern technology. Rybin admitted that he had been "out" with the Makhnovists, but showed Iziurov documents which indicated he had in fact been on a government-sanctioned mission to bring about the merger of the Makhnovists forces with the Red Army.

Five days after arriving in Kharkov, Rybin made the fatal error of arranging to visit Danylina at her apartment despite the fact that she had made it clear that she hated him. When he showed up, the Cheka was waiting to arrest him. Stunned by this betrayal, Rybin immediately declared that he was an anarchist and would confess to everything.

This was not literally true, because Rybin had equipped himself with a cover story. He claimed that he left Guliai-Pole on November 25, just before the Reds launched their treacherous attack, and headed for Crimea for cultural work at the front. Upon hearing of the breakdown in the agreement, he went underground and spent time in various cities of Ukraine.

There was no way Rybin could sustain this story. On December 18 Arshinov's tachanka, containing the Insurgent Army's archive, was captured in battle. Among the captured documents were the minutes of a meeting of the RMC dated December 6 and signed by P. Rybin. His campaign diary (see Appendix) may have been part of this trove of documents. Also, the Makhnovist commander Grygoryi Savonov, present in the Insurgent Army in December 1920 - January 1921, told the Cheka after his capture:

"The army had a revolutionary military council composed of four persons: Makhno, Belash, Rybin, and a fourth person I didn't know."<sup>33</sup>

Besides the copious evidence of Pavlina Danylina, the Cheka also took a statement from her sister Maria, who said:

"There was gossip that Rybin was crazy [*bozhevilniŭ*]. They also said that he was going to go to Makhno."<sup>34</sup>

The Cheka followed the standard practice of planting a stool pigeon in Rybin's cell - the communist Sergii Kolpakov. Rybin told Kolpakov that he had come to Kharkov to raise an insurrection among the workers on account of the difficult food situation. For this purpose he had been supplied by the Insurgent Army with a large sum of money (seized by the Cheka at the time of his ar-

rest). Rybin also ridiculed Soviet power, carried on anarchist agitation in his cell, and expressed the opinion that Makhno could be expected in Kharkov within a few weeks.

Once the Soviet authorities were convinced that he was of no further use to them, Rybin was doomed. On February 24 he received the death sentence:

“... for implementing Makhnovist policies and thereby causing harm to Soviet power (as secretary of the RMC of the Makhnovist army).”<sup>35</sup>

The record of his sentence also indicates that it was carried out. Other Makhnovist leaders managed to survive capture, for example, Rybin’s colleagues Arshinov and Belash.<sup>36</sup> But Rybin fell into the clutches of the Cheka at a time when the Soviet regime was on shaky grounds due to peasant revolts and worker unrest in the cities. The Insurgent Army was still in the field, not to be subdued for many months. Rybin was just too dangerous to be kept alive.

Malcolm Archibald

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## **APPENDIX**

From the diary of the Makhnovist P. R.<sup>37</sup>

### **21 October. Village of Ulianovka.**

Vanya<sup>38</sup> and I prepared a draft of an agreement with Soviet power, then after supper we went to Batko Makhno, where I met Béla Kun<sup>39</sup> and other Soviet representatives. When Béla Kun and his entourage left, we got to work analyzing the political question, i.e. our draft of the agreement. These representatives from Kharkov were a big waste of our time. In view of this we made some changes [in the agreement] and sent them off by telegraph. In the evening of October 21 an order arrived from the staff of the Southern Front about preparing for the offense.

### **24 October.**

In the morning we arrived in Novonikolaevka. At 4 p.m. we held a meeting, which wasn’t a success. In the evening Petrenko (commander of the infantry regiment) arrived and told the Batko and me that Red Army soldiers were deserting from their regiments and moving over to us. Then we went to the regiment and explained to the Red Army men that we did not have the right to accept them, but they categorically refused to return to their own regiments and declared that they were going to fight for Batko Makhno.

### **31 October. Guliai-Pole.**

Today an Italian anarchist and two Maximalists arrived from Kharkov. The Batko talked with them for a long time. They offered their services to the cultural-educational section. But we declined and proposed that they work in the field hospitals, which they agreed to.

### **3 November. Guliai-Pole.**

I'm sad and depressed. The thought "and what will happen next" torments me and gives me no peace. The White Guard regime will be crushed, and then what will happen to the Insurgent Army? At headquarters everyone is tired. Makhno himself is weighed down with fatigue. There is no concrete goal for the army and no well-defined plan - and so nothing for cultural workers to do. I'm alone and feel like I'm on an island. One feels aimless and apathetic. I wish the guys from Kharkov would get here quicker so we can combine forces and perhaps make some decisions about a plan for subsequent work. I'm afraid the communists will declare us outside the law, and then the shedding of the workers' blood will begin again. Those bunglers can't understand that the Red Army is demoralized and is moving over to our side. But our whole tragedy consists in the absence of cultural forces. Makhno has also slowed down. I have the impression he is worn out.

### **6 November.**

While heading to the staff, I met Makhno on the road riding on horseback with his sotnia [personal body guard detachment - M. A.]. Galina Andreyevna<sup>40</sup> was riding up front. At 1 p.m. I met Belash, who passed on depressing news about the knavery and hypocrisy of the communists, with one hand signing an agreement, and with the other making plots against us. People are capable of any kind of perfidy in the name of power. Is it really conceivable that they can do anything for working people?

### **8 November.**

In the morning Budanov<sup>41</sup>, Taratuta<sup>42</sup>, etc. arrived from Kharkov. In the evening comrades Budanov and Kurilenko<sup>43</sup> (he also arrived from Kharkov) made a report in which it was explained that the communists are playing politics and intend to use us. After which we arrived at the same conclusion, namely, that with the communists it is necessary . . . [*editor's note: several pages are missing at this point*]

### **25 November. Guliai-Pole.**

Today we spoke on the telephone with Kharkov (with comrades Voline and Popov). They communicated that negotiations are coming to an end. In the evening a meeting of the Council was held. Before the meeting, the Batko presented me with a silver rouble. I remarked to him that it was a Suvorov rouble<sup>44</sup>, whereupon he laughed and said sheepishly, "Well then, give it back." I replied that it was too late. Belash asked me: "How come the Batko never gives me anything?" I replied: "Don't ask me, take it up with the komandarm<sup>45</sup>".

### **26 November.**

From the staff we heard that the Reds are attacking on all sides. I went to the Batko and found him already prepared to move. We assembled everyone and began departing from Guliai-Pole, but it appeared that the Reds had surrounded us with a tight ring. Our cavalry attacked, smashed the Reds, and we drove off 24 versts [about 25 km] from Guliai-Pole and made ourselves secure for the night. The Batko is worried about the Crimean group.

### **1 December.**

At 4 p.m. Shchus had to go to Yelenovka to destroy the railway bridge. Upon going to the staff I saw that our troops were retreating in panic. I boarded a tachanka and we headed in the direction of Malaya Mikhailovka. We didn't sleep the whole night and were hungry.

### **5 December.**

After breakfast we left the village of Yasen. As we were leaving, we learned that the group of comrade Marchenko (commander of the Crimean group) was 25 versts from us. We stayed to wait for his group, and at 4 p.m. Marchenko arrived with 300 cavalry and 15 machine guns. They were greeted by an orchestra playing in the village. The Batko met the group, and exchanged greetings. Marchenko approached the Batko and reported facetiously: "The Crimean group has successfully returned."

### **10 December. Village of Popovka, Yekaterinoslavsky province.**

In the morning, by pre-arranged signal, we all gathered to meet the detachment of comrade Vdovichenko (which was part of Marchenko's group), composed of 260 cavalry and 15 machine guns.

### **11 December. Village of Berestovaya.**

In the evening a meeting of the Council was held, at which it was decided to attack Berdyansk.

### **12 December.**

We entered Berdyansk and left by night in the direction of Guliai-Pole, which we approached at 8 a.m. and proceeded to open fire. The cavalry circled around the town. The Reds (42<sup>nd</sup> Division) fled from Guliai-Pole. Lying about the streets were corpses of Reds, commissars, etc. The peasants told me the Reds shot 60 people just before our arrival. Six hundred Red Army soldiers carrying rifles approached the staff and began to stack their weapons. We held a meeting where we explained the goals and tasks of the Insurgent Army of Ukraine (makhnovists), after which 400 of the 600 soldiers enlisted; the rest we dismissed. At the meeting of the Council we decided to break up our army into two groups. In the first group are two regiments of cavalry and one regiment of infantry under the command of comrade Marchenko. In the second group are one regiment of cavalry and two regiments of infantry under the command of comrade Petrenko. The machine gun regiment and batteries form a reserve under the direct command of the staff of the army. All this was done because the enemy has started to operate in the manner of partisan detachments.

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- <sup>1</sup> Peter Arshinov, **History of the Makhnovist Movement (1918–1921)**, (Black & Red: Detroit, 1974), pp. 230-231. Rybin is also mentioned in another chronicle of the movement: V. F. Belash and A. V. Belash, **Dorogi Nestora Makhno** [The Odyssey of Nestor Makhno], (Kiev, 1993); but Viktor Belash misspells his name as “Ryvkin”.
- <sup>2</sup> Mikola Borovik, **Sekretar Rady revolyutsiynykh povstantsiv Ukrayiny (makhnovtsiv) Petro Rybin: portret anarkhista** [The Secretary of the Council of revolutionary insurgents of Ukraine (makhnovists) Petro Rybin: portrait of an anarchist], **Z arkhiviv VUCHK–HPU–NKVD–K–HB / NAN Ukrayiny** [From the archives of the VUCHK–GPU–NKVD–KGB], № 2 (37), 2011; pp. 184–206.
- <sup>3</sup> See, for example, [http://www.hrono.ru/biograf/bio\\_r/rybin\\_p.html](http://www.hrono.ru/biograf/bio_r/rybin_p.html).
- <sup>4</sup> Borovik, *op. cit.*, p. 187.
- <sup>5</sup> Grigory Dvigomirov (?–1921) was a metalworker who was active in the Russia revolution of 1905–1907, emigrating to the USA in 1907.
- <sup>6</sup> Robert Erdman (birth name: Yevgeny Dolinin) (1897–1938) emigrated to the USA in 1910 where he became an anarchist.
- <sup>7</sup> The author is indebted to Ukrainian researcher Yury Kravetz for information about the “New Federation” and its leaders.
- <sup>8</sup> So-called because it was founded by industrialists from the Russian city of Bryansk.
- <sup>9</sup> Arshinov, *op. cit.*, p. 231.
- <sup>10</sup> V. D. Yermakov and P. I. Talerov, eds., **Anarkhizm v istorii rossii ot istokov k sovremennosti** [Anarchism in the history of Russia from its origins to the present day], (Saint-Petersburg, 2007), p. 698.
- <sup>11</sup> Borovik, *op. cit.*, p. 191.
- <sup>12</sup> The Whites held Kharkov from late June to early December 1919.
- <sup>13</sup> Huge iron-and-steel mill with thousands of workers.
- <sup>14</sup> Borovik, *op. cit.*, p. 193.
- <sup>15</sup> Borovik, *op. cit.*, p. 194.
- <sup>16</sup> A “Soviet baryshnya” was defined by Angelica Balabanoff in her pamphlet **Ot rabstva k svobode** [From slavery to freedom] (Moscow, 1920) as “a young lady from a former petty-bourgeois or bourgeois family”, employed in clerical work in a Soviet administrative office. Often these women needed the protection of a powerful patron to survive; however, public opinion associated such protection with the requirement to provide services of a sexual nature.
- <sup>17</sup> Borovik, *op. cit.*, p. 193.
- <sup>18</sup> Borovik, *op. cit.*, p. 193.
- <sup>19</sup> Borovik, *op. cit.*, p. 192.
- <sup>20</sup> Borovik, *op. cit.*, p. 196.
- <sup>21</sup> Yakov Alii (real name: Sukhovolsky) and Iosif Gotman were members of the secretariat of Nabat. Little is known about Safian, other than that he was a member of Nabat. Makhno and other anarchists believed that, despite the credentials they were carrying, the Nabat emissaries were arrested en route by local Chekists and shot.
- <sup>22</sup> Vasyl Mantsev was head of the Central Administration of the Cheka in Ukraine, while Yakiv Yakovlev was a member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (bolsheviks) of Ukraine. Yakovlev chaired the Soviet delegation which negotiated with the Makhnovists in the fall of 1920.
- <sup>23</sup> The Russian freemen [*bolnitsa*] were escaped serfs who formed anarchic communities on the fringes of the early Russian state. The Zaporizhian Sich was a territory, roughly coextensive with the Makhnovist heartland, where an anarchic Cossack society flourished in the 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- <sup>24</sup> Borovik, *op. cit.*, p. 189.
- <sup>25</sup> Borovik, *op. cit.*, p. 198.
- <sup>26</sup> Borovik, *op. cit.*, p. 198.
- <sup>27</sup> Isaac Teper was active in the cultural-educational section of the Insurgent Army in 1919–1920, before becoming an agent of the Cheka. His oddly-titled memoir is: **Makhno. Ot «yedinogo» anarkhizma k stopam rumynskogo korolya**. [Makhno: from “united” anarchism to the feet of the Romanian king] (Kiev, 1924).
- <sup>28</sup> Viktor Belash (1893–1938) was the chief of staff of the Insurgent Army. His memoirs are cited in footnote #1.

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<sup>29</sup> Dmitry Popov (1892–1921), former factory-worker, sailor, and Left SR, was a member of the RMC of the Insurgent Army from May 1920, before being entrusted with diplomatic responsibilities.

<sup>30</sup> Borovik, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

<sup>31</sup> Borovik, p. 200. The Makhnovist ataman Savonov reported this comment of the Batko.

<sup>32</sup> S. E. Volkov, **Banda Makhno v Kurskoy gubernii** [Makhno's Band in Kursk province] (Kursk, 1929).

<sup>33</sup> The "fourth person" was Peter Arshinov.

<sup>34</sup> Borovik, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

<sup>35</sup> Borovik, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

<sup>36</sup> Belash and Arshinov were also shot, but not until 1937–1938. At that time there also perished or disappeared in the gulags virtually everyone associated with the suppression of the Makhnovists, including Mantsev, Rakovsky, Yakovlev, Kun, and the Soviet commanders in charge of the war against Wrangel.

<sup>37</sup> Although the diarist is identified only as "P. R.", he is almost certainly Peter Rybin. The translation here is from an uncertified typewritten copy found in a collection of copies of documents about the Makhnovist movement assembled by a Soviet Commission on the History of the Civil War. The diary was apparently not part of Rybin's criminal file with the Ukrainian Cheka. (Thanks to Yuriy Kravets for this information.)

<sup>38</sup> Probably Ivan Lepetchenko, Makhno's adjutant (see photo at the head of the article).

<sup>39</sup> Béla Kun, former leader of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, was a member of the RMC of the Soviet Southern Front and assigned to negotiate with the Makhnovists. On this occasion, he presented Makhno with a commemorative album of portraits of leaders of the Third International (Comintern) with a signed dedication "to the warrior for the Worker-Peasant Revolution comrade Batko Makhno". Biographies of Kun describe his visit to Makhno as an unparalleled act of heroism. In her memoirs, Kun's wife went so far as to say he could have been killed for one careless word. But the diary suggests his visit was strictly routine. Several weeks later Kun distinguished himself by executing thousands of White officers who had surrendered under terms of an amnesty. And Kun did not limit himself to shooting officers, but also shot hundreds of dock workers whose only crime was loading the ships used to evacuate the White refugees from Crimea.

<sup>40</sup> Makhno's wife Galina Andreyevna Kuzmenko.

<sup>41</sup> The Makhnovist commander Avraam Budanov (1886–1929), a metalworker by trade and an anarcho-communist from 1905, was engaged in negotiations with the Bolsheviks for most of the fall of 1920. His goal was to gain independence for a large area of southeast Ukraine for the purpose of creating a free anarchist system.

<sup>42</sup> The veteran anarchist Olga Taratuta (1876–1938) was a leader of Nabat and one of Makhno's most trusted advisors.

<sup>43</sup> Vasyly Kurilenko (1891–1921), a bootmaker by trade and an anarcho-communist from 1910, was chief of the administrative section of the Insurgent Army's RMC in the fall of 1920.

<sup>44</sup> The Russian general Alexander Suvorov (1729–1800) never lost a battle, being undefeated in over 60 large battles while always having a numerical disadvantage. He also socialized with the rank-and-file, addressing soldiers as "brother".

<sup>45</sup> "Komandarm" = commander of the army, i.e. Makhno.