



BOĞAZIÇIMUN 2026

HCC:
Makhnovshchina
STUDY GUIDE

Agenda Item: Open Agenda

Under Secretary-General: Kaan Akkaş

Academic Assistants: Eylül Pazarözyurt,
Zehra Yılmaz



Table of Contents

1. Letter from the Secretary-General
2. Letter from the Under Secretary-General
3. Introduction to the Committee
4. Theoretical Framework
 - a. Legacy of Marx and Engels
 - b. First International and Role of Bakunin
 - c. Paris Commune
 - d. Hague Congress
5. Historical Background
 - a. Pre-Cossack Rebellion
 - b. Cossack Rebellion and Hetmanate
6. The Revolutionary Vacuum
 - a. Ukraine After the Bolshevik Revolution
 - b. Austro-German Occupation & Puppet Hetmanate
 - c. Formation of Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army of Ukraine
 - d. Conflicts Pre-Apex and Retreat to the West
7. The Apex Period
 - a. Institutional Establishments
 - b. Administration Mechanics
 - c. Economic Organization
8. The Fall and Legacy
9. References and Further Readings



1. Letter from the Secretary-General

Meritorious Participants,

I am Duru Yavuz, a senior Political Science and Sociology student at Boğaziçi University. As the Secretary-General, I would like to welcome you all to the 8th official session of BoğaziçiMUN, BoğaziçiMUN'26.

Our academic and organizational teams have been working endlessly to ensure the best BoğaziçiMUN experience for our participants. I would like to begin by thanking our Deputy Secretaries-General, Ömer Alp Şiringöz and İpek Şen for their efforts, support and friendship. And the biggest of thank you's goes to our Director-General and Club co-Coordinator Kaan Berker and our Deputy Director-General Ekin Asyalı, this conference would not be what it is without their ambition and hard work. I would also like to thank our Club co-Coordinator İrem Ayber for all her help in both academic and organizational capacities.

BoğaziçiMUN has always been a ground where we aim to achieve academic and organizational excellence, but it has also been a place where old friends get to gather and work towards a common goal, even if it is in the middle of a snowstorm. In our experience as a club and as a conference, we have broken and reshaped barriers, we have learned what it means to be in a close-knit team, we have looked to the past and embraced our legacy, and we have looked to the future to envision an improved BoğaziçiMUN.

Throughout the years, we have gained new experience, knowledge, and strength; and found a sense of community in our members and participants. In each BoğaziçiMUN; we have seen you, our participants, learn and grow with us; expanding your knowledge of international relations, world politics, and history. It was this growth and the chance to witness your dedication and curiosity that have inspired us to continue improving BoğaziçiMUN every single year. And because we get to see your enthusiasm, because we get to engage our participants' minds with the pressing issues of our time, our efforts are made worthwhile. This year, we have prepared for you a wide range of unique committees and agenda items, all thanks to our wonderful Under



BOĞAZIÇİMUN 2026

Secretaries-General who have worked closely with our academic team to bring fresh perspectives and discussions to the conference.

After months of preparation on top of our years of foundational experience, BoğaziçiMUN is finally ready to open its doors to you and ‘Bridge the Gap’ once again this February. At the intersection of diplomacy, international relations and creative decision-making, BoğaziçiMUN stands as a chance to take matters into your own hands. Let us embark on this mission together and broaden our horizons as well as our community. It is my utmost honor to welcome you all to BoğaziçiMUN 2026, I hope to meet you soon.

Kind regards,

Duru Yavuz

Secretary-General of Boğaziçi MUN 2026



2. Letter from the Under Secretary-General

Most Distinguished Participants,

It is my utmost pleasure to welcome you all to the BoğaziçiMUN'26. I am Kaan Akkaş, a senior Economics student of Boğaziçi University, who will serve as the Under-Secretary General responsible for the Historical Crisis Committee: Makhnovshchina.

Makhnovshchina, also known as Makhno Movement, is the anarchist-revolutionary insurgency period to establish anarchist communism in southern and eastern Ukraine, named after and led by Nestor Makhno during Ukrainian War of Independence of 1917-1921. Emerging out of the chaos following the fall of the Russian Empire and the Russian Civil War, Makhnovist movement desired to establish a stateless and egalitarian society, rejecting both White monarchist and Bolshevik authoritarianist control. In BoğaziçiMUN'26, delegates will experience one of the most interesting periods of history: the Apex period of Makhnovshchina. Apex period, between late 1919 and early 1920, occurred when the Revolutionary Insurgent army of Ukraine advanced their controlled territory and implemented radical libertarian socialist policies. In this committee, the delegates will be the members of the Regional Congress to establish the constitution of Makhnovshchina, defining the characteristics of the anarchist movement for the future.

Lastly, I would like to thank my academic assistants Eylül Pazarözyurt and Zehra Yılmaz for their contributions to the study guide and committee in general. I am asking delegates to send me their questions regarding the committee via the email address below. I hope that all participants will leave this conference with a greater understanding of the underlying conflicts that influenced Europe during the 19th and 20th century.

Best Regards,

Kaan Akkaş

kaanakkas013@gmail.com



3. Introduction

The early 20th century was one of the most transforming times of our history. The aftershock of the Bolshevik revolution caused a revolutionary vacuum that failed during the 19th century and it collapsed the imperial institutions, changing the concept of state as we know it. The era transformed the intellectual debates of the first International, and the conflict between “dictatorship of the proletariat” of Marx and anti-statist federations of Bakunin was experimented in a violent reality of steppes and tundras. The Makhnovist movement and modern Ukraine emerges from a deep history of Cossack semi-autonomous state system, and their spirit of counter-sovereignty was characterized by horizontal aggregation, and a rejection of bureaucratic militarism attempting to build a free society with a direct decision making system.

4. Theoretical Framework

a. Legacy of Marx and Engels

The revolutionary vacuum in Europe during the early 20th century is dominated by the colossal shadow of the October Revolution, which is an event that fundamentally fractured leftist movements into competing. When we discuss within this chaotic historical trajectory, the impact of Marx and Engels on the Makhnovist movement stands as a subject of profound complexity. The conflict between the Red Army and Revolutionary Insurgent Army of Ukraine was not a mediocre military dispute but a collision between two distinct revolutionary ideas, each claiming to be the true representation of human liberation. The conflict between anarchists and communists does not start in 1917, but a lot earlier, during the first International, which collapsed 4 years after anarchists were expelled. This is also discussed below, but anarchism and communism have a complex relationship. They both affected each other, and the heated debates of First International between communists and anarchists didn't remain a mere theoretical dispute in congress halls of Europe; it established a trajectory that would violently manifest on the steppes of Ukraine during the Russian Civil War.

To understand the tragic demise of Nabat Confederation and the Makhnovist movement at the hands of the Bolshevik state, we should look beyond the immediate circumstances of the Russian Civil War, which originated in the ideological climate of the 1860s and 70s. The tense discussions between Mikhail Bakunin, who was a big fan of Marx before the International, and



Karl Marx has increased and exploded during the 1872 Hague Congress, which ended up with Bakunin's, and anarchists, expulsion from the International Workingmen's Association (IWA). This event marked the beginning of a still ongoing conflict over the nature of the revolutionary state. But, reducing Marx and Engels' legacy to the anarchist movement and Makhnovschina to an antagonist in the narrative would be to ignore the dialectical ways that Marxist theory influenced the anarchist movement. Marx's legacy to the movement is a mirror through which the anarchists defined their own ideas of the "class struggle" and "socialism". Furthermore, after the defeat of Makhnovschina, which revealed the internal crisis within the European anarchist movement, Makhno and Peter Arshinov showed a painful struggle with the "Marxist lesson" of unity and discipline in their writing, especially in the *Organization Platform of the General Union of Anarchists* (1926). The "Platformists" would be accused by anarchist critics like Voline or Malatesta of succumbing to the "Bolshevization" of anarchism, which is the acceptance of Marx's organizational theory while rejecting statist politics.

b. The First International and the Role of Bakunin

During the establishment of the First International, Karl Marx had earned an influence with his intellectual labor. He wrote the *Inaugural Address of the International Working Men's Association* (1864), which pushed the organization toward a class struggle point of view. The leadership of Marx put the trade unionists' immediate economic needs into a bigger picture of historical materialism and class struggle that point towards a political conquest. But, the Proudhonist group put the Marxist movement to the test. French mutualist groups who were heavily influenced by Proudhon, like Marxist groups influenced by Hegel, imagined a society of small property owners trading goods based on the value of their work which Marx advocated was a backward looking form of petty-bourgeois socialism. The early congresses, especially the Geneva and Lausanne, were battlegrounds where Marx fought to marginalize Proudhonist influence in favor of collectivism.

The dynamics of the International drastically changed when Bakunin joined in 1868. Bakunin was a charismatic revolutionary who initially worked with the bourgeois League for Peace and Freedom, and joined the International upon realizing the futility of uniting with bourgeois liberals. Bakunin brought the Alliance of Socialist Democracy with him, which was denied by



Marx and Engels' previously (since both organizations were international organizations, Marx thought this could create a "state within a state" issue). At the end, the Alliance dissolved itself and each party joined the IWA on their own (Angaut, 2007). Despite the formal dissolution, Marx and Engels remained suspicious that Bakunin maintained a parallel network of loyalists and established a secret Alliance to influence the policies of the International and drive it toward anarchism. These suspicions and the theoretical dispute between these two groups would eventually become the central pretext for the eventual purge at the Hague Congress.

Despite the fact that conflict between Marx and Bakunin is constantly reduced to clash of personalities, and these discussions were characterised by Marx's accusations of Bakunin being devoid of all theoretical knowledge, and Bakunin's accusations on Marx as authoritarian, the conflict between these two groups fundamentally rooted to question of state and agents of revolution (Robertson, 2018).

The Marxist state was an instrument of class rule, part of its superstructure that came from the economic base. Proletariat, Marx argues, has to seize the instrument so that it can free itself. The "dictatorship of the proletariat" was advocated as a transitional period in which the working class would use the power of the state to keep the bourgeois and centralize the means of production. The state would wither away, as the class distinctions are eradicated. Bakunin, on the other hand, argued that state was the primary source of oppression itself. The state is not merely a tool of the economic class, any dictatorship, even the proletariat, would inevitably cause a new ruling class of bureaucrats and red intellectuals, which only continues the cycle between oppressor and oppressed. "No state, however democratic, not even the reddest republic, can ever give the people what they really want; the free self organization and administration of their own affairs from the bottom upward without any interference or violence from above, because every state, even the pseudo-People's State concocted by Mr. Marx, is in essence only a machine ruling the masses from above, through a privileged minority of conceited intellectuals, who imagine that they know what the people need and want better than do the people themselves..." said Bakunin (1873), in Statism and Anarchy.



The secondary vital divergence, which also caused communist movements to diverge within each other later on, concerned the revolutionary subject. Marx identified the industrial proletariat of the industrialized capitalist nations as the vanguard of the revolution. Marx was skeptical about peasantry, and characterised them as a reservoir of reaction (Marx, 1852), especially influenced by the events during the rise of Napoleon III. Bakunin placed his hopes in the peasantry; uncivilized, dispossessed elements of society. He thought that less developed countries like Italy, Spain, and Russia were where the revolutionary impulse was strongest.

In 1869, during the Basle Congress of 189, the Bakuninists proposed the immediate abolition of the right of inheritance as a primary revolutionary demand. Marx authored a report, in the name of General Council, arguing the higher inheritance taxes as a transitional measure but not abolition as a starting point, due to the issues of attacking inheritance without abolishing the capitalist mode of production. The Congress voted against the General Council's report by 32 to 23. The Bakuninists were gaining hegemony within the International, which caused Marx to view Bakunin not just as a factional struggle but as a threat to the existential necessity for the integrity of the socialist movement.

c. The Paris Commune

The Paris Commune was the crucible of all the discussions of the International. For 72 days, the proletariat of Paris was controlling the city. This novel form of government terrified the European bourgeoisie. Marx (1871) declared that the Commune demonstrated that “the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purpose”, he argued the state must be *smashed*. This powerful defense led to confusion upon Marx's interpretations of state theory. Marx vouched for the Commune's abolition of the standing army and replacing them with the National guard, revocability of officials, and wage equality. Commune was the positive form of the social republic, which caused Lenin (1917) to claim later on that Marxism was anti-statist in the long run. Bakunin viewed the Commune as the negation of the state itself. He pointed out the fact that most of the communards were Blanquists and Proudhonists, aligned with Proudhonist ideas than with the centralist General Council, which was criticized by both Marx and Bakunin after the failure of the Commune. Bakunin accused



Marx that his praise to Commune was a tactical appropriation, the power of the event was so great that Marx was pushed to adopt anarchist phraseology to maintain credibility.

After the failure of Commune, the schism between Marx and Bakunin deepened. Marx argued that the Commune's failure underlies their decentralized organization. The Commune lacked a disciplined and unified entity that could stand against the Versailles and failed to seize the Bank of France. Bakunin, on the other hand, criticized Commune for failing to destroy the state and property. It remained too weighed down by Jacobinism and hesitated to fully unleash the social revolution, which was also criticized by Robespierre during the French Revolution. The Commune convinced Marx that without a disciplined political party, any revolution would suffer the same fate.

d. Hague Congress

The Hague Congress heavily focused on the investigation of the Alliance, and the ratification of Article 7a of the General Rules. A committee dominated by the Marxists reported that the Alliance had violated IWA statutes by maintaining a secret organization. Bakunin was expelled with 27 in favor and 8 against on charges of founding a secret society and for the Nechayev-Lyubavin affair regarding an advance payment for a translation of Das Kapital to Bakunin which he never completed. As a final tactical movement (hi, if you are reading this, send me your favorite Marx meme, if you don't have one, just say hi. You can find my mail address in the "Letter from USG" section.), Marx proposed moving the General Council to New York which shocked the assembly. The move effectively seized the International. Cut off from the European labor movement, the General Council withered and formally dissolved in 1876. The Bakuninists convened their own congress called Anti-Authoritarian International in Switzerland, which survived until 1877.

5. Historical Background

a. Pre-Cossack Rebellion

Before the 1917 hit, sharp divides scarred southern Ukraine, above all in farming areas. Land stayed out of reach for so many; rich owners and old aristocrats gripped huge properties and city



spots. Hardship, loans, and temporary jobs defined life for most people. Steep fees, low pay, and grueling toil, all stemming from lopsided land splits, stirred fierce anger against the setup. In countryside spots, the main government hardly worked; area bosses ruled over farmers' days without real changes.

Those strains built up over time; they grew worse. The Tsar's rule clamped down hard to hold rural zones steady. Chances for political input were basically none. Groups pushing change that were moderated by leftist or anti-authoritarian individuals got crushed regularly. The Okhrana: Tsarist spies tracked rebel efforts and gatherings, hauling in crowds that spread dread and endless watching. Farmer rallies, work stoppages, and grabs of property faced army crackdowns, broad lockups, and group penalties. Rules curbing talk, meetings, and printing stopped milder thoughts from circulating openly; bold networks dove deeper into hiding.

Oddly, that clampdown nurtured the uprising instead of stamping it out. Secret webs passed around anti-authoritarian and worker writings, bringing in views that rejected both dictatorship and top-down command completely. Anarchism caught on strongly with peasants living in rural areas.

A history of farmer and Cossack revolts ran deep in southern Ukraine, tied to fights against mistreatment and foreign rule; this stretched back long before the Makhnovshchina. Starting in the 1500s, the area, particularly open plains, worked as a borderland: changing edges, faint oversight from afar, crowds of escaped workers and bands chasing freedom. Cossacks, those half-armed settlements stressing personal freedom and group choices, gained ground there.

Up to 1648, chunks of what became Ukraine sat mostly under the Polish-Lithuanian union, a strong power that grabbed hold through battles, settlements, and alliances. Running those territories sparked constant friction. Polish lords, Ukrainian Cossacks, faithful country people, Jewish overseers: each held spots in the uneven social ladder that created a shaky blend that set the stage for outbreaks.

Standing out in Ukrainian life were the Cossacks, an armed, wandering bunch along the Dnieper's banks. At first made up of fleeing laborers, seekers of thrills, fighters, they formed self-reliant clusters fed by catching fish, tracking game, and swapping goods, but their standout battle talents earned bigger fame. The Polish-Lithuanian setup viewed Cossacks as handy yet



pesky. Against Tatar raiders from Crimea and Ottoman forces, they shone as border guards. Cossacks joined Polish wars, acting as flexible units sharp in hit-and-run moves. Still, the Polish rulers never quite believed in them; their free spirit and pushback against tight reins complicated control.

To handle Cossacks, the Polish side set up a list system: only some got formal nods and perks, plots of ground, breaks on dues. Just a sliver of Cossacks snagged those gains. Most stayed without land. Those left off the list and that had no land or property, dealt with tough picks, turning to hired fighting, farm drudgery, or attacks on Polish bosses.

b. Cossack Rebellion and the Hetmanate

The Khmelnytsky uprising from 1648 to 1657 stands as a major clash in Eastern Europe's past, reshaping Ukraine's, Poland's, and nearby lands' setups in basic ways. Guided by Bohdan Khmelnytsky, it started as a Cossack flare-up against the Polish-Lithuanian union but ballooned into a wider mess pulling in Ukrainian workers, Crimean Tatars, Russia's rulers, and Ottoman players too. Out of it came a somewhat free Cossack realm, for a little time, and it kicked off power shifts that shaped Ukraine's direction for ages.

Deep down, the uprising stemmed from heavy complaints among Ukrainian Cossacks and country people. Union rules had sidelined Cossacks, cutting their ranks, trimming war benefits. The mostly Orthodox Ukrainians endured rising faith-based and money squeezes from Polish Catholic elites. Gaps in standing widened. Jewish handlers linking nobles to laborers turned into outlets for built-up rage; strains boiled over into fierce fights.

Beyond quick wins in battles and rule-making, the uprising's weight is still known to this day. It helped form the Ukrainian sense of self, showing the Cossack knack for standalone action in war and governance. Khmelnytsky's Cossack leadership marked a real shot at Ukrainian self-rule: the initial big try at a separate Ukrainian setup free from Polish grip. That freedom wobbled and faded fast; Cossack heads dealt with nonstop pushes from stronger neighbors.

Effects lingered long. Seeking backup against Poland, Khmelnytsky linked with Russia's tsars via the 1654 Pereyaslav deal. It brought army help at first but slowly pulled Ukraine toward



Russian sway. This opened Ukraine's extended splitting, with pieces under Polish, Russian, and Ottoman holds at times. The scattered power setup from the uprising laid the groundwork for Ukraine's future pushes for full independence.

The establishment of the Cossack Hetmanate following the Khmelnytsky Revolt represented a significant moment in Ukrainian history, marking a brief period of Cossack self-rule. However, the Hetmanate's survival was precarious from the beginning, as it faced internal divisions, external pressures, and shifting allegiances between Poland, Russia, and the Ottoman Empire. Although the Hetmanate initially enjoyed autonomy under Russian suzerainty, its independence gradually eroded over the following century, culminating in its complete dissolution in 1764 by Catherine the Great. Due to not only imperial centralization but also internal socio-political reasons. At its core, the hetman stood as both the military commander and chief executive. His authority expanded to commanding the Cossack army, dealing with foreign diplomacy, enforcing laws, taxation, and maintaining order in the area. But his authority was also constrained by institutions such as the General Military Council and the Starshyna.

Beyond the Hetman, the regimental system (polk–sotnia) ran the government. The military units acted as districts. The units handled administration, judicial work, and tax collection. The General Military Chancellery organized the administration. The local courts and the local officials took care of fiscal matters. The political authority stayed personal and weak. The Hetmanate stayed open to splits and outside pressure.

Over time, the social composition of the Hetmanate shifted significantly. The Cossack officer class changed into a landed elite. The landed elite took estates and privileges. The landed elite moved away from the peasantry. This process broke the base of society. This process cut support for autonomy. As social layers grew deeper, the Hetmanate stopped being a community. The Hetmanate began to serve the interests of the elite. The elite saw joining the nobility as more than defending a weak autonomous system.

The internal changes were made worse by institutions and cultural habits. The administrative and legal work of the Hetmanate began to look like the work of the Russian Empire. The Moscow Patriarchate took the Kyiv Metropolises under its control. That move reduced the church's freedom. Added power to the empire. By the middle of the century, the Russian Empire had



already taken the Hetmanate's independence away, from inside. Catherine the Great abolished the Hetmanate in 1764. The abolition of the Hetmanate did not happen suddenly. The abolition of the Hetmanate marked a step in an internal decline.

6. The Revolutionary Vacuum

a. Ukraine After the Bolshevik Revolution

After the Bolshevik seizure of power in late 1917, southern Ukraine entered a period marked less by revolutionary consolidation than by administrative collapse. Imperial institutions did not gradually erode; they largely ceased to function. Systems of taxation, law enforcement, and local governance fragmented almost overnight, leaving no single authority capable of enforcing durable control. In this environment, political power became provisional and situational. Authority depended not on formal legitimacy, but on the ability to mobilize armed forces, secure supplies, and negotiate compliance from a cautious rural population.

Bolshevik influence in the region rested primarily on the Red Army and the implementation of grain requisitioning policies designed to sustain urban centers. While effective in addressing immediate logistical needs, these measures clashed sharply with peasant expectations of autonomy following the collapse of imperial rule. Requisitioning was widely perceived not as revolutionary redistribution, but as an external imposition, fueling cycles of resistance that required increasing levels of coercion to suppress.

At the same time, General Anton Denikin's White forces advanced into southern Ukraine with a fundamentally different political vision. Their campaign aimed at restoring pre-revolutionary property relations and centralized military authority. Yet in practice, White administration prioritized military objectives over civilian accommodation. This approach alienated rural communities whose cooperation was essential for long-term control, undermining the Whites' ability to establish stable governance despite their battlefield strength.

Ukrainian nationalist formations also competed for authority, but their fragmented leadership structures and limited resources prevented them from exercising sustained territorial control. As a result, no claimant to power was able to translate military presence into lasting sovereignty.



Faced with overlapping demands from competing armies, rural communities increasingly armed themselves as a matter of survival. Local self-defense groups emerged not out of ideological commitment, but practical necessity, gradually developing independent security and self-administration capacities.

It was within this context of prolonged instability that the Makhnovist movement took shape. Rather than simply opposing Red or White forces, it articulated a distinct response to the absence of credible authority. The movement drew strength from local networks, presenting itself as a form of counter-sovereignty rooted in peasant self-organization rather than external command. This foundation would later allow the Makhnovists to transform fragmented rural resistance into a coherent insurgent force capable of operating across southern Ukraine.

b. Austro-German Occupation & Puppet Hetmanate

The Austro-German occupation of Ukraine in 1918, formalized by the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, represented an attempt to impose political order from outside rather than to rebuild authority from within. For Berlin and Vienna, Ukraine was valued primarily for its agricultural output at a moment when wartime shortages were placing enormous strain on their economies. Political arrangements in the region were therefore shaped less by local legitimacy than by the urgent need to secure food deliveries and maintain transport routes. This logic defined the Hetmanate of Pavlo Skoropadsky. Although it adopted the outward forms of a sovereign government, its survival depended almost entirely on the presence of foreign troops. The regime rested on a narrow social base, drawing support mainly from landowners, former imperial officials, and urban elites, while large segments of the rural population remained politically excluded. As a result, authority flowed downward from military protection rather than upward from popular consent.

One of the Hetmanate's first actions was to reverse the land seizures that had occurred during the revolutionary upheaval of 1917. Large estates were restored, and peasant gains were rolled back through legal decrees backed by occupying forces. In villages where land redistribution had already altered social expectations, these measures were experienced not as a return to order but



as a direct attack on newly asserted rights. Resistance followed quickly, often taking informal and localized forms rather than organized political opposition.

Requisitioning practices further deepened rural hostility. Grain collection was enforced with little regard for local conditions, reinforcing the perception that the Hetmanate functioned primarily as an extraction mechanism for foreign powers. With formal political channels closed and state institutions widely distrusted, peasants increasingly turned to armed self-organization as a means of protection. Local armed groups offered security where official authorities could not, gradually undermining the regime's claims to legitimacy. Within this context, Nestor Makhno's detachments began to assume a broader role than that of mobile guerrilla bands. In areas where the Hetmanate's authority was weakest, Makhnovist units provided not only military resistance but also mechanisms for dispute resolution and the redistribution of land and resources. Their appeal rested less on abstract ideology than on their ability to address immediate social grievances. Opposition to foreign occupation merged with demands for agrarian equality, allowing the movement to transform loosely organised peasant anger into a coordinated insurgent force.

Makhno's forces, the Black Army, sustained engagements against the Austro-German occupationary government as well as the Red Army and the White Army. Moving from one battle to the next, Makhnovist forces proved particularly effective using raiding tactics on supply lines and command nodes, hastening the war in the Soviet's favor. It should also not be forgotten that the Hetmanate was officially a Ukrainian state, propped up by military support from the Austro-Germans and was run as a federation. This led to confrontations, some of them politically and even ethnically charged between the Makhnovist forces and Hetmanate cities/rural settlements, with claims of massacres still being debated today amongst historians and anarchist political circles. The strength of the Black Army came from its successful utilisation of quasi-guerrilla warfare methods that relied on raiding, the obfuscation between the civilian and the combatant, and use of mobile, volume of fire based manoeuvres and engagement tactics. They proved capable of holding their ground, both politically and militarily, until late 1919 when the Soviets finally moved in for the kill.



c. Formation of Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army of Ukraine

The Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army of Ukraine (RIAU) came to power, which meant that instead of random partisan attacks, there was now a well-organised insurgent system that could coordinate on a large scale. The RIAU didn't grow like traditional armies do, with strict, top-down hierarchies. Instead, it grew through "horizontal aggregation." It was a federated network of independent units that used elective leadership and had a lot of tactical freedom. This was a purposeful break from bureaucratic militarism; it was the most basic form of decentralised coercive power, which let the army stay deeply rooted in society while still being able to change with the war's changing winds.

The RIAU's success in battle was based on how well they could move around. They could focus a lot of firepower on the fly without losing the ability to move across the vast steppe thanks to cavalry and the innovative tachanka, which is a horse-drawn carriage with a mounted machine gun. This decentralisation lets smaller groups make their own decisions while still working together towards a common goal. The Makhnovists made sure that their power was seen as an extension of the community by putting military command in the hands of local participatory practices instead of an outside state apparatus. While this decentralisation was their biggest strength when it came to being flexible, it also made it hard for institutions to last over time because the logistical needs of total war often clashed with their ideals of ideological independence.

A direct comparison of the Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army of Ukraine and the Bolshevik Red Army shows two very different ways to deal with revolutionary warfare when the state is falling apart. The Bolshevik model sought rapid centralisation as a deliberate strategy for state reconstruction. The Red Army wanted to turn revolutionary violence into a long-lasting tool of sovereign authority by using mandatory conscription, political commissars, and a unified command hierarchy that answered to the Communist Party. Military effectiveness was inextricably linked to bureaucratic discipline; cohesion was mandated vertically, and legitimacy emanated from the party-state nexus. In contrast, the Makhnovist military system refuted the notion that revolutionary success necessitated the duplication of state-like command structures. The RIAU was a non-statist military group where power was situational, revocable, and built



into local social relationships. People voted for officers, command decisions were open to public review, and political education focused on independence instead of following orders. The Red Army saw the peasants mostly as a source of soldiers and food, but the Makhnovists saw rural areas as the building blocks of military power. This difference led to different ways of mobilising: Bolshevik unity depended on coercive extraction and ideological discipline, while Makhnovist unity depended on consent, reciprocity, and shared material interest.

These differences in how the organisations worked led to different strengths and weaknesses in their operations. Bolshevik centralisation made it possible to coordinate large groups, standardise logistics, and keep up attacks on multiple fronts. These were all necessary skills for winning a war of attrition. But this same strictness made it harder to change tactics and often led to peasant resistance, which meant that more force was needed to keep people in line. The Makhnovists, on the other hand, were able to adapt in amazing ways. Decentralised command made it possible to quickly adapt to changing conditions on the battlefield, allowed troops to get deep into enemy territory, and kept morale high without a lot of strict rules. But this flexibility meant that the institution wasn't as deep as it could have been. The RIAU couldn't manage territory, control supply over long periods of time, or bring in new members on a large scale without watering down its core principles because it didn't have any permanent administrative bodies. The difference shows that the Makhnovist and Bolshevik armies were not just enemies, but also examples of two different revolutionary ontologies. The Red Army saw revolution as a way to strengthen the state, while the RIAU saw it as a never-ending process of social self-organization that needed to be protected by weapons. The eventual Bolshevik victory was not just a military victory; it was also a structural one. Centralised power was stronger in the long run than decentralised coercion, even when the latter was more effective in fluid warfare.

This would further be intensified when the Red Army, under Trotsky's command reached a diplomatic detente with The Black Army of Makhno's Free States. Under the agreement, Makhno's militias kept their unit colors, clothing and insignias, as well as the horizontal command structure they had come to enjoy. The Soviets, in turn, secured the participation of Soviet commissars i.e political officers in Black Army ranks, perhaps in hopes to cause discord amongst the fighters, and cause them to defect to Soviet ranks. However, these diplomatic arrangements were short lived as on the field propaganda and re-education efforts of the Soviets



faced steep resistance from the people under Makhno's political structure, and eventually, the Black Army was "betrayed" by the Red Army, leading to their eventual liquidation.

d. Conflicts Pre-Apex and Retreat to the West

By late summer 1919, the Makhnovist movement was under growing strain. Denikin's White Army intensified its northern advance, forcing Makhnovist units to abandon previously held positions while supply lines deteriorated under constant pressure. What followed was not a planned withdrawal so much as a prolonged struggle to remain operational. Units were compelled to disperse, regroup, and move repeatedly, relying on mobility rather than fixed defensive lines to avoid encirclement.

This westward retreat unfolded under near-continuous contact with enemy forces. Skirmishes were frequent, reinforcements scarce, and coordination increasingly difficult across wide distances. Although this form of fighting preserved the army's core, it carried significant political risks. Extended retreat threatened to erode peasant confidence, particularly in regions where Makhnovist authority had depended on the perception of strength and protection. The situation shifted dramatically in September 1919 at Peregonovka. After weeks of withdrawal, Makhnovist units regrouped and launched a coordinated counterattack against White forces that had overextended their positions. Familiarity with local terrain, combined with rapid cavalry movement, allowed the insurgents to strike unexpectedly and concentrate force at decisive points. The result was an operational shock that far exceeded what their numbers alone would suggest.

The consequences of Peregonovka extended well beyond the battlefield. The defeat disrupted White command structures and severed critical supply lines supporting Denikin's broader offensive toward Moscow. In the weeks that followed, Makhnovist detachments moved swiftly into the rear of White forces, targeting rail junctions, depots, and communication routes. This campaign forced the White leadership to divert resources away from strategic objectives, weakening their overall position. Yet the success of this offensive created new difficulties. Rapid territorial expansion placed heavy demands on an insurgent movement ill-suited to sustained



administration. At the same time, the military alignment between Makhnovist and Bolshevik forces, previously justified by the shared threat posed by the Whites, became increasingly unstable. Once Denikin's advance faltered, underlying tensions resurfaced.

From the Bolshevik perspective, the continued existence of an autonomous armed movement posed a structural problem. The Red Army's strategy rested on the reestablishment of unified command and the elimination of independent centers of military authority. Efforts to subordinate Makhnovist units to Red Army control were therefore not temporary measures, but steps toward consolidation. Locally, these initiatives were often interpreted as attempts at absorption rather than coordination, undermining the participatory command structures that had sustained Makhnovist legitimacy.

The renewed conflict that followed was less the product of personal rivalries than of incompatible organizational imperatives. Bolshevik authority required standardization, discipline, and administrative clarity. Makhnovist power depended on flexibility, local autonomy, and negotiated relationships. Peregonovka accelerated this confrontation by demonstrating that decentralized forces could produce strategic-level effects, thereby reinforcing Bolshevik resolve to eliminate rival military formations. In retrospect, the destruction of the Makhnovist movement was not an unexpected deviation but a consequence of revolutionary consolidation. Prolonged warfare favored actors capable of transforming military success into enduring institutions. While Makhnovist forces excelled in fluid combat and rapid adaptation, they lacked the mechanisms necessary to sustain authority once the revolution shifted from open contestation toward centralized rule. Peregonovka thus stands as a paradoxical moment: the point at which Makhnovist military effectiveness reached its height, even as the political conditions that allowed its survival began to disappear.

7. The Apex Period

a. Institutional Establishments

The fundamental root of the Makhnovist political system was the Free Soviet, which differed radically from the Bolshevik model. Bolsheviks argued that the Soviet had become a transmission belt for the party, a mechanism to transform to the "Dictatorship of Proletariat". The



Draft Declaration of the Revolutionary Insurgent Army, adopted in October 1919, stated a third revolution to overthrow the Bolsheviks and restore to their original 1917 purpose. Makhnovshchina was a total rejection of the state in favor of a free federation, but they did not reject the organization, constructing a vertical structure of delegatory democracy designed to operate from bottom up.

Free Soviets were the basic form of organization Makhnovshchina. These societies acted independently from the Regional Congress, which was the supreme legislative and constitutional authority of the Makhnovshchina. Soviets had to be composed only of workers and peasants and no political party could dictate decisions of the soviets. The soviets were to federate horizontally with one another. The Regional Congress, which was the constitutional authority, could not just dictate anything to the Soviets, but also represented the highest form of democratic authority the Makhnovist movement could ever achieve.

The first Regional Congress was an emergency response to the encirclement of the region by Ukrainian Nationalists and White Army forces; its output was purely militaristic, it marked the transition from isolated partisan bands to a coordinated regional insurgency. The second Regional Congress was important because it effectively drafted the constitution of the Makhnovshchina with delegates from different districts. The Congress passed a resolution establishing a regime of freely elected, anti-authoritarian society explicitly rejecting the Bolshevik decrees. The movement formally declared its intention to build a new, free society without tyrannical decrees and orders. The third Congress was the largest and most significant gathering, since it solidified the anarchist character of the movement. The resolution from the Congress rejected the dictatorship of the proletariat and adopted a specifically anarchist political forum, effectively declaring the region an autonomous entity. To manage the region between Congresses, the movement established the Military Revolutionary Council (VRS). The VRS was the de facto executive cabinet of Makhnovshchina, though ideologically it was defined strictly as an executive organ with no inherent power over free soviets.



b. Administrative Mechanics

Makhnovists immediately dissolved the police, courts, and the city councils as soon as they entered the cities, and encouraged the formation of Free Soviets. Urban infrastructure required technical expertise that a loose federation of soviets struggled to provide. The Makhnovists rejected the employment of bourgeois specialists and preferred to rely on trade unions and factory committees. This led to an administrative paralysis in cities (Darch, 2020); the railway workers demanded wages in Katerynoslav and as a movement who opposed the wage system, Makhnovists struggled to pay, which eventually led to strikes and friction.

c. Economic Organization

Upon expelling the landlords and the Austro-German forces, the Makhnovist movement socialized the land and *black repartition* became the foundation of the economy. Land was seized and distributed to households based on the labor norm, which entitles households to exactly as much land as they could cultivate without hiring labor. This reform became extremely popular and caused a fanatical support by peasantry to the Makhnovist movement. But the ideal economic unit of movement was the Free Commune, which were voluntary collectives. The commune functioned on the principle “from each according to their ability, to each according to their need”, with no permanent managers and administrative tasks were rotated among members. These ideologically potent communes were fragile at the same time. Volin (1947) later noted that the constant warfare turned the region to a “Kingdom of Wheels”, preventing the communes from establishing deep roots.

The Makhnovist movement’s attitude towards money was hostile, but to deal with chaotic money supply, they utilized a stamping system which overprinting anarchist slogans and validation stamps to captured banknotes, which both validated the currency and ashamed the state authority that issued it.

8. The Fall and Legacy

The fall of the Makhnovist movement was not just a military defeat but the violent conclusion of the ideological conflict between Marx and Bakunin that began during the first International. The



structural incompatibility between two revolutionary forces caused the collapse of the movement, the free state eventually collapsed during the Red Terror but in reality the intellectual conflict collapsed the state. The Red Army viewed the existence of an autonomous military authority as a threat to its existence. Though Makhno's militias were allowed to retain their internal organization while working alongside Soviets, the threat feeling dissolved the Black Army, demonstrating that in a prolonged conflict, centralized revolution was able to overwhelm decentralized coercion. Makhnovshchina lacked the permanent administrative institutions necessary to resist the Red Army and sustain the logistics. The legacy effectively changed the socialist movement. The defeat triggered an internal crisis within European anarchists and forced them to redefine their concepts of "class struggle" and "organization".



9. References and Further Readings

Angaut, Jean-Christophe. "The Marx-Bakunin Conflict in the First International: A Confrontation of Political Practices." *Actuel Marx* 41, no. 1 (2007): 112–29. <https://doi.org/10.3917/amx.041.0112>.

Arshinov, Peter. *History of the Makhnovist Movement (1918–1921)*. Translated by Lorraine Perlman and Fredy Perlman. Detroit: Black & Red, 1974.

Avrich, Paul. *The Russian Anarchists*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971. [suspicious link removed].

Bakunin, Mikhail. *Statism and Anarchy*. Translated by Marshall S. Shatz. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Collins, Daniel A. "Ukraine, 1918–21 and Spain, 1936–39: A Comparison of Armed Anarchist Struggles in Europe." Honors thesis, University of Rhode Island, 2020. <https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/srhonorsprog/553>.

Darch, Colin. *Nestor Makhno and Rural Anarchism in Ukraine, 1917–1921*. London: Pluto Press, 2020.

Figes, Orlando. *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution 1891–1924*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1996.

Himka, John-Paul. *Galician Villagers and the Ukrainian National Movement in the Nineteenth Century*. Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1988. https://archive.org/details/galicianvillager00himk_0.

Kropotkin, Peter. *The Paris Commune [Sur la Commune]*. London: Freedom Press, 1891.

Lenin, Vladimir. *The State and Revolution*. Translated by Robert Service. London: Penguin Books, 1992.

Magocsi, Paul Robert. *A History of Ukraine: The Land and Its Peoples*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010.



Makhno, Nestor. *The Russian Revolution in Ukraine (March 1917–April 1918)*. Edmonton: Black Cat Press, 2007. <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/nestor-makhno-the-russian-revolution-in-ukraine-march-1917-april-1918>.

Malet, Michael. *Nestor Makhno in the Russian Civil War*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1982.

Marx, Karl. *The Civil War in France*. Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1970.

Marx, Karl. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. New York: International Publishers, 1963.

Mawdsley, Evan. *The Russian Civil War*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007.

Palić, Michael. *The Anarchism of Nestor Makhno, 1918–1921*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976.

Skirda, Alexandre. *Nestor Makhno: Anarchy's Cossack*. Translated by Paul Sharkey. Edinburgh: AK Press, 2004.

Smele, Jonathan D. *The "Russian" Civil Wars, 1916–1926: Ten Years That Shook the World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Subtelny, Orest. *Ukraine: A History*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009.

Tilly, Charles. *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990–1992*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992.

Yekelchyk, Serhy. *Ukraine: Birth of a Modern Nation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Youvan, Douglas C. "The Khmelnytsky Revolt and the Cossack Hetmanate: A Turning Point in Ukrainian Statehood and Eastern European Geopolitics." ResearchGate, 2025. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/389437934>.