Voline
Bolshevik-Aligned Leader of the Russian Nabat Anarchists
(1882 - 1945)

**Description:** March of 1920 saw him taken to Moscow, where he would remain prisoner until October, when he and many other anarchists were released by virtue of a treaty between the Soviet Union and Makhno's army. Voline then returned to Kharkov, resuming his old activities... (From : Rudolph Rocker Bio)

**Tags:** nabat, anarchist, russian, ukrainian revolution, synthesis anarchist, writer, intellectual.

**Quotes:**

"Socialism, so mighty in Germany, Austria and Italy, has proved powerless. 'Communism', itself very strong, especially in Germany, has proved powerless. The trade unions have proved powerless. How are we to account for this?" (From : "The Unknown Revolution," by Voline.)

"As we know, there it was an authoritarian state communism (Bolshevism) that scored a stunning and rather easy victory in the events of 1917. Now, these days, nearly seventeen years on from that victory, not only is communism proving powerless to resist fascism abroad, but, where the regime within the USSR itself is concerned, the latter is more and more often being described more and more deliberately as 'red fascism'." (From : "The Unknown Revolution," by Voline.)

"Yet there is consolation to be had. The masses learn through all too palpable first hand experience. And the experience is there." (From : "The Unknown Revolution," by Voline.)

**Biography:**

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From the introduction to: Voline. The Unknown Revolution. Ed. Rudolf Rocker.
Vsevolod Mikhailovich Eichenbaum was born on August 11, 1882, in the district of Voronezh in Great Russia. So far as I know only one of his writings, a small booklet of Russian poems, was published under his real name, while all the others, and certainly his many articles and essays, were signed with his pseudonym. It is much easier to think and speak of him as Voline. Both his parents were medical doctors who lived in comfortable circumstances. This permitted them to engage French and German governesses for the early education of their children, so Vsevolod and his brother Boris became familiar with both languages from their early youth to the extent that Voline was able to speak and write French and German as fluently as his native Russian.

His first general education was received at the college in Voronezh. Upon completing his studies there he went to St. Petersburg to study jurisprudence, but all plans for his future life were interrupted by the critical situation developing in Russia at that time. Voline became acquainted with revolutionary ideas as a student at the age of nineteen, and made important contributions to the labor movement from the year 1901.

In the 1905 revolution, which nearly overthrew the tyrannical Romanov rule, the young man from Voronezh joined the Social Revolutionary Party (commonly known as the SRs) playing an active role in the uprising. After the bloody suppression of the insurrection he, along with thousands of his comrades, was arrested. In 1907 after a Czarist tribunal's sentence banished him to one of the numerous places in Russia for political exiles, he was fortunate enough to find means of escape and traveling to France.

Once in Paris Voline really began to study and weigh the various schools of the Socialist movement and the numerous aspects of the social problem in general. He became associated with various libertarians, among them Sebastian Faure, the eloquent orator of the French Anarchists, and made connections with the small circle of Russian Anarchists in Paris, such as A. A. Kareline and his group, as well as other associations of Russian exiles. Under the exposure of his new surroundings Voline's political and social views underwent a process of transformation, resulting in his departure from the Socialist Revolutionaries and conversion to anarchism.

In 1913, when the danger of armed conflict cast a shadow over Europe, Voline
became a member of the Committee for International Action Against War. This activity nettled the French authorities, and in 1915, when the battle-lines were extending across the continent, the Viviani-Millerand government ordered that he be banished to a concentration camp for the duration of the fighting. Warned in time, he was able, to escape to Bordeaux with the help of some French comrades. There he shipped out as a storekeeper on a freighter bound for the United States.

In New York, Voline joined the Union of Russian Workers in the United States and Canada, a formidable organization with about 10,000 members entertaining ideas similar to those of the Confederation Generale du Travail (the General Confederation of Labor) in France during that period, finding a rich field for his activities. Soon he was serving on the editorial staff of Golos Truda, (The Voice of Labor), a weekly paper of the Federation, and as one of its most gifted lecturers.

But in 1917, when the Revolution broke out in Russia, the whole staff of Golos Truda decided to return to their homeland and transfer the periodical to Petrograd. Arriving there, they readily cooperated with members of the lately organized Anarcho-Syndicalist Propaganda Union, enabling them to arrange for the publication of Golos Truda on Russian soil. Voline joined that Union and was immediately elected as one of the editors. During the early months the paper appeared as a weekly, but became a daily after the October Revolution.

Meanwhile the Bolshevik government in Moscow had signed the peace treaty of Brest-Litovsk, handing over the Ukraine to the German and Austrian occupation forces. It was for this reason that Voline left Petrograd and joined a troop of libertarian partizans who went to the Ukraine to fight against the foreign invaders and their Russian supporters. This also enabled him to go to Bobrov and visit his family, which he had not seen since 1915 when forced to leave France for America.

During ensuing months of comparative freedom in Russia, when other social movements other than the Bolsheviks still enjoyed the freedom to spread their ideas through their own publications and at public meetings, Voline was constantly busy in many fields. He took part in the work of the Soviet Department for Public Education and Enlightenment of the People, first in Voronezh, and later in Kharkov. In autumn, 1918, he helped to build up the Anarchist Federation of the Ukraine, for a few months a potent organization, known by the name Nabat (Tocsin), participating in the dissemination of a great deal of literature. Besides its principal
organ in Kursk, *Nabat* had regional papers under the same name in several parts of the Ukraine. Voline became a member of *Nabat*'s Secretariat and of the editorial staff of its periodicals. And the conference of that organization in Kursk entrusted him to work out a *Synthetical Declaration of Principles* which would be acceptable to all schools of libertarian socialism in Russia, enabling them to work together.

But all *Nabat*'s plans for the future came to naught when in spring of 1919, the Soviet government began to persecute the anarchists by suppressing their papers and arresting their militants en masse. It was then that Voline joined the revolutionary army of Nestor Makhno who sought to enlighten the people and prepare them for a new social order, based on common ownership of the land, home rule of communities, and federative solidarity. Voline soon became head of the public education department throughout the duration of the whole campaign against Denikin.

In December 1919, the Military Revolutionary Council sent him to the district of Krivoi-Rog to oppose the dangerous propaganda of the agents of Hetman Petlura, but on his way he was stricken with typhoid fever and had to remain in the cottage of a peasant. Meanwhile Denikin's army was defeated, and shortly afterwards there was word of a new break between the Soviet government and Makhno's partizans. Still exceedingly ill, Voline was arrested on January 14, by military agents of the Moscow government and transferred from one prison to another. Trotsky already had ordered his execution, and according to Voline's own account, he escaped death then only by sheer accident.

March of 1920 saw him taken to Moscow, where he would remain prisoner until October, when he and many other anarchists were released by virtue of a treaty between the Soviet Union and Makhno's army. Voline then returned to Kharkov, resuming his old activities as well as participating in continuing negotiations between the Lenin government and a delegation from Makhno's forces. But the agreement reached by these contending parties was quickly broken by the Bolsheviks, and in November, scarcely a month after their release, Voline and most of his comrades were arrested again and confined in the Taganka prison in Moscow.

The only charge held against them was their libertarian views. There can hardly be any doubt that, except for a sudden, fortunate turn of circumstances, they would
all have been liquidated in one way or another like so many thousands later in the years to come. It was by a mere coincidence that their lives were saved.

In the summer of 1921 the Red Trade Union International held a congress in Moscow. The delegates included representatives of some anarcho-syndicalist organizations in Spain, France, and other countries, who had come to ascertain whether an alliance with this new International would be feasible or not. They arrived in the capital just as the anarchists in the Taganka prison went on a ten-day hunger strike conducted to compel the authorities to explain publicly why they had been jailed.

When the delegates heard what had been happening they responded with vehement protest, demanding the liberation of their Russian comrades. But it was only after the affair became an open scandal in the congress that the government consented to release the hunger-strikers, on condition that they leave Russia. It was the first time that political prisoners were deported from the vaunted Red Fatherland of the Proletariat.

The Bolshevik furnish those victims with passports taken from Czechoslovakian war prisoners en route to their homeland. When the deportees arrived at the German port of Stettin they gave the authorities their real names and pointed out that the passports given to them by the Bolsheviks were not theirs. Fortunately for them, Germany itself was then in the midst of a revolutionary situation, a time of extenuating circumstances when many things could be done which were later made impossible.

Though the commissar of the port had no legal right to let this group of about twenty remain on German soil, he sympathized with their plight and permitted them to send two of their comrades to Berlin in search of a friendly organization that would assume responsibility for their maintenance, and guarantee their good behavior. When the two delegates appeared at the headquarters in Germany's capital, Fritz Kater, chairman of the Freie Arbeiter Union Deutschlands, went with them to the Chief of Police signing all necessary documents so that within a few hours they had permission to bring the whole group to Berlin. They arrived by the end of 1921.

It was not an easy job to provide for such a number, but the German comrades did what they could. It was especially difficult to find places for the newcomers to
live in, for the housing situation in Germany after the first World War was simply abominable and would remain one of the nation's greatest problems for many years to come. The toughest task was to discover a spot where the Voline family of seven could all be under the same roof. The only shelter our committee could find for them at that time was a heated attic.

It was then that I first met Voline and his comrades. Although only forty-one, he looked much older, for his hair and beard were almost white. But his energetic gestures and quick movements quickly countered my initial impression. He was a genial and intelligent man with mild manners, thoughtful and courteous, almost immune to outer circumstances and personal hardship. Having an unusual faculty for concentration, he could go on with his writing, apparently without difficulty, in the same attic where his whole family had to sleep, eat, and carry on their daily lives.

In fact, Voline did a great deal of useful work while in Berlin. He wrote, in German, a valuable pamphlet of eighty pages, entitled *The Persecutions of the Anarchists in Soviet Russia*. This was the first authentic and documented information to the outer world about what was then going on in Russia. He also translated Pyotr Arshinov's book, *The History of the Makhnovist Movement*, into German, while at the same time he edited a Russian magazine, *The Anarchist Worker*. Besides that, he did extensive work for the German libertarian movement, lecturing and writing articles for our press.

Voline remained in Berlin for about two years, until receiving an invitation from Sebastian Faure to settle with his family in Paris, where living conditions in those days were much better than in Germany. Faure was occupied with the preparation and publication of his *Encyclopedie Anarchiste* and needed a man who was familiar with foreign languages to serve as a regular contributor, giving Voline a challenging and engrossing field in which to further his political activity. He wrote various articles for the new encyclopedia, many of which were also published as special pamphlets in several languages. He also accepted an invitation of the *Confederacion Nacional del Trabajo* (National Confederation of labour) in Spain to become editor of its French periodical in Paris *I L'Espagne Anti-Fasciste*.

But although his economic fortunes in France were notably more favorable than in Germany he suffered a succession of misfortunes, of which the death of his wife
under harrowing circumstances was the worst. Shortly afterwards he left Paris for Nimes, arriving in Marseilles some time after that. During the Second World War, after the Nazis invaded France, his position became progressively more dangerous. Forced from one hiding place to another, he was compelled to live amid constant tragedy and in dire misery.

When the war ended he returned to Paris, but only to enter a hospital, for he was afflicted with incurable tuberculosis and knew that his days were numbered. There he died on September 18, 1945. Many of his old friends followed him on his final journey, which led to the crematorium in the old cemetery of Pere-Lachaise. They mourned the loss of a dauntless comrade who had suffered much in his life, but who remained to the last a valiant fighter for a better world and the great cause of freedom and social justice.


Works :
Author of The Unknown Revolution, Book One (November 30, 1946)
Author of The Unknown Revolution, Book Two (November 30, 1920)
Author of The Unknown Revolution, Book Three (November 30, 1920)

Chronology :

August 11, 1882 : Voline's Birth Day.
September 18, 1945 : Voline's Death Day.

Links :

• Anarchy Archives: Voline Archive
  http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives/bright/voline/index.html
• Anarchist Library: Voline
  https://theanarchistlibrary.org/category/author/voline
• Wikipedia: Volin
  https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Volin

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