

# What was the role of the anarchists in the Russian Revolution?

by JEFF HEMMER

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*“The International is broken! But woe to any government should red and black again be united for no force on earth shall stand before them.”*

Bismarck, on the dissolution of the First International in 1872  
[quoted in: Tampa Red And Black,  
*Russia 1917-1921: “There is no stopping half-way. We must conquer or die.”* (Tampa, n.d.), p. 2.]

*“The only thing which can impede the agreement of all revolutionaries in common action is the narrow-mindedness of those who see any ideas different from their own as being harmful.”*

Victor Serge, July-August 1920  
[from: *Revolution in Danger* (London, 1997), pp. 118-119.]

# **INTRODUCTION**

When the revolution of February 1917 broke out in Russia, the dreams of the anarchists seemed at last to be coming true. The spontaneous popular uprising which led to the overthrow of the Tsarist autocracy bore all the earmarks of the long-awaited social revolution. "The sun has arisen", one anarchist in exile wrote, "and has dispersed the black clouds. The Russian people have awakened! Greetings to revolutionary Russia!"<sup>1</sup> Filled with enthusiasm, the anarchists threw themselves into the task of eliminating what remained of the state and before long came to constitute a small, yet highly active and disproportionately influential group on the radical left of the Russian revolutionary movement. Their involvement in the Russian Revolution, the problems they came to face and the causes of the downfall of their movement by the start of the 1920s are the focus of this essay.

The dissertation is subdivided into two parts. Part One will provide the reader with an introduction to the theories underlying the various currents of anarchism as well as an analytical overview of the development of the Russian anarchist movement up to the eve of the February Revolution. In Part Two the role of the anarchists in the revolutionary period from 1917 until 1921 will be outlined and discussed in detail. The dissertation is going to examine the various methods of revolutionary struggle employed by the anarchists, ranging from direct action and armed struggle to syndicalist agitation and cooperation with the Soviet government, and will argue that the anarchists failed to leave their libertarian stamp on the revolution as a consequence of factional strife in their own ranks, lack of organisation and Bolshevik repression. The appendix provides a chronological overview of the main events.

Apart from primary and secondary source materials available at Aberdeen University, a number of primary sources obtained from the rich collections at the International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam and the Centre International de Recherches sur l'Anarchisme in Lausanne will be used to illustrate and sustain the arguments put forward by this dissertation.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Paul Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists* (Princeton, 1967), p.124.

# **PART ONE**

**ANARCHY AND ANARCHISM**

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**THE GENESIS OF THE RUSSIAN ANARCHIST MOVEMENT AND ITS  
DEVELOPMENT UNTIL THE EVE OF THE FEBRUARY REVOLUTION 1917**

## ANARCHY AND ANARCHISM

*“It is not bombs, disorder, or chaos.  
It is not robbery and murder.  
It is not a war of each against all.  
It is not a return to barbarism or to the wild state of man.  
Anarchism is the very opposite of all that.”*  
Alexander Berkman<sup>2</sup>

*“connotation: implication(s) or suggestion(s) evoked by a word (individual or general),  
e.g. anarchist may evoke a large black-bearded man holding a bomb.”*  
Glossary of Poetical Terms<sup>3</sup>

The word *anarchy* ultimately derives from the Greek *anarkhiā* ‘lack of a leader’, a term coined from *an-* ‘without’ and *arkhos* ‘ruler, authority’.<sup>4</sup> In the course of the past two centuries, the term has become associated increasingly with random acts of violence, terrorism, chaos and destruction, and is prominently used in the media and in political rhetoric to describe a state of crisis beyond control, such as the looting in the streets of Baghdad shortly after the collapse of the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq. This negative image of anarchy as a universally irrational and dangerous concept is so vivid and widespread in the public mind that, in recent years, even James Bond was sent off to hunt down his first ‘anarchist’ on our cinema screens.<sup>5</sup> However, it is possible, and indeed desirable, to understand anarchy in its theoretical, socio-political context as a condition in which a just and equal society can exist and develop in the absence of government. This understanding of anarchy forms the basis for anarchism.

Anarchism is not easily distilled into a formal definition. In the words of Noam Chomsky, it is “not a doctrine. It is at most a historical tendency, a tendency of thought and action, which has many different ways of developing and progressing.”<sup>6</sup> Anarchist ideas have been traced back to ancient times, to be found in the writings of Chinese philosophers like Chuang Tzu<sup>7</sup> and Lao-tse as well as in the Stoic philosophy of Zeno.<sup>8</sup> Libertarian thinking continued to find an expression in the teaching of Karpocrates, in several early Christian movements, in the preaching of the Hussites and the early Anabaptists<sup>9</sup>, as well as in the actions of Gerard Winstanley<sup>10</sup> and in the work of some thinkers of the

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<sup>2</sup> Alexander Berkman, *ABC of Anarchism* (London, 1992), p.2.

<sup>3</sup> Extract from *Glossary of Poetical Terms*, photocopied handout for students of English Literature at the Lycée Robert Schuman (Luxembourg, 2000). The entry for ‘connotation’ is taken from Karl Beckson and Arthur Ganz, *A Reader’s Guide to Literary Terms* (London, 1970), p.40.

<sup>4</sup> J. A. Simpson & E. S. C. Weiner (eds.), *The Oxford English Dictionary, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*, Volume 1 (Oxford, 1989), p.438; [http://www.artpolitic.org/infopedia/an/Anarchism\\_\\_\\_etymology.html](http://www.artpolitic.org/infopedia/an/Anarchism___etymology.html) (13/04/2005); <http://www.answers.com/topic/anarchy> (13/04/2005)

<sup>5</sup> *The World Is Not Enough* (1999), produced by Danjaq Productions, Eon Productions Ltd. and United Artists.

<sup>6</sup> Noam Chomsky, *The Chomsky Reader* (New York, 1987), p.29. Chomsky leaves no doubt about his belief that anarchism will “continue as a permanent strand of human history.” Peter Marshall expresses the same idea in more poetic terms, likening anarchy to a river with many currents, in Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible – A History of Anarchism* (London, 1993), p.3.

<sup>7</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Roads to Freedom* (London, 1918), pp.50-51; Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, pp.58-59.

<sup>8</sup> Rudolf Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism* (London, 1989), p.12; Peter Kropotkin, ‘Anarchism’, *The Encyclopedia Britannica* (1910); URL: [http://www.lucyparsonspj.org/anarchism/kropotkin\\_anarchism.html](http://www.lucyparsonspj.org/anarchism/kropotkin_anarchism.html) (13/04/2005)

<sup>9</sup> Kropotkin, ‘Anarchism’.

<sup>10</sup> For more information on Gerard Winstanley, see Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, pp.96-104.



Enlightenment, in particular Diderot.<sup>11</sup> All raise, to varying degrees, profound doubts about the necessity of any form of imposed authority, including social and political hierarchies and coercion. However, it was not until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century that the anarchist conception of life was expressed in clearer form in William Godwin's seminal work, *Concerning Political Justice and its Influence upon General Virtue and Happiness*.<sup>12</sup>

Godwin's observations led him to advocate the abolition of the state, but it was left to the French theorist Pierre Joseph Proudhon to first use the word *anarchy* to describe the state of society without government in his *Qu'est-ce que la propriété?*<sup>13</sup>, published in 1840. Proudhon proclaimed that property is theft, a privilege rooted in exploitation<sup>14</sup>; the negation of authority, for him, was the logical consequence of the negation of property. Proudhon did not advocate violent dispossession of the owners of the land and the means of production, but he maintained that society could attain the highest perfection only through the combination of order and anarchy.<sup>15</sup>

It is necessary at this point to mention the work of Max Stirner, the publication of which coincides with that of Proudhon's earliest works. In *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*<sup>16</sup>, Stirner laid out the basic foundations of Anarchist-Individualism, a current of anarchism we will encounter occasionally in the course of this dissertation. Stirner combined his revolt against authority and the state with the call for the full liberation of the individual from all social and moral bonds, and came to regard the free development of the individual as more important than the interests of the community.<sup>17</sup>

The ideas of Proudhon were developed further by Mikhail Bakunin, and later by Prince Peter Kropotkin. Bakunin, born into the Russian landed gentry in 1814, arrived in Berlin in 1840 and took an active part in the uprisings that shook Western Europe in the late 1840s. In his writings, he condemned all forms of authority and came out for collective ownership of the land and the means of production. In 1844 Bakunin met Marx, whom he came to admire for his analytical skills and his understanding of economics, but soon found himself in fundamental disagreement with Marx over the question of the transition from the social revolution to the future stateless society.<sup>18</sup> While Marx and Engels claimed that socialism could only be achieved after a temporary dictatorship of the proletariat, Bakunin regarded the workers' state merely as a new source of repression and arbitrary centralized authority. Before long, the argument turned into a heated dispute, leading to a schism in the young anti-capitalist movement which would climax in the exclusion of the 'Bakuninists' from the First International at its Fifth Congress in Den Haag in September 1872.<sup>19</sup>

Bakunin did not consider himself an "inventor of systems, like Marx."<sup>20</sup> He envisaged an all-embracing revolution that did not depend on the maturation of historical conditions, and considered

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<sup>11</sup> Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, pp.12-13; Justus F. Wittkop, *Unter der schwarzen Fahne – Aktionen und Gestalten des Anarchismus* (Berlin, 1996), p.9.

<sup>12</sup> Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, pp.13-14; Wittkop, *Unter der schwarzen Fahne*, pp.11-16.

<sup>13</sup> 'What is property?'

<sup>14</sup> Kropotkin remarks that Proudhon "meant property in its present, Roman-law, sense of 'right to use and abuse'; in property-rights, on the other hand, understood in the limited sense of possession, he saw the best protection against the encroachments of the state." (Kropotkin, 'Anarchism')

<sup>15</sup> Wittkop, *Unter der schwarzen Fahne*, pp.34-38.

<sup>16</sup> 'The Ego and his Own'

<sup>17</sup> Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, pp.16-17; Wittkop, *Unter der schwarzen Fahne*, pp.25-33. Note: Stirner himself never used the words *anarchism* or *anarchy* in his works.

<sup>18</sup> Wittkop, *Unter der schwarzen Fahne*, pp.59-76.

<sup>19</sup> Wittkop, *Unter der Schwarzen Fahne*, pp.93-96.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, p.21.

the idea of a revolutionary *coup d'état* "a heresy against common sense and historical experience."<sup>21</sup> He famously postulated that "the urge to destroy is also a creative urge"<sup>22</sup>, but remained vague in his outline of the organisation of life after the abolition of the state, anticipating only the transfer of the means of production into the hands of a free federation of autonomous producers' associations, cooperating on a worldwide basis.<sup>23</sup>

The constructive side of anarchism was to become the focus of the work of Bakunin's disciple and compatriot, Peter Kropotkin. Kropotkin's aim was to put anarchism on a scientific basis and establish a connection between anarchism and the philosophy of natural sciences.<sup>24</sup> Kropotkin opposed the concept of Social Darwinism and dwelled further on Proudhon's theory of mutualism.<sup>25</sup> His observations of animal life in Siberia, a visit to the watchmaking communities of the Swiss Jura Mountains in 1872 and his study of human history all led Kropotkin to conclude that the natural instincts of solidarity and mutual aid, rather than conflict, lay at the root of the historical process. The centralised state, whose rise from the sixteenth century he considered a temporary aberration from the normal pattern of western civilisation, would eventually be replaced by a free, anarchist-communist society in which each and all would labour willingly to the extent of their capacities, and in which the produced goods would be distributed according to the needs of each member of the community, regardless of their contribution to the process of production. Kropotkin fundamentally opposed the principle of wages and criticised Bakunin's collectivist approach for having maintained a system of rewards based on the individual's direct contribution to labour, which, in Kropotkin's opinion, could only serve to perpetuate a hierarchy of labour and would make authority necessary in one form or another in order to organise the distribution of goods and services.<sup>26</sup>

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the split in the French trade union movement gave birth to revolutionary syndicalism. The idea to form workers' councils as a weapon of class struggle and use them as the structural basis for the future libertarian society had already been put forward by some factions of the International Working Men's Association at a congress in Basel in 1869.<sup>27</sup> During the early 1890s, disillusionment with the tactics of terrorism led many French anarchists to join the trade unions, an example soon followed by many who had lost faith in the conquest of political power through parliamentary reform.<sup>28</sup> In 1893 the *Fédération des Bourses du Travail* was formed, organising all local unions in a given area, followed by the *Confédération Générale du Travail* (C.G.T.) in 1895, in which local unions were organised on a national scale according to their trade. The C.G.T. and the *Fédération des Bourses* finally merged in 1902, the national federation of industries entrusted with tackling parochialism<sup>29</sup> whilst the *bourses* would foster solidarity among local workers of all trades. The methods of struggle of the revolutionary syndicalists were sabotage, boycott and, most of all, strikes.<sup>30</sup> Less concerned with merely gaining immediate benefits for the workers as a means of social reconciliation, the revolutionary syndicalists considered the overthrow of the state and the capitalist

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<sup>21</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, pp.23-24.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, p.25.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.20-26.

<sup>24</sup> Kropotkin, 'Anarchism'.

<sup>25</sup> Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, pp.18-19.

<sup>26</sup> Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, pp.26-32.

<sup>27</sup> For a detailed account of the Basel Conference, see Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, pp.70-73.

<sup>28</sup> Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, p.73.

<sup>29</sup> This term is used by Cole, quoted in Russell, *Roads to Freedom*, p.77, meaning 'localism' (*localisme*).

<sup>30</sup> Russell, *Roads to Freedom*, pp.76-79.

system their main task. But while the Anarcho-Syndicalists came to embrace syndicalism as *the* new method of class struggle, the Anarchist-Communists warned of the syndicalist preoccupation with the proletariat, which in their opinion had a strong Marxist flavour, and argued that the goal of the anarchists had always been the emancipation of all humanity and not of one single class alone. It was also feared that syndicalism was vulnerable to bureaucratization and trade union reformism.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, by the time historians generally speak of the genesis of a genuine anarchist movement in Russia, the international anarchist movement was split into three major currents, i.e. the Anarchist-Communists who followed in the tradition of Bakunin and Kropotkin, the Anarcho-Syndicalists, and finally the Anarchist-Individualists, whose influence, however, remained mostly confined to literary and artistic circles. Within Russia, Lev Tolstoy's condemnation of the state, institutionalised religion, violence and patriotism had inspired a fourth current within anarchism, the basic tenets of which were non-violence and faith in Christian love.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, pp.82-84; Russell, *Roads to Freedom*, pp.84-85.

<sup>32</sup> Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, pp.35-36. Unfortunately the word limit of this dissertation does not allow for a more detailed discussion of the theoretical development of anarchism; therefore I can only recommend Daniel Guérin's *No Gods No Masters – An Anthology of Anarchism* (Edinburgh, 1998), which is an excellent collection of the most fundamental texts by the most influential anarchist writers. A most thorough and fascinating account of the history of anarchism awaits the reader in Peter Marshall's *Demanding the Impossible – A History of Anarchism* (London, 1993).

## THE GENESIS OF THE RUSSIAN ANARCHIST MOVEMENT AND ITS DEVELOPMENT UNTIL THE EVE OF THE FEBRUARY REVOLUTION 1917

*“Let every conscientious man ask himself this question: Is he ready? Is he so clear in his mind about the new organisation towards which we are moving, through the medium of those vague general ideas of collective property and social solidarity? Does he know the process – apart from sheer destruction – which will accomplish the transformation of old forms into new ones?”*

Alexander Herzen<sup>33</sup>

While Russia contributed greatly to the development of an international anarchist movement in the writings and lives of Bakunin and Kropotkin, a specifically anarchist movement within Russia only came into being in the late 1890s. The populist movement had been permeated with libertarian ideas, calling for the abolition of the state and its replacement by a federation of peasant communes and workers' cooperatives, but the repression following the assassination of Alexander II in 1881 came close to decimating the revolutionary movement within Russia and drove a considerable number of revolutionaries into exile, where some of the most active Bakuninists, like e.g. Plekhanov and Axelrod, soon converted to Marxism.<sup>34</sup>

In the late 1890s small anarchist groups began to spring up in the southern parts of Russia<sup>35</sup>; from 1903 onwards, there was an increase in the circulation of Russian-language publications which were imported through clandestine channels from the West.<sup>36</sup>

The 1905 revolution<sup>37</sup> gave an enormous boost to the anarchist movement within Russia, even though the libertarians failed to overcome their numerical inferiority to the socialist parties. In many places, disaffected Social Democrats and Socialist Revolutionaries joined students, workers and unemployed labourers to form small anarchist circles and engage in agitation, demonstrations, strikes, robberies, bombings and assassinations.<sup>38</sup> It is estimated that, between 1905 and 1907, more than five thousand anarchists were active in around 255 groups in some 180 towns and villages in the Russian Empire; not included in this figure are the thousands of sympathizers who read anarchist literature and followed the movement's activities without taking a direct part in them.<sup>39</sup>

The anarchists, however, failed to establish a unified front. Anarchist-Communist groups like *Chernoie Znamia*<sup>40</sup> and *Beznachalie*<sup>41</sup>, as well as a number of individualist anarchists, endorsed a

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<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, p.72.

<sup>34</sup> George Woodcock, *Anarchism* (Harmondsworth, 1963), pp.376-389.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p.389. A different account is given in Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, pp.38-39, and in Harold Shukman (ed.), *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of the Russian Revolution* (Oxford, 1988), p.94, where it is claimed that the *Bor'ba* ('Struggle') group, formed by disillusioned Bundists in Bialystok in 1903, was the earliest known anarchist organisation within Russia.

<sup>36</sup> Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, pp.38-40.

<sup>37</sup> For a detailed account of the 1905 revolution, see Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy* (London, 1996), pp.173-241; a more concise account is given in Victor Serge, *Year One of the Russian Revolution* (London, 1972), pp.35-45.

<sup>38</sup> Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, p.43-44.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p.69; Vladimir Cherniaev, 'Anarchists', in Edward Acton, Vladimir Cherniaev & William Rosenberg (eds.), *Critical Companion to the Russian Revolution 1914-1921* (London, 1997), p.222. The strength of the Bolshevik and the Menshevik factions of the Social Democratic Party in 1905 is estimated at twelve or thirteen thousand and fifteen thousand members respectively in Serge, *Year One*, pp.377-378.

<sup>40</sup> 'The Black Banner', mostly active in the frontier provinces of the west and south.

policy of unmitigated terror against the established order<sup>42</sup> and failed to see much use in the methods of their Anarcho-Syndicalist comrades, who condemned the use of random terror and focused their efforts on the distribution of propaganda and the organisation of the emerging industrial proletariat.<sup>43</sup> The debate over the use of terrorism was a complex and complicated one, as even Anarcho-Syndicalist groups at times organised 'battle detachments' of their own and resorted to expropriations in order to finance their activities, claiming that, unlike the wanton bombthrowing of their Anarchist-Communist comrades, their actions were benefiting the movement "as a whole".<sup>44</sup> The Kropotkinites in their London exile found it equally difficult to coherently define their position on terror. Staunch opponents of terror campaigns launched by conspiratorial bands<sup>45</sup>, they nevertheless continued to sanction acts of violence impelled by compassion for the oppressed, as well as "propaganda by the deed" designed to galvanize the revolutionary consciousness of the masses.<sup>46</sup>

The question of terror, in the particular context of the Russian situation, was closely linked to that of syndicalism. The Russian proletariat was still young and had only recently started to organise itself. In 1905 trade unions sprang up all across the Empire, but they were mostly illegal or semi-legal, often holding their meetings in the woods.<sup>47</sup> While the Anarcho-Syndicalists were deeply impressed by the workers' propensity to self-organisation<sup>48</sup>, anarchist opponents of syndicalist tactics, in addition to their natural suspicion of large-scale organisations, were concerned that the trade unions could easily be subverted into reformist institutions or succumb to the control of one particular party.<sup>49</sup> The Anarchist-Communist Askarov thus warned that trade unionism bore the seeds of authoritarian centralism, and instead called for the creation of underground unions that would strive to maintain anarchist homogeneity.<sup>50</sup> Others, like the *Chernoznamets* Abram Grossman, remarked that trade unionism was a product of the capitalist system, and that as such, it would be annihilated along with the existing social structure in the coming revolution.<sup>51</sup> Grossman's brother, alias Roshchin, added that the Russian syndicalists, by exclusively focusing their efforts on the industrial proletariat, were destroying the solidarity of the oppressed Russian masses.<sup>52</sup>

The Anarcho-Syndicalists, however, far from being docile reformists, regarded the various workers' organisations as combat units and likened the soviets to *bourses du travail* with the additional revolutionary function of acting as non-partisan labour councils designed to overthrow the regime.<sup>53</sup> They had recognised the pressing need for the federation, not only of individual anarchist cells

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<sup>41</sup> 'Without Authority', mostly active in St. Petersburg.

<sup>42</sup> Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, pp.44-54.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p.72.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.61-62.

<sup>45</sup> Kropotkin, on this point, did not share the views of Bakunin who, despite his condemnation of the concept of the *coup d'état*, had been fascinated by conspiratorial underground groups and secret societies. The popular revolution, Bakunin wrote, should be "invisibly led, not by an official dictatorship, but by a nameless and collective one" which must be composed of persons that are "wholly absorbed by one passion, the people's liberation." See Paul Avrich, *Bakunin & Nechaev* (London, 1987); the quotations above are taken from pp.22-23 of this monograph.

<sup>46</sup> Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, pp.58-60.

<sup>47</sup> Serge, *Year One*, p.40; Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, pp.79-80.

<sup>48</sup> Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, p.79.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.72,82-84.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.86-87.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.84-85.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.85-86.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.77-82.

scattered across the country, but of the working masses themselves. In the brutal climate of the 1905 revolution, where the use of violence and expropriations had become standard practice even among the rank and file of the revolutionary parties<sup>54</sup>, the Anarcho-Syndicalists failed to gather a strong following; this was to change over the next decade.

The differences between the anti-syndicalists and the Anarcho-Syndicalists, branded as “legal” anarchists by their most radical antagonists, were further accentuated by the legalisation of the trade unions in March 1906<sup>55</sup> and the subsequent decision of the Tsar’s censors to allow the publication and circulation of syndicalist literature within the Empire.<sup>56</sup> What Russia needed, asserted Abram Grossman, was not the Western European, law-abiding type of labour movement, but an illegal, revolutionary movement that relied upon direct action in its struggle.<sup>57</sup>

It seems that, at the time, only the socialists recognised the full potential of the Anarcho-Syndicalist approach. Fearful of the pro-syndicalist competition, they strove to limit the influence of the Anarcho-Syndicalists over the Russian workers. The fragmentation of the anarchist movement, the anarchists’ total refutation of political reform, and the terrorist exploits of various groups, which the socialists claimed were discrediting the revolutionary movement as a whole, served to prove Lenin’s point that anarchism was merely “bourgeois philosophy turned inside out”, and that, as adherents to such “individualistic theories”, the anarchists represented a “liability”, and not an asset, within the revolutionary movement.<sup>58</sup> On 23 November 1905, the executive committee of the St. Petersburg Soviet voted to exclude all anarchists from its organisation.<sup>59</sup>

In 1906 P. A. Stolypin was appointed as the new Prime Minister and embarked on a campaign of fierce repression,<sup>60</sup> coupled with a programme of reforms aimed at conciliating the opposition and strengthening the tsarist system.<sup>61</sup> The economic situation improved sufficiently to weaken the impetus of the revolutionary movement, and by the end of 1907 many revolutionaries had either been killed or imprisoned or forced into exile.<sup>62</sup>

In 1907 Russian émigrés in the west formed an Anarchist Red Cross to help prisoners and refugees.<sup>63</sup> Most of the new organisations formed in exile were Anarchist-Communist and followed Kropotkinian lines, the most important journals of that period being the Paris-based Anarchist-Communist *Burevestnik*<sup>64</sup>, the *Listki “Khleb i Volia”*<sup>65</sup> of the Kropotkinite circle in London and the pro-

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<sup>54</sup> Woodcock, *Anarchism*, pp.390-392, e.g. notes that Stalin was “an adept bank robber for the Bolsheviks”; Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, pp.63-64, states that the terror campaigns of the militant wing of the Socialist Revolutionaries and the anarchists together claimed more than 4,000 lives during 1906 and 1907.

<sup>55</sup> Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, p.80.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p.88.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p.85.

<sup>58</sup> V. I. Lenin, ‘Socialism and Anarchism’, *Novaya Zhizn*, No. 21, 25 November 1905; URL: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1905/nov/24.htm> (07/11/2004)

<sup>59</sup> Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, p.81.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.64-71.

<sup>61</sup> Serge, *Year One*, p.43; Figes, *A People’s Tragedy*, pp.224-230.

<sup>62</sup> Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, pp.112-114; Figes, in *A People’s Tragedy*, p.224, claims that, during Stolypin’s first three years in office, nearly 60,000 political detainees were executed, sentenced to penal servitude or sent into exile while thousands of peasants were tried in military field courts.

<sup>63</sup> Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, pp.113-114. Boris Yelensky, *In the Struggle for Equality* (Chicago, 1958), offers a good first-hand account of the history of the Anarchist Red Cross (also known as Anarchist Black Cross). See also ‘History and Motives of the Anarchist Black Cross (ABC)’: <http://www.anarchistblackcross.org/abc/why.html> (15/04/2005)

<sup>64</sup> ‘The Stormy Petrel’

<sup>65</sup> ‘Leaflets of “Bread and Liberty”’

syndicalist *Golos Truda*<sup>66</sup> of New York, which became admittedly Anarcho-Syndicalist after the outbreak of the First World War.<sup>67</sup> The Anarcho-Syndicalists were also quickly expanding their influence on the international movement, the Anarcho-Syndicalist Union of Russian Workers in the United States alone counting some ten thousand members.<sup>68</sup> Within Russia, the anarchist movement slowly started to recover from 1911 onwards; in 1913 a young circle of students adopted a Kropotkinite, pro-syndicalist position and formed the Moscow Group of Anarchist-Communists.<sup>69</sup>

In the aftermath of the failed 1905 revolution, the Russian revolutionary movement came to re-assess the efficacy and the ethics of terrorism; the revolutionary parties engaged in internal debates over the necessity of continuing underground organisational work as opposed to participation in legal public organisations. Within the anarchist movement, the need for more effective organisation was finally recognised, but none of the various efforts undertaken to reconcile the diverse currents of anarchism bore fruit. After the Amsterdam Congress of 1907, at which the dispute over the relationship between anarchism and syndicalism had come to a head in a debate between the Italian Anarchist-Communist Malatesta and the French revolutionary syndicalist Monatte, a second congress, at which the vital issues of terrorism, syndicalism, nationalism and anti-militarism were to be discussed, was scheduled to take place in London in August 1914; the congress, however, was cancelled when the First World War broke out earlier that month.<sup>70</sup>

The war only added to the tensions within the movement. In October 1914 Kropotkin, in a letter published in the London edition of *Freedom*, came out in support of the Allies and urged every man “who cherishes the ideals of human progress” to help prevent the triumph of German militarism and authoritarianism.<sup>71</sup> The majority of anarchists, however, rallied behind the anti-patriotic and anti-militaristic declaration issued by thirty-five “internationalist” anarchists, including Malatesta, Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman and Alexander Shapiro, in February 1915, which condemned the “imperialist war” and called for a social revolution instead.<sup>72</sup> The controversy over the war escalated further in spring 1916, when Kropotkin, Jean Grave, Paul Reclus and thirteen other anarchists published the ‘Manifesto of the Sixteen’, which reaffirmed the “defensist” position Kropotkin had outlined in his earlier article.<sup>73</sup> But while, outside Russia, the defensists remained largely isolated from the movement, the majority of anarchists within Russia accepted Kropotkin’s view. As a consequence, those Russian anarchists who opposed the war now started looking towards Anarcho-Syndicalism in order to distance themselves from Kropotkin.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> ‘The Voice of Labour’

<sup>67</sup> Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, pp.114-115.

<sup>68</sup> Woodcock, *Anarchism*, p.391. It is also worth mentioning the creation of the predominantly Anarcho-Syndicalist union *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* (C.N.T.) in Spain in 1910, as well as the founding of the I.W.W. (Industrial Workers of the World) union in the United States in 1905 which, albeit never ‘controlled’ by anarchists, was firmly rooted in the revolutionary-syndicalist tradition. On the C.N.T., see Robert Alexander, *The Anarchists in the Spanish Civil War*, Volume One (London, 2002), pp.53-60. On the I.W.W., see Kathlyn Gay & Martin Gay, *Encyclopaedia of Political Anarchy* (Santa Barbara, 1999), pp.107-109, and the I.W.W. website: <http://www.iww.org> (15/04/2005)

<sup>69</sup> Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, p.116.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.82-84,115-116.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p.116.

<sup>72</sup> See Guérin, *No Gods No Masters*, Book Two, pp.34-37.

<sup>73</sup> Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, pp.116-117; Guérin, *No Gods No Masters*, Book Two, p.36.

<sup>74</sup> Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, p.119.

# **PART TWO**

**DIRECT ACTION, ARMED STRUGGLE AND TERRORISM**

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**THE ANARCHISTS AND WORKERS' CONTROL**

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**THE "ANARCHO-BOLSHEVIKS" AND THE "ADVANCE GUARD OF THE REVOLUTION"**

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**THE NEED FOR ORGANISATION**



## DIRECT ACTION, ARMED STRUGGLE AND TERRORISM

*“The economic alliance of the producers not only affords them a weapon for the enforcement of better living conditions, it becomes for them a practical school, a university of experience, from which they draw instruction and enlightenment in richest measure.”*  
Rudolf Rocker<sup>75</sup>

Rudolf Rocker’s statement refers to “the general cultural significance of the *labour* struggle”<sup>76</sup>; however, if interpreted in a more general context of socio-political struggle, it serves to highlight one essential difference between the anarchists and revolutionaries coming from a Marxist tradition. Referring to the Russian Revolution, one scholar has argued that “within the Marxist discourse, there was a sense that the soviets were simply a means to an end.”<sup>77</sup> The substitution, in the early 1920s, of the Communist Party for the Soviet as “the organisational expression of the revolutionary will of the proletariat”<sup>78</sup>, as well as Marxist references to the proletariat’s abolishing itself<sup>79</sup>, seem to confirm this. The anarchists, on the other hand, believe in the potential for self-assertion inherent in the counter-community<sup>80</sup>; hence the social revolution is the process through which the counter-community’s sense of its identity and competence is strengthened, the process through which the counter-community gains the experience which will allow it to translate its (conscious or sub-conscious) egalitarian vision into reality. The self-assertion of the counter-community is thus intended, not as “a base for a rigid course of social development led by a political elite”, but as an end in itself.<sup>81</sup>

In this light it is possible to understand the stance taken by parts of the anarchist movement after the February Revolution. The anarchists were united by their desire for radical change and the abolition of the state, but not all anarchists drew the same conclusions from their assessment of the situation in Russia; as a result the tactics used by the various groups differed greatly in scope and outlook. While the Anarcho-Syndicalists engaged mostly in propaganda and concentrated their efforts on workers’ organisations like the factory committees, Anarchist-Communist groups called for systematic expropriations and, from the start, put particular emphasis on direct action. The Petrograd Federation of Anarchist-Communists advocated the transformation of Petrograd into an egalitarian commune similar to the Paris Commune of 1871.<sup>82</sup> In Moscow, Petrograd and a number of other cities, militant groups of anarchists expropriated a number of private residences and printing presses.<sup>83</sup>

The practice of expropriations, certainly one of the most radical methods adopted by any part of the revolutionary movement, was highly controversial. Within the anarchist ranks, the Anarcho-

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<sup>75</sup> Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, p.117.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p.117 [italics are my emphasis].

<sup>77</sup> Sharif Gemie, ‘Counter-Community: An Aspect of Anarchist Political Culture’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 29:2 (1994), p.363.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p.363.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.356-357. Remember that socialism is achieved once the state, in the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat, has withered away.

<sup>80</sup> In general terms, the counter-community can be understood as a social or ethical grouping with a revolutionary anti-statist outlook, at the heart of which a meaningful degree of liberty and equality is developing. As such, it is to be “generalised, not abolished.” See Gemie, ‘Counter-Community’, pp.353-357.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p.363. It is crucial that the reader bears this fundamental notion in mind throughout the discussions which will follow, even when it is not stressed explicitly. It is central to many of the problems which will be dealt with.

<sup>82</sup> Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, pp.125-126.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p.130.

Syndicalists and the “Anarcho-Bolsheviks” were the staunchest critics of it. The Anarcho-Syndicalists, while they agreed in principle, considered that immediate confiscation of houses and factories was premature, even retrogressive, as long as the masses were not adequately prepared.<sup>84</sup> Such concerns were echoed by Iuda Roshchin who, in March 1918, argued that the practice of expropriations, which he saw as a form of compulsion, was “attracting the unprincipled and the unstable.”<sup>85</sup>

There is certainly a lot of truth to these allegations; however, a look at primary sources begs a more balanced assessment. One of the most prominent seizures was that of the Petrograd *dacha* of the former Governor-General of Moscow, P. P. Durnovo, by a group of anarchists and left-wing workers from the radical Vyborg district in spring 1917. The occupants were left undisturbed until 5 June, when a group of anarchists quartered in the “house of rest” endeavoured to seize the printing plant of the “bourgeois” newspaper *Russkaya Volia*. A crisis ensued during which both the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet condemned the seizure of the plant and the *dacha*, and demanded that the “criminals who call themselves anarchists” return both premises to their owners. Demonstrations by large numbers of workers from the Vyborg factories and the protection from a delegation of sailors from Kronstadt frustrated the eviction efforts of the Provisional Government and the *dacha* was not raided until 18 June, after a group of anarchists liberated a number of prisoners from a Vyborg jail during the so-called “June Demonstration”.<sup>86</sup>

In his account of the incident, Sukhanov notes how the Procurator visiting the *dacha* during the crisis was surprised to find “nothing either dreadful or mysterious”, “nothing dilapidated or broken”; there was a room for lectures and meetings, the garden was used as a playground by children and, most of all, it turned out that the anarchists were not the only residents of the house. In fact there were a number of other organisations located in the Durnovo *dacha*, including a baker’s trade union and a People’s Militia organisation.<sup>87</sup> Similarly Philips Price, during a visit to Kronstadt in May 1917, was stunned to find the house of Admiral Veren, murdered on the first day of the Revolution, in the possession of “peaceful Tolstoyans who would refuse to shed blood on principle.”<sup>88</sup>

These experiences are contrasted by the account of the correspondent of the *United Press of America*, who also visited the Durnovo *dacha* in June. He describes the *dacha* as “a filthy hole” full of “unwashed, unshaved” men, including a group of American anarchists which he refers to as “the most extreme New York gun-men.”<sup>89</sup> The British agent Bruce Lockhart, who visited a number of “anarchist nests” in Moscow after the Cheka raids in April 1918, similarly paints a shocking picture of carpets covered in “wine stains and human excrement”, ceilings “perforated with bullet-holes” and “priceless pictures [...] slashed to strips.” The sight of the corpses of the fallen anarchists, who in one house had apparently been surprised in the middle of an orgy, led him to conclude that these were “men who belonged obviously to the criminal class.”<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p.135-136,148.

<sup>85</sup> Roshchin, Orgeiani and Ikonnikova, ‘Declaration on Expropriations’, *Golos Anarkhista* (11 March 1918), in Paul Avrich (ed.), *The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution: Documents of Revolution* (London, 1973), pp.112-113.

<sup>86</sup> See Alexander Rabinowitch, *Prelude to Revolution – The Petrograd Bolsheviks and the July 1917 Uprising* (Bloomington, 1991), pp.64-66,107-108; Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, 3 vol. in 1 (London, 1934), pp.451-466.

<sup>87</sup> Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution 1917* (London, 1955), pp.387-388.

<sup>88</sup> Quoted at length in Harvey Pitcher, *Witnesses of the Russian Revolution* (London, 1994), p.107.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p.121.

<sup>90</sup> Bruce Lockhart, *Memoirs of a British Agent* (London, 1932), p.258-259.

However, the fact that Lockhart's guide was none other than Peters, the Lettish assistant of Dzerzhinsky<sup>91</sup>, raises some doubts about the general validity of his findings. Maximoff offers a completely different account of the activities of the anarchists in the occupied houses in Moscow; thus he states that the Moscow Federation of Anarchists catalogued and guarded the art treasures found in the seized houses and later transferred them to the respective museums in conjunction with the Moscow Soviet and Art Societies. Apart from being centres of anarchist propaganda, the premises were also used by various organisations to hold lectures and discussions or to set up circles of proletarian art-printing, poetry and theatre.<sup>92</sup>

From these contradictory accounts it becomes obvious how hard it is to draw a general conclusion about the nature of anarchist activities. The militancy of the anarchists was certainly the most visible, for they were often seen carrying weapons at demonstrations and participated in countless uprisings and flare-ups throughout the revolutionary period; as a result they were not only perceived as a potential threat both by the Provisional Government and the Soviet regime, but, one might suggest, they also offered a great target for repressive measures designed to prove the commitment to discipline and order of those in power.

The anarchists had initially benefited from the overthrow of the Provisional Government; the movement gained in numbers and experienced a greater degree of freedom. However, from early 1918 onwards their situation started to change for the worse. The anarchists had opposed the peace negotiations and instead advocated guerrilla warfare against the German-Austrian troops. Many of them participated in the spontaneous partisan detachments which, with the consent of the government, were fighting the German-Austrian advance after the October Revolution. After the signing of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, the Soviet government began to view these detachments with growing concern.<sup>93</sup>

Partly in preparation for the campaign against the German-Austrian troops, and partly to discourage hostile moves by the Soviet government, the Moscow Federation of Anarchists had been organising armed detachments of "Black Guards". Unfortunately for the Federation, a number of individuals and groups within the ranks of the Black Guards started acting on behalf of the Federation without securing its permission.<sup>94</sup> The Petrograd anarchists had already infuriated the Bolsheviks in January 1918 by threatening the United States Ambassador with harm should he not achieve the release of American anarchists from jail.<sup>95</sup> On 9 April a group of Moscow anarchists stole an automobile belonging to Colonel Robins, the representative of the American Red Cross and a pro-Bolshevik contact with the United States government.<sup>96</sup> This incident provided the pretext for the Cheka raids on 26 anarchist clubs in Moscow on the night of 11-12 April, during which about forty anarchists were killed or wounded, and more than five hundred were taken prisoner.<sup>97</sup> The raids quickly spread from the capital throughout Russia and the majority of anarchist papers were suspended. Although the Bolshevik government claimed that it was only carrying out the task that the anarchist movement seemed unable to achieve on its own, i.e. purging it of the criminal and counter-

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<sup>91</sup> Dzerzhinsky was the head of the Cheka.

<sup>92</sup> G. P. Maximoff, *The Guillotine at Work – Twenty Years of Terror in Russia* (New York, 1975), pp.405-408.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p.411.

<sup>94</sup> Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, pp.179-184.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p.184; Edgar Sisson, *One Hundred Red Days* (New Haven, 1931), p.282.

<sup>96</sup> M. Philips Price, *My Reminiscences of the Russian Revolution* (London, 1921), pp.269-270.

<sup>97</sup> Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, pp.184-185.

revolutionary elements that were infiltrating its ranks, many of those arrested were “ideological” anarchists like Maximoff, Iartshuk,<sup>98</sup> or Bleikhman, a member of the Petrograd Soviet.<sup>99</sup>

Following the raids there were also allegations of a planned anti-Bolshevik insurrection by the anarchists. Serge mentions a meeting of anarchists at which such plans were apparently discussed, but dismissed after the intervention of Borovoi and Novomirskii, two influential orators. He also produces a document which suggests that sixty or seventy members of the counter-revolutionary Fatherland and Freedom Defence League had infiltrated the Moscow Federation by the beginning of April.<sup>100</sup> Although it is virtually impossible to determine exactly to what extent the Anarchist-Communist groups were infiltrated by counter-revolutionary elements, it seems plausible. Both Avrich and Serge point out efforts by the anarchist press to distance themselves from such elements, acknowledging in part their inability to control the actions of self-styled anarchists claiming to adhere to their groups.

Anatoly Gorelik, an anarchist active in Russia at the time, claims that the true reason for the April raids were secret negotiations held in Vologda between the Bolsheviks and the Entente. According to his account, the Bolsheviks were proposing to create a united front with the Entente against the German-Austrians in exchange for the official recognition of the Soviet government; the Bolshevik clamp-down on anarchist organisations would have been caused by the Allies’ refusal to negotiate with a government that cooperated with anarchists.<sup>101</sup> There could well be an element of truth to Gorelik’s claim. Serge mentions negotiations which took place in late March 1918 between Trotsky, Colonel Robins (for the United States) and Captain Sadoul (for France) on the possible collaboration of the Allied missions in organising the Red Army and the transport system. It seems that the negotiations did not yield any success, for on 14 April the French government declared that it would recognise neither the Soviets nor the Brest-Litovsk peace.<sup>102</sup> Furthermore, Philips Price states that Robins, in a conversation with Trotsky following the theft of his car, threatened to leave Russia, rhetorically asking if there was “any central authority in Soviet Russia now.”<sup>103</sup>

The anarchists outside Russia were mostly unaware of the developments that were taking place inside Russia and, in an effort to counter the negative representation of the Bolsheviks in the western press, continued to praise the gains of the Russian Revolution. Emma Goldman, in 1918 still active in the United States, wrote that the Bolsheviks embodied “the most fundamental, far-reaching and all-embracing principles of human freedom and of economic well-being”,<sup>104</sup> a statement she would later come to regret when she was allowed to witness the Bolsheviks’ understanding of ‘freedom’ during her stay in Russia from 1919 until 1921.

In the aftermath of the April-May pogroms against the anarchists, a number of them turned towards armed opposition against the regime through terrorist methods. The terror campaign of the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries was, by that time, in full swing, reaching its peak with the murder of the German Ambassador, Count Mirbach, in July and Dora Kaplan’s failed attempt to shoot Lenin in

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<sup>98</sup> Maximoff, *Guillotine*, pp.409-411. Iartshuk and Maximoff were members of the editorial staff of the Anarcho-Syndicalist paper *Golos Truda*.

<sup>99</sup> Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, p.185.

<sup>100</sup> Serge, *Year One*, pp.214-215.

<sup>101</sup> Anatoly Gorelik, ‘Les Anarchistes dans la Révolution Russe’, in Alexander Skirda, *Les Anarchistes dans la Révolution Russe* (Paris, 1973), pp.68,85-86.

<sup>102</sup> Serge, *Year One*, p.229.

<sup>103</sup> Philips Price, *My Reminiscences*, p.270.

<sup>104</sup> Emma Goldman, *The Truth about the Bolsheviks* (New York, 1918), p.11.

August. Southern Russia saw the resurgence of self-styled anarchist battle detachments, patterned after those from the 1905 revolution, which were not always motivated by revolutionary ideals. In Kharkov a group of “Anarcho-Futurists” proclaimed death to world civilisation; in Rostov, Briansk and Ekaterinoslav anarchists broke into jails and inaugurated a new “era of dynamite”, calling for the violent overthrow of the Bolshevik “Social-Vampires”.<sup>105</sup>

In September 1919 a group called the Underground Anarchists, in conjunction with a group of Left Socialist-Revolutionaries, bombed the headquarters of the Moscow Committee of the Communist Party while a plenary meeting was in session. Twelve members of the Committee were killed and fifty-five were wounded, among them Bukharin. Although prominent anarchists lost no time to disavow terrorist measures (in spite of their condemnation of the proletarian dictatorship), a wave of wholesale arrests swept across the country once again.<sup>106</sup>

From the second half of 1918 onwards, those anarchists who were unwilling to subordinate themselves to the terms of cooperation imposed on them by the Bolshevik repression began to look increasingly towards the Ukraine as a refuge where they could enjoy greater freedom to put their ideas into practice. By the fall of 1918 the *Nabat* Confederation of Anarchist Organisations had established its headquarters in Kharkov. *Nabat* considered the defence of the revolution against the Whites its most pressing task, yet resolved to boycott the Red Army which it denounced as an authoritarian organisation. Instead *Nabat* wished to see this task carried out by a partisan army organised spontaneously by the revolutionary masses themselves. In early spring 1919 a few of the members of *Nabat* approached Nestor Makhno, the leader of the Insurgent Army of Ukraine, for his forces appeared to be a likely nucleus of such a partisan army.<sup>107</sup>

Whereas nowadays, Makhno is considered by many anarchists to have been, in the words of one historian, “the most formidable of all anarchist guerrilla warriors”<sup>108</sup>, anarchists at the time certainly had a more reserved opinion on him. According to Alexander Berkman, due to their opposition to armed uprisings none of the major anarchist groups still active in the northern parts of Russia regarded the Insurgent Army of Ukraine as an anarchist movement; Berkman himself held no brief for Makhno either.<sup>109</sup> Ida Mett, who became acquainted with Makhno in Paris in the 1920s, later wrote that she felt as though he sensed “a lack of coordination of the anarchist idea with the reality of social life”.<sup>110</sup> Even the members of *Nabat* maintained that calling the Makhnovites anarchists was “a mistake”, adding that the nucleus in the centre of the army had come to “assimilate the slogans of non-government and free Soviet order” through years of struggle against different regimes.<sup>111</sup>

Makhno had become an Anarchist-Communist during the 1905 revolution. After his release from prison in 1917 he became head of the local Soviet in his native Guliai-Pole region, formed a small

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<sup>105</sup> Avrigh, *Russian Anarchists*, p. 186-188.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.188-189; Maximoff, *Guillotine*, pp.359-360.

<sup>107</sup> Avrigh, *Russian Anarchists*, pp.204-209. We will concentrate more on the character of the Insurgent Army of Ukraine in this chapter. For a concise history of the Insurgent Army of Ukraine and Makhno, see Avrigh, *Russian Anarchists*, pp.209-222.

<sup>108</sup> Woodcock, *Anarchism*, p.394.

<sup>109</sup> Alexander Berkman, ‘Some Bolshevik Lies about the Russian Anarchists’, *Freedom*, April 1922, Berkman Archive (IISG), p.25.

<sup>110</sup> Ida Mett, *Souvenirs sur Nestor Makhno*, pamphlet, n.d. [written in 1948, published after her death in 1973], p.15.

<sup>111</sup> Michael Palij, *The Anarchism of Nestor Makhno, 1918-1921* (Seattle, 1976), p.58.

detachment of armed peasants and set about expropriating the landed gentry.<sup>112</sup> Within his Insurgent Army, *Nabat* was in charge of the cultural section, publishing leaflets, newspapers and pamphlets.<sup>113</sup> When Makhno detachments entered a certain town or village, they immediately announced to the population that they did not intend to exercise any political authority. In many places, the Makhnovites dynamited or burned the prisons.<sup>114</sup> There was complete freedom of speech, press, assembly and association, and the currencies of all forces occupying the region were recognised.<sup>115</sup> All orders of the previous authorities were abolished and the population was invited to freely elect “administrative soviets” “without the compulsion of any party” and proceed with the formation of free communes.<sup>116</sup> Makhno harboured a deep suspicion of political parties, especially the Bolsheviks. When a group of Bolsheviks in Alexandrovsk proposed to Makhno a “division of spheres of action” in which they would assume all political and civil authority, leaving him the military power, he told them to “go and take up some honest trade”.<sup>117</sup>

Makhno was not only an able military leader; his peculiar brand of instinctive, direct anarchism and his strong attachment to his Ukrainian identity made him popular with the Ukrainian peasantry, who shared his suspicion of authority and “foreign invaders”.<sup>118</sup> The strength and the successes of the Makhno army caused serious concern to the Bolsheviks. They felt the need to “discipline” Makhno’s army<sup>119</sup> for the “final liquidation of banditry and the strengthening of the Soviet apparatus”.<sup>120</sup> In addition to the military and intelligence units deployed against Makhno to this effect, the Bolsheviks embarked on a campaign of slanderous propaganda, frequently denouncing the Makhnovites as “kulaks”, “Anarcho-Bandits” and “counter-revolutionaries”.<sup>121</sup>

The Bolsheviks soon found that they could project the alleged “banditism” of Makhno onto other anarchists as a justification for their arrests.<sup>122</sup> When prompted by Berkman why there were so many anarchists in Soviet prisons, Lenin furiously replied that the Bolsheviks had “bandits in prison, and *Makhnovtsy*, but no *ideiny* anarchists.”<sup>123</sup> Similarly Bukharin, at the International Red Labour Congress in 1921, declared that the anarchist movement in Europe was one thing; the anarchist movement in Russia, however, was “nothing but banditism and *Makhnovstchina*”, “murderers and counter-revolutionaries”.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Volin, *The Unknown Revolution* (London, 1955), pp.86-87.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p.65.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.159-160.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p.152.

<sup>116</sup> Cultural-Educational Section of the Insurgent Army, ‘Qui sont les Makhnovistes et pour quoi combattent-ils?’, 27 April 1920, and Insurgent Makhnovists, ‘Arrête-toi! Lis! Réfléchis!’, June 1920, in Nestor Makhno, *La lutte pour les soviets libres en Ukraine 1918-1921 – Tracts makhnovistes*, n.d., photocopied booklet from CIRA Lausanne, pp.964-965,974-975.

<sup>117</sup> Volin, *Unknown Revolution*, pp.161-162.

<sup>118</sup> Palij, *Makhno*, pp.57-61.

<sup>119</sup> Trotsky to Lenin, 22 May 1919, in Martin McCauley (ed.), *The Russian Revolution and the Soviet State 1817-1921: Documents* (London, 1975), pp.165-166.

<sup>120</sup> Gusev to Trotsky and Lenin, 17 December 1920, in McCauley, *Documents*, pp.166-167.

<sup>121</sup> Maximoff, *Guillotine*, p.419; Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, p.217; Trotsky, ‘The Makhno Movement’, 2 June 1919, in McCauley, *Documents*, pp.167-171.

<sup>122</sup> Berkman, ‘Bolshevik Lies’, pp.24-26; Maximoff, *Guillotine*, pp.360-361,503-505; Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, p.223.

<sup>123</sup> Emma Goldman, *Living My Life* (London, 1932), p.765.

<sup>124</sup> Alexander Berkman, ‘Bukharin on Anarchism at the Red Labour Congress’, typewritten manuscript, March 1922, Alexander Berkman Archive (IISG), p.5.

Makhno's army was defeated in winter 1920-1921 and the members of *Nabat* arrested. In February 1921, Kropotkin died of pneumonia. Anarchist prisoners were released for one day to attend his funeral.<sup>125</sup> The anarchist movement was running out of steam. After the Kronstadt uprising, hailed by a number of anarchists as the start of the "third revolution", the Bolsheviks proceeded to smash the remainder of the anarchist organisations in Russia.

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<sup>125</sup> George Woodcock & Ivan Avakumović, *The Anarchist Prince: A Biographical Study of Peter Kropotkin* (London, 1950), pp.434-437.

## THE ISSUE OF WORKERS' CONTROL

*“In essence, the entire question of control amounts to who controls whom, that is, which class is the controller and which the controlled.”*  
Lenin<sup>126</sup>

The question of workers' control is without doubt the most complex and complicated issue to be discussed in this dissertation, for it needs to be addressed both on a political/ideological and on an economic level. In the first place, one needs to understand what the various advocates of workers' control are actually advocating, and perhaps more importantly, what they are not. One interpretation of the term is that which equates workers' control with direct involvement of the workers in the management of production; in this case the working class is the actual owner of the means of production. The second interpretation is that which limits the extent of workers' control to the supervision of the production process; in this case the means of production are not owned by the working class itself, but remain firmly in the hands of private or state ownership. Needless to note that, under a government which claims to represent the working class, the question of supervision and ownership turns all the more into a tricky semantic exercise.

Secondly, there is the question of the bodies through which the various forms of workers' control manifest themselves, be it trade unions, factory and shop committees or soviets, and the question of these organisations' affiliation to a given political party or lack thereof. And finally, there is, on a purely economic level, the question of which form of workers' control is the most effective, and which of the various bodies representing workers' control is best suited to assure economic stability.

1917 saw the resurgence of workers' organisations on a large scale. Factory committees sprang up, partly in order to keep up production for the war effort after superiors fled from the turmoil of the February revolution, but mostly with a view to inaugurating the democratization of industrial relations, and received legal recognition as the workers' representative organs on 23 April. The trade unions also began to flourish after a few months.<sup>127</sup>

The mounting economic crisis in early summer led to a radicalisation of the workers' demands. Faced with the prospect of mass unemployment, the factory committees came to demand ever greater involvement in the industrial process, insisting on monitoring the stocks of raw materials and getting access to order books and company accounts. In some cases, factory committees sought to prevent or revoke closures by taking over the enterprises. The committees also proceeded to set up workers' militias to protect factory premises and keep order in working class districts.<sup>128</sup>

While the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries were highly critical of the “excesses” which could arise from unrestricted forms of workers' control and instead insisted on the need for centralised, planned and all-embracing state control of industry<sup>129</sup>, the anarchists, in particular the Anarcho-Syndicalists, greeted the factory committees as “the cells of the future socialist society” which

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<sup>126</sup> Quoted in Paul Avrich, ‘The Bolshevik Revolution and Workers' Control in Russian Industry’, *Slavic Review*, 22:1 (1963), p.47.

<sup>127</sup> Steve Smith, ‘Factory Committees’, in Edward Acton, Vladimir Cherniaev & William Rosenberg (eds.), *Critical Companion to the Russian Revolution 1914-1921* (London, 1997), p.346-348.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.349-354.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p.351.



would “deliver the decisive and mortal blow to capitalism” and hastened to join them.<sup>130</sup> The Bolsheviks also came to recognise the movement for workers’ control as a driving force of the revolution and undertook to establish their influence in the factory committees and in the trade unions.<sup>131</sup>

By late summer 1917 the Bolsheviks came to dominate the factory committees, which hitherto had been mainly under the influence of the moderate Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries<sup>132</sup>; the Anarcho-Syndicalists, too, enjoyed increasing popularity in factory committee elections.<sup>133</sup> The Bolsheviks and the anarchists were united in their efforts to prevent the full subordination of the factory committees to the trade unions, in which the Mensheviks prevailed over the Bolsheviks until late autumn.<sup>134</sup>

Syndicalist ideas became increasingly popular in the second half of 1917 and it seems that the anarchists succeeded in considerably extending their influence on the masses, even though they remained relatively small in numbers.<sup>135</sup> The Anarcho-Syndicalist journal *Golos Truda*, re-established in Petrograd in August 1917, is said to have at times rivalled the influence of *Pravda*.<sup>136</sup> The coal miners in Kharkov adopted, in late October, the preamble of the constitution of the International Workers of the World and declared a general strike when Cossacks came to disperse them.<sup>137</sup>

After the October revolution, workers’ control spread quickly and assumed a more active form than before. The Decree on Workers’ Control, issued on November 14, was interpreted by many workers as giving official sanction to their taking over the management of the enterprises. The decree did indeed state that workers’ control was to be organised in each factory through elected representatives whose decisions were binding on employers and could only be overruled by “the trade unions and congresses”, and that the workers’ representatives and the owners were responsible to the state “for the strictest order, discipline and maintenance of property”. Local committees or councils were to be responsible to a Regional Council of Workers’ Control which in turn was subordinated to an All-Russian Council of Workers’ Control which comprised representatives from the All-Russian Executive Committee of the Soviets, the Executive of the All-Russian Council of Trade Unions, the All-Russian Council of Factory Committees and a number of other bodies.<sup>138</sup>

While the anarchists had always made it clear that, for them, workers’ control meant that the workers would eventually take over the actual management of production, the Bolsheviks had remained rather vague in the outline of their interpretation of workers’ control.<sup>139</sup> After October it became increasingly obvious that, in their understanding, workers’ control was to be limited to the “active supervision” of production.<sup>140</sup> Furthermore, there occurred a shift in Bolshevik policy towards the earlier demands of the Mensheviks for state control of industry. During the two months leading up

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<sup>130</sup> Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, p.140.

<sup>131</sup> Edward Hallett Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923*, Volume Two (London, 1952), pp.56-58.

<sup>132</sup> Smith, ‘Factory Committees’, p.352.

<sup>133</sup> Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, p.145.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.143-144; Maurice Brinton, *The Bolsheviks and Workers’ Control* (Detroit, 1975), pp.6-8.

<sup>135</sup> Arshinov is said to have estimated the total number of anarchists active within Russia in 1917 at thirty to forty thousand, in Skirda, *Anarchistes*, p.24.

<sup>136</sup> Serge, *Year One*, p.213.

<sup>137</sup> John Reed, *Ten Days that Shook the World* (Watford Herts, 1961), p.36.

<sup>138</sup> Brinton, *Workers’ Control*, pp.15-20; Carr, *Bolshevik Revolution*, pp.66-69.

<sup>139</sup> Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, pp.142-146.

<sup>140</sup> Avrich, ‘Workers’ Control’, p.51.

to the First All-Russian Congress of Trade Unions in January 1918, important steps were taken towards the statization of economic authority. In December 1917 the Supreme Economic Council (*Vesenkha*), directly attached to the Council of People's Commissars, was created to work out "a plan for the regulation of the economic life of the country", absorbing the All-Russian Council of Workers' Control.<sup>141</sup>

At the Congress of Trade Unions, where the relationship between the factory committees and the trade unions and that between the unions and the state were to be determined, the debate over the nature of workers' control (and indeed the very nature of the Russian Revolution) came to a head. The Mensheviks, maintaining that the revolution was still at the "bourgeois-democratic" stage, argued that the efforts of the anarchists to inaugurate a stateless society were premature. Losovski, a Bolshevik trade-unionist, declared that by pressing for "industrial federalism" at such an early stage the Anarcho-Syndicalists were engaging in an "idyllic" quest for the "bluebird of happiness". In response to this, Maximoff, referring to Marx's statement that the liberation of the working class is the task of the working class itself, declared that the Anarcho-Syndicalists, in their efforts to preserve the autonomy of the factory committees, were "better Marxists" than the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks themselves.<sup>142</sup> Capitalism had already been "seized by the throat", he continued; the realisation of the free, egalitarian society was as imminent as never before.<sup>143</sup>

The anarchist delegates, greatly outnumbered, failed to protect the autonomy of the factory committees. The Congress voted for the transformation of the committees into local organs of the trade unions, which in turn were to "take upon themselves the main task of organising production and of restoring the weakened productive forces of the country." The trade unions were also entrusted with the centralisation of workers' control, which was defined as "the instrument by which the universal economic plan must be put into effect locally."<sup>144</sup>

The motivations for and the implications of this change in policy have since been the subject of great debate. From an economic point of view, some historians, echoing the arguments put forward by a number of revolutionaries and observers at the time, have claimed that workers' control had a devastating effect on Russian economy due to the inexperience or the irresponsibility of the workers and therefore needed to be curbed.<sup>145</sup> In response to this claim Rosenberg has pointed out the factory committees' difficulties in reconciling their role as breeding cells of a conscious and unified working class with the concerns of the local workers in the face of economic instability, which was in part caused by rapid demobilisation towards the end of 1917.<sup>146</sup> Others have stated that the evidence regarding the contribution of workers' control to the worsening of the economic crisis points in different directions and requires further research.<sup>147</sup>

From a political point of view, both Carr and Avrich have argued that the Bolsheviks, in supporting the claims for workers control, had been "carried along by a movement which was in many respects embarrassing to them", but which "they could not fail to endorse". In accepting as their own

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<sup>141</sup> Brinton, *Workers' Control*, pp.21-22.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.29-31.

<sup>143</sup> Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, p.168.

<sup>144</sup> Brinton, *Workers' Control*, p.32.

<sup>145</sup> Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, pp.149-151,161-165.

<sup>146</sup> See William Rosenberg, 'Russian Labour and Bolshevik Power after October', *Slavic Review*, 44:2 (1985), pp.213-238.

<sup>147</sup> Smith, 'Factory Committees', p.351.

“practices which were anarchist and syndicalist”,<sup>148</sup> the Bolsheviks had used “the people’s destructive capabilities” to undermine the Provisional Government and maintained workers’ control only until they had consolidated their popular support.<sup>149</sup> Brinton, on the other hand, has noted that the restriction of workers’ control to mere supervision of the productive process implies a state of duality of power, in which one party determines the objectives while a second party sees that the appropriate means are used to achieve them. Judging that “dual power is essentially unstable”, and thus will eventually give way to the concentration of all power in the hands of one of the two parties, Brinton concludes that the inauguration of centralised administration from above marked the genesis of the Bolshevik state bureaucracy and the failure of the workers’ revolution.<sup>150</sup>

The anarchists continued their work in the soviets and factory committees. In late April 1918, they were joined in their criticism of the militarization of labour and the restoration of “capitalist management of industry” by a group of left Bolsheviks which included Bukharin and Radek.<sup>151</sup> In September the Anarcho-Syndicalist *Vol’nyi Golos Truda*<sup>152</sup> published an article in which the author deplored the rise of “a new class of administrators” created by the division of labour and management.<sup>153</sup> The First All-Russian Conference of Anarcho-Syndicalists in Moscow condemned the Bolshevik program of “war communism” and called for the replacement of the Sovnarkom by a federation of “free soviets”.<sup>154</sup>

As the civil war intensified, the Bolsheviks began to clamp down on trade unions they deemed unreliable. Where elections failed to appoint individuals who were not suitable to the needs of the Central Council, the elections were often annulled and the representatives replaced, reported the delegates at the Second All-Russian Congress of Trade Unions in January 1919.<sup>155</sup> Anarcho-Syndicalist-dominated unions soon fell victims to mergers; the number of Anarcho-Syndicalist and sympathetic delegates also shrank from congress to congress, dropping from twenty-five in 1918 to fifteen in 1919 and finally only ten at the Third All-Russian Trade Union Congress in 1920.<sup>156</sup>

The decision by the *Golos Truda* group to refrain from advocating the formation of purely revolutionary underground unions in the hope that participation in the legal unions would eventually bring success to the syndicalist movement turned out to be a mistake. Scattered across the Bolshevik unions, the Anarcho-Syndicalists were in no position to resist the subordination of the unions to the Party programme. The only union which still held out for the Anarcho-Syndicalist line at the beginning of 1920 was the Moscow Bakers’ Union, in which the Anarcho-Syndicalist Pavlov and two Maximalists maintained a strong influence. An attempt to create an underground Federation of Food Workers in November 1920 was frustrated by a new wave of repression following the Cheka raids on the Makhno headquarters in Ukraine.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Carr, *Bolshevik Revolution*, p.56-58.

<sup>149</sup> Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, p.143; Avrich, ‘Workers’ Control’, pp.47-48.

<sup>150</sup> Brinton, *Workers’ Control*, pp.ii-xv.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.38-39.

<sup>152</sup> ‘The Free Voice of Labour’, founded after the suppression of *Golos Truda* in May.

<sup>153</sup> M. Sergven, ‘Paths of Revolution’, *Vol’nyi Golos Truda*, 16 September 1918, in Avrich (ed.), *Documents*, pp.122-125.

<sup>154</sup> Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, p.190.

<sup>155</sup> Brinton, *Workers’ Control*, p.51.

<sup>156</sup> G. P. Maximoff, *Syndicalists in the Russian Revolution*, Direct Action Pamphlets No. 11, n.d. [presumably early 1970s], p.14.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, p.15.

While the Anarcho-Syndicalist movement was vanishing from the trade unions, the Bolshevik leadership had to put up with the growth of “syndicalist and anarchist deviation” in the ranks of their own party. The Workers’ Opposition, headed by Kollontai and Shliapnikov, demanded the creation of an All-Russian Congress of Producers and the transfer of the administration of the economy back into the hands of the factory committees and trade unions.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, p.225.

## THE “ANARCHO-BOLSHEVIKS” AND THE “ADVANCE GUARD OF THE REVOLUTION”

*“The freedom fighters died upon the hill  
They sang the red flag  
They wore the black one”*  
The Clash <sup>159</sup>

*“If I can’t dance, it’s not my revolution.”*  
Emma Goldman <sup>160</sup>

Unfortunately it seems that no study has yet been dedicated exclusively to the so-called “Anarcho-Bolsheviks”, already mentioned very briefly in Part One, but this dissertation would not be complete without a discussion of their role in the Russian Revolution.

Upon his return to Russia in April 1917, Lenin published his famous ‘April Theses’, in which he called for the overthrow of the Provisional Government and the creation of a “commune state” (an idea which he traced back to the Paris Commune) and a popular militia; Lenin also called for the transformation of the “predatory imperialist” war into a revolutionary struggle against the capitalist order.<sup>161</sup> Lenin’s impatience to push forward the revolution and his apparent dismissal of rigid historical stages dismayed many traditional Marxists, but it struck a chord with the anarchists who, despite their objections to Lenin’s preoccupation with the seizure of power, found his views sufficiently in tune with their own to serve as a basis for cooperation.<sup>162</sup> It would be inaccurate to speak of this in terms of a formal alliance between the Bolsheviks and the anarchists but nevertheless, throughout 1917, both groups represented the radical wing of the revolutionary movement, temporarily united in their efforts to bring an end to the Provisional Government and bring about the social revolution.

In late August, the anarchists participated in the expedition to stop the advance of the counter-revolutionary General Kornilov on Petrograd. Events were now moving swiftly towards the overthrow of the Provisional Government. In the second week of October, the Petrograd Soviet established a Military-Revolutionary Committee. The committee also included, apart from 48 Bolsheviks and 14 Left Socialist Revolutionaries,<sup>163</sup> four anarchists, namely Bogatsky, the Anarchist-Communist Bleikhman and the Anarcho-Syndicalists Shatov and Iartshuk.<sup>164</sup> On 25 October the Provisional Government was overthrown.

After October 1917 the anarchists were faced with the dilemma of either fighting the counter-revolution alongside the Bolsheviks and thus risking to strengthen the Bolsheviks’ grip on power, or opposing both the Bolsheviks and the counter-revolution, a position which might well result in the defeat of the revolution. One historian has gone so far as to claim that it was not persecution by the

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<sup>159</sup> From the song ‘Spanish Bombs’, released on The Clash’s 1979 album *London Calling* (Columbia/Sony Music Entertainment UK Ltd.). The song is actually about the Spanish Civil War 1936-1939, but these three lines also nicely illustrate the situation of some of the “Soviet Anarchists”.

<sup>160</sup> Quoted in Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, p.623.

<sup>161</sup> See V. I. Lenin, ‘The Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution’, *Pravda*, No. 26 (7 April 1917); URL: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/apr/04.htm> (20/04/2005)

<sup>162</sup> Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, pp.127-129; Maximoff, *Guillotine*, p.346, even goes as far as stating that “at the time, the Bolsheviks were indeed revolutionists and Anarchists of a sort”.

<sup>163</sup> Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, pp.156-158.

<sup>164</sup> Skirda, *Anarchistes*, p.25.

Bolsheviks which destroyed the anarchist movement in Russia, but this very dilemma, which led to an “auto-liquidation of the movement”.<sup>165</sup>

Arshinov has accused the “Soviet Anarchists” of having abandoned “the troublesome positions of anarchism” for “the quiet lap of the ruling party”, thus helping the Bolsheviks in their efforts to cause “disruption in the anarchist ranks” and prove the “baselessness of anarchism.”<sup>166</sup> However, it would be inaccurate to simply dismiss all the “Anarcho-Bolsheviks” as opportunistic cowards or traitors. Initially, many of them were guided in their decision to support the Bolsheviks, or even join the Communist Party, by a genuine feeling that they had no other option than supporting the Bolsheviks, at least temporarily. Thus Bill Shatov, a prominent Russian émigré and former I.W.W. activist, regarded the dictatorship of the proletariat as an “unavoidable evil” necessary to crush the counter-revolution. He was convinced that, as “the anarchists had been the first to respond to Lenin’s essentially anarchistic call to revolution”, they would surely have “the right to demand an accounting” once Russia was safe from the reactionary powers.<sup>167</sup>

A member of the Military-Revolutionary Committee in October 1917, Shatov became the Chief of Police in Petrograd in 1918.<sup>168</sup> In 1919 he defended Petrograd against the advance of General Yudenich as an officer in the Tenth Red Army, and in 1920 was appointed Minister of Transport in the Far Eastern Republic.<sup>169</sup> A number of other anarchists followed his example and accepted small government posts, urging their comrades to do the same or at least refrain from anti-Bolshevik activities that would jeopardize the success of the revolution.<sup>170</sup> The Bolshevik cause attracted anarchists from all backgrounds, ranging from former Black Banner terrorists like Heitzman and Roshchin<sup>171</sup> to Anarchist-Communists like German Sandomirskii, who took a position in Chicherin’s Commissariat of Foreign Affairs,<sup>172</sup> and Alexander Ge, according to Victor Serge one of the organisers of Red Terror in the Terek region.<sup>173</sup> Other well-known anarchists in the service of the Bolsheviks were the Anarcho-Syndicalists Shapiro, who joined Sandomirskii in the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, and Daniil Novomirskii, in 1905 a prominent figure in the syndicalist circles in Odessa, who entered the Communist Party and became a Comintern official in 1919.<sup>174</sup> In 1918, prior to the formation of the *Nabat* Federation, Volin engaged in voluntary work for the Educational Commission of the local Soviet in Bobrov, in the province of Voroneje, but he left his post after receiving instructions from Moscow to

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<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, p.41.

<sup>166</sup> Petr Arshinov, ‘An Answer to the Soviet Anarchists’, typewritten manuscript, n.d. [presumably autumn 1923, as it is a response to an article published in *Izvestia* in September 1923], Fléchine Archive (IISG), p.1. Arshinov had been a Bolshevik until 1906 when he converted to anarchism. In 1917 he was active in the Moscow Federation of Anarchists before joining the *Nabat* Federation in Ukraine in 1918. In 1930 he returned to Russia from exile and joined the Communist Party (Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, pp.205-206,245).

<sup>167</sup> Shatov gave this explanation when meeting his friends Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman in 1920. Goldman, *Living My Life*, p.731.

<sup>168</sup> Accounts of Shatov by foreign observers offer an interesting hint at how misleading the cooperation of the “Anarcho-Bolsheviks” must have been to some. Thus Sisson, the special representative of President Wilson in Russia, refers to Shatov as the “leader” of the “party” of the anarchists, a party “recognised” by the Bolsheviks; Sisson, *Red Days*, p.342. The British agent Bruce Lockhart speaks of him simply in terms of a Communist; Lockhart, *Memoirs*, p.245.

<sup>169</sup> Paul Avrich, ‘Russian Anarchists and the Civil War’, *Russian Review*, 27:3 (1968), p.296.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, p.297.

<sup>171</sup> Arshinov, ‘Soviet Anarchists’, p.5.

<sup>172</sup> Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, p.199.

<sup>173</sup> Serge, *Year One*, p.395. This is confirmed by Skirda, *Anarchistes*, p.41, who writes that Ge joined the Cheka in the Caucasus.

<sup>174</sup> Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, p.199.

follow the party line.<sup>175</sup> Maximoff joined the Red Army, but was expelled after refusing to take part in repressions and the disarmament of workers.<sup>176</sup>

Not in all cases did this collaboration with the Bolsheviks entail a complete departure from anarchist principles or the end of fierce criticism of the dictatorship of the proletariat; many would indeed come to dismiss cooperation with the Bolsheviks as repression against anarchist groups in Russia increased. The extent to which anarchists decided to cooperate actively with the Bolsheviks also varied greatly, and one needs to differentiate between those anarchists who, like for instance Volin and Maximoff, remained true to their anarchist ideal, and those who drifted further and further away towards a Marxist point of view.

In spring 1918 the Anarcho-Communist Apollon Karelin formed the pro-Bolshevik All-Russian Federation of Anarchist-Communists in Moscow, arguing that a Soviet dictatorship was acceptable as a transitional phase in the development of a free anarchist society. According to Karelin, the defence of the Soviet government was to be regarded not as an affirmation of the principle of authority, but as a means of protecting the revolution.<sup>177</sup> A similar view was put forward by the Moscow-based Universalists, formed in 1920 by the brothers Gordin, who had previously been rabid anti-Marxists and anti-intellectuals<sup>178</sup>, and German Askarov, an Anarchist-Communist who was also a member of the Soviet Central Executive Committee.<sup>179</sup> Roshchin, the former *Chernoznamennets* and staunch anti-Marxist who, in 1919, came to see the Bolsheviks as “the advance guard of the revolution”, seems to have taken these ideas even further; according to Victor Serge, he tried to develop an “anarchist theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat.”<sup>180</sup>

It would be interesting to find out if Roshchin and his fellow “Soviet Anarchists” were familiar with the work of the anarchist Lev Mechnikov. Like Kropotkin, Mechnikov had put forward the concept of cooperation as a factor in the evolution of human society. In his 1889 book *La Civilisation et les grands fleuves historiques*<sup>181</sup>, Mechnikov described three ascending stages of social co-operation. At the lowest level cooperation is introduced by coercive social organisations. At a second stage, society is divided into interdependent groups through the division of labour. Finally, the third type of social organisation is characterised by free association and the absence of social controls.<sup>182</sup> Although Mechnikov’s analysis focused on the evolution of the phenomenon of cooperation, it is possible to imagine how his theories could have been used with a view to establishing an anarchist theory of the proletarian dictatorship.<sup>183</sup>

The support from the “Soviet Anarchists” was welcomed by the Bolshevik leadership, who insisted that the only anarchists that were persecuted in Russia were criminal elements. The

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<sup>175</sup> G. P. Maximoff, ‘Vsevolod Mikhailovitch Eichenbaum – Voline’, typewritten manuscript, n.d., Volin Archive (IISG), p.6; Volin, ‘5<sup>e</sup> Conférence’, typewritten paper from a series of conferences Volin gave in France in 1935-1936, n.d. [presumably 1936], Volin Archive (IISG), pp.25-29.

<sup>176</sup> Skirda, *Anarchistes*, p.41; Rudolf Rocker in a note on the author, in Maximoff, *Syndicalists*, p.18.

<sup>177</sup> Avrigh, *Russian Anarchists*, pp.201-202. In 1918 Karelin also became a member of the Soviet Central Executive Committee.

<sup>178</sup> See Avrigh, *Russian Anarchists*, pp.176-179.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.202-203.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, p.200-201.

<sup>181</sup> ‘Civilisation and the great historic rivers’

<sup>182</sup> James White, ‘Despotism and Anarchy: The Sociological Thought of L.I. Mechnikov’, *Slavonic and East European Studies*, 54:3 (1976).

<sup>183</sup> Unfortunately our discussion of this point must end at this stage, because our understanding of Mechnikov’s work is limited to the outline provided in Dr White’s article.

Communist Party Executive could declare that “*ideiny* anarchists”<sup>184</sup> were working with the government; those anarchists who did not cooperate were considered enemies of the revolution.<sup>185</sup>

The stance taken by the “Soviet Anarchists” did certainly not aid the anarchist cause. Apart from adding to the tensions within the movement and serving Bolshevik propaganda, they failed to leave their mark on the revolution in the long run, for they had virtually no influence on its development. In fact they were not even safe from persecution either; as the civil war came to an end, their groups were harassed regularly and some of their members imprisoned on trumped-up charges of “banditry and underground activities.”<sup>186</sup>

Nevertheless, many upheld their cooperation with the regime. The break-up of the Universalist group during a police raid in November 1921 gave birth to the most grotesque product of anarchist cooperation with the Bolsheviks by far, a docile group called the “Anarcho-Biocosmists”. The “Anarcho-Biocosmists” came out in full support of the Soviet Government and pledged to pursue the social revolution “in the interplanetary spaces but not upon the Soviet territory.”<sup>187</sup> In September 1923 another group of “Soviet Anarchists” issued a declaration in which they stated that, owing to its opposition to government, anarchism found itself “in contradiction with the tasks of the revolution” and was limited in its functions to “the tearing down of the old order.” The task of building socialism, their statement implied, could not be achieved by the anarchists.<sup>188</sup>

During the NEP period, a number of anarchists who had remained at their government posts became increasingly disillusioned with the regime; some of them turned to scholarly pursuits. In 1929 a new wave of arrests and persecutions struck the final blow to what was left of the anarchist movement in Russia; those who survived into the 1930s vanished in the Stalinist purges.<sup>189</sup> The *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia* failed to pay tribute to those anarchists who, in the words of Lenin, had been “the most dedicated supporters of Soviet power”<sup>190</sup>; Soviet historiography would remember anarchism as a “reactionary, petit-bourgeois socio-political tendency.”<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> ‘Ideological anarchists’

<sup>185</sup> Goldman, *Living My Life*, pp.796-797.

<sup>186</sup> Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, pp.222,230-231. For an example, see Askarov, Simchin and Stitzenko, ‘The Persecution of the Anarchists Universalists’, 26 November 1921, in Maximoff, *Guillotine*, pp.503-505. The charges against the Universalists included “banditism”, “close relations with the Makhno robber bands” and “selling and using counterfeit money”.

<sup>187</sup> Maximoff, *Guillotine*, p.362.

<sup>188</sup> Arshinov, ‘Soviet Anarchists’, pp.4-5.

<sup>189</sup> Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, pp.244-245.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, p.197.

<sup>191</sup> Skirda, *Anarchistes*, p.13.



## THE NEED FOR ORGANISATION

*“Especially in the matter of organisation anarchism is really staying behind the demands of life; it does not yet occupy its own place in the social struggle.”*  
Petr Arshinov<sup>192</sup>

During the twenty years of its existence the anarchist movement in Russia always remained a set of separate groups that were at best loosely connected. There were efforts to organise a united libertarian front on a number of occasions, but none of them ever came to fruition. In June or July 1917 an Anarchist Information Bureau was established in Kharkov to summon an All-Russian Conference. Representatives from a dozen cities gathered during five days and discussed the most vital issues the movement had to face. After the conference, the Information Bureau endeavoured to organise an All-Russian Congress. Questionnaires were sent out to gauge the strength and profile of the various groups in Russia. The response was overwhelmingly positive, but the scheduled Congress, announced several times at the end of 1917 and the beginning of 1918, never took place.<sup>193</sup>

In 1917 and 1918 two Conferences of Anarchists of the Donets Basin were held in Kharkov and Ekaterinoslav; there were also two All-Russian Conferences of Anarcho-Syndicalists and an All-Russian Congress of Anarchist-Communists which convened in Moscow.<sup>194</sup> At the end of 1918 an All-Russian Confederation of Anarcho-Syndicalists was formed, but there seems to be little evidence that the Confederation had any success in coordinating the activities of the various syndicalist clubs and circles in Russia. Similarly the Moscow Union of Anarcho-Syndicalist-Communists, formed in early 1919 by prominent anarchists from both wings of the movement, merely succeeded in issuing a journal which was shut down by the Bolsheviks after its sixth number.<sup>195</sup>

A last attempt at unifying the movement was made in Kharkov in autumn 1918 by the *Nabat* Confederation of Anarchist Organisations, in which Volin was a guiding spirit. Volin attempted to formulate a synthesis of Anarcho-Syndicalism, Anarchist-Communism and Anarchist-Individualism, a “united anarchism”. The establishment of an anarchist commune would be achieved by Anarcho-Syndicalist class struggle, guaranteeing the creation of the material basis necessary to allow for the full development of the individual. Volin was sent to Moscow to present the new platform to the All-Russian Conference of Anarcho-Syndicalists; however, to his great disappointment, the Conference rejected the platform as a vague and confused re-formulation of the theories of Kropotkin.<sup>196</sup>

The lack of a national platform of organisation, or at least of coordination, greatly contributed to the failure of the anarchists to impose themselves as a strong movement alongside the effectively organised revolutionary parties. Worse even, the fragmentation of the movement played into the hands of those who wished to limit or liquidate the influence the anarchists could take on the revolutionary masses.

After the depressing experience of the Russian Revolution a few attempts were made to organise at least on an international level, even though the divisions between the various currents

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<sup>192</sup> Arshinov, ‘Soviet Anarchists’, p.4.

<sup>193</sup> Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, pp.171-173; Gorelik, ‘Anarchistes’, p.84.

<sup>194</sup> Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, p.173.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.194-195.

<sup>196</sup> Maximoff, ‘Voline’, p.6-7.

remained. The Russian exiles formed the Joint Committee for the Defence of Revolutionists imprisoned in Russia and, together with the Anarchist Red Cross which resumed its activities in 1922, engaged in relief work to support their imprisoned comrades and make their experience of Bolshevism known in the hope that the next revolution would develop differently.<sup>197</sup>

The Anarcho-Syndicalists formed the International Working Men's Association in Berlin in winter 1922/1923. In 1926 Arshinov proposed an "Organisational Platform" to create a General Union of Anarchists with a central executive committee to coordinate policy and action. Makhno turned out to be the only prominent anarchist who welcomed the idea. Volin, Mollie Steimer and Senya Fléchine broke with Arshinov over this, accusing him of intending to create an anarchist party with a central committee, a concept that clashed with the anarchist principle of local initiative. The debate degenerated into a bitter personal quarrel among former comrades and achieved nothing constructive.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Yelensky, *Struggle for Equality*, pp.57-58.

<sup>198</sup> Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, pp.239-243.

## **CONCLUSION**

*“The Bolshevik idea is even more dangerous than the other governmental ideas,  
for they parade as revolutionaries, even today.”*  
Alexander Berkman<sup>199</sup>

The anarchist experience of the Russian Revolution is interesting from a number of different perspectives. As far as the anarchist movement is concerned, the Russian Revolution turned out to be, not the beginning of a new millennium free from social and political coercion, inequality and human suffering, but rather a sobering and tragic revelation of its own ideological and practical shortcomings and of the veracity of Bakunin’s prophetic warning that revolution, “whenever it is concentrated in the hands of a few governing individuals, inevitably and immediately turns into reaction”.<sup>200</sup>

It should be remembered that the Russian Revolution was the most important upheaval, in both geographic and socio-political terms, since the conception of the anarchist and socialist theories in the course of the nineteenth century, and that it came as a surprise even to the revolutionary movement itself. The anarchists, wishing to preserve the popular character of the revolution, had no interest in the struggle for political power which ensued in Russia after the February revolution, and instead made it their task to guide and inspire the masses through propaganda by the deed and the word. Yet while this safeguarded them from falling into the authoritarian trap which for example, as Bogdanov pointed out in 1917<sup>201</sup>, was inherent in the cult of leadership that had developed in the Bolshevik Party, it also denied them the ability to expand their influence on the revolutionary masses and steer the development of the revolution to the same extent as the revolutionary parties, most of all the Bolsheviks.

Another important factor in the failure of the anarchist movement was its fragmentation into the three major currents of Anarchist-Communists, Anarcho-Syndicalists and Anarchist-Individualists, which was aggravated by the controversies over the ‘correct’ positions to be taken with regard to the First World War and later the Soviet government and the Bolsheviks, a debate complicated and intensified by the threat from the counter-revolution during the civil war period. This fragmentation was cunningly exploited by their enemies. Counter-revolutionary and criminal elements, albeit in small numbers, managed to infiltrate anarchist organisations and abused anarchism as a justification for their delinquency. The Bolsheviks on the other hand, making a virtue of denouncing all their critics as counter-revolutionaries, could target the anarchists as such while pointing at the “Anarcho-Bolsheviks” as proof of the compatibility of the Leninist brand of Marxism with anarchism and of their esteem for *ideiny* anarchists. Bolshevik repression played a major part in bringing about the demise of the anarchist movement because the constant harassment of anarchist newspapers, organisations and individuals from mid-1918 onwards had a very disruptive effect on the dissemination of anarchist ideas in particular and on the organisation of anarchist activity in general.

Volin has noted that what the anarchists lacked in the Russian Revolution was institutions able to apply the anarchist vision to life.<sup>202</sup> The absence of an organised and conscious working class in Russia has often been emphasized, by revolutionaries and scholars alike, but this circumstance is of

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<sup>199</sup> Alexander Berkman to Max Nettlau, 17 December 1926, Max Nettlau Archive (IISG).

<sup>200</sup> Mikhail Bakunin, ‘Letter to the Brussels newspaper *La Liberté*’, 5 October 1872, in Guérin, *No Gods No Masters*, p. 160.

<sup>201</sup> See A. A. Bogdanov, ‘What is it we have overthrown?’, *Novaya Zhizn*, 17 May 1917 (translated into English by Dr. James White).

<sup>202</sup> Volin, *Nineteen-Seventeen* (London, 1954), p.78.

particular significance for the anarchist movement which did not have a party apparatus to compensate the absence of long-standing and experienced working class organisations. The subordination of the factory committees, which the Anarcho-Syndicalists had regarded as a basis for the re-organisation of economy along libertarian lines, to the direct administration by the state via the trade unions in 1918 also needs to be considered as a factor in the downfall of the anarchist movement because it made the committees virtually ineffective as tools of change from below.

However, the hardships endured by the anarchists during and after the Russian Revolution were not completely in vain. In the 1920s and 1930s the issues thrown up by the experience of the Russian anarchists were debated in great length in the international anarchist press; in Spain, where the anarchist movement was particularly strong, the lessons of the Russian Revolution would become of great importance during the Spanish Revolution of 1936-1939.

# **APPENDIX**

## CHRONOLOGY OF SELECTED EVENTS 1917-1921

1917

February – February Revolution

March – Formation of Provisional Government; amnesty of political prisoners; formation of Petrograd and Moscow Federations of Anarchist-Communists

June – Durnovo Dacha incidents

July – Abortive “July Days”; Conference of Anarchists in Kharkov

August – Return of Anarcho-Syndicalist émigrés; *Golos Truda* established in Petrograd

October – Formation of Military-Revolutionary Committee; October Revolution

November – Decree on Workers’ Control

December – Creation of Vesenkha

1918

January – Dispersal of Constituent Assembly; First All-Russian Congress of Trade Unions

March – Treaty of Brest-Litovsk; government moves to Moscow

April – Cheka raids on Moscow anarchists

November – First Conference of Nabat Confederation; Second All-Russian Conference of Anarcho-Syndicalists

1919

September – Bombing of Communist headquarters in Moscow by Underground Anarchists

1920

November – Communist raids on Makhno headquarters in Ukraine; arrest of Nabat Confederation

1921

February – Death and funeral of Kropotkin

March – Kronstadt uprising; suppression of Russian anarchists

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