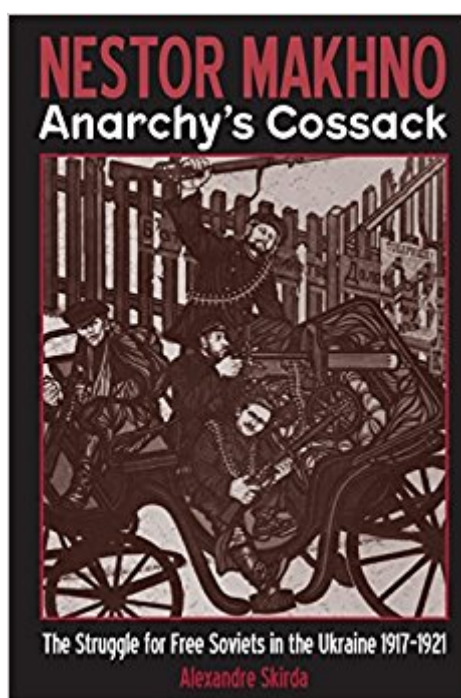


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Nestor Makhno--Anarchy's Cossack: The Struggle For Free Soviets In The Ukraine 1917-1921



Synopsis

Available for the first time in English, here's the gripping story of Ukrainian anarchist Nestor Makhno. With his usual wit and engaging style, Skirda chronicles the life of a legend and the insurgent army that fought in his name. Always controversial, Makhno has been described as everything from a drunken bandit to an inspirational hero. From Makhno's imprisonment, to battles with the Bolsheviks and the White Army, to the final exile in Paris, Skirda captures the life of Makhno and the history of the Makhnovist movement. Alexandre Skirda is the foremost anarchist theorist and activist writing in Europe today.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Paul Sharkey is an accomplished translator. He has single-handedly made available a vast body of non-English language anarchist writings.

A great job from Skirda -- but it is a truly horrible, careless attempt from AK Press. Skirda deserves 5 stars, AK deserve 2 stars. How did AK mess up such a great subject? Skirda has collected a vast array of sources on Makhno, ranging from a presentation of his speeches and prison memoirs to Communist screeds against him, to personal reminiscences from family members. There is a wealth of material here, and it is engrossing, giving us reasonable insight into Makhno's motivations and character. Skirda does his best to recreate Makhno's youth, describing how grinding poverty and beatings at the hands of employers created a sense of injustice in Makhno which was only

reinforced from his youthful meetings with other Anarchists. The cover art is good, and there is a collection of rarely seen photographs, including pictures of Makhno's fellow anarchists, his immediate family, and of his living relatives taken in the 90's. Skirda is to be commended for a work of care and love, with attention to the historical record combined with a good narrative progression to draw in the reader : much of the story is inspiring, and exciting to read. Makhno led an extraordinary life, the life of a true free spirited rebel who would not bow down to any master on the left or the right. Makhno loathed and despised the 'left' as much as he did the Capitalists -- a true Anarchist who despised all 'isms' and restriction. However -- AK really did a truly horrible editing job here. Whole chunks of the book are just embarrassingly badly written in translation : Makhno, and Skirda's significant body of work surely deserve more respectful treatment. Some of the prose is so hackneyed it is painful to read on to the next page. Secondly, there is no index, and the sourcing is vague and unclear. AK have done a really bad job here -- how can we take a text seriously -- if there is no complete and careful record of sources? So -- a great work from Skirda -- but AK, you really did a horrible job here. Why are Anarchist books so often badly translated, badly written, badly edited and presented? Here, Skirda's commendable work is lessened by poor publishing approach. Makhno and the wider Anarchist heritage surely deserve better treatment.

Nestor Makhno was a man of unparalleled single-mindedness, unflagging courage, tactical brilliance, and utter devotion to the necessity of real human liberty, fraternity and equality. Although described as a Ukrainian partisan, nothing was provincial about Makhno's anarchist vision as Skirda's book demonstrates. The Ukraine was the arena in which he fought for that vision and for the safety and well being of the Ukrainian "toilers." The Ukrainians were beset by murderers and oppressors of every sort and ideology. After the fall of the Russian empire and the ascendancy of Bolsheviks, the Bolsheviks entered into the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, ceding the Ukraine among other territories to the Central Powers effectively ending Russia's involvement in World War 1. The Makhnovists successfully repulsed the new masters of the Ukraine. But others enemies would arise--the White Russian forces, the Red Army--that the Makhnovists would engage almost always successfully. In the end the Makhnovists made a fatal mistake, one that would be repeated by the anarchists years later during the Spanish civil war. They entered into a military alliance with the Bolsheviks (Marxist Leninists) to fight the Whites, trusting the USSR's promises that they had no territorial aims on the Ukraine. Although successfully winning battles against the Red army, the sheer size of their forces overwhelmed the Makhnovists. Makhno barely escaped and ended his years poor, cheated by "sympathizers" out of funds donated to him and almost completely

abandoned as an exile in Paris. Skirda's book dispels many myths about Makhno, mostly spread by historical revisionists in the Soviet Union. Here we see Makhno the executioner of anti-Semitic murders not one himself; Makhno the worst nightmare of the White Russian forces and not one of their collaborators; Makhno the liberator of the toilers and not their enslaver like the Reds. Nothing in the text of this book is disappointing. It's thorough, passionately written, admirably detailed, yet lacking in one important respect to make it an important scholarly tool. It has no index. I cannot fathom why. Nevertheless, I highly recommend reading this book. I suspect it is probably the best portrait of Makhno's life in print.

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