

Documents from the Confederation of Russian Anarcho-Syndicalists on relations between anarchists and the Communist regime, with appendices

sources:

ICCP 1925: International Committee for Political Prisoners (ed.), *Letters from Russian Prisons*, London (Albert & Charles Boni)

Maximoff 1940: G. P. Maximoff (ed.), *The Guillotine at Work. Twenty Years of Terror in Russia (Data and Documents)*, Chicago (The Chicago Section of the Alexander Berkman Fund)

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Document 1

Attitude of the Russian Communist Party, of the Communist International and of the Red Trade Union International Towards Anarchists and Syndicalists

(From the Archive of the Provisional Executive Bureau of the All-Russian Confederation of Anarcho-Syndicalists)

... A number of active workers in the Anarchist and Anarcho-Syndicalist movement abroad came in 1920 to Moscow for the Congress of the Communist International: Comrade Souchy, delegate of the F.A.U.D. (German Syndicalists)¹; A[rrmando] Borghi, delegate of the Italian Syndicalist Union²; A[ngel] Pestaña, delegate of the Spanish Confederation of Labor³; Lepetit (who perished on his way back) from France, and others.

The Russian Anarcho-Syndicalists held conferences with the foreign comrades and showed them quite clearly what the general situation in Russia was like, and, in particular, gave them an insight of the situation in which the Anarchists and Anarcho-Syndicalists found themselves. As a result of these interviews and of the mutual information, the Provisional Executive Bureau of the Russian Confederation of Anarcho-Syndicalists transmitted to the delegates — in its name — two appeals to

¹ *Freie Arbeiter-Union Deutschlands* (Syndikalisten). (Ed.)

² *Unione Sindacale Italiana* (USI). (Ed.)

³ *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* (CNT). (Ed.)

the world proletariat. One of these appeals referred to the war with Poland: in it, the proletariat abroad was invited to do its utmost to help Revolutionary Russia, at the same time warning it not to imitate the Russian example, not to follow the Bolsheviks in their methods of making the Revolution.

Characteristic detail: the appeal was photographed and published in the “Libertaire” of Jan, 7-14, 1921, No. 103. (See also No. 3 of April 8, 1921 of “L’Antorcha,” Buenos Aires).⁴

The other document, a more elaborate one, and which contained information upon the situation in Russia, calling upon all to protest against Bolshevik persecutions and against the shooting of Anarchists and other revolutionists, never reached Europe for reasons unknown (perhaps because of the strict Bolshevik censorship).

The persecution of Anarchists increased after the departure of the delegates. This compelled the Bureau to send a protest to the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party against the tactics of the Party which was bent on the extermination of the Anarchist movement, pushing it underground to an illegal life.

We had also decided to obtain P. Kropotkin’s signature under that protest. In a conversation I had with him, P. Kropotkin, categorically refused to put his signature to that protest, and advised us not to protest before the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party. “*It would be ridiculous,*” he said, “*to address a protest to the headquarters of the gendarmerie.*” ...

As a result of the refusal of Kropotkin to join in our protest, the Executive Bureau reconsidered the question and it was decided to send a statement to the Communist International only, informing it of what was happening. This was found necessary, according to the Bureau, because of the persecutions becoming more and more widespread and brutal; it was, besides, urgent to destroy the pro-Bolshevik illusions of the foreign comrades who, owing to erroneous and insufficient information, were handing over the libertarian movement to the mercy of the Russian Communist Party.

The Executive Bureau considered that these illusions could best be done away with by a protest addressed to the Communist International, hoping that it might perhaps compel the Russian Communist Party to put a damper on its persecution of Anarchists and save the latter the right to conduct legally their propaganda. Both of these solutions were desirable. The Communist International would have been unable to act otherwise, as the protest was being addressed directly to it in which it was asked to put a stop to the Russian Communist Party’s terror against Anarchists, and to render the position of Russian Anarchists equal to that settled toward foreign Anarchists and Anarcho-Syndicalists with whom that Party was undoubtedly flirting.

As much as an affirmative answer would be disadvantageous to the Russian Communist Party, a negative one would be undesirable and harmful to the Communist International. The Executive Bureau would not have hesitated to circulate widely that reply: it would have unmasked the Communist International in the eyes of foreign Anarchists, and especially of Anarcho-Syndicalists, whom Bolsheviks dared not neglect. This they were well aware of. At least it was one impression, during our interview with [Alfred] Rosmer⁵, to whom we handed a French text of our protest with a

⁴ see below, **Document 2**. – A German translation appeared in the paper of the *Föderation Kommunistischer Anarchisten Deutschlands* (FKAD – Federation of Communist Anarchists of Germany), *Der freie Arbeiter* [The Free Worker], Vol. 14/1921, No. 9. (Ed.)

⁵ French Syndicalist connected with the Third International in Moscow.

covering letter addressed to him personally in which we asked him to submit our statement to the Executive of the Communist International.

The statement and the letter were handed personally by the author of this article and by Yartchuk to Rosmer in the presence of the Dutch delegate Janson⁶ (member of the Executive).

At this first interview, carried on in English, a great deal of time was taken up owing to Rosmer's desire to obtain ample and detailed information on the relations between Communists and Anarchists, on the role of the latter during the Revolution, and on their point of view on the current situation. Rosmer was friendly and promised to examine our statement, and let us have an early reply as to his readiness to submit it to the consideration of the Executive of the Communist International.

The second interview also took place at Rosmer's: this time A[lexander] Shapiro was present on our behalf as translator. Rosmer agreed to place our statement before the Communist International, but under one condition: that we would redraft it, eliminate the polemical tone and the attacks against the Russian Communist Party, and omit a few expressions injurious to the Communist International. After a short discussion, we agreed that we would follow his advice.

Shortly after this conversation, numerous arrests took place in Kharkoff. The entire Anarchist movement of the Ukraine, known under the name of "Nabat" ("Alarm") was wrecked. Among the hundreds of arrested comrades were two or three dozen of our best workers: A[aron] Baron, [Nicolai] Dolenko-Checkeress (who has since joined the Communist Party), [Efim] Yartchuk (delegate of the Executive Bureau to the Congress which was to have taken place), M[ark] Mratchny, B[oris] Stoyanoff, Volin, and others.

Yartchuk being in prison, I was the only delegate of the Executive Bureau at the third interview with Rosmer at which A. Shapiro was again present in the capacity of translator, Janson was again present.

The manifesto which I had drawn up (and the text of which I give below) seemed to Rosmer even stronger than the first one. This was natural, as I had written it under the influence of the Kharkoff pogrom, from which I escaped by a mere accident. Rosmer flatly refused to submit the statement to the Executive. I was obliged to consent, on behalf of the Executive Bureau, to the alterations demanded with regard to the form as well as the text of the statement.

The third and final text of the manifesto, transmitted to Rosmer by A. Shapiro after the latter, together with other members of the "Golos Truda"⁷ group, and myself, had redrafted it, differs from the text published below by the absence of polemical outbursts, and also in that no time-limit was given to the Communist International during which its reply was to be sent; the period thus fixed during which no reply might be forthcoming was not to have been taken as a reply in the negative. A few days later, Rosmer notified us that the statement was handed over, and that it would be examined. One month later, Rosmer again notified us that the statement had been considered but that, in the absence of a quorum, without which no definite decision would be arrived at, the question was referred to the forthcoming session of the Executive Committee of the Communist

⁶ I. Jansen, i.e. Johannes "Jan" Proost, [1882–1942] – Dutch artist; helped smuggle revolutionary literature into Germany during WWI; founding member of CP 1918; party's representative in Moscow 1920–3; delegate to I, II, III ECCI plenums 1922–3; left CP with Wijnkoop/Van Ravesteijn group 1926; imprisoned by the Dutch authorities as "revolutionary and seditious person" in May 1940 and, after the occupation, handed over to the Germans; died on March 26th, 1942, in Sachsenhausen concentration camp. (Ed.)

⁷ "Voice of Labor".

International; a delegate of the organization which had drafted the Manifesto would be invited to attend the session.

In the meantime, things turned out quite differently. A month later (March 8, 1921), the Russian Communist Party replied in lieu of the Communist International: Yartchuk (recently released from prison) and myself, were arrested.

A collective hunger-strike in the Taganka prison (Moscow), during which 13 Anarchists and Anarcho-Syndicalists refused food for 10 days, compelled the Russian Communist Party to deport us abroad. This measure, used at that times for the first time, has by now become an everyday occurrence. It received the assent of the Communist International. Nay, the latter passed from the defensive to the offensive and published a libelous diatribe of Mr. Yakovlev entitled: “The Russian Anarcho-Syndicalists before the tribunal of the world proletariat.” This pamphlet was distributed by the Communist International in different countries.

That was the answer to our statement.

The same attitude has also been adopted by the Red Trade Union International. The last sitting of that International’s Congress closed, thanks to the eleventh hour intervention of Bukharin, who reduced the entire Anarchist movement of Russia to the “Makhnovshchina” and to the rejoinder of Sirolle, with a scandalous uproar. The Russian Federation of Trade Unions took sides for the Communist International. This is its declaration:

“We declare hereby that some of the prominent individuals had taken an active part in the Makhnovist movement⁸ and had occupied important posts in these bands. We possess all the necessary documents and Comrade Sirolle was cognizant of them. Some other groupings were intimately related to the counter-revolutionary “Makhnovshchina”⁹ as well as to the Kronstadt rebels.”

... I publish here the text of the second statement¹⁰, because the third, which differs little from this one, is in the hands of the Vecheka. When arrested, my correspondence and the Archives of the Provisional Executive Bureau of the All-Russian Confederation of Anarcho-Syndicalists were taken away—never to be returned. The original text is in the possession of the Communist International.

G[rigori] Maximoff.

in: ICPP 1925, p. 249–253; also in: Maximoff 1940, p. 440–444.

⁸ Comrades Volin, Mark [Mratchny] and a few others are here alluded to.

⁹ Followers of Makhno, leader of Ukrainian peasant rebellion against the Soviet Government.

¹⁰ see below, **Document 3**. (Ed.)

Document 2

Appeal of the All-Russian Confederation of Anarcho-Syndicalists

To the Workers of All Countries

Comrades: The four years of imperialist war and three years of civil war have reduced our country to a state of utter ruin.

The civil war, which led to the exhaustion of the revolutionary forces of Russia, is the work not only of the inner counterrevolution or of the Russian bourgeoisie; the greatest guilt is borne by the infamous governments of the Entente who did not overlook the slightest opportunity to crush our revolution.

The Entente attacked us directly and indirectly and still continues attacking us; it captured the north of Russia; it openly supported the Czecho-Slovakian Legions in Siberia; it aided Kolchak, Denikin and Yudenich; it incited against us all the small neighboring states and through its infamous blockade it holds the country in the grip of hunger and starvation. But all its attempts have failed to break the resistance of the revolutionary proletariat. And still the powerful Entente, the rulers of the world, does not lay down its arms, does not lose hope of crushing our revolution and re-establish its decaying democracy. It is helping the general of the old Russian Empire, Baron Wrangel, to rally his counter-revolutionary forces, it hurls Poland against us, it incites Romania, Hungary and other countries. And it continues providing all the enemies of revolutionary Russia with expert advisers, armaments and money.

Comrades: our heroic people has been weakened by this struggle and is perishing now from hunger, and lack of medical supplies. It aspires toward peace, it wants to be given a chance to rebuild its economic life. For this it needs your help, the aid of your revolutionary energies. Help it immediately, without any delay!

We, Anarcho-Syndicalists of Russia, notwithstanding the persecutions which we suffer from the socialist government, notwithstanding our complete disagreement with the party in power, notwithstanding our rejection of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and party dictatorship especially, a dictatorship which has been one of the large factors in causing economic chaos and the demoralization of the political life of the country, notwithstanding all that—we send you an ardent appeal to support Russia in its struggle against the world bourgeoisie.

Comrades: we ask you to fulfill your duty in regard to us, the duty of universal proletarian solidarity. Put an end to the domination of your bourgeoisie just as we did here. *But do not repeat our mistakes: don't let state communism be established in your countries.*

Come to our aid! Prevent trains with munitions from leaving for the Russian territory held by counter-revolutionists. Destroy such trains. Stop production of armaments and ammunitions. Force the governments to establish commercial relations with us; to send to us machines, medical supplies, food and clothing. But the greatest and most effective help you can extend to us now is to make the revolution in your countries.

Your help is urgently needed. Long live the World Social Revolution! Long live the world solidarity of the proletariat! Down with the bourgeoisie and the State, the proletarian State included!
Long live the social order of communism-syndicalism; Anarcho-Syndicalism will lead to the Anarchist Commune and will do away with all forms of dictatorship.
Long live the Workers' and Anarchist International.
Forward! The spirit of free communism is hovering all over the world.

The Provisional Bureau of the All-Russian Confederation of Anarcho-Syndicalists
G[rigori] Maximoff, E[fim] Yarchuk, S[ergei] Marcus,
All-Russian Confederation of Anarcho-Syndicalists
The Executive Bureau

in: Maximoff 1940, p. 444 – 446

Document 3

To the Executive Committee of the Third International

A Declaration

Comrades:

The first and second Congresses of the Communist International adopted the point of view that its ranks should be, made up not only of Communists, but that they should also include the entire left wing of the international revolutionary labor movement: Anarchists, Syndicalists, I.W.W's, etc.; the Comintern found it not only feasible but also, urgently necessary to work with these elements in closest contact, shoulder to shoulder, notwithstanding the outstanding differences in basic views existing between the Communists and the lefts, that is the Anarchists.

Apart from the general tactical line adopted by the Second Congress on this question, the same is further attested by a number of official documents issued by the Comintern, such as: "The appeal of the Executive Committee of the Comintern to the Industrial Workers of the World" ("Comintern," No. 9, January, 1920); "Toward the Second Congress of the Communist International" (ibid, No. 11); "The theses on the basic tasks of the Second Congress of the Comintern" (ibid, No. 12); Zinoviev's official speech at the Fifth All-Russian Conference of Trade Unions; the fact that A. Borghi with the "Unione Sindacale Italiana" and also Pestaña with the Spanish C.N.T. (General Confederation of Labor) were accepted as members of the Comintern.

It is known to you that this line of friendly collaboration with the left elements adopted by the Comintern is being carried out in various degrees in regard to our comrades, the Anarcho-Syndicalists of Spain, Italy, Germany, Scandinavia, France, England, America and Australia. The Comintern renders substantial aid in their struggle for a free society, that is, for Anarchy.

It seems then that the same line of behavior should also be carried out in relation to the Anarcho-Syndicalists of Russia, the more so, because the program and tactics of the latter coincide with the program and tactics of the Anarcho-Syndicalists of Western Europe. It would seem that all the resolutions of the Comintern touching the Anarchists and Syndicalists of Western Europe should be valid for Russia also. However, the practice shows us something different: the resolutions adopted by the Comintern on that question are not carried out in Russia; here Anarchists and Syndicalists are being persecuted. The Russian Communist Party, a member of the Comintern, pursues undeviatingly its terroristic tactics. The position in which the Russian Anarchists have been placed is incompatible with the honor of the Comintern and cannot be tolerated any longer.

Let us, for instance, take as an illustration: the occurrence which took place October 24 this year.

Is it possible that in this Socialist Republic the Communist Party, which is the leading member of the Comintern, should make raids, through its police organ, the Extraordinary Commission (CheKa), upon Anarchist and non-anarchists, and give the CheKa's soldiers the license to undertake the searching of the women?

Is it possible, is it admissible that in the absence of the owner of the premises, without showing any search warrant, that police agents should be permitted to break into headquarters, conduct a search, without even going through the trouble of making a record thereof and in addition, to arrest people without any justifiable grounds? This happened, on the day already referred to, to the Secretary of the Executive Bureau of the Confederation of Russian Anarcho-Syndicalists.

Is it compatible with the honor and dignity of the Comintern and the Russian Communist Party, the most prominent member of the former, to arrest wholesale all those that are present at a legally authorized meeting and, without preferring any charges against them, to throw them into the damp dungeons of the CheKa, to treat the roughly, to keep them on a starvation regime and to ignore completely their lawful demand to squash their case within twenty-four hours?

Is it not shameful to bring all the arrested Anarchists to a point where they were forced to declare a hunger strike? And that did take place; the arrested comrades refused food, their hunger strike lasted three days and some, like Goldberg, kept it up for eleven days.

Comrades: These unheard of happenings have become part and parcel of daily life; they do not even arouse indignation any more, for under conditions of the absolute sway of the club-law under which we live now, the feeling of human dignity has become atrophied. Like a pack of animals, the citizens of the Socialist Republic bear patiently their cross.

The above mentioned occurrences took place in Moscow. And what is taking place in the provinces? There, terror and nightmare conditions have full sway. This is quite natural, no other course being possible under a party dictatorship.

Freedom does not exist in Russia; not even for Communists. Free press is absent. Papers and publications are closed up; they are persecuted in the fiercest and most senseless fashion.

There is no such a thing as freedom of speech: meetings, rallies are forbidden fruit to us. We have the right to call ourselves Anarchists, to work in Soviet institutions, but to carry on propaganda, to spread our ideas, that is, to be active and not to become mere talking machines, a mere inventory item in the general economy — that is not granted to us. Moreover, in some provinces, in the Ural region for instance, Anarchists are arrested just for belonging to the movement, It is clear that under such conditions the freedom to publish books is non-existent; in this respect all kinds of obstacles

are made, going as far as banning the publication of the works of Bakunin, Kropotkin and Pelloutier.

But what took place in Kharkov is the most monstrous occurrence of all!

It is, perhaps, known to you that in Ukraine there is in existence an army of irregular peasant troops, named after its leader — an old Anarchist, Makhno — the “Makhnovites.” And you may also know that while Makhno was treacherously beaten by the Bolsheviks on several occasions, he always came to the aid of the Soviet Government at the most critical moments, hitting out at the common enemy — Petliura, Denikin, Wrangel. It was due to his aid that the Red Army succeeded in wiping out the Southern counter-revolution.

Wrangel’s rapid advance in Ukraine impelled Makhno to cease his struggle against the Soviet Government and to offer it his aid. The offer was accepted and a pact was drawn up between both Makhno and the Soviet Government, and duly signed by both sides. According to this pact, the Soviet Government undertook to free all the Anarchists arrested on the territory of the Soviet Republics. This provision of the agreement was not fulfilled; just the reverse, the persecutions, as shown by the events of October 24, have taken on greater sweep. According to that pact, Anarchists obtained the right freely to engage in written and oral propaganda. This condition was fulfilled only in Kharkov where the Anarchists began to publish their paper “Nabat” (the “Alarm”).

But Wrangel was defeated and there was no need any longer for Makhno. It was decided to get rid of him, to put an end to the “Makhno” movement and simultaneously, to the Anarchists in Kharkov. Apart from the 360 people seized in the Anarchist club, a number of comrades were arrested outside of the latter.

The hounding of Anarchists still continues. A legally authorized Anarchist convention was to take place in Kharkov. Those comrades who came to that convention were arrested as soon as they came to the city. Among the arrested comrades was a member of the Executive Bureau of the Confederation of Russia Anarcho-Syndicalists, Comrade Yartchuk, who was detained at the Kharkov Railway station; Comrade Dolenko-Chekeres who was arrested with his wife and two children (one was eight and the other two years old). Among those who are kept in prison are women in the seventh month of pregnancy.

Anarchist publishing houses have been closed up, all books have been confiscated. The Central Administration of the Ukrainian CheKa publishes its official declaration (“Communist” 2—1920, declaration No, 279) under the title “Makhno’s Treason,” in which it tries to justify its behavior by an alleged discovery of a plot against the Soviet Government, but perusal of this document leaves no doubt that we are dealing with pure fabrication.

Such are the facts ...

Avoiding all polemics, and trying to throw light upon the situation from an objective angle, the Executive Bureau of the Confederation of Russian Anarcho-Syndicalists pose before you the following questions:

1. What is the attitude of the Comintern toward the Russian Anarchists and Syndicalists?
2. Is the Comintern of the opinion that the resolutions and the tactical line adopted in relation to the Anarchists and Syndicalists of Western Europe are also valid in regard to the Anarchists and Syndicalists of Russia, Ukraine and other Soviet Republics?

3. What does the Comintern intend to do in order to put an end to the persecutions of Anarchists and Syndicalists by the Communist Party of Russia and Ukraine who by pursuing their terroristic policy, compromise the Comintern in the eyes of the proletariat of Western Europe?

The Confederation of Russian Anarcho-Syndicalists hopes that within one month the Executive Committee of the Comintern will give a definite answer to all these questions.

If such an answer does not come forth within one month, the Confederation will be compelled to assume that the Comintern is quite in agreement with the policies of the Russian Communist Party.

With fraternal greetings

The Executive Bureau of the All-Russian

Confederation of Anarcho-Syndicalists,

(Seal)

G[rigori] Maximoff

S[ergei] Marcus,

in: Maximoff 1940, p. 449 – 453

A Ray of Light from Moscow¹¹

At the Moscow conference of the delegates to the Congress of Red Trade Unions (it took place July 22, 1921) at which the opposition of this congress was organized, Trotzky, during one of the sessions of this conference, said the following:

“... All Anarchists (Russian, of course) are rascals and criminals, None of those who at present are kept in prison can be set at liberty.”

[Gaston] Leval: (Delegate of the Spanish National Confederation of Labor – C.N.T.) Asks that this statement be substantiated by proofs.

Trotzky: “And who are you, Leval? I do not find it necessary to answer you.”

When Orlandis [Hilario Arlandis] (also a delegate of the Spanish C.N.T.) in turn also demanded proofs to corroborate the above cited statements Trotzky answered: “You give me the impression of a hysterical woman, I am the People’s Commissar and find it superfluous to give you any explanations. My word is sufficient. The delegates to the International Trade Union Congress have no right to demand freedom for those counter-revolutionary bandits. We are responsible for our action right here in Russia. And we, who are in power here, act in the interests of the revolution ...” (from “Der Syndikalist,” Vol. III, No. 32, [August 13th] 1921, Berlin – paper of the *Freie Arbeiter-Union Deutschlands (Syndikalisten)* – FAUD(S)¹²).

in: Maximoff 1940, p. 503

[See also Leval’s ‘Anarchists behind bars’ (in: Daniel Guerin (ed), *No Gods, No Masters. An Anthology of Anarchism*, Oakland – Edinburgh – London 2005 (AK Press & Kate Sharpley Library), p. 595 – 604; online here:

http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives/bright/leval/abb.html]

¹¹ German title: “*Streiflichter aus Moskau*“. (Ed.)

¹² Free Workers' Union of Germany (Syndicalists). (Ed.)

Trotsky's Reply

To Com. Michel¹³ and to the other comrades who composed the delegation which visited yesterday Com. Lenin¹⁴:

Dear Comrades:

The Central Committee of our Party has again, this morning, examined with due care the question of the imprisoned Anarchists which was called for in your yesterday's talk with Lenin.

We are fully aware of the necessity of being exceedingly careful in our handling the question of imprisoned Anarchists. The more is this necessary because¹⁵ the Western European Anarcho-Syndicalists, among them being those who play a very important and positive role in the revolutionary movement, do not always make the necessary differentiation between the Anarchists and Syndicalists who, while preserving the peculiarities of their opinions, consider it, nonetheless, as their revolutionary duty to support the dictatorship of the Russian proletariat against the world bourgeoisie — and these who, sheltering themselves behind an extreme revolutionary phraseology, carry out, in fact, a counter-revolutionary activity, dealing blows from behind to the Soviet Power, at a time when the latter is turned with its face to its imperialist enemies.

The fact that Anarchists, who have exterminated, helped to exterminate or advised to exterminate Communists, are hunger-striking in prison can, in no way — you will agree — serve as a pretext for their release. In the meantime those prisoners whom, as you know, we have found possible, at considerable risk, to release, refuse to go out of prison and continue their hunger-strike, demanding the release of the others. We have no right whatever to expose the lives of fresh dozens and, perhaps, hundreds of Communist workers and peasants, a large number of whom have already fallen into the hands of the anti-Soviet Anarchist organization in which the imprisoned Anarchists were active. We consider it necessary to remind you again that the Communists who fall into the hands of that organization have no opportunity either to make any protests or to get into touch with delegates to International Congresses, or even to declare hunger-strikes — because they are immediately and mercilessly exterminated¹⁶.

The hunger-strike is actually kept up by the false hope that the Soviet Government will, under the influence of the intervention of insufficiently informed foreign delegates, commit the error, approaching to a crime, and release its irreconcilable enemies, whose closest partisans and friends still continue by force of arms to destroy Soviet institutions and to exterminate Communists. As we cannot, fully conscious of our duties towards the revolution, take such a step, any interview of the foreign comrades with the prisoners which could not, because of the nature of the situation, give any practical results, *would be capable, however, of raising, among the prisoners, false hopes and of inducing them to continue a hopeless hunger-strike.*

¹³ Michel [Moisei] Kneler, French Syndicalist, while on his way out of Russia, was drowned in the passage by a small boat from a Northern Russian port to Norway.

¹⁴ cf. Gaston Leval, *Anarchists Behind Bars*; in: Daniel Guerin (ed), *No Gods, No Masters. An Anthology of Anarchism*, Oakland – Edinburgh – London 2005 (AK Press & Kate Sharpley Library), p. 595 – 604; online here: http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives/bright/leval/abb.html. (Ed.)

¹⁵ In the source: 'that'. (Ed.)

¹⁶ He doubtless refers to the Makhno rebels whom Anarchists were accused of supporting.

Free from any spirit of revenge, considerations of revolutionary expediency alone dictating our steps, we would be willing *to let all the prisoners go abroad*, facilitating their departure by providing them with passports and financial means, and we are ready to accept, in this direction, any help, assistance and indications which you might give us.

We consider, nevertheless, that *the only right step on your part would be a written declaration on your part appealing to the prisoners to cease immediately their hunger-strike*, considering the manifest discrepancy between the means and the aim, Such letter would be immediately transmitted to the prisoners.

We do not wish to doubt that you will understand the actual sense and spirit of our answer and of our propositions. We still consider ourselves a revolutionary fortress, besieged by the world imperialism. Within this fortress no treason, treachery or counter-revolutionary rebellion can be permitted by us. The welfare of the revolution is our supreme law. This law takes sometimes a stern form. The advance-guard of the workmen of Europe and of the whole world will only then triumph over the bourgeoisie when they will learn to place the stern law of revolutionary expediency above all other considerations.

With comradely greetings,

12-7-1921.

L. Trotzky.

Source:

ICPP: International Committee for Political Prisoners (ed.), *Letters from Russian Prisons*, London 1925 (Albert & Charles Boni), p. 255 – 257

again in:

Maximoff 1940: G. P. Maximoff, *The Guillotine at Work*. Twenty Years of Terror in Russia (Data and Documents), Chicago 1940 (The Chicago Section of the ALEXANDER BERKMAN Fund), p. 499 – 501

– The CI immediately published a pamphlet (for the RILU delegates to get them into the right road): – I. Iakovlev, *Les »Anarchistes-Syndicalistes« russes devant le tribunal du prolétariat mondial*, Moscow 1921 – which contained an abridged version of Trotsky's letter, without naming the author and esp. with the omission of the 'offer' to emigrate (cf. Reiner Tosstorff, *Profintern*. Die Rote Gewerkschaftsinternationale 1920-1937, Paderborn 2004 (Schöningh), p. 358, fn 34). – For the Iakovlev pamphlet cf. also Maximoff, *Attitude of the Russian Communist Party, of the Communist International and of the Red Trade Union International Towards Anarchists and Syndicalists* (ICPP 1925, p. 249–253; Maximoff 1940, p. 444–446)

Talk with Lenin 1921

by Manuel Díaz Ramírez

in: S. F. Rezveselsy & D. Y. Grisberg (ed.), *They Knew Lenin*. Reminiscences of Foreign Contemporaries, Moscow 1968 (Progress Publishers), p. 240-245

In addition to the discussions held at the Third Congress of the Comintern, there were also arguments between delegates and delegations after the sessions. These arguments often lasted till the break of day.

It was in the course of such arguments that it occurred to some delegations to exchange opinions on a problem that was at the time a matter of great concern to certain workers' and trade-union circles in various European countries. The problem had to do with a number of anarchists from the gangs of Makhno¹⁷ or his assistant and ideological adviser Volin who had been caught, arms in hand, in the Ukraine and kept under arrest in Moscow. All over the world anarchists and enemies of the October Revolution had made them their banner.

In Mexico we waged a very active struggle against anarchists and anarchistic elements who tried to interfere with our work of giving the workers a Marxist education and of developing our movement among them. Here workers' trade unions were established by "House of the Workers of the World"¹⁸ where anarchist or anarcho-syndicalist ideas dominated. Disturbed by this problem and wishing to settle it we held a number of meetings with the result that we decided to ask Lenin to intervene on behalf of the arrested anarchists in order to clear up this case, hand the culprits over to justice, punish those guilty of the uprising and set free those who were innocent. This, in our opinion, had to be done in order that the case of the Russian anarchists should not be utilised by the anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists of other countries, as well as by various bourgeois circles hostile to the Russian revolution, as a banner against the Communist Parties and the revolutionary movement in general.

Delegations from seven countries asked Lenin to meet with them at any time and place he might find it convenient. [241] We did not have long to wait for the answer. Lenin invited us for 2:00 a.m., timing our reception for the end of a session of the Comintern Congress.

At the appointed time we came to the assigned place. It was one of the Kremlin dining-rooms with which we were familiar since we sometimes took our meals there. Lenin arrived exactly at 2:00 a.m. After an exchange of greetings he apologised for the late hour of the meeting, but he was very busy and we, too, had plenty to do.

Lenin was at once ready to hear the opinion of the delegations which had come to the meeting and remarked that our delegation was the only Latin-American delegation, while the others were from the Romanic countries of Europe.

The seven delegations numbered a total of some 30 people. When it was announced that one of the members of the French delegation, a trade-union worker, would speak on behalf of all the delegations, Lenin smiled, glanced at all of us and apparently thought that the Latin temperament had played a more important role in raising this question than political considerations. But even if

¹⁷ N. Makhno — head of counter-revolutionary anarchist kulak bands in the Ukraine lighting against Soviet power in 1918-21. Ed. (note from 1957 printing – 2023 notes appear in square brackets)

¹⁸ [Casa del Obrero Mundial (COM) – cf. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casa_del_Obrero_Mundial]

Lenin had thought so, he undoubtedly realised that that was not the case after some of the delegates had spoken. Our arguments were, in certain measure, based on the situation prevailing in many countries.

After hearing out the main speaker and at least one speaker from each delegation very attentively Lenin answered: "I am greatly pleased with what I have just heard. Many of the things that were said sound just to me. We are being asked to settle a question whose consequences might harm the revolutionary movement in your countries by virtue of the wrong approach to it by the anarchists and, naturally, the bourgeoisie and elements hired by the bourgeoisie for the struggle against us.

"Well, then, comrades, although this is not my personal opinion and at the same time is neither a complete nor a partial solution of this problem, here is what I can say to you: we want you to help us solve it.

"The cases of the arrested anarchists, both the 'theoreticians', like Volin (I am told he is the 'theoretical' adviser of Makhno, the head of the terrorist gangs who derailed trains, devastated Ukrainian villages, robbed the people and [242] raped women), and those who were caught with arms in hand, will be reinvestigated as you desire. All those who constitute no danger to the revolution and its system will be set free."

But that did not bring our talk to an end. Lenin, as well as each of the delegations, wanted to take advantage of the favourable moment: Lenin—to become more closely acquainted with some of the problems of our countries, we to get his authoritative opinion and wise advice on those problems.

Before recounting what was probably the most important thing for our delegation at that meeting with Lenin I want to emphasise one thing that occurred in the very beginning of our talk and attests the tactfulness of the great leader. Lenin knew we had come directly from a late session of the congress and had not as yet had supper. He immediately ordered tea and sandwiches and insisted that we partake of them during our talk.

After talking to individual members of the delegations Lenin spoke to us all in English since we had used that language before. He asked for our opinion on the question of anti-parliamentarism which was then being widely discussed in Europe and was due to the negative attitude of the German Workers' Communist Party to the parliament. The delegation of this party was present at the meeting and expounded its point of view which Lenin sharply criticised. The Canadian workers' delegation representing the One Big Union¹⁹ which fully corresponded to the Canadian IWW and also took an anti-parliamentary stand had been criticised with similar sharpness earlier.

When the turn of our delegation came, we gave Comrade Lenin a general outline of the history of our young Mexican Communist Party and its activities and struggle during that period. We made a brief historical review of the 30-year period that had preceded the 1910 Revolution and had taken place under Porfirio Diaz's dictatorship which had deprived the people of all freedom, especially political. It was in this connection that we explained to Lenin the anti-parliamentary position of the Mexican Communist Party which [243] took into account the political illiteracy of the masses (in Mexico there were not even any of the traditional socialist parties which existed in other Latin-American countries). On the other hand, we also had to consider another unfavourable circumstance: the only widespread mass social movement was anarchist or anarcho-syndicalist. At first it had exerted an influence through anarchist literature coming from Cuba and Spain and

¹⁹ One Big Union — trade-union association of Canadian workers founded in 1919. Ed.

through individual Spanish anarchist workers, who came to Mexico; some anarchist influence was also exerted by propaganda from the ‘House of the Workers of the World’ in trade unions which were strongly affected by erroneous theories.

Against such influence exerted on the working people the Mexican Communist Party should have started a struggle as soon as it was organised. And, although the Party did not then openly and officially oppose participation in parliament, its anti-parliamentary stand was clear to the workers from the trend of its newspaper articles and from the fact that it abstained from participating in election campaigns. But most members of the Central Committee of the Mexican Communist Party held that that stand of the Party was temporary and that it was a tactic for the period during which the Party was gathering strength and its ranks were growing by the joining of the workers who were ridding themselves of the anarcho-syndicalist ideology toward which they were oriented by the leaders of the “House of the Workers of the World”.

Lenin, in his turn, bombarded us with questions, as he usually did, in order to get a complete picture of the problems under discussion. After a broad exchange of mutual questions and answers, Lenin said with his typical modesty: “I know little about Mexico. But taking into consideration its position as a dependent and industrially less developed country with a small and ideologically weak proletariat, the given transient anti-parliamentary stand may be accepted only as a temporary tactical measure. But this stand would not be acceptable or permissible in such countries as Germany, Canada, etc.”

Looking at the comrades from the German Workers Communist Party²⁰ and from the Canadian “One Big Union” and apparently addressing them Lenin emphasised that, whereas such anti-parliamentary stand was permissible for [244] Mexico because of the peculiarities of that country’s internal situation, this stand was absolutely intolerable in Germany and Canada. It was a crime against the proletariat and the revolution and “we cannot but censure the comrades, groups and parties which take this stand. We expect the comrades to change it within the shortest possible time.”

Lenin was extremely modest and humane and at the same time had an extraordinary ability to understand people. Considering that we were expressing the opinion of the majority of our Party’s leadership we stated there and then that the aforesaid temporary tactical stand would soon be revised. And it was. In April 1923 the Second Congress of the Mexican Communist Party rejected this incorrect stand.

*

A new day was breaking. It was already about 6 o’clock in the morning when we said good-bye to the great Lenin. Leaving the Kremlin surrounded by its mighty walls we all walked together: Tom Mann, the old and experienced English trade-union worker and leader of many big strikes in England (some of them had only recently been waged), Comrade Cascaden²¹ and others. Comrade

²⁰ Maurice Disch (*Allgemeine Arbeiter-Union Deutschlands – AAUD*), Delegate to the *Profintern* Congress; Bernhard Reichenbach (alias Seemann), representative at the ECCI for the *Kommunistische Arbeiter-Partei Deutschlands* (KAPD) and delegate to the Third Congress of the CI.

²¹ Cascaden was a delegate with a deliberative vote from the *Canadian Woodworkers Industrial Union*. Ed. [In fact Cascaden was the delegate of the *Lumber Workers’ Industrial Union of Canada, Edmonton District*, with a decisive vote; cf. Gordon Cascaden, *Shall Unionism Die?* “Red” Union International Congress (Meeting in

Cascaden had upheld before Lenin the anti-parliamentary position of the Canadian “One Big Union” whose leader he was.

However, Cascaden appeared very gay and content. Taking a breath of the fresh morning air he started singing. Tom Mann asked him: “What’s up, Cascaden, what makes you so happy? Maybe the dressing down Lenin gave you?” Cascaden looked at Tom Mann and answered: “Yes, I’m very happy. You are anxiously pondering all that Lenin said to you, whereas I want to express my joy, my enormous satisfaction in a song because three of my life’s big dreams have come true today. I wanted to see what the revolution had done, to meet Lenin and talk to him, and see the Moscow bell.” We had just passed by the bell lying on the ground and noticed how curiously Cascaden examined it.

Cascaden was a plain worker and at that time was not yet a member of the Party²². He joined it later. His feelings were quite natural: on that memorable day (for him, as well as for all of us) he spoke to the brilliant leader of the revolution and the Communist Party of Soviet Russia.

These lines and reminiscences have been called up by my deep admiration of the 40th anniversary of the glorious October Revolution. The eternal memory of our brilliant Lenin cherished by the working people of the world, the memory of the great creator of Soviet power, the founder of the Communist Party and its tried and tested leader, cannot be separated from this anniversary.

1957

“Ramirez, M. D.— General Secretary of Mexican Communist Party(1921). Delegate to Third Congress of Comintern. Represented Mexican General Confederation of Labour at First (Constituent) Congress of Profintern”. (Rezveselsy & Grisberg, l.c. p. 285)

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Moscow, Russia) Plans Division of Workers of Canada and United States and Destruction of Worldwide Labor Movement, s. l., s. d. (published by the *Industrial Union League of Canada*, Windsor, Ontario; the *Introduction* is dated ‘Windsor, Ontario, Canada, Jan. 28, 1922’.)]

²² [*In fact* Cascaden was a journalist working for radical US and Canadian papers. He was a member of – or at least close to – the IWW and a close friend to Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman; cf. Emma Goldman, *Living My Life* 1931.]