



War Without Fronts: Atamans and Commissars in Ukraine, 1917-1919

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*War Without Fronts:
Atamans and Commissars in Ukraine, 1917-1919*

A dissertation presented

by

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to

The Department of History

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

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Abstract

The double Revolution of 1917 buried the old Romanov Empire without installing anything definite in its stead. It did, however, attenuate authority to the extreme, producing a climate propitious to the emergence of socio-political projects each with a claim upon the present and the future. One of such projects was the revolutionary warlordism known under the name of *atamanshchina*. Reaching greatest scope and complexity on the territory of modern-day Ukraine, this predominantly peasant phenomenon represented, on one hand, an effort of the countryside to fill in a power vacuum by *institutionalizing* the rural insurgency. On the other hand, as an efficient form of military self-organization, it embodied a factor of paramount importance in the ongoing Civil war – to be courted and reckoned with. The Bolsheviks appeared to have been the most successful in that task, establishing a type of joint dominion with the warlords over Ukraine in the months following German departure (Nov. 1918). Experiment for all those involved, this alliance attempted to reconcile the atamans' suspicion of disciplinary regimes with the Bolshevik war-making imperatives. Ultimately, this experiment proving disastrous, the notion of party-state centralism collided against the practice of revolutionary particularism and compelled the partners to split under the dramatic circumstances of the Grigoriev's uprising. Drawing heavily from archival sources, this work looks, therefore, at the manner whereby major players came to recognize their own political identities and ends – not in the least the Bolsheviks themselves, who evolved from the unsure parvenus to the seasoned *Staatsmachthaber* (“state power holders”) in the course of their interaction with the forces of rural revolt.

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Introduction

Part I: Institutionalized Insurgency: Project Overview

Whether driven by an onerous administrative chore or, on the contrary, by the desire to take in a dose of a big city air after the unrelenting rural winter, the couple of Dunin-Kozickis picked the least appropriate season for traveling to Kiev (Kyiv). It was in the middle of March and this meant that a notorious *bezdorizhzhia*, a creeping mélange of dirt and snow, a cantankerous child of vernal elements, took hold of the countryside roads, metamorphosing them into nearly impassable mud swamps. The journey, accomplished during clement weather in 5-6 hours, became a veritable ordeal, testing the limits of endurance of all those involved: the inanimate droshkies, which creaked and coughed in their exactions of pity, horses, their feet stuck in the mud, dragging on with flagging resolve of sentient creatures, and, finally humans, who, although sheltered from physical hardships, found the strain of monotony no less deleterious than the abrasion of labor. When the night finally came, effacing all hopes of reaching Kiev in one day, the party decided to stop at a guest house in Belaia Tserkov (Bila Tserkva) and rest there before hitting the road again in the morning.¹

It was there, in that inn named in a risible rebuttal of its provincial whereabouts “European,” that the spouses learned the shocking news from the innkeeper: the Tsar was toppled and herewith the Dynasty and the Empire came to an end. At first, fatigue prevented them from registering the ramifications of such cataclysmic turnabout, but then, some minutes or maybe hours later, in their room cozily snuggled in feather comforters, with the *Dziennik Kijowski* (“Kiev Daily”) in their hands, they began to discern the contours of the event’s grandeur.

“The charm of the printed word enthralled us,” remembered Maria Dunin-Kozicka. “Inspired by hope of standing perhaps on the threshold of the Slavic spring of nations, we set out to

¹ Maria Dunin-Kozicka, *Burza od wschodu* (Łomianki: LTW, 2007), 11

Kiev on the evening train.” There, in the city of multitudinous crowds, they became witnesses of the first “procession of freedom” as massive demonstrations in support of changes became to be known.

As an uninterrupted wave flowed the human stream along the Kreshchatik street, hurrying to reach the City Hall, where the revolutionary powers now sat. Fiery speeches were being declaimed there. Red, revolutionary banners passed before the eyes of thousands spectators, who crowded up the space on the pavement. The wind unfurled them, displaying at once the words of defiance, cast at the faded spirit of the tsarist order

“Long live Russia freed from the tyrants!”...

“We demand the summoning of the Constituent Assembly!”

“Land and Freedom to the toilers!”

“Long live Federal Russian Republic!”

“Seven-hour working day! Freedom to trade-unions!”

“Long live revolutionary, free Russia!”

Observing the exaltation of the masses with the hindsight of subsequent events, Kozicka-Dunin felt obliged to add: “The Revolution – as usually in its first moments before it turns into a sanguinary fury, which never gets its fill of offerings and destructive follies – showed up in the radiant guise of the goddess of freedom.”²

Like the Kievan crowds, most of the Tsar’s former subjects readily succumbed to the intoxicating excitement of the early days. Most – but not all. General Anton Denikin, who had a chance to see the surreptitious intrigue unfold behind the festive performance of the revolution from the very outset belonged to the small coterie of skeptics. The vision of “enthused faces,” the music of “excited speeches,” “the joy of being emancipated from the hovering incubus” affected him much less than did the first army decrees aiming to loosen the screws of its overworked and rickety structure.³ His initial alarm found indirect confirmation in Petrograd, whither he was summoned to discuss the possibility of becoming

² *ibid.*, 12

³ Anton Denikin, *Ocherki russkoi smuty* (Minsk: Kharvest, 2004), v. 1, 48

the Army's new Chief-of-Staff. Everywhere in the capital city he felt the weight of dereliction and indiscipline. "Streets were busy as before, yet dirty and overfilled with the new masters of the situation – all clothed in army overcoats, but infinitely removed from the toils of military life and only poised to defend and deepen the revolution." He further continued:

I read a lot about the exulted mood, which apparently reigned supreme in Petrograd, but I haven't found it. Anywhere... Contrived animation; invigorating and uplifting phrases, which have nonetheless long grown wearisome; and anxiety, deeply-planted anxiety in hearts. Plus the total absence of practical work: ministers in essence had neither the time, nor the occasion to concentrate and take hold of their departmental affairs; the wound-up bureaucratic machinery, creaky and lame, continued to work somehow with its old parts attuned to new transmissions.⁴

The heavy atmosphere of the post-revolutionary abeyance chafed the General and, grasping at the first opportunity, he rushed back to the Front if only to preserve it from the corrosive miasma spreading from the center outward.

This emotional ambivalence even if tilting on the side of enthusiasm, overblown and hence grotesque, harked back to the fundamental fallout of the fatidic February. Ramming into the mighty walls of czarism, the Revolution tore a gaping chasm, all the more disorienting in its cavernous presence because of the ingrained habit to regard those walls as flat-out impregnable. Many, sensing the matter of history melt before their eyes and slip from under their feet, felt as if suspended in a vacuum, without a clear downward pull or indications as to where one might veer in the absence of true gravity. Along with the few maverick peasants of the Starokonstantinov (Starokonstantyniv) district in Volhynia, those individuals must have thought aloud: "No good will ever come out of it... With the Tsar gone there is

⁴ *ibid.*, v. 1, 78

neither order nor any use (*tolku*).”⁵ The word of “Freedom,” vulgarized through abusive references and haphazard incantations, was bringing the careworn listeners its sinister overtone: Free for all! Free for all! Free for all!

That chasm in the ordered flow of time, intangible at first, began to take on concrete manifestations in the same proportion as that State, managed up to now by the defunct dynasty, was picking up the gait en route to its own disintegration. Cracks quickly appeared on its polyglot and polymorph body, sequestering one estate from another, a class from a class, a newly-born and self-affirming nation from the Empire and other nations. Naturally reflecting those developments in the rear, the army too quickly shed its unifying corporate identity, unleashing millions of gun-wielding men into the interior to the effect of giving those cracks a battle-line appearance. By the time of the October coup, the barely subdued uncertainty burst into a bellicose quarrel with each of the active players laying a claim over the past and the future, the body politic and the social body, material resources and human capital. A host of all-encompassing projects, budding in the propitious climate of the revolutionary interim, came to fruition in the course of these struggles, being designed as they were either to mend the gaps in the texture of time or to fill them in with the new techniques for mediating rapports between groups and individuals.

To these latter belonged the rural warlordism or *atamanshchina* (or *otamanshchina* in Ukrainian), a phenomenon receiving its name from the warlords’ (*atamans* or *otamans*) nostalgic submission to the memories of the Cossack past. Both in terms of scope and

⁵ Zofia Kossack, *Pożoga* (Kraków: Greg, 2008), 12

internal complexity it reached its apogee on the territory of the modern-day Ukraine,⁶ a key region of the former Empire where the Civil War had its first act played out and where it was destined to go through the denouement.⁷ As an expression of broader peasant militancy, the advent of *atamanshchina* was announced – somewhat prematurely – in spring months of 1917 with the state losing its proverbial monopoly over the means of violence to the self-defense organizations sprouting in urban centers and countryside alike. Acting at first within bounds of relative legality, the peasant groups lost much of their inhibition toward August-September of 1917 as they turned to arms in resolving pressing issues of “land and freedom,” transforming the villages, in the apt phrase of the best known ataman Nestor Makhno, into “military-revolutionary camps.”⁸ Their growth temporarily checked by the Austro-German occupation of Ukraine, as peasant para-military units came back to the fore of events in the summer of 1918, giving the recrudescing Center and its foreign protectors a mighty if not fully effective shake. The next twelve months witnessed the rise of the atamans to the position of quasi-absolute hegemony so much so that the Bolshevik commissars no less than the Nationalist emissaries had to pay homage to these *informal* power-brokers and court favors with them if they wanted their *formal* dominion recognized. This period, unprecedented and portentous at once,⁹ lasted at least until May 1919 when the Grigoriev’s uprising broke a quaint ataman-Bolshevik alliance, although *atamanshchina* itself, in a modified form and under modified slogans, would persist well after all other contenders laid down their arms at the feet of victorious Moscow.

⁶ Nikolai Kakurin, *Kak srazhalas' revoliutsiia* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1990), v. 1, 97

⁷ Andrea Graziosi, *Bol'sheviki i Krest'iane na Ukraine, 1918-1919 gody* (Moscow: Airo-XX, 1997), 42

⁸ Makhno, *Spovid' anarkhista* (Kyiv: Kniha rodu, 2008) 64

⁹ Andrea Graziosi calls the Ukrainian peasant movement “the prototype of the great national-emancipatory struggles (*natsional'no-osvoboditel'nych*)” of the twentieth century. It is somewhat of a stretch to say the Ukrainians discovered the use of the peasant militancy for the nationalist agendas, but his thought, when seen as describing the praxis rather than the idea, seems to be fundamentally correct (Graziosi, 70)

Barring testimonies of the atamans and their followers, participants of those events treated peasant militancy as an exponent of ubiquitous chaos, an elemental force of apocalyptic proportions. “The movement,” wrote in his diary the Volunteer Army General Aleksei von Lampe about *atamanshchina*, “threatens to brush us aside along with the Bolsheviks and will trigger off foreign intervention and [the imposition of] protectorate.”¹⁰ Thoroughly metropolitan, this perspective registered a shift in the locus of power from the urban municipalities to the innumerable villages and hamlets scattered across the wide terrain from Don to Danube. All of a sudden the city saw itself stripped of its privileged position from which it dictated and exacted, being reduced to a non-productive agglomeration of famished tenants left at mercy of its transient rulers; amply supplied with arms, the village, on the other hand, thrived. Nothing provided a more poignant expression to this role reversal than the conquest of Kiev accomplished by the peasant bands in mid December 1918; other examples, less spectacular but all the more suggestive as a result, studded the progression of the “red,” “black” and “yellow-blue” peasant insurgents during the vertiginous campaigns of the year 1919. To those of the policy-makers and strategy-planners who had to eyes to see, the consequence of the changed constellation could have not been clearer: the war, as the contest over power, could only be won there, where the power now resided – deep in the hinterland, away from the stalled industrial hubs and paralyzed railroad arteries.

For all its unprecedented character, the ascendancy of the rural insurgency over the city did not herald the triumph of anarchy as most of its antagonists and even some of its apologists (in the Makhnovite camp) claimed. Collapse of a city-centered state with its bureaucracy, its

¹⁰ GARF f 5853 o 1 d 1 л 134

army of recruits, its tax-collecting agencies, its post and telegraph services still fell noticeably short of chaos even if what came in its stead held in none too high an esteem any of the aforementioned perquisites. Buttressed by a network of revolutionary committees (*revkom*, pl. *revkomy*), bound to their leaders by sinews of respect and obedience, armed peasant detachments – stationary or mobile – brought forth a system of rule, which in many respects best reflected popular political hopes in the aftermath of the February revolution. The practice of electing one's own commanders (*vybornoe nachalo*), the emphasis on the voluntary nature of "consciptions" (*printsip dobrovol'chestva*, or *dobrovol'cheskoe nachalo*) – principles linked with the change in the disciplinary regime following the release of Order Nr 1 – retained their appeal, entering as hallowed tenets into the unwritten constitutions of the ataman-led peasant militias. The act of translating the gospel of Revolution into the preexisting idiom of peasant parochialism yielded a new political canon wherein plethora of rural communes arrogated upon themselves the privileges of small universes to the near-exclusion of the grand-style politics.

That this was the system with which one could and had to work was demonstrated by the six month collaboration between the commissars and atamans, of which the Ukrainian Front and the separate Ukrainian Red Army were the most conspicuous products. That this was, moreover, a profoundly anti-etatist system, jealous of its gains lest they be snatched by the eager Center, found incontrovertible proof in the systematic defections of peasant bands away from the side marked by the self-strengthening proclivities to the one espousing looser notions of discipline. This happened in November of 1918 with the peasants flocking to the banner of rebellion hoisted by the Directorate; two months later the above scenario was given

another run as the wave of peasant insurgency, aggrieved by the UNR usage of *ancien regime* practices (*starorezhmnye poriadki*), turned to greet advancing Bolshevik troops; finally, May of 1919 saw those latter lose control over their mosaic forces and the insurgents-turned-red army men revert to the condition of unaffiliated “political banditry.” As a result, insurgency – both as a manner of conducting a certain type of revolutionary politics and of defending associated order – lost the status of an extraordinary event, acquiring instead elements which allow one to speak of its institutionalized character. This came in closest to making a reality of Trotsky’s permanent revolution as an everyday condition – with a crucial caveat that the peasantry (as opposed to the working class) was standing at the van of history’s relentless procession.

Part II: Setting the Stage

A. Land and People

Although in currency among certain nationalist-minded intellections, Ukraine as a geopolitical concept did not exist before 1917 – not so in the minds of the imperial bureaucrats. Known either under a vague appellation of “South of Russia” (*Iug Rossii*) or “Little Russia,” it encompassed a territory of nine provinces with seats in Kharkov (Kharkiv), Yekaterinoslav (Katerynoslav, present-day Dnipropetrovsk), Poltava, Simferopol (Taurida province), Chernigov (Chernihiv), Kiev, Kherson, Zhitomir (Zhytomyr, Volhynian province) and Kamenets-Podolsk (Kamianets-Podilsky, Podolian province). The last three provinces formed the so-called South-Western *krai*, or Kiev General Government, which from 1912 onwards also included small Kholm (Chełm in Polish) province detached from the Kingdom

of Poland. Not counting Austrian-controlled Galicia and Bukovina, nine Imperial provinces roughly coincided with the boundaries of the modern Ukrainian state and would constitute the *minimum programme* of territorial reclamations advanced by diverse national (or nationalist) governments in the course of the Civil War.

The key geographic feature of the land is the divide running from east to west and separating the southern steppes from the northern hillocks and forests. Although the weather in the southern half (Yekaterinoslav, Taurida and Kherson) could be rather rough, rendering it, as one contemporary statistical survey asserted, “unfit for vegetation,”¹¹ the black earth, found there in abundance, made that region one of the most fertile in the whole empire. This combination of fertility and hibernal “inclemency” naturally resulted in the predominance of the spring (*iarovyie*) cultures, with Yekaterinoslav province alone, for example, producing in 1899 a little less than a third of Ukraine’s total spring wheat harvest (40 out of 130 millions *poods*) and a quarter of its barley (27 out of 110 million *poods*). Consequently, the seasonal nature of peasant field labor essentially struck out few weeks in April and May for any activity other than sawing – a fact of non-trivial importance, as the Austrians harried by peasant rebels from mid summer of 1918 and Grigoriev bereft of peasant support in late spring 1919 would discover in time to their discomfiture.

In contrast to the southern steppes, the north lavished the viewer with diverse landscape forms: the eastern woodless plains changed into luxuriating lowlands along the banks of the Dnieper River, which in their turn gave way to hillier surfaces as intimation of the approaching Carpathians. Matching this diversity, sundry crops were being grown there

¹¹ *Vsia Rossiia*, (Saint Petersburg: Izdatel’stvo Suvorina, 1900), 456

despite the fact that the soil, especially in Chernigov and in parts of Kiev province was substantially inferior to the black earth. Thanks to mild winters and abundance of snow, the six Northern provinces specialized in the production of winter cultures – rye in particular. That meant that the busiest time on peasant calendars corresponded to the months of September and October, prior to the folk holiday of *Pokrov* (October 14). Without elevating the suggestion to the level of a strict causality, it appears fair to assume that the activities of the peasant bands in Kiev and Poltava provinces in the fateful Autumn of 1918 owed something to the end of the sowing season and hence to the availability of spare time.

Table 1: Ukrainian Provinces in the context of European Russian (1897)¹²

Province	Population (in millions)	Density (per sq. verst)	Urban population (%)	% Peasant estate	number of individual per household	population growth, thousands (%)
European Russia	94.2	22.1	12.9	77.1	5.8	1,716 (1.8%)
Chernigov	2.3	49.9	9.1	87.2	5.7	41 (1.8%)
Kharkov	2.5	52.1	15.1	90.8	6.2	49 (1.9%)
Kherson	2.7	43.9	28.9	67.5	5.5	51 (1.9%)
Kiev	3.6	79.71	12.9	77.8	5.5	73 (2%)
Podolia	3	81.9	7.3	80.8	5.2	53 (1.7%)
Poltava	2.8	63.4	9.9	88.5	5.7	50 (1.8%)
Taurida	1.4	27.3	20	77.6	6.1	36 (2.5%)
Volhynia	3	47.4	7.8	74.9	5.7	61 (2%)
Yekaterinoslav	2.1	37.9	11.4	87.3	6.1	64 (3.1%)

As follows from Table 1, the nine Ukrainian provinces belonged to the most densely populated areas of the empire with the population density exceeding the national average by a factor of two or more. Moreover, Ukraine’s 24 million residents procreated at the pace

¹² Table based on data taken from N.A. Troinitsky, *Obshchii svod po imperii rezul'tatov razrabotki dannykh pervoi Vseobshchei perepisi naseleniia proizvedennoi 28 ianvaria 1897 goda* (Saint-Petersburg: Izdanie Tsentral'nogo Statisticheskogo Komiteta Ministerstva Vnutrennikh Del, 1905) (v. VIII (*Volynskaia Guberniia*, 1904), v. XVI (*Kievskaia Guberniia*, 1904), v. XXXII (*Podol'skaia Guberniia*, 1904), v. XXXIII (*Poltavskaia Guberniia*, 1904), v. XLI (*Tavricheskaia Guberniia*, 1904), v. XLVII (*Khersonskaia Guberniia*, 1904), *Vsia Rossiia* (1900), *Obzor Ekaterinoslavskoi Gubernii za 1909 god* (Yekaterinoslav: Tipografiia gubernskogo pravleniia, 1910) *Karmannyi Atlas Rossii* (Saint Petersburg: Izdanie A.F. Marksa, 1907), N.A. Rubakin, *Rossiia v tsyfrakh: strana, narod, sosloviia, klassy* (Saint Petersburg: Izdanie “Vestnika Znaniia,” 1912), A. Rusov, *Opisanie Chernigovshchiny* (Chernigov: Tipografiia Gubernskago Zemstva, 1898-1899).

which was deemed high even in the context of the extraordinary growth rate maintained by the Russian empire at the turn of the century (1.8% annually). The three southern provinces – the *Novorossia* in the parlance of the day – held the honor of being the fastest growing region in the country, result achieved not only by the high natality figures (500 per 10,000), but also by the relatively low mortality (281 per 10,000 as compared with the all-Russian average of 321).¹³ The latter was all the more unusual because Ukraine, to the greater extent than the rest of the empire, was a true peasant land when judged from the perspective of the estate distribution as well as the proportion of non-urban inhabitants. Brushing shoulders with the rural folk who counted among the hungriest in the region between the Urals and the Vistula river (Voronezh and Tambov), the Ukrainian peasant obviously profited from the higher fecundity of the soil and a moderate household size – at least by the Russian standard.

Table 2: Town-Village Divide in nine Ukrainian Provinces (1897)¹⁴

Province	% male literacy (province /town/ district) ¹⁵	% population below 20 y. old (province /towns/ districts)	% "Small Russians" (province/ town/ district)	% "Great Russians" (province/ town/ districts)	% Jews (province/ town/ district)	% Poles (province/ town/dist)
Chernig	29.8/50.4/27.7	50.9/47.4/51.3	66.4/*/*	21.6/*/*	5/*/*	*/*/*
Kharkov	25.9/50.8/21.5	50.8/43.1/52.1	80.6/*/*	17.7/*/*	.5/*/*	*/*/*
Kherson	35/54/26.9	50.8/42.3/54.3	53.5/17.2/68.2	21.5/45/11.3	11.8/28.4/5.1	1.1/3.1/3
Kiev	27.6/55.7/23.1	51.5/41.7/52.9	79.2/28.1/86.7	5.9/33.2/1.8	12.1/31/9.3	1.9/4.7/1.5
Podolia	15.5/33.8/14.1	50.5/45.9/51	80.9/32.5/84.8	3.3/15/2.3	12.2/46/9.6	2.3/4.9/2.1
Poltava	27.8/64.1/23.7	52.7/48/53.2	93/57.2/96.9	2.6/11.4/1.7	4/29.3/1.2	.1/1.1/.04
Taurida	36.9/53.1/32.6	51.9/41.1/54.5	42.2/30.2/50.1	27.9/49.1/22.6	3.8/11.8/1.8	.7/2.2/3
Volhynia	24.4/50.22/22	51.3/43.13/52.1	70.1/19.7/74.4	3.5/19/2.2.	13.2/50.8/10	6.2/7.6/6
Yekater	31.5/53.3/28.7	51.6/44.6/52.1	68.8/*/*	16.4/*/*	4.8/*/*	*/*/*

¹³ *Rossia v tsyfrakh*, 44

¹⁴ See footnote 12 due to the absence of sources, data on Chernigov, Kharkov and Yekaterinoslav provinces remain incomplete; there is no doubt, however, that the figures, had they been available, would have maintained the general trend.

¹⁵ "Province" is the percentage of the said population relative to the entire province; "town" is the percentage relative to the total population of the provincial cities and towns; "districts" is the percentage relative to the total population of the province less that of the cities and towns, i.e. rural population

Despite all those points of distinction, externally Ukraine looked very much like an extension of Russia's prodigious corpus, subduing or exacerbating certain imperial tendencies according to its own temperament. It was only when seen from within that the major rifts started to come to light, with none perhaps being of greater import than the one separating Ukrainian village from a town. Provincial and district centers, let alone such metropolises as Odessa (Odesa), Kiev, Kharkov or Yekaterinoslav, stood out like alien bodies embedded in the unbroken mass of peasant element. In comparison with their peers in the land, urban residents were older, wealthier and incomparably more literate – urbane, in short. The two groups had to overcome substantial hurdle in order to reach understanding – quite literally, for, with the exception of the Poltava province, speakers of the “Little Russian dialect” everywhere comprised a minority of the urban population. In linguistic terms, cities and towns in the central and southern parts of Ukraine were dominated by the Jews and the “Great Russians”; in the West, by the Jews, and, to a lesser extent, by Poles. Fragmentary data reveal even stronger domination of the non-Ukrainians if translating the anonymous head counts into terms of economic and, ultimately, cultural power. In other words, in and of themselves, the Ukrainians were more than just a peasant nation par excellence, representing, as Mykhailo Drahomanov put it, a “plebian nation” neatly circumscribed within the boundaries of the exploited group.¹⁶ This non-accidental coincidence soldered national demands with the program of social emancipation so much so that twenty years later the act of balancing between those two moments evolved into an exercise of political tightrope walking, with each careless step embodying the fatal danger for the major performers on display.

¹⁶Ivan Rudnytsky, “Observations on the Problem of “Historical” and “non-Historical” Nations,” *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Sept 1981), 361

During the intervening years between the all-Russian census and the outbreak of the Revolution the situation in the Ukrainian countryside changed markedly, although the city lost none of its foreignness in the eyes of the rural population. For one, the village went through the process of internal differentiation expedited by the agrarian revolts in 1905-1906 and the panoply of government halting measures. Before 1906 most of the land owned by the peasant “estate”, i.e. about 20 million *desiatins*, belonged to the communes (*mir*), which periodically distributed it between their members in the form of the land allotments (*nadel*).¹⁷ Privately owned plots (*podvornoe khoziaistvo*) constituted only a fraction of the total land in peasant possession and were largely concentrated in the northeastern parts of the country (Poltava, Kharkov). With the introduction of the Stolypin’s land reforms and the removal of the last formal ties binding individuals to their *mirs*, the number of the private smallholders rapidly took off even in the Steppe provinces where the practice of private ownership among the peasants had only feeble roots. Thus by 1911 about a third of all peasant economies of the Yekaterinoslav and Kherson provinces left their communes and formed separate homesteads (*khutora*); in Taurida province that number reached 40 per cent.¹⁸ This exodus, accompanied by the steady diminution of the per capita landholding size, naturally widened the gap between the rural poor and the landless villagers on one hand and the well-to-do peasants with an endowment of 9 *desiatins* or more; the sizeable category of the middle peasants, about 33 per cent by some counts,¹⁹ served as a mediator between the two extremes, allaying resentments and maintaining a semblance of unanimity for the time being. Yet, in the winter and spring of 1918, the internal tensions unseen in the smoke of the burning

¹⁷ *Vsia Rossiia*

¹⁸ D. Erde, *Revoliutsiia na Ukraine* (Kharkov: Proletariy, 1927), 16

¹⁹ *ibid.*, 17

landlord manors would come to light, forcing many a homesteader back into the *mir* and putting the rest on the watchful defensive.

Although the education in the Russian was never made free nor compulsory, the Ukrainian village progressed in wide strides towards initiating its youth to the benisons of universal enlightenment. Within the span of fourteen years the number of elementary schools increased by 50%, reaching the number of almost nineteen thousand in 1911. Literacy appeared to have expanded at the comparable rate. In the Poltava province alone, for example, the percentage of individuals who could read and had a modicum of writing skills rose from 16.9% to 23.7%.²⁰ The cumulative population of pupils and students oscillated around the figure of half a million in 1909 – a dramatic departure from the puny 67,000 at the time of the Emancipation.²¹ To be sure, the spirit of the Valuev Circular and Ems Ukase still reigning unperturbed, there was little talk of conducting instructions in the “Little Russian dialect of the Russian language.” However, to a certain extent the niche for the education in vernacular was filled by the organizations similar to *Prosvita*, which began to sprout in the Russian part of Ukraine shortly after the October Manifesto, adapting the structure of the Austrian counterparts to their own circumstances. Focusing on the “lower layers of the society,” *Prosvita* organized reading groups in the villages, built libraries, filling them with the Ukrainian language titles with subjects ranging from the lubok-style popular tales to the classics of Kotliarevsky and Shevchenko.

²⁰ M. Lazarovich, *Istoriia Ukrainy: navchal'nyi posibnyk* (Kyiv: Znannia, 2008), 370

²¹ Robert Magocsi, *A History of Ukraine* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998), 371-373

The relentless spread of the secular education made the figure of a teacher a cynosure on the stage of provincial life. Yet, despite his growing importance, it cannot be said that the teacher inspired universal admiration. Resistance came first and foremost from those, upon whose prerogatives he was believed to have impinged – or whom he himself regarded as his natural adversaries. “To the vilest enemies of school as a source of literacy (*istochnik gramoty*)” wrote one embittered teacher from the Chernigov province, “belong the village big wigs (*zapravily*) – volost elders, scribes, he-men-kulaks (*bogatyri-kulaki*) and the Jews.”

The teacher, who directly confronts the peasantry and depends upon it, who gives himself up to his task not formally, but with his soul – that teacher won't get away unscathed. What might prevent the guzzler-scribe or someone else of his mould from compiling a denunciation against the teacher, accusing him of all possible crimes?... Every priest too treats the teacher as his enemy, looks at him askance, and, although he does not challenge him openly, he spreads hearsays and rumors of the most unfavorable quality.²²

Ordinary peasants, appreciative as they might be of the services rendered to them and their children by the village teachers, could easily succumb to the hostile rhetoric of their traditional leaders. The teacher, after all, was still a foreigner, stemming more often than not either from the nobility or clergy; the fact that as many as a half of them were females created additional difficulties in endearing the patriarchal world of the peasant *mir* to the new forms of moral authority.²³

Overcoming those difficulties, impecunious and constantly on guard, the teacher nevertheless succeeded to connect the village with the external world, bringing the volatile hodge-podge mixture from the socialist and nationalist ideas to the somnolent circles of his rural clientele.

²² *Opisanie Chernigovshchiny*, v. 2, 122

²³ Of the 700 teachers who responded to the enquiry of the Chernigov chancellery of the old age insurance scheme, 367 were women, 160 (22 %) nobles, 170 (24%) clergy; the percentage of the nobles and clergymen was substantially higher among women, male teachers tending to come from the ranks of the so-called “unprivileged estates”: merchants, bourgeois and peasantry (*Opisanie Chernigovshchiny*, v. 2, 115).

As his personal ambition merged with the selfless concern for the welfare of “the injured and the insulted,” the teacher began to set himself in opposition to that regime and that system, on whose payroll he found himself listed. His perseverance gradually melting lingering suspicion, the village too habituated itself to regarding the teacher as a spokesman of its interests, delegating him at first to the uezd and provincial assemblies and then, when the Petrograd events announced the dawn of a new era, to the inchoate inter-party committees. In this environment, wrote Boris Stelletsy, the Head of Staff of Hetman Skoropadsky, “only a minor push from the exterior was needed to transform the modest figure of a teacher into an ardent preacher of revolutionary teachings, an organizer and a leader of popular masses in their struggle against the inveterate ‘enemies of the people’.”²⁴

The immediate future fully borne out veracity of Stelletsy’s judgment. During the Civil War the word “teacher”, more so even than that of the returning “frontline soldier,” became nearly synonymous with the phenomenon of *atamanshchina* and other forms of peasant insurgency. In his report on “banditry” in 1919, an agent of a regional CheKa put forth an assertion with an alacrity betraying its self-evident nature, i.e., that “most of the atamans are former popular teachers (*narodnye uchitelia*).” A list of individuals follows, who abandoned stuffy classrooms for the open fields of guerilla lifestyle, replacing a teacher’s pointer with a Berdan rifle and a heavy cavalry saber: certain Grigory Pirkhovka near Boguslav (Bohuslav) a nameless gymnasium instructor in the Borispol (Boryspil’) uezd, Sheniuk in Zhitomir, etc.²⁵ To those obscure curios one could add teachers-cum-atamans with all-Ukrainian renown, akin to Struk who operated in the environs of Chernobyl or Volynets from the area

²⁴ TsDAVO f 4547 o 1 d 2 l 94

²⁵ TsDAHO f 5 o 1 d 153 l 113

of Gaisin (Haisyn). Divided, as individuals are, by shades of political preferences, as members of a professional substratum teachers evinced remarkable unity in their active reception of the revolution with its uncertain prospects, giving substance to their position as a distinct type of rural intelligentsia.

Thus, the world populated by the Ukrainian peasant on the eve of the revolution could be best described as developing. On one hand it manifested essential features of a traditional society: large families, squalor and as a consequence high mortality, the lowest literacy rate in Europe, a geographical and mental estrangement from the urban seats of power, a skewed demographic distribution with an unusually large proportion of teenagers, all still too young to learn caution, etc. On the other hand, none of those aspects seemed fixed forever as might have been the case a generation or two earlier; the village was in flux, growing more cultured with the passage of each year, losing its internal solidarity under the impact of economic and political challenges. Traditional authorities, attending to the spiritual growth of the communities entrusted to their care, saw their moral mandate mortally curtailed as the secularly-minded teachers, judges, agronomists or doctors began to apply their incisive if not overly nuanced penchant for social criticism. They brought in new ideas, all the “isms” of the modern age, with each refuting the possibility of transcendence outside of history and purporting to have perfectly divined the meaning of human becoming. One had to follow instructions implicitly contained in those novel doctrines, casting aside the cloak of uninformed condition, if one wished to enter the world of universal equity.

Yet, while vying for the bodies and minds of the countryside folk, tradition and modernity were not the types of reified entities with clear demarcations between corresponding *modi operandi*. Existing side by side, they percolated each other and produced transient symbolic systems of recognizably mixed parentage. The Cossack myth, an ingenious adaptation of the historical past to the rapidly changing present, was one of the typical and signal hybrid phenomena. Its importance grew as it was gaining in currency amidst popular masses, invisibly evolving the full array of terms to serve the needs of political articulation and lending – when the time comes – the peasant militancy the name under which it would be known to a friend and foe alike.

B. The Cossack Myth

A subject of several reanimation attempts in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, by the time of the Crimean War the Ukrainian Cossack Host was definitively a dead institution. Many of the mavericks, who thought of escaping the fate of their Zaporozhian peers in the thickets of the Danube river delta, returned to the birthplace of their fathers unable to come to terms with the new Ottoman loyalties (1828). The Black Sea Cossacks, formed from the materials of the abolished Sich with the blessing of Grigori Potemkin were gradually transferred to the Kuban region where they would constitute the backbone of the newly established Cossack Host. The Imperial state, its hold on the hitherto unclaimed steppes firmly secured, announced the closing of the southwestern frontier and

canalized the energies of hand-picked inhabitants towards the goals of its continued expansion.²⁶

Expiring as a tangible body, the Ukrainian Cossack Host cleft to its turf in the mnemonic domain with obstinacy amassed over two hundred years of autonomous existence. Members of the military gentry (*starshyna*) carefully groomed their proud ethos and convoluted genealogies, passing them onto successive generations; meanwhile substantial apologetic literature lionized virtues of the individual Cossack hetmans such as Petro Sahaidachny, Ivan Mazepa, and, of course and above all, Bohdan Khmelnytsky. This was an essentially aristocratic mythology, which combined, as Serhii Plokhy averred, both “political needs and historical beliefs” of the ruling elite.²⁷ The heroic reconstruction of the past served to fill the void triggered by the practical desuetude of the Cossack gentry, enabling the endangered estate to militate coherently for the preservation of old privileges in the ongoing debate with the encroaching center.

The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed a radical reevaluation of the myth’s applicability. Expanding beyond the gentry circles, for whose internal consumption it was originally conceived, the Cossack hagiography soon reached largely illiterate peasant masses, who recognized in its libertarian narrative a reflection of their own aspirations. This reappropriation of the old ideological tropes found an early expression in the agrarian discontent, which affected several districts of the Kiev and Chernigov provinces in the last year of the Crimean War. Adumbrating in many ways what would transpire three score later,

²⁶ V. Lobodaev, *Revoliutsiina stykhiia: vil'nokozatskyi rukh v Ukraini 1917-1918 rr* (Kyiv: Tempora, 2010), 53-54

²⁷ S. Plokhy, *Ukraine and Russia: representations of the past* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 171

the movement of the “*Kyiv kozachchina*” brought hundreds of peasants into spontaneously organized “Cossack” squads. These emerged in response to the conscription orders with an idea that everyone joining popular militias (the “Cossacks”) would be made free and receive landlord’s land in reward once the war is over. Although the villagers themselves denied any imputation of rebellious intent, the unsanctioned self-organization, the election of atamans coupled with the overt anti-serfdom rhetoric amounted to a high treason in the eyes of the tsarist authorities.²⁸ Their reaction, directed at suppressing the peasant initiative, drove another wedge between the elitist original of the myth and the inchoate popular version thereof, for the State, previously a guarantor of liberties and privileges, had unquestionably set itself up as the major hurdle on the way of obtaining them.

The popularization of the Cossack mythology progressed to the rhythm of the generous literary outpouring of the Ukrainian writers and historians. Shevchenko led the way with his epic poem *Haidamaks* and a cycle *Kobzar*, entwining peasant elemental revolt with the visions of Cossack liberty across his steady stanzas. The romantic view of the Zaporozhians as the defenders of the common folk, champions of justice and freedom, blossomed on the pages of Panteleimon Kulish’s prose, and in the dialogues of Mark Kropyvnytsky’s plays, etc.²⁹ Toward the end of the nineteenth century historical novels in the style of Walter Scott were being complemented with a swarm of popular histories, no more veracious than fictionalized accounts but efficacious all the same. Works of Adrian Koshchenko, sketches of Dmytro Iavornitsky, despite their apparent one-sidedness (or thanks to it), became veritable bestsellers which stayed in print for thirty years up to the time of the revolution. Mykhailo

²⁸ Lobodaev, 56-58

²⁹ *ibid.*, 58

Hrushevsky, the dean of the Ukrainian national historiography, working in the footsteps of his great predecessors, also tried his hand in producing historical vignettes. The paradigmatic text in that regard entitled in a folkloristic style *About the Cossack Bat'ko Bohdan Khmel'nitsky* created a portrait of a national leader, who, apart from his controversial decision to place Ukraine under the Tsar's Alexis scepter, was uncompromisingly given over to the task of "finding truth and freedom" in the midst of a powerful popular upheaval.³⁰

In a certain sense, the revolution received its first symbolic treatment in the dramatic reversal to which the figure of a Cossack had been subjected, both in works of the Ukrainian men of letters and in minds of their audiences. From an embodiment of gentry's pride, jealous of his privileges as a servitor of the state and aware of his distinction from the common masses, the Cossack transmogrified into Freedom's faithful child, unremittingly on guard lest the lords grow insolent and the boyars abusive. A frontiersman, his was not the stance of a loner, full of pathos and futility, braving the violent gales of history; instead, the Cossack emerged surrounded by the jovial community of the like-minded die-hards, an aspect which must have appealed to the collectivist sensitivities of overawed peasant readers. The putative involvement of the Cossack in the multifaceted struggle against the economic, political and social domination of the foreigners girt him in a perfect store of tropes, from which the disaffected consumers at the turn of the century could always find something to their liking – be it a language of national revolt, a violent condemnation of social iniquities or a non-cooperation with a colonial state both remote and heedless of the interests of the people.

³⁰ Mikhaïlo Hrushevsky, *Pro Bat'ka kozats'koho Bohdana Khmel'nits'koho* (Jersey City: Svoboda, 1919), 68

It seemed natural that when the hour of the revolution chimed its exulted tune the whole generation of young activists turned to the metaphors imbibed from the tales of the Cossack glory. Refusing to proceed to the front under the pretext of defending new order back home, the units of the Imperial army were only too eager to rechristen themselves after some illustrious hetman or his faithful lieutenants. Paramilitary groups, emerging in the spring and summer of 1917 to take over functions of the tsarist law-enforcing agencies, believed that they were giving the Cossack practice of self-rule another lease of life. Their descendants, atamans proper, went even further, believing, as did ataman Iukhym Bozhko to be the embodiments of modern-day Cossacks and proceeding to recreate Sich with a museum-like precision as though taking a cue from Repin's tableau and accompanying commentaries.³¹ Champions of Sich and its traditions – although not to such a theatrical extent – were the volunteers from the Galician crown land, whose enthusiasm betrayed a desire to efface the shame for having never been a part in the mainstream of Cossack history. When creating their own armed forces, leaders of sundry national regimes were tailoring old imperial ranks to fit the imagined hierarchy of the Zaporozhian host. Finally the Red Army regiments formed in the interior of Ukraine or along its borders in the last months of 1918 rummaged through names, signs and symbols, to be changed into titular lucky charms which might smooth the transition from the world as it was to the world as it should be. Of all belligerents, only the Whites and the Poles refused to scoop from the abundant stocks of Cossack-related paraphernalia as if accentuating their unconcealed foreignness to the unfolding of the Ukrainian quandary.

³¹ G. Skrukwa, *Formacje wojskowe ukraińskiej „rewolucji narodowej”* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2008), 409-410

This ubiquitous Cossack-mania was not exclusive to the agents of *atamanshchina*, although it does hint at its complexity and explain some of the confusion which ensued whenever principal commentators of the age attempted to give this phenomenon an encompassing definition. Thus, Vynnychenko, for instance, having mostly in mind the UNR officers (“*otomans*” in the official parlance) and the Volhynian partisans nominally subordinated to the Directorate, thought that *atamanshchina* represented the unhale prevalence of the military caste over the civilians in determining the political orientation of the regime. Vynnychenko’s plangent narrative of the power slipping into the hands of the officer “junta” – the *otomans* – jibed well with his intention to lay the entire blame on Petliura, *de jure* the “Head Otoman,” for all the dismal failures which befell the first serious sovereignist endeavor in modern Ukrainian history.³² Trotsky, whose own object of observation consisted of the countless *bat’ki* and insurgent atamans entering en masse into the ranks of the Ukrainian Red Army, saw essential features of *atamanshchina* in the cultivated “unprofessionalism” of the commanders and the soldiers, proclivity to exercise the uncalled-for initiative, finally, on a broader level, in the tendency to pursue autonomous course of action in disregard of the central plan. No doubt, each of those divergent interpretations captured something of the phenomenon, although, swayed by the community of terms that the Cossack myth brought into use, both Trotsky and Vynnychenko (along with many others) tended to look at the variegated praxis much at the expense of the “pre-linguistic” etiology. For, besides young men with spirits straddling tradition and modernity, and Cossack-inspired ideology upon which they avidly seized to mount over their speechlessness, *atamanshchina* required another element – a catastrophic event – to come into being: the War with its simultaneous

³² Volodymyr Vynnychenko, *Vidrodzhennia natsii; Zapovit bortsia za vyzvolennia* (Kyiv: Knyha rodu, 2008), 475ff

effect of inuring individuals to violence and of weaning them from obeying the invisible authority of the state.³³

C. The War

As the interwar French classic *La Grande Illusion* suggested, the war which broke out in August 1914 on the European continent still had something vestigially chivalrous about it. On the eve of the first wartime Christmas, soldiers in the area of the beleaguered fortress Przemyśl, both the besieged and those carrying out the siege, used to leave out gifts for each other in the open – as tokens of humanity and mutual respect. Around the same time an Austrian pilot shot down by the Russians was buried with honors due to his rank; few days later the Russians dropped a photo behind the enemy lines, showing the grave of the fallen airman.³⁴ Prisoners as a rule were kept in manageable conditions, even in the frosty Siberia, with the postal traffic between the relatives back home and the camp inmates being operative throughout the entire period of the war.

However, from the first days the war distinguished itself by the unprecedented brutality, staggering losses in men and materiel, an imagination-defying price, which never seemed sufficiently high to buy the coveted victory. In the east, where the exchange of territories won and lost still made an impression of sweeping strategic movements, entire armies were often sacrificed to death, injuries and captivity. The encirclement and the annihilation of

³³ On that last subject see a good discussion in Felix Schnell's *Die Räume des Schreckens: Gewalt und Gruppenmilitanz in der Ukraine 1905-1933* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2012) 145-158

³⁴ Manfred Rauchensteiner, "Russland und Österreich-Ungarn im Ersten Weltkrieg" in *Die Besatzung der Ukraine 1918: historischer Kontext, Forschungsstand, wirtschaftliche und soziale Folgen*, ed. Wolfram Dornik et al. (Graz: Verein zur Förderung der Forschung von Folgen nach Konflikten und Kriegen, 2008), 32

Samsonov's 2nd Army in East Prussia set the tone and it was later replayed as a gloomy leitmotif in the taking of the aforementioned Przemyśl with its booty of a 120,000 garrison, in the excruciating winter battles over the Carpathian passes, in the concentrated attack of fire and steel at Gorlice, finally in that epic effort of Russia's arms in the summer and fall of 1916, which brought one of the opponents on the verge of defeat and the other – on the verge of exhaustion. For, although Russia with its 15 and a half million mobilized, about 9.3% of the total population,³⁵ appeared as still possessing untapped resources – its allies and adversaries having brought to arms much higher proportion of the population – its obsolescent conscription laws combined with structural limitations of space and demographics (such as the lesser productivity of a Russian worker) severely constrained the pool of reservists. Alarms, voiced timidly in 1914 and 1915, grew loud and peremptory towards the end of the next year: at the rate with which the front and, more importantly, the rear were consuming able-bodied men, the war was as good as lost.³⁶

Divided between the two states, Ukraine got more than its fair share of destruction, exertion and population loss. Figures found in Golovin's study show that the percentage of able-bodied men mobilized in southwestern provinces of the Russian Empire varied between 34.2% (for the Yekaterinoslav province) to almost 50% (for Volhynian and Poltava provinces),³⁷ altogether about 3.5 million individuals.³⁸ Immense amount of property was lost, especially in Galicia and Bukovina, which became scenes of the largest operations

³⁵ N. N. Golovin, *Voennyi usiliia Rossii v Mirovoi voine* (Paris: Tovarishchestvo ob'edinennykh izdatelei, 1939), v. 1, 87

³⁶ *ibid.*, v. 1, 97ff; according to General Gurko, for every battalion sent to the front-line, two and a quarter were left in the rear, a proportion more than four times higher than that in France (*ibid.*, v. 1, 102)

³⁷ *ibid.*, v. 1, 223

³⁸ Orest Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 340

undertaken by the Russian army in the war. Animals were drafted on the unprecedented scale with the result that as many as 40% of all households in the Russian part of Ukraine found themselves entirely bereft of horses.³⁹

The war affected Ukraine not only materially, but also morally. Peasants remaining in villages, who may have seen their kinsfolk and horses drafted for the needs of the war, lived through a paradoxical prosperity caused by the wartime prohibition and the governmental cash handouts. Now with more money at their disposal the rural population began acquiring taste for consumption, enacting what many outside observers registered as moral degeneration, a veritable feast in time of plague. “Simple women,” wrote Hans Limbach, a Swiss citizen residing in Kherson province, “who hardly had enough to eat in their life, found themselves suddenly in possession of flowing money.”

Cakes, sweetmeats, candies (Schleckwaren), silk and velvet became at once necessities for them. It was outrageous to see them come and go all perfumed and rouged; one could image only too well how they perfumed and rouged themselves! And yet not only grown up women, but also little toadies (kleine Kröten) who could barely count to four.⁴⁰

Even before the Revolution made it permissible, Limbach informs the reader, the peasants learned to demand a raise in a rather peremptory fashion. One maid in Limbach’s service asked for additional fifty kopecks and when questioned what for, she retorted without a hint of hesitation: “For the make-up.” Needless to say, her answer contained little of that Russian peasant’s proverbial insentience to hardship upon which both the regime and the urban society came to rely – if only out of ignorance.

³⁹ I. Rybalka, *Istoriia Ukrainy. Chastyna II: Vid pochatku XIX st. do liutoho 1917 roku* (Kharkiv: Osnova, 1997), 440

⁴⁰ Hans Limbach, *Ukrainische Schreckenstage: Erinnerungen eines Schweizers* (Bern: Verlag von A. Francke, 1919), 20

At the same time news of defeats and incompetence carried by the soldiers had a much shorter course to traverse in Ukraine than everywhere else before leaving a deep abrasion upon the popular psyche. Hundreds of thousands of refugees, mostly Jews from the Pale, their plight inscribed in their bodies and engraved on their tattered appurtenances, inundated the cities, causing bouts of compassion among some as well as fits of anger among others chafed at the sight of uninvited guests. With armies stationed in Volhynia and Podolia and rears organized farther east to support them, Ukraine received the taste of a military rule as the population was accustoming itself to the heavy-handed and unceremonious manners of men in uniform. The enthusiasm for the war – and hence the active support of the state – were wearing out, but so did collective sensitivities for the individual lot, a type of a paradox which often results when the passive perseverance in and of itself acquires characteristics of a principal social virtue.

Entering into the battle as the subjects of multiethnic, dynastic empires, raw conscripts from Galicia and Russian “Dnieper Ukraine” have seen their loyalties subjected to the most strenuous test. In multiple cases the crisis was inspired by the encounter with the gospel of nationalism, the tenets of which appeared incomparably more relevant in the age of national rivalries. The word “Ukrainian” used only sparingly before 1914 in the official discourse of the Dual Monarchy, and almost never in the realm of Tsar firmly entered into the approbated political parlance with the emergence – on the Austrian side of the hill – of civil and military bodies purporting to represent interest of the Habsburg “Ruthenians” and Romanoff “Small Russians.” Thus on August 1, 1914 the “Main Ukrainian Council” (HUR) came into being in

Lemberg (pol. Lwów/ukr. Lviv), creating in its own turn the “Ukrainian Military Board” (UBU) charged to deal with the army-related affairs. The HUR was soon transformed into the “General Ukrainian Council” (ZUR) reflecting the expansion of prerogatives to areas beyond the limits of the Galician crown land.⁴¹ More portentous than any of those abbreviated agencies was the establishment of the first national Ukrainian unit, the two-battalion strong Legion of the Ukrainian Sich Riflemen. Although the legion owed its existence to the special imperial authorization from Kaiser Franz Josef, it became soon the institutional crucible in which new corporate identity was being forged and which, as the war wore on, would come into irreconcilable conflict with that of its royal patrons.

Wary of the problems that the Pandora box of the “Ukrainian quandary” contained, the Tsarist regime did its best to keep silent all talks of national autonomy. Yet, when the revolution had done away with the monarchy, removing the obstacle for the Ukrainian self-organization, the national movement began to gather momentum at vertiginous speed.

Identities and loyalties evolved as much on the level of the individual as they did on the plane of empires, nations and groups. In the environment where survival depended primarily on cooperation with one’s fellow-soldiers, strangers to each other on the civvy street but brothers at the trenches, the figure of the immediate commander rose dramatically in prominence. If he seemed aloof, cowardly or unfair, he was quietly vilified, often as a concrete manifestation of the Center’s criminal insolvency; if, on the other hand, he proved himself to be “one of our own,” cherishing the common man and paying attention to his

⁴¹ Wolfdieter Bihl “Die Ukraine-Politik Österreich-Ungarns im Ersten Weltkrieg” in *Die Besatzung der Ukraine 1918 historischer Kontext, Forschungsstand, wirtschaftliche und soziale Folgen*, ed. Wolfram Dornik et al. (Graz: Verein zur Förderung der Forschung von Folgen nach Konflikten und Kriegen, 2008), 55

concerns, the reward might be something greater than simple admiration – personal attachment if not a quasi-feudal devotion might be in store for him. “Varyvoda,” wrote one of the Sich riflemen about his superiors “is, as a commander, an extraordinarily kind man.

He is like a father: everywhere he takes care of us, doing his best to meet our needs. One regards and treats us differently now. Captain (sotnik) Lysniak is another valuable addition. He is flesh and bone a rifleman like us, half-civilian. He directs everything and does everything himself. One rarely meets people like that in the civilian life.⁴²

On the invisible scales of power the war was thus pushing the center of gravity away from the remote bureaucracies towards men standing nearby, giving rise to the *politics of the proximate* and, in fact, effectuating a sort of “re-immanentization” of the art of governance. The distant state was growing more distant, being menaced to disappear entirely from the field of vision. When this happened, as it did in Russia, and the state became quaintly unimportant, the bonds connecting the Army with the Center were as good as dissolved, letting the revolution and infrastructural collapse rush into the resultant vacancies.

No wonder then that a great many of the future atamans, perhaps even their majority, came from the pool of the NCOs (*unter-ofitsery*) and ensigns (*praporshchiki*) of the former Tsarist army.⁴³ Having risen through the ranks in the course of the war, they felt little attachment to the half-decimated caste of the professional officers – the *kadroviki*. Without the protective sheath of *esprit de corp*, these bottom-rung officers had shown themselves particularly susceptible to the rhetoric of the revolutionary criers – socialists, Bolsheviks, nationalists, etc. At the same time they remained what they always were: common soldiers, mostly of peasant issue, intoxicated with the first quaffs of power just enough to overcome self-doubt without

⁴² cit in Skrukwa, 64

⁴³ Angel, Struk, Zeleny, Grigoriev, Sokolovsky all belonged to that group. Makhno is, as is often the case with him, an odd egg in the dozen.

tumbling into the abyss of abuse. Since they could lead their men into mortal danger for the abstract imperial interests none could fully comprehend, the task of eradicating class enemies appeared all the more easier. In a word, combining in perfect measure transcendence of revolutionary ideology with immanence of revolutionary politics, they were perfectly cut for the role of the rural power-brokers once the countryside detached itself from the orbit of urban authority.

Civilians and the military experienced the war differently, but the lessons they drew evinced many commonalities. First of all, through conscious state policies, clandestine revolutionary activities or as a result of the unwilling consequences of demographic crises,⁴⁴ one learned to regard himself and his surroundings through the prism of new doctrines. Furthermore, the war, a school of violence, provided the space, or “spaces”⁴⁵ where violent acts could be exercised and observed. Honing to the perfection the social eye-hand coordination, it created a cast of perpetrators, who had no difficulties committing atrocities, and a much larger contingent of spectators, who did not shy away from it in the state of utter revulsion. Finally, the war had discredited the state, stripping it of its status as a *sine qua non* condition for social existence. Whether in the trenches or on board of numerous privately-sponsored charity organizations, people began to accustom themselves to the idea of acting independently, without expecting official sanction and often in opposition to it. This gradual weaning away from the tutelage of the tsarist administration lay at the root of the parastatal complex (as Peter Gatrell put it), accompanied by the process of *Entstaatlichung*, or “de-

⁴⁴ For the connection between the refugee crisis and the issues of national autonomy in Russia during the First World War, see Peter Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking: refugees in Russia during World War I* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1999)

⁴⁵ Idea taken from Felix Schnell's book, *Räume des Schreckens*.

statization,” in Felix Schnell’s apt expression. Starting from two different points of departure, the Army and the social body proceeded inbound to meet each other half-way, united as they were by the welter of disenchantment and hopefulness, but also by the spreading insentience for the acts of physical and moral aggression.

The transition from the First World War to the Civil War resulted precisely from the merge of the Front with the remaining rear, that casting of the frontline existence onto fabric of civilian life. *Atamanshchina*, which saw the “peasant army” transform into the major vehicle of the radical revolutionary changes, was only the most poignant manifestation of that amalgamation.

Part III: Intellectual Background, Sources and Secondary Literature

The project, well before it had a single written word to show for itself, was already gestating in the metaphysical conviction that the relationship between Time and Space is mediated by what Spengler used to refer to as “Style.” “Time gives birth to Space,” he asserts in his classical work,⁴⁶ and this birth, really the act of creating meaningful references (symbolic or material) and of simultaneously inscribing the space into the resultant constellation, unfolds according to a certain impalpable worldview centered at the culture-specific notion of Fate (*Schicksal/Fügung/Bestimmung*). Revolutionary time is no exception to that – in fact, it might be even seen as an unfairly seamless confirmation of the above idea, given how self-conscious its major actors are of history’s alleged presence and of posterity’s unblinking eye. Then again, that intervening (self)consciousness is not necessarily a roadblock, but a sign-

⁴⁶ Oswald Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, (München: C.H. Beck, 1912) v.1, 240

post to transcendence, being subsumed, as ideologies are, within the ineffable intellectual climate usually associated with the condition of modernity.

The question of historical consciousness aside, the Revolution attempted to paint the changing space to the hues of its preferences – and so in a manner which was more internally consistent than one is usually inclined to believe. Practically this means (as it does in Spengler's *Decline*) that there existed a profound affinity between variegated expressions of participation in “history” with common “revolutionary streak” running through all of them. Thus deliberations over tactical minutiae – disciplinarily, a sphere of military history – are woven into notions of the revolutionary substitute to the state (prerogative of “political history”), which are, in their own turn, overlain with visions of fair social order (“social/cultural history”), being echoed, no doubt, in forms of revolutionary prosody and preferred geometries of plastic art. Without tackling that last aspect of aesthetics, this dissertation assumes the “stylistic unity” and tries to present the phenomenon of *atamanshchina* not through the narrow perspective of, say, military undertakings, but as an overarching symbol of the age, affecting or afflicting people's senses and deeds in the world sunk into post-war “chaos.”

This approach – a hybrid of epistemological centralism and methodological libertarianism – opened the gates for the host of other ideas. Trotsky's concept of “permanent revolution” as a quasi-normal condition, during which issues raised by the initial upheaval are addressed without cataclysmic seizures, certainly proved helpful in understanding the “staying power”

of the Ukrainian warlordism.⁴⁷ The classical equation of the state with the agency possessing monopoly over the legitimate use of violence remained proximate and prominent even if the dissertation arrived at a conclusion that the loss of monopoly and the ongoing clash of claims does not necessarily result in the emergence of “*anti-state*” with some radically different system of anarchic rapports. Calling for a timely remedy, the tough substance of Weberian “ideal types” became more yielding thanks to the intellectual tenderizers derived from the works of British social historians: Eric Hobsbawm, E.P. Thomson and George Rudé to name the best known. Thus, by placing his “social bandit” at the disposal of the scholarly community, Hobsbawm managed to transform an allegedly aimless highwayman into a powerful historical figure, an agent operating in the realm of power. In Hobsbawm’s works, however, the bandit (and the Ukrainian atamans would have been surely included into that category) acquires shape mainly in the light of an anachronistic backlash against the relentless advance of modernity, the point justly contested in studies of Anton Blok and Charles Tilly. The parallels drawn between the functioning of the bureaucratic apparatus and organized crime coupled with the image of the Sicilian mafia occupying recesses of power on a tacit fiat from the center brought into relief the ambiguity of rapports between the representatives of formal authorities (the “Commissars”) and the informal power-brokers (the “Atamans”) at the peripheries of the Russian empire.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ That cannot be said about his doctrinaire Marxist division of the revolution into “stages,” which are all allegedly unfolding in a near-simultaneous fashion in a society bent on building socialism.

⁴⁸ See Eric Hobsbawm, *Bandits* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1969); Anton Blok, *The Mafia of a Sicilian Village, 1860-1960: a Study of Violent Peasant Entrepreneurs* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974); Charles Tilly, *The Vendée* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1964); Charles Tilly, “War Making and State Making as Organized Crime,” in *Bringing the State Back In*, ed. Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer and Theda Skocpol (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

Just as the original theoretical framework owed its existence to multiple parents, so too did the final narrative stem from sources of different types and varying degrees of “reliability.” In fact, reliability as such – as a yardstick of scientific truthfulness – becomes secondary, with facts never fully belonging to the realm of “objective history” and impressions never being entirely grounded on the vanishing isles of fiction. Thus, in line with the idea that facts are in some ways observations modified or even generated by current prejudices, memoirs, diplomatic communiqués, newspaper clips, pamphlets, matter-of-fact military dispatches, hearsays, novels and outright disinformation ploys – all are brought to work with and against each other. Straddling a vague position between primary sources and secondary literature, the analytic works written by the participants of the events in their immediate wake – works of Antonov-Ovseenko, Denikin, Erde, Arshinov or Khrystiuk – received much attention, although not necessarily to correct previous accounts but to trace the evolution of the never-dying past in the mercurial present. Together these documents, either published or not, created an environment redolent with suggestions as to why, for example, different players all claiming the honor of being Bolshevik, failed to find common language and ended up at each other’s throats. The task of the historian in collating them consisted, therefore, in toning down noisy assertions of authenticity or veracity – which so many authors were keen on making – as if limning out afresh the sanguinary debates over legitimacy in the climate of broached possibilities.

A watershed event of the twentieth century, the Russian Revolution engendered an immense body of academic literature. Yet, studies specifically on atamanshchina remain few and far between, marred either by cavalier reduction of the peasant insurgency to opportunism and

license, or, as is the case with many contemporary Ukrainian authors,⁴⁹ by the glib ascription of romantic platforms to the individuals only vaguely aware of the national moment in the Revolution. In the Soviet discussion of the phenomenon the most insightful works were also the earliest ones, books exemplified by Dmitry Lebed's brochure *Itogi i uroki trekh let anarkho-makhnovshchiny* (1921) and, especially, by Mikhail Kubanin's *Makhnovshchina* (1926). Although unfolding within the rigid constraints of Bolshevik agrarian terminology, they compensated for their analytical failures with the attentiveness to detail no less than their stunning candor. Kubanin, for example, is not only willing to call the makhnovite movement circumstantially progressive but also to admit the deeply-rooted adversity separating the Bolshevik power from the bulk of the Ukrainian peasantry.⁵⁰

From late 1920s onward concessions of that sort became dangerous as the Civil War "Green armies," peasant units of self-defense, or urban gangs saw themselves diminished to the machinations of the Kulaks-Entente-White Guard cabal. This precipitous disavowal of their importance ultimately led to their near-total disappearance from the historical narrative. In Likholat's some 700-page *Razгром natsionalisticheskoi kontrrevoliutsii na Ukraine, 1917-1922 gg.*, the name of Makhno is not mentioned once. Another typical study of the period – history of Odessa, published on the fortieth anniversary of the October Revolution – deliberately ignored the role of Grigoriev's troops in driving out the French and Greek forces; it would have been too much of an embarrassment to admit that Grigoriev acted as a Red

⁴⁹ Numerous works by Roman Koval' and Viktor Savchenko are by far the worst in that respect. A monograph of Volodymir Sidak on Petro Bolbochan is better, yet it still avails itself the terminology of heroization and condemnation. Volodymir Lobodaev's recent work on Free Cossacks – *Revoliutsiina stykhiia* – in this respect represents a breath of fresh air in the otherwise cloying atmosphere of nationalist encomia, endeavoring, as it does, to present the important phenomena independently of the sovereignist projects which attempted to usurp it to their own ends.

⁵⁰ M. Kubanin, *Makhnovshchina: Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie v stepnoi Ukraine v gody grazhdanskoi voiny* (Leningrad: Priboi, 1926), 56

Army commander.⁵¹ That a number of canonical figures in the Soviet Civil War hagiography – Shchors being only the most well-known among them – emerged from the insurgent movement and that the unaffiliated atamans thought of themselves as architects of the Revolutionary order – that incontrovertible fact receded into the mist of staged oblivion.

Works written outside of the Soviet Union exhibited similar tendencies either towards depreciation of *atamanshchina* or romanticization thereof. The chapter on Ukrainian developments during the Civil War in William Chamberlin's long-standing classic *The Russian Revolution* is pointedly entitled "Whirlpool of Peasant Anarchism." Writing in early 1970s, American historian Arthur E. Adams presents the reader with a vision of "the peasants and Cossacks fighting for land and freedom."⁵² The monographs dealing specifically with Makhno – those of Michael Palij, Michael Malet or Alexandre Skirda – appear to have taken *ex post* claims to the anarchist inheritance made by Makhno and his émigré entourage at their face value - so much so that ideology, vague though it might be, evolved into the central tenet of the entire narrative. An otherwise meticulous scholar, Skirda proceeds to tackle Ukraine's great insurgent with a staggering and unscholarly goal in mind: to wit, "to derive from the movement teachings useful for the current revolutionary project."⁵³

Fortunately, such deviations were straightened out recently under the impact of newly available documents and infusions from cultural studies, sociology and political science.

⁵¹ S.M. Kovbasiuk, ed., *Odessa: Ocherk istorii goroda-geroia*, (Odessa: Odesskoe obl. Izdatel'stvo, 1957), 169

⁵² Arthur E. Adams, *Bolsheviks in the Ukraine; the Second Campaign, 1918-1919* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1973), 89

⁵³ Alexandre Skirda, *Nestor Makhno: Le cosaque libertaire (1888-1934): La Guerre Civile en Ukraine 1917-1921* (Paris : Editions de Paris, 1999), 416

Bolsheviki i Krest'iane na Ukraine, 1918-1919 gody, Andrea Graziosi's Russian-language monograph (1997), a short but intelligent book, consciously avoids depicting peasant insurgents as noble freedom fighters doomed from the start by the inequality of means. Instead, he brings into focus the fact of lasting collaboration between the Ukrainian Bolsheviks and the rebels, founding it, however, upon a type of august misunderstanding (*nedorozumenie*).⁵⁴ The introduction of the “national-socialist” discourse into the discussions of peasant aspirations belongs to one of the truly felicitous discoveries of the last two decades; yet, if anything, Graziosi errs on the side of stressing too much the transparency and distinctiveness of the newly-found ideology. In the final account, according to the Italian scholar, the Bolsheviks remain Bolsheviks and the atamans, who let themselves be instrumentalized by the Party – stay champions of a national cause, an impression running counter to the widespread contemporary opinion about the low degree of national consciousness (*natsional'naia osvedomlennost'*) among the Ukrainian rural masses.

An interesting and much needed perspective on the events in Ukraine is provided by the fresh work of Felix Schnell, *Räume des Schreckens*. Together with notable monographs of Christian Gerlach (*Extremely Violent Societies*), Jörg Baberowski (*Der Feind ist überall*) and Timothy Snyder (*Bloodlands*), it exemplifies the now growing field of the so-called “violence studies”; yet, in contrast to Baberowski or Snyder with their interest in state-organized calamities, Schnell investigates violence stemming from below.⁵⁵ The first Jewish pogroms, occurring before and during the First Russian Revolution, opened up “the spaces of horror” with the population not only acclimating to acts of violence but learning to mobilize

⁵⁴ Graziosi, 106ff

⁵⁵ Schnell, 12

itself for the performance thereof. Embodying the second wave of destruction, loot and murder, the Civil War was by all accounts the apex of the unsanctioned yet organized violence – all the more so, of course, since the state, unlike in 1905-07 and 1928-1933, ceased to exist for all intents and purposes. Herein, however, lies a set of essential issues that Schnell leaves unaddressed: namely, the extent to which violence perpetrated by popular militias represented the functional substitute of the activities of the defunct state and the role those organizations played in the emergence of the new state apparatus.

This dissertation does not purport to fill in the blanks left out in the historiographical corpus anent the subject of Ukrainian insurgency. Without diminishing virtues of the aforementioned works, it tries to offer, however, an alternative view of *atamanshchina*. Neither merely the concretization of peasant aspirations usurped by the Bolsheviks, nor exclusively the advent of systematized license ushered by the disappearance of legitimate authority, *atamanshchina* arose as an institutional response to the power vacuum, not an *anti-state*, but a *counter-state*, uniting in its ranks undifferentiated masses of future claimants to state power. Bolsheviks and non-Bolsheviks alike – categories defying easy descriptions beyond self-ascriptions – worked within the framework of peasant militancy as equal partners till the clampdown of Moscow and the speedy reply of Grigoriev's troops sundered erstwhile allies apart and incrustated them within the ring of implacable enmity.

Ultimately, it is this conscious reluctance to deal in fixed political categories that sets this work apart not only from the *atamanshchina*-specific studies but also from the magisterial narratives of the Russian Revolution – the canonical texts of Richard Pipes or the current

standard history by Orlando Figes. However complex and suggestively confusing it might be, the Civil War is regarded by most of authors in terms of sheer struggle for power; from the perspective of the outcome it becomes rather insubstantial whether the ‘people’ was the victim or the accomplice of the principal culprit. The present work, on the contrary, sees the post-revolutionary chaos as the period of *crystallization of political identities*, a gradual switch from vague sentiments to lapidarian creeds. The first two years following the Revolution (summer 1917-summer 1919) elapsed under the sign of political, military and diplomatic experimentations with naiveté, euphoria, imperfect understanding of other and of self all mixed in some measure. In a sense, the struggles of those months owed more to the February than October, for, dogged as they were, they still maintained the possibility of the all-Left ruling coalition, *atamanshchina* being, in fact, one of its workable manifestations. The initial disillusionments experienced with the bitterness of the early lovers encouraged the process of differentiation among the players, the drawing-up of war aims with the inevitable return to the techniques of rule practiced from before the Revolution. This was not the Civil War yet, but only its bloody preamble, the long farewell to the fantasies of utopian politics and the greeting of Realpolitik.

Covering the period of this preamble – from the double turnabout of the 1917 to the Grigoriev’s revolt – this dissertation is divided into four parts of uneven length. The first and the longest deals with the pendulum-like movement of the countryside from the complete withdrawal from the arena of imperial politics to its subsequent return as a key element in the all-Russian (or all-Ukrainian) struggle (Summer 1917 to Summer 1918). The second part gives an account of the anti-Hetman revolt (November to December 1918), a zenith of rural

ascendancy in the eyes of the urban contemporaries. Disproving the myth of Soviet centralism, the third chapter traces the evolution of *atamanshchina* along the path of its institutionalized development, which made it assume forms of a separate Ukrainian Front and separate Ukrainian Red Army (September 1918 to March 1919). Those two remarkable entities, the quasi-autonomous expulsions of the peasant insurgency, are also treated at length in the last chapter, largely as subjects of heated debates between the leading Bolsheviks about the form of the revolutionary armed forces and the future of the revolutionary state (January 1919 to June 1919). In the end, it was the debate over the Bolshevik party itself – or, rather, over its role in the post-revolutionary world. Never conclusively settled it was brought to an issue with the outbreak of the Grigoriev's revolt, sending the Bolsheviks towards the ideal of a one-party state and leaving the atamans the unenviable lot of political banditry.

Chapter I

From the Railroads to Country Roads: Birth of Peasant Insurgency

Those landowners who decided to persevere through the first revolutionary fall and winter of 1917-18 away from the famished cities in their country estates well understood that they ran the danger of being looted. They lived in anticipation of a peasant throng, emboldened by speeches, alcohol and ungovernable soldiers, standing before the gates of the courtyard and clamoring for the blood of the “blood-suckers”, or at least for their property. “Each day, recalled Zofia Kossak-Szczucka, then a young teacher married to a manorial steward in Volhynia, *Dziennik Kijowski* (“Kiev Daily News,” the main organ of the Polish minority in Ukraine) brought us a fresh list of destroyed manor-houses and murdered victims from the Kiev province and Right-bank Ukraine. With calm and weightiness, without chasing after sensation, in a modest column entitled “Our Disasters” facts were given that sent chills down our spine... Each day we read aloud that frightening litany, looking with apprehension for the names of our acquaintances, friends and kinfolk.”

¹ The path of negotiating with the villagers, pursued by some of Kossak’s peers, was becoming increasingly untenable, whereas the dogged defense of the old privileges in the environment of the waning authority was beginning to bear the features of a dignified suicide.

Only few of the landowners managed to make it to the new, “great and terrible” year of 1918 in the familiar setting of their manors; surely none succeeded in keeping the land, livestock and equipment from being ‘socialized’, a contemporary euphemism for the appropriation of goods. The passing of the so-called Land Law (*zemel’nyi zakon*) by the Central Rada, abolishing private ownership and raising the principle of the collectivized possession into the

¹ Kossak, 23

basis of social relations,² provided little more than a legal embellishment to the accomplished process. This massive transfer of national wealth proceeded as if by itself, without much interference either from Kiev or Kharkov, unable or unwilling to keep it unwilling or even keep the process orderly.

The village, gripped by “a naïve political ambition... to be its own master,”³ became inaccessible to the metropolitan voices used until now to getting their commands received without further discussion. This new political behavior stood at the very essence of the state vitiation, more so than the pogroms of the manor houses, brutal beatings of the functionaries or the rejection of army service. In the context of the burgeoning civil war, the autonomy of the peasant world represented the *disjunction* between the question of *formal* power and the need – or even desire – to control the country-side. This paramount fact of the present reality translated itself in the form that the struggle for the remaining carcass of the state assumed, namely, in the tactical convention of the armed detachments to progress along the railroads, skirting the outlying villages, and aiming directly at the key junctions and towns en route to provincial capitals.

The control, established in such a manner through the victory of the pro-Bolshevik forces in February of 1918, was gossamer at best, prone to be broken as easily as a cobweb tautly extended to the tips of the desiccated branches. The Germans with their twenty odd *Landwehr* divisions on the mission of delivering the hard-pressed Central powers from the narrowing ring of the Allied blockade, at once exposed the weakness of the Bolshevik hold

² For full text of the Land Law see Pavlo Khrystiuk, *Zamitky i Materiialy do istorii ukrains'koi revoliutsii 1917-1920 rr* (New York: Vydavnistvo Chartoryis'kykh, 1969), v. 2, 129-131

³ Limbach, *Ukrainische Schreckensstage*, 11

on the land. Moreover, having dispatched some of the “agents of the revolutionary disorder” (*Umtriebe*) beyond the borders of the Ukrainian state and driven back the rest into the underground, they had compelled the Left parties (temporarily at peace with themselves) to start looking “peasant-ward”, in the direction of the parochially-preoccupied but otherwise disengaged village. The efforts of the organizers and *agitators* from the ill-defined revolutionary front to implicate the countryside into the struggle for political authority – in fact, to make it into the key arbiter thereof - resulted in the emergence of the *clandestine state*, which rose up to the surface in its first bid for power during the summer months of 1918, when the districts of the Kiev, Yekaterinoslav and Chernigov provinces went up in flames of peasant uprisings.

Focus of the present chapter, this transition from what was dubbed the “railroad war” (*eshelonnaia voina*) to the full-scale uprisings did not merely register the change in the tactical notions about ways of winning the domestic war. The unprecedented scale of the popular involvement, the exportation of the contest well beyond the city limits into the open country, its *ruralization* in fact, signaled the egress of the native protagonists on the Left (the Bolsheviks, S-R’s, Ukrainian Social-Democrats, etc.) from the power *cul-de-sac* where they floundered in the wake of the administrative collapse and the speedy disintegration of the army. The militarized and active countryside became perforce a panacea to the ills of the state’s implosion, with the errant peasant partisans carrying in them the seeds of the new polity. Born in the heat of the summer battles, the new figure, that of the band leader, the future warlord and the ataman, embodied therefore the authority recrudescant and not, as the

contemporary opinion saw it, the all-pervasive insubordination and anarchy of the troubled times.

Part I: Collapse of the Army: a Few Prefatory Remarks (March-November 1917)

Akin to the armed neutrality, the distance that the Ukrainian countryside took vis-à-vis the contenders for power and their early scuffles reflected the condition of the Russian Imperial Army and the manner whereby it withered away. That stupendous body of armed men, the fifteen and a half million souls mobilized to celebrate the success of Russia's modernization, was at once a liability and an asset, holding the regime and the populace in the state of co-dependency, or, better said, of mutual hostageship. The willing and continuous acquiescence of the largely peasant country to transfer its most productive part into the custody of the state implicated the village and the city-centered officialdom in direct proportion to the intensity of the war effort and transformed the army into something incomparably greater than an institutional intermediary between the governing and the governed. In the course of the Great War it evolved into a crucible of aspirations, a repository of the alienated authority, authority itself, as Denikin pithily averred in his *Sketches*.⁴ In such a capacity, the army stood for the key expression of the popular loyalties to Petrograd, attenuated and consequently dissolved as the spring epidemic of transgressions gave way to the self-legislated mutiny towards the end of the year 1917.

⁴ "All authority was in the hands of the army" is the exact phrase from the general's work. (Denikin, *Ocherki*, v. 1, 128)

That the army did not actually disappear in 1917 could probably be attributed to the force of inertia and affective ties, lingering despite the infrastructural collapse in a type of recognition lag. Totalling about 6,500,000 enlisted men and officers as late as November 1917,⁵ this institution managed to outlive the regime it purported to support and defend. It still held 127 enemy divisions, 80 of them German, about a third of what they had, affixed to their increasingly porous positions in the European provinces of the Russian Empire.⁶ These figures, however, cannot conceal the fact that the army had long ceased being combat-worthy, thoroughly demoralized by the well-embedded committee politics, masterfully conducted German propaganda, fraternization with the adversary, lacking supplies and, of course, the insuperable desire for peace. The need to put a speedy end to the war, “before the first snow,” “before October 15” etc, turned into the *leitmotif* of life in the trenches, inciting the soldiers to the sabotaging of orders if these were judged as prolonging the conflict, to the destruction of the materiel so that “there won’t be anything to fight with,” ultimately, to the expressed rejection of that government which still toyed with the ideas of the defensive patriotic war.⁷ Even the proverbial bolshevization of the army looked more like a façade, used only to accentuate the contours of the real issue. “We simply can fight no longer...,” said a deputy of the 8th army to the Romanian Front Congress. “We have no faith in individual persons, neither Kerensky nor Lenin. We are conditional Bolsheviks – whoever gives us peace we’ll support.”⁸ The rank-and-file mapped the frustration with the politics of unfulfilled promises onto the language of political extremism.

⁵ Norman Stone, *The Eastern Front, 1914-1917* (London: Penguin, 1998), 300

⁶ Denikin, v. 2, 146

⁷ Allan K. Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980-1987), v. 2, 224-230

⁸ *ibid.*, v. 2, 369-370

When in November of 1917 the new commander-in-chief general Nikolai Dukhonin refused to assume responsibilities for the peace negotiations with the Central Powers, Lenin and Krylenko decided to bypass the *Stavka*, exhorting each unit to enter into the discussion of the armistice terms on their own.⁹ The ordinary soldier, however, did not need public encouragements to a mandatory initiative, having long realized that the solution to the problem lies entirely with him. In his famous *Ten Days...* John Reed wrote that “the soldiers began to solve the peace question by simply deserting,”¹⁰ and, as the Revolution progressed in the direction of the Bolshevik denouement, the aforementioned ‘method’ rapidly took on features of the spontaneous self-demobilization. Although there are no definitive data regarding desertion before and after the February Revolution, Nikolai Golovin, a Russian general and a preeminent military historian, claimed that with the downfall of the Romanov dynasty the rate of monthly *registered* desertion rose by the factor of five, reaching the cumulative figure of 365,000 by August 1 of that year.¹¹ On the other hand, the number of the *unregistered* deserters, i.e. of those who were called to duty but failed to appear in the units assigned to them, was estimated at 1,500,000 men. Adding up to 1,900,000, even that grand total “did not encompass the entire number of the conscripts... who were evading at the close of the war their military duty...”¹² Extended sick-leaves, permanent ‘meetings’ and ‘demonstrations’ (*mitingovanie*) in the units, “pilgrimages” of the multitudinous “delegates” to the sites of revolutionary conventions – all these were forms of the latent desertion that the new times created for the war-weary footmen. The coming of frosts was about to give this massive ebb of bodies into the absorbent interior of Russia supplementary impetus – no less

⁹ *ibid.*, v. 2, 352, Denikin, v. 2, 161-162

¹⁰ John Reed, *Ten Days that shook the World* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1919), 3

¹¹ Golovin, *Voennye usiliia Rossii...*, v. 1, 205

¹² *ibid.*, v. 1, 206-207

so, perhaps, than the Decrees on Peace and on Land, promulgated by the Bolsheviks on the day of the October coup.

The rejection of war and the urge to conclude peace without delay at whatever conditions did not mean that the returnees from the front blanched at the idea of violence. The opposite in fact was true, for the three long years of fruitless sacrifices on the battle-fields markedly lowered whatever inhibitions one might have retained before consigning himself to the dangerous magic of force. Hans Limbach, a Swiss observer of the events who worked administering an estate in the Kherson province, claimed that the residents lived less in the fear of the peasants “as [in the fear] of the thought of the homecoming Army and of the spirit and horrors that it would bring along.”¹³ Traveling at the speed of bad news well in advance of the sluggish locomotives, apprehensions of that kind subjected the moral equipoise of the countryside to a difficult trial. Maria Dunin-Kozicka, for example, a Polish noblewoman from the Tarashcha district of the Kiev province, saw her hopes in the magnanimity of Revolution sink when the rumors of the disintegrating front began reaching her ears. “Incredible things (*dziwy*)”, she wrote in her memoirs, “were related about the soldiers, who take passenger trains by storm, break the glass windows to get inside faster [and] hurl the travelers from their paid seats. The doors to the wagons would at times be permanently barricaded by the soldierly crowd as the resourceful porters would shove the travelers in and drag them out simply via the window, sometimes by dint of a great effort (*z okrutnym mozolem*).”¹⁴ Although ubiquitous to the point of seeming banal, such descriptions retained an aspect of certain grotesque – inspiring incredulity and fright – not least because the dire

¹³ Limbach, 12

¹⁴ Dunin-Kozicka, 37

danger to life and property stemmed reputedly from those that the now-targeted civilians long came to associate with peace, order and security.

The story of the soldiers arriving to their native villages with an intention of exposing its slumbering denizens to the pealing message of the immediate redistribution and of rousing them to a corresponding action – that story occurred with frequency and regularity that may warrant following generalization: the man with a rifle, on leave or deserting, was at the vanguard of the peasant revolt. “The year of 1917 opened peasants their eyes, untied their hands”, wrote one villager from Podolia. “The soldiers coming back from the front were stirring up the conflagration with their agitation.”¹⁵ His account is seconded by the testimony from Iurovo village of the Chernigov region, where some anonymous soldiers (*kakie-to soldaty*) first established the “new order” (*novyi poriadok*) in the republican spirit and then explained the intolerable injustice of exacting the 25 ruble compensation for the *desiatina* of the landlords’ patrimony;¹⁶ according to the recollections of the peasant from Novaia Maiachka (ukr. Nova Maiachka) of the Taurida province the *frontoviki* played the key role in familiarizing the locals with the gospel of Bolshevism and in putting together first revolutionary committees. “The soldiers were becoming leaders of the peasants”, attested the aforementioned witness while describing the momentous changes that the relationship between the village and the manor underwent under the impact of the radicalized front returnees.¹⁷

¹⁵ Ia. Iakovlev, ed., *1917 god v derevne: vospominaniia krest'ian* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1967), 114; in May of 1917 Podolian governor complained about the soldiers who regularly come to the villages and militate for “the idea of land seizure.” (cit in M. Frenkin, *Russkaia armia i revoliutsiia 1917-1918* (München: Logos, 1978), 208)

¹⁶ *ibid.*, 131

¹⁷ *ibid.*, 213

The violent words of the radical slogans, with which the soldiers addressed peasant masses, echoed back with a rumble of pogroms perpetrated against the landlords and the single-homestead farmers (*khutoriane* and *otrubniki*). As might have been expected, the men in uniforms led the way, “spurring the villagers to the united attacks on the lords.”¹⁸ The connection of the pogroms¹⁹ with the urgency of the land question was not always evident, especially when the soldiers participating in the destruction of manor houses came from the units stationed nearby only for a short period of time; the act itself was not made less political as a result, for the profanation of the allegedly inviolable right to private property as well as the conditional legitimization of all-permissiveness belonged to the essential ingredients in the appeal of the Revolution. The Chuguev Lancer regiment, billeted for the spring months of 1917 in a small hamlet of Semirenki (ukr. Semyren’ky), gave a good illustration of precisely such a formation, one that, while still remaining relatively unaffected by the desertion, took a change in the disciplinary regime as an instigation to a nearly risk-free debauchery. At first marking their presence by laying waste to the domains of the local proprietor, “the eccentric and the collector” Jan Pruszyński, the soldiers decided to include the neighboring Morozovka (ukr. Morozivka/pol. Łaszki) into their ‘field of operation’ once the rumors of sumptuous wine reserves found there caught up with them. The regiment, wrote Kossak-Szczucka, “darted off to the spot to see if it was true, taking few carts along.”

There they discovered that

Łaszki was empty at the time, because the proprietor with his family lived in Zhitomir. The entry doors were broken at once and cellar was found with the help of the locals. There was indeed a veritable treasure trove in the form of

¹⁸ Dunin-Kozicka, 52

¹⁹ Here and elsewhere the word “pogrom” is used in a Russian sense – as an act of vandalism, destruction – not necessarily in the narrow sense of an anti-Jewish violence.

enormous quantity of the old wines, vodkas and meads. Upon hearing of the soldiers in the yards the entire village gathered up in a multitudinous crowd, assisting in deaf silence the transfer of oak cask and moldy bottles. The soldiers loaded up their carts as much as they could and drove off, addressing the peasants: 'Now it's your turn.' Before long the entire the entire village was lying drunk in rows (pokotem pijana). Peasants, women, children, even dogs, pigs and fowl were covering the lanes of the forecourt and the benches, incapable of the slightest movement. The air was suffused with a powerful, intoxicating odor.²⁰

Noteworthy is not only the catalytic role of the soldiers in sparking the bout of plunder, or the successive participation of the villagers but also the fact mentioned later in Kossak's book, that the robberies ended with the departure of the Chuguev lancers, the peasants themselves being still unable, in apodictic words of the author, "to commence the pogrom on their own initiative."²¹ She made the same point when giving an account of a similar pogrom in Skovorodki (ukr. Skovorodky) sometime in November of 1917. The short trip to the landlord's house resembled more a religious procession than a wild onrush, with positions determined by a tacitly accepted hierarchy: at its head was "a throng of soldiers," in the middle were women and children, "flitting like a flock of crows"; "the male peasants walked at the very end."²² Both causality and precedence came to a visible expression in this flow of human bodies – a kind of a pecking order establishing who could have the first serving and who would have to wait till the rest are satisfied.

More so than the acting servicemen, the deserters often proceeded against the manor lords with an intention of expediting the transfer of land and property into the peasant hands. They acted with determination and finality of people, who had little left to lose – not just to probe the limits of the permissible but to make a clean break with the government and the state,

²⁰ Kossak, 23-24

²¹ *ibid.*, 26

²² *ibid.*, 46

which had failed to deliver on its promises. Thus upon their return to their native village of Luganskoe (ukr. Luhans'ke) in the Bakhmut district of the Yekaterinoslav province, the returnees resolved to kill local landlord Smykalov and would have probably carried out their sanguinary plan had the condemned man not hid himself in the stable beforehand.²³ His Volhynian peer, the Polish octogenarian Roman Damian Sanguszko, proprietor of great estates and manufacturing enterprises, fared much worse. With his house surrounded by the disorganized crowd from the remains of the 264th Reserve regiment, he was dragged to the porch and subsequently bayoneted to death. Following the murder, wrote one local observer few years later, “the peasants got on courageously with the partitioning of the *burzhuj*'s land without fearing anyone.”²⁴ In November and December of 1917, the large economies of Podolia and Kiev provinces were being so thoroughly destroyed by the soldiers en route to their homes that even the Bolsheviks in Petrograd, those ideologues of the merciless class war, began to ring the alarm bells against the pogromist wave; as could have been expected, with little effect.²⁵

It would be difficult to arrive at a single statistic demonstrating the extent of the soldiers' contribution to the agrarian pogroms and other types of peasant violence. One could collate the change in the number of “the pogrom-acquisitionist transgressions” (*pogromno-zachvatnicheskie pravonarusheniia*), escalating from 440 in August to 958 in September²⁶ against the staggering rates of desertion as well as the demographic gradient thereof; such operations, illustrative as they are, would raise other questions with respect to the intangible

²³ *1917 god v derevne*, 193

²⁴ *ibid.*, 120-121; Kossak, 36

²⁵ Frenkin, 682-683

²⁶ *ibid.*, 188, 473

and elusive causalities. Then again, even if the necessary figures were readily available, they would have probably failed to capture the most important effect that the acts of violence perpetrated by the soldiers produced on the peasant psyche: namely, by exposing the helplessness of the central authority in upholding the crumbling local order, the men from the front helped the villagers to extricate themselves from the lingering reservations in the face of law, and provided them with the model of autonomous action.

The Front came crashing down like a mighty edifice onto the cuddled huts below, irreparably altering the landscape of the country. Drove of soldiers seeped back home, and as the sight of the untended trenches was sinking lower on the horizon, the full ambivalence of their message stepped out into the lucid light. Combining seemingly incompatible elements, these men preached peace yet clutched readily at their arms at the slightest pretext and without visible provocation. Their war-fatigue did not inscribe itself exclusively within the demands for the immediate armistice, realized by the Bolsheviks and thus made obsolete. The aversion for the external war persisted for quite some time, shaping uncountable resolutions, all directed to exorcise the specter of another war – one that crept into the heart of the land; delegates from all fronts spoke out against “the fratricidal slaughter” (*boinia*) simultaneously insisting on the immediate “reconciliation of the parties.”²⁷ At the same time, these admonitions to peace and moderation notwithstanding, units sent soldiers with mandates to the villages of Podolia, Volhynia, Yekaterinoslav, Kherson and Kiev provinces, and these would talk the peasants into seizing the landlord’s property or forcing the *otrubnik* back into commune, never shirking from arson, pillage or murder themselves. “The strangest thing occurred: those, who could not cry out enough about the violation and against the war...

²⁷ Wildman, v. 2 353, 355; Frenkin, 614-616, 625

proceeded to violations more fiercely than any government had done, summoning to fight and waging the war, not against the external enemy at first, but above all against all the existing and the established.”²⁸ These lines that came from Ludendorff’s pen to describe the Bolshevik regime appear uncannily applicable to the ex-soldiers of the Russian Imperial Army and to the spirit that they came to embody and that they passed on to their peers in the interior.

On a fundamental level, however, both the flight from the war and the easy falling back on the violent resolutions of the pressing questions resulted from the experience of the so-called *Entstaatlichung* as Felix Schnell put it in the recent monograph – the phenomenon of *denationalization* or even “*de-statisation*.”²⁹ The war and the Revolution strained and severed the ties between the soldier and the authority and released him from the bond of obedience towards it. The Tsarist state gravely compromised itself not only by failing to provide the *muzhiks* in uniforms with the appealing idea to die for or the war materiel to fight with – factors from which the Germans and the Bolsheviks drew full *agitprop* value only after Nicholas’ fall. What transformed the Army into a terrible nemesis of the regime which begot it was the fact of the soldiers’ dislocating and *incomplete* transformation from the peasants to citizens. In other words, called up to bear the brunt of the longest and most gruesome war in the meaningfully remembered past, the Russian conscript left for good the parochial world of the lord and the peasant, which up until now offered him the most

²⁸ Eric Ludendorff, *Meine Kriegserinnerungen 1914-1918* (Berlin: Ernst Siegfried Mittler und Sohn Verlagsbuchhandlung 1919) 407

²⁹ Schnell, 147

concrete and accessible model of political subservience;³⁰ now, palpating his way to the greater abstract community (whose member he was enjoined to become), he still fumbled fruitlessly as if in the dark, confused by the profusion of the mutually negating fingerposts. The great impatience with the temporizing revolutionary powers and the subsequent decision to take the law into one's own hands, circumventing Petrograd or even Kiev,³¹ signaled exactly that inability to engage the soldier and the peasant into the politics of the grand style, one that asked for yet another exertion at the bulwarks of the threatened *patrie* or on the construction sites of the fledgling nation. Instead, the galvanized countryside turned onto itself – “to the agrarian routs and pogroms”³² – giving substance to the gestating notion of the ‘peasant anarchism’ and observing the inaugural phase of the power struggle with a look of quizzical indifference.

Part II: The Railroad War (December 1917 – February 1918)

A. Partitioning of the Army

Recognizing that the corrosive developments in the army had gone too far for it to be saved, the new competing authorities began concentrating on the means of preserving whatever still could be preserved of the uniformed men and enormous war materiel stocked up on the frontlines and in the interior of the country. The Central Rada, whose program of radical social reforms and national autonomy found a strong backing among the delegates of the first

³⁰ The tendency of the émigré writers to wax eloquent on the harmony that reigned between the ‘loyal’ peasants and the ‘just’ landlords before the Revolution made short work of it is, of course, one of the key tropes of the memoirs literature; even as such, it is indicative of the manner whereby that quasi-feudal world was mentally perceived or experienced in practice.

³¹ Frenkin, 538; “Rada will not give you land!” claimed the soldiers of the South-Western Front as they exhorted the peasants to the immediate and the unsanctioned seizure of landlords’ property (Frenkin, 681)

³² *ibid.*, 693

two All-Ukrainian Army congresses (May and June 1917), wagered its political capital on the continued pursuit of the politics of Ukrainization.³³ On paper the project of creating an ethnically homogenous national army by pruning away the non-Ukrainian elements from the predominantly Ukrainian units and, inversely, by culling the Ukrainians from the largely non-Ukrainian setting unfolded so auspiciously that by early October Symon Petliura, then the Rada's Secretary of Military Affairs, could dream of twenty fully Ukrainized divisions at the disposal of the national Ukrainian government.³⁴ One Austrian observer went beyond this, claiming in his report to the Habsburg foreign minister Count Ottokar Czernin that in the immanent conflict with the Sovnarkom the Rada could count on some 30 infantry and 2 cavalry divisions.³⁵ This optimism acquired a peremptory note at the 3rd All-Ukrainian Army Congress, convened between November 2 and November 14, when the delegates, speaking on behalf of a "three-million strong" soldierly body, resolved to carry out the Ukrainization of all garrisons inside Ukraine and to commence at once with the Ukrainization of the Black Sea fleet.³⁶

Passed against the background of effusive loyalty vows that the smaller radas in sundry army detachments were pledging to the great one in Kiev, such resolutions did reflect a real aspiration on the part of the "politically conscious" soldiers of the Ukrainian descent (*voiak* *ukraintsi*) to move from the cultural programs of the early Ukrainization towards establishing genuine Ukrainian army.³⁷ Army corps and divisions pressed for the immediate relocation

³³ Tiutiunyk gives a moving if one-sided account of the 2nd All-Ukrainian Army Congress (Iurko Tiutiunyk, *Revoliutsyina stykhiia* (L'viv: Universum, 2004), 24-36); see Khrystiuk, v. 1, 48-55, Frenkin, 215-225

³⁴ Frenkin, 537

³⁵ PA Karton 1041 Die Ukraina. Ueberblick über die wirtschaftliche, historische, politische und militärische Entwicklung

³⁶ V. Manilov, ed., *1917 god na Kievshchine. Khronika sobytii* (Kiev: Gosudarstvennoe izd-vo, 1928), 333, 351.

³⁷ Frenkin, 536

with an express aim of defending the national government in Kiev. The XXVI Corps of the 9th Army, for instance, managed to obtain Rada's authorization to leave the now silent trenches in Moldova for the agitated quarters around the capital; the two regiments from the Ukrainized XXXIV Corps had no patience for such administrative trifles and decided to take off in Kiev's direction entirely on their own initiative (*samochnno*).³⁸ Ukrainian units from the Fronts that did not pass through Ukrainian territory attempted to execute the same 'patriotic' demarche; such was the case of 30,000 men from the XXI Corps swarming the suburbs of Livonia's Volmar (present-day Valmiera in Lithuania) in anticipation of the south-bound trains.³⁹

Yet, neither the declarations of loyalty nor the movements of the army units into the interior of the country could belie the fact that the soldiers were too affected by homesickness to be of much use. The Ukrainization itself was often only a pretext for a semi-sanctioned self-demobilization, as was evidenced by the tendency of the human 'content' to peter out en route to Kiev. Both the XVII Corps of the 11th Army and the 156 division of the 7th Army ceased to exist in December 1917 according to that scenario, vanishing in the face of the new adversary well before the first shots were even heard.⁴⁰ Formations of the Romanian front, where the combined efforts of the Russian officers and the Romanian military kept the Bolshevik clout at bay,⁴¹ showed no more fortitude than the rest when confronted by the temptation to desert. With its normal strength regulated at 35,000-40,000 men,⁴² by

³⁸ Frenkin, 638

³⁹ PA Karton 1041 Die Ukraina. Ueberblick über die wirtschaftliche, historische, politische und militärische Entwicklung

⁴⁰ Ia. Tynchenko, *Ukrains'ki zbroini syly: berezen' 1917-lystopad 1918 (orhanizatsiia, chysel'nist', boiovi dii)* (Kyiv: Tempora, 2009), 24; Frenkin, 693

⁴¹ Wildman, 366ff

⁴² *Voennaia entsyklopediia* (Saint Petersburg: Tovarishchestvo Sytina, 1911-1917), v. 3, 36

December of 1917 the XXVI Corps of the 9th army counted about 4,000 soldiers; the X Corps from the same army reported the pitiful number of 600 armed men. For as long as these units still remained in their positions – under the surveillance of the “more conscientious Cossack detachments” – they were preserved from the complete disintegration; yet, the departure of the echelons loaded with the prospective defenders of Rada meant a definite farewell, if not to arms than certainly to the army, the X Corps whittling away on the Kremenchug (ukr. Kremenchuh)-Poltava stretch of the road and the XXVI disintegrating in the area of Kamenets-Podolsk, barely twenty away miles from the front line.⁴³

All in all, despite the boastful claims and impressive figures, the support that the Central Rada amassed for its cause among the *frontoviki* was rather paltry. In Kiev itself it could safely rely on the Bohdan Khmelnyts'ky (*bohdanovtsi*) and the Pavlo Polubotok (*polubotkivtsi*) regiments, two of the first units to undergo the Ukrainization within the Russian Imperial Army; the so-called *kurin* (battalion) *of death*, formerly a shock-troop formation of the Romanian front as well as the fresh Sich Riflemen battalion, made up of the Galician POWs from the Austrian army, were both accountable and combat-worthy.⁴⁴ By contrast, the remaining detachments of the Kiev garrison (those of Pavlo Doroshenko, Petro Sahaidachny, Taras Shevchenko, Mykhailo Hrushevsky and others) either openly espoused pro-Bolshevik positions or were filled with youngsters whose inexperience dulled the sharp point of their enthusiasm. Put together that gave a number of about 16,000 bayonets, concentrated inside the city and along the rail lines leading respectively to Chernigov and

⁴³ Tynchenko, *Ukrains'ki zbroini syly*, 49, 51

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 52ff; Erde, 139

Poltava.⁴⁵ In the Right-bank Ukraine Rada's principal hopes for political dominance lay with the XXXIV Corps, rechristened into the I Ukrainian Corps and commanded by none other than Pavel Skoropadsky, the tsarist general with a remarkable flair for political divination. A smattering of garrison regiments, stationed in small and medium towns and often lacking direct communication with Kiev, completed the picture of the Rada's regular armed forces, irregularly embedded within the flowing mass of the demobilized and demoralized soldiery.

Contrary to appearances, the Bolsheviks did not have much luck recruiting the front-line troops to their side – certainly not more than did the Rada, its ally of convenience and the future competitor. True, in the weeks following the Petrograd coup, they established their Military Revolutionary Committees (MRC) at all command levels of the South-Western Front, simultaneously liquidating the old commissariats of the defunct Provisional Government.⁴⁶ Yet, the Bolshevik attempt at spreading their influence down to the Romanian front engendered an immediate counterstrike masterminded and executed by the Staff of the Romanian Front Commander General Dmitri Shcherbachev, who like thousands of other officers saw in the Rada the lesser of the two evils. On the night of December 4, less than twenty-four hours into its existence, the Bolshevik MRC of the Romanian front saw itself apprehended and its sympathizers disarmed through a conjoint Russo-Romanian action; the MRCs of the 9th, 4th and 6th armies followed the suit few days later.⁴⁷ This offensive did not end there and soon all but the MRC of the 7th army of the South-Western Front were duly seized and dissolved.⁴⁸ The astounding successes scored by the Bolsheviks on the terrains of

⁴⁵ E. Bosh, *God bor'by* (Kiev: Politizdat Ukrainy, 1990), 174-175, Tynchenko, *Ukrains'ki zbroini syly*, 52ff

⁴⁶ Skrukwa, 192; Frenkin, 601-603, 617-619; Tynchenko, *Ukrains'ki zbroini syly*, 22-23

⁴⁷ Frenkin, 634-635

⁴⁸ *ibid.* 642-643; Tynchenko, *Ukrains'ki zbroini syly*, 27

the Northern and Western fronts were thus counterbalanced by failures south of the Pripiat marches, reflecting as though through a gigantic mirror realities of the soldiers' voting preferences – as much by chance as by the force of necessity.

Insofar as the deep fissures in the command structure kept the above permutations isolated to its upper rungs (for such was indeed the essential feature of the military collapse), the Bolsheviks could hope to preserve their presence among the troops. Even before the October events shook the Russian capitals, the 15th Regiment in Vinnitsa solemnly swore to “die but assure the victory of the power of the workers, peasants and soldiers.”⁴⁹ A similar mood was registered in the bolshevized 1st Turkestan Corps of the Special Army,⁵⁰ the XII Corps of the 8th Army, or the remnants of the XVIII and XL Corps of the broken 9th Army.⁵¹ Most important support, however, came from the large II Guard Corps, a unit held in the state of trance by the rhetoric of the Bolshevik firebrand Yevgeniia Bosh.⁵² Prompted to occupy Zhmerinka and its environs on Nov. 2, 1917, the corps seemed to offer the Party its main trump card in the coming struggle for political hegemony.⁵³

The Bolsheviks and the Rada proceeded to divvy up the army in the manner of two robust siblings, who, while equally relieved by the death of their unloved parent have learned to treat one another with combination of jealousy and disdain. Tugging at the pieces of the Imperial military inheritance, they contributed in process to its near-complete destruction, a

⁴⁹ Bosh, 105

⁵⁰ The army owed its name – ‘Special’ (*Osobaia*) – to the superstitions of the Russian High Command, who wanted to avoid maligning its fortunes with next number in row – the number ‘13’; as for the Turkestan Corps, it must be mentioned that while approving of Bolshevik seizure of power, the soldiers expressed themselves against ‘the fratricidal war.’ (Wildman, v. 2, 355)

⁵¹ Tynchenko, 23, Frenkin, 619, 642

⁵² Bosh, 112ff

⁵³ “Iz istorii Sovvlasi na Ukraine,” *Letopis' Revoliutsii*, v. 4 (1924), 166

point illustrated by the lot of the 9th Army: an object of intense suasion from all sides, it had at first split up in two and then fully disintegrated with the Ukrainian corps (X and XXVI) moving east and the pro-Bolshevik ones (XL and XVIII) heading north to the protection of the 8th Army.⁵⁴ This partitioning of the standing army with all of its concomitant effects pierces through the opening phase of the revolutionary strife as one of its key lines, an aspect not bereft of irony, since the struggle over the state apparatus entailed in those months a deliberate and substantive obliteration thereof. In practical terms that meant, as Kakurin aptly phrased it, “the jettisoning onto the scene of the spreading civil war the wrecked fractions of the old army,” all poised to reach home as fast as circumstances would allow.⁵⁵ Some of those, indisposed, like most, to wage another war (but alacritous to jiggle with their weapons all the same), would find their passage barred by the tussle and traffic, and, by attempting to brush the obstacle aside they would provide this war with its peculiar shape and its particular rhythm.

B. Irregular Forces

The escape of men with arms from the enfeebled clasp of the dying state ran its course while the social body was overcome by the flood of pullulating irregular formations. Put in rather schematic terms, the bulk of the people’s militia split in two, either entering the stream of the so-called ‘Free Cossacks’ societies (*vil’ne kozatstvo*) or going the way of the ‘red guards,’ these latter all too often containing tinctures of the anarchist ‘black.’ The first of the two, the ‘Free Cossackdom,’ originated sometime in March or April 1917, when Nykodym Smoktii, a 40-year prosperous peasant organized something of a patrolling force in his native Gusakovo

⁵⁴ Frenkin, 642

⁵⁵ Kakurin, *Kak srazhalas’ Revoliutsiia*, v. 1, 156

(ukr. Husakovo) village of the Zvenigorodka (ukr. Zvenyhorodka) district.⁵⁶ With its membership almost invariably (and always statutorily) limited to the individuals exempt from the military service,⁵⁷ the movement claimed to provide an answer to the challenges raised by the collapsing army and exaggerated by the vitiating central authority. As the “Instruction for the formation of the Free Cossacks in Zvenigorodka district” put it

Recognizing the current situation of Ukraine, when the disorder is being spread by the dark forces, robberies are committed, when the entire bands deserting wholesale from the front [dezertevania ... ide tsilymy bandamy z frontu] are laying waste in our Ukraine, purloining everything they encounter on the road, bullying the population of Ukraine, sowing discord and disorder while we lack the means to protect ourselves – for that reason we are beholden to rally up to the defense of our land.⁵⁸

Watchword of the hour, this call to self-defense was regularly invoked by the growing choir of peasant criers as the example set by the villagers from the environs of Zvenigordka first crossed the district border, then that of the province, acquiring by early autumn truly all-Ukrainian dimensions.⁵⁹

Looking from the abyss of years and the distance of exile, Volodymyr Vynnychenko believed to have discovered a pattern which comfortably confirmed his faith in the goodhearted nature of the folk – namely, that the Free Cossack phenomenon as a particular practice of self-defense “developed especially in the front zone, where the desertion and crime figures were especially high.”⁶⁰ This is not exactly the case for by October 1 the number of the registered Free Cossack Societies both in Podolian (5 societies with 276 members) and Volhynian provinces (1 society with 35 members) was dwarfed by that in

⁵⁶ Lobodaev, 65; on the importance of the Cossack myth see Introduction to this work

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, 66, 130

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, 71

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, 91

⁶⁰ Vynnychenko, 225

Kiev province (40 societies with 12943 members) and was still markedly lower than those in Poltava (11 with 840 members), Chernigov (7 with 605 members), or Yekaterinoslav provinces (5 with 783 members).⁶¹ Although these statistics did not capture the full scope of the movement – its estimated strength varying between 45 and 60 thousand members - they hinted at the relationship between the peasant self-defense, the army and the civil authorities which was more complex than Vynnychenko’s simple proportion allowed.⁶² For one the Free Cossacks remained aware of the persons, whose livestock, forests, lands, lakes and machinery the Revolution delivered into the peasants’ hands. “The struggle with those, who only yesterday fled from the authority, was not out of question,”⁶³ wrote Yurko Tiutiunnyk as he offered a list of illustrious names that the vengeful exiles bore: Branickys, Shuvalovs, Urusovs, Engelharts, etc. He could have included those who decided to stay and face ‘the peasant element’ were it not self-evident. Armed with a hallowed mandate from a village *skhod* (assembly), the Free Cossacks would battle the landlords without scruples and fear. On November 12, for instance, the Free Cossacks of the Berdichev district were seen commandeering horses from the manors, allegedly to appear at the festive announcement of Rada’s Third Universal *comme il faut*; on the 18th of the same month the head of Kiev district militia reported that the Free Cossacks were plundering the spirits from the local cellars together with the common folk; in Borshchagovka they requisitioned wood, in Motivilovka, landlord’s sleighs...⁶⁴ As the executors of the ‘popular will’, the Free Cossack units often acted in unison with the homecoming soldiers, making a mockery of their professed defensive aims. “The Free Cossacks in the localities not only fail to take the measures and

⁶¹ Lobodaev, 91

⁶² *ibid.*, 91, 170-173

⁶³ Tiutiunnyk, *Revoliutsiina stykhiia*, 52

⁶⁴ Lobodaev, 139-140

help the militia, but they actually connive with the same robbers, from whom [the movement] is often made up” – authoring those plaintive lines, the Chigirin district commissar might have at least congratulated himself on having wisely guessed the fundamental ambiguity of the institution.⁶⁵

The alliance that the Free Cossacks allegedly struck with the rural troublemakers went hand in hand with their growing animosity towards the rural organs of control, the state militia in particular. Seen as superfluous, this institution was grudgingly tolerated, but only until the local peasant congresses, having decided to endow the Cossacks with the exclusive right to gun ownership, placed the militia under the penumbra of semi-legality – a unique predicament for a law-enforcement agency. Deriving an easy corollary from such resolutions, the units of peasant self-defense proceeded to the immediate disarmament of their competitors sparing no effort that they otherwise had been so jealously conserving in their lackadaisical dealings with the looters. In Chigirin (ukr. Chyhyryn), Cherkassy (ukr. Cherkasy), Berdichev, Kiev and Lipovets (ukr. Lypovets) districts the Cossacks unilaterally resolved to abolish the militia altogether, “for failing to live up to its task” as one decree had it, assuming all the rights and functions deemed necessary for the maintenance of order; that the act of defining this order belonged likewise to those called to uphold it did not raise concerns about the dangerous circularity of the entire undertaking.⁶⁶ In any event, the Free Cossacks were less a revolutionary alternative to the tsarist police force than an instrument for turning the countryside into a string of enclosed armed camps with government officials either banished or kept in the state of petrified impotence.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, 145

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, 140-143

The attitude of the Central Rada towards the Free Cossack movement remained ambivalent and its politics followed a predictably inconsistent course. For as long as it remained a counter-government with a labile support base and an uncertain future, it could indulge itself in encouraging the spontaneous growth of this “useful and natural (*pryrodoi*) organization.”⁶⁷ By creating a special department headed by the former ensign Apolon Pevnyi, the Rada extended the recognition to the Cossacks and attempted to take hold of its successive development; yet all plans to turn the impulse of the movement to a good account inevitably foundered against insufficient means, political inexperience of the Rada members as well as the general anxiety of the small town bureaucracy vis-à-vis the towering self-assurance of the armed countryside.⁶⁸ One pointed version of this deeply seated urban fear surfaced to the light of historical action in late November-early December 1917, when the Ukrainian national government, while denying the few willing peasant detachments the entrance to the capital, attempted to blackmail them into subordination by making the supply of arms and instructors incumbent upon the fulfillment of certain state-issued statutes.⁶⁹ Coming so late in the game, measures of that kind could only have a marginal effect, all the more because the returning soldiers, walking in lockstep with the peasant militant élan, brought both the weaponry and the expertise required for the necessary expertise.

Its apprehension of the armed village only strengthened by the failure to control it, the Central Rada turned to the organization of the urban analogues of the Free Cossacks. The best-known of such units was the so-called Kiev regiment of the Free Cossacks, assembled

⁶⁷ Vynnychenko, 225

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, 226; Lobodaev, 88ff, 95-101

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, 147,169

and led by Mykhailo Kovenko, an adventuresome engineer at the machine building plant “Greter & Krivanek.”⁷⁰ Comprised of sixteen worker battalions (*kureni*), the regiment represented the largest voluntary force at Rada’s disposal, a distinction which in a short while would earn Kovenko a post of Kiev’s commandant, an endowment of near-dictatorial powers over the beleaguered city.⁷¹ There had been a certain quantity of other urban squads of the Free Cossacks, dispersed over Ukraine: about 500 men in and around Chernigov, 300 in Rovno (ukr. Rivne), 800 in Lugansk (ukr. Luhans’k), a 700-strong Yekaterinoslav detachment of ataman Gorobets, formerly student Vorobiev from the Kiev Polytechnic Institute.⁷² Taken together, the urban units of the Free Cossacks numbered hardly more than 4 or 5,000 individuals, i.e. less than a tenth of the estimated strength of the movement. With time some of them would be converted into crack fighters for the Rada’s cause, but for now their presence mostly vexed the grumbling city dwellers, reminding Ukrainian national leaders of their isolation, made only more acute through the village’s visible disengagement from the trajectory of their fate.

Much like the largely peasant Free Cossack movement, the workers’ militias and the Red Guards in particular resulted from the drive towards the ubiquitous self-armament against the backdrop of the wilting state authority.⁷³ Yet, the similarities between the two new forms of social organization essentially end at the above assertion of common etiology. Although

⁷⁰ Dmytro Doroshenko, *Istoriia Ukrainy 1917-1923* (Uzhhorod: Svoboda, 1930-32), v.1, 260

⁷¹ Lododaev, 177

⁷² Tynchenko, 35, 62; Lobodaev, 172

⁷³ The participation of the Red Guards in the Russian revolution inspired such a plethora of studies that any concise exposition of this subject would appear dilettante. To preempt future accusations of that sort, I am taking a refuge in the demarche *ad absurdum* by making an inevitably short account even shorter. That said, I hope all the same to communicate that aspect of the coeval reality essential for the comprehension of the subsequent events – namely, the ubiquitous militarization of the social body as well as its willingness to engage in violent resolutions of the pressing issues.

often emerging ‘spontaneously’, forming as they did at the factory floors without the prefatory approbation from a local soviet, the workers’ units saw themselves quickly integrated into the fractious modus operandi of the all-Russian post-February party politics. In Kharkov, for example, the first two months of the guideless experimentation with self-defense were over as soon as the city Bolsheviks decided to establish special district staffs for the Red Guard and accept respective regulations taking a cue from their Petrograd comrades.⁷⁴ Receiving encouragement and instruction from the radical left (with the Bolsheviks among the most active organizers), the workers’ militias set off on the path of accelerated growth, uniting by early August as many as 1,000 armed men at Kharkov’s All-Russian Electric Company (VEK in Russian) alone;⁷⁵ two months later, the city housed a body of roughly 3,000 Red Guards.⁷⁶ Despite the opposition from the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionaries, sizable Red Guard units were likewise established in Yekaterinoslav, especially at its enormous Briansky Ironworks.⁷⁷ In Kiev the locus of workers’ militancy sprawled around the Arsenal in the Pechersk district, where the Bolsheviks, driven by distrust of the Rada and eager to seize the opportune moment, hastily moved their headquarters.

Spread against the network of party cells like an array of spangles on a gauzy tissue, individual Red Guard units could profit from the procurement system which was no longer bound to locally available resources. Thus, when a batch of 200 odd rifles from the nearby

⁷⁴ Rex A. Wade, *Red Guards and Workers’ Militias in the Russian Revolution*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984), 249-250

⁷⁵ V. Morgunov, “Organizatsiia i bor’ba Krasnoi Gvardii na Ukraine v 17-18 g.g.,” *Letopis’ Revoliutsii*, v.5 (1925), 160.

⁷⁶ Wade, 265

⁷⁷ Erde, 177-178

regiment fell short of demand,⁷⁸ the Kharkov party bosses – Bolsheviks and Mensheviks alike – turned northward, where the work of dissolution converted army depots into veritable mining fields for weaponry and men. David Erde, then the chief editor of the Kharkov's *Izvestiia*, was delegated by the Party Committee to Petrograd with a mission of obtaining and delivering revolver bullets, which he succeeded in doing, albeit not without certain difficulties.⁷⁹ Much more important, however, was the so-called Tula connection exploited with enviable efficacy in the months before October. This entailed a compromise for the Bolsheviks, who were only all too well aware of predominantly Menshevik leanings of the Workers' Soviet at Tula as well as that of the Tula Arms Factory Committee. As a result, they came to rely on another Menshevik, a certain Poliakov, dispatched forth to confabulate with his Tula party comrades. Yet, whatever the costs of keeping this alliance, the benefits reaped made one easily forget about them: with 5000 rifles, 300 machine guns (sic!) and 5 rail cars full of ammunition the Bolsheviks could equip the city militants and still have something to spare.⁸⁰ Incidentally, the instructors too came from Tula, or, to be more precise, from the 30th Infantry Regiment, transferred in July 1917 to Kharkov partly in hopes of making it shed its bolshevized trappings en route. With men earmarked for prominence and martyrdom in their midst – Nikolai ("Kolia") Rudnev, Sergei Petrikovsky (Petrenko), Vasily Glagolev and others – the unit officers waded into the task of molding the unsteady rows of the Red Guards into battle-worthy formations, keeping a neat account of the tactical opportunities on the ground along with the strategic exigencies of the greater struggle.⁸¹

⁷⁸ V. Morgunov, "Organizatsiia i bor'ba Krasnoi Gvardii na Ukraine v 17-18 g.g." in *LR* 1925, v. 5, 159

⁷⁹ Erde, 119

⁸⁰ I. Poliakov, "Kakim putem bylo, glavnym obrazom, dostignuto vooruzhenie obrazovavsheisia v Kharkove Krasnoi gvardii," *Letopis' Revoliutsii* v. 3 (1923), 73-74

⁸¹ Erde, 93

Although neither the Free Cossack societies nor the Red Guards had enough time to ossify into the fully-fledged formal institutions, they still exhibited a number of internal commonalities which could justify the act of contrasting them (reductionist as it may be). The most obvious point of difference was demographic, for while the Free Cossacks gravitated around villages and explicitly barred frontline conscripts from becoming their members, the Red Guards stayed essentially urban, drawing support from the wide range of individuals: factory workers, civil servants, defecting soldiers and even criminals.⁸² Secondly, contrary to the half-hearted and often botched attempts of the Rada ministers to strike a happy medium with the peasant self-defense, the oppositionist radical Left – Bolsheviks in particular – succeeded in securing the crucial initiative in forming and arming tessellated militia units. The involvement of the party cadres plugged the Red Guards to the immense trove of neglected arms and unemployed men, a substantial improvement over the situation of the Free Cossacks for whom the question of supply remained largely a matter of luck.⁸³

These arms, however, came at a price, the Red Guards having to abandon their municipal autonomy and assume set positions before the shot of *Aurora*'s starting gun announced the beginning of an all-Russian scramble. Herein lies the third and possibly most substantive difference – i.e. in the foil between the retirement of the Free Cossacks to their native villages and the progressively guided involvement of the urban militias in the affairs beyond their turf. It was no surprise, therefore, that the overture to the Civil War was conducted to the sound of towns and cities clashing against each other, with areas of contact narrowed to the filigree rail-lines running both ways to expedite the moment of encounter.

⁸² Anything but anecdotal, the involvement of criminals in the Red Guard is confirmed by the Bolsheviks themselves; see, for example, “Kharkovskaia Krasnaia Gvardiia”, *Letopis' Revoliutsii*, v. 3 (1923), 70-72

⁸³ On the supply of the Free Cossacks with arms, see Lobodaev, 147-149

C. The Echelon War

The conflict between Kiev and Kharkov was already approaching its denouement when the Sovnarkom officially declared war against the Central Rada on January 17 (4), 1918. Sparked by the inter-party disagreements at the 1st All-Ukrainian Congress of the Soviets, it began with the Bolsheviks and the left S-Rs walking out of the meeting hall to set up shop farther east under the uninviting glances from the local Bolsheviks. Simultaneously Petrograd, engaged in its first trial of strength with the rebellious Don, confronted the Rada with a 48-hour ultimatum, bidding it to stop the passage of all Don and Ural Cossack regiments through the Ukrainian territory, to abstain from further “disorganization” (meaning Ukrainization) of the “common” Front and finally, to join the “revolutionary army” in eradicating the enclaves of counter-revolution.⁸⁴ While the General Secretariat of the Rada (its executive branch) temporized, trying as it did to save face without erring into unsolicited boldness, the Bolsheviks in Kharkov elected a new Executive Committee with a rather farcical name of TsIKuKa (often without the intervening capitals, *Tsikuka*) and established their own government, christened, to distinguish it from the Kievan protagonist, into the *People’s* Secretariat. Having at this point depleted their reservoir of inventiveness, the Bolshevik-SR coalition opted to give the polity they purported to represent a cognomen already in use: the Ukrainian People’s Republic. Thus, with one Congress endeavoring to out-shout another Congress, one Secretariat mustering its forces to meet those of another Secretariat, one People’s Republic contesting the legitimacy of another People’s Republic,

⁸⁴ Doroshenko, v. 1, 214-215; for various accounts of these events, see, for example, Bosh, 134-174, Erde, 127-141, Doroshenko, v. 1, 214-225, Vynnychenko, 269-279, etc.

the entire affair seemed to degenerate into the collision of self with its imposter mirror image, the fight of “authenticity” with “pretense.”

But so it looked only from the perspective of intangible abstractions, a realm best fit for propaganda. Concretely, however, the war had already seen the first blood spilt and property destroyed, unfolding as the rules of the new tactics demanded; known as the *echelon* or *railroad war* (*eshelonnaia voina*), that novel technique for conducting military operations was perfectly captured by Nikolai Kakurin, a soldier and a historian of the Civil War.⁸⁵

Written with precision of an army report, his strategic portrait of the period deserves an extensive citation:

Against the backdrop of minor conflicts of purely local significance, occurrences of the greater import begin to manifest themselves: this happens when the struggle between the local forces is joined by other forces, which come from other directions or sectors, and which are related (*rodstvennye*) to one side or another. Owing to that the scale of events widens; then the military operations are timed (*priurochivaiutsia*) to certain directions, which as a rule coincide with the directions of the main railroad thoroughfares.

The small quantity of the active military forces of which both sides availed themselves to resolve problems of local significance coupled with their initial organizational weakness tied those forces to the rail-lines...

The paucity of engaged forces and the echelon character of the war create an impression of the extraordinary flexibility and mobility of maneuvering. “Armies” of few hundred men, riding in trains and therefore capable of quick concentration at the altogether unexpected directions, solve within few days the fate of the most complex and far-reaching operations.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Born in 1883, Kakurin was a colonel of the Russian Imperial Army when the Russian Revolution trumpeted the end of the war and with it the end of the army; unemployed and with the frontline troops in full disarray, he decided to try his luck first in the inchoate forces of Skoropadsky’s Ukrainian State; when it collapsed, he went on to serve in the Galician Army, engaged at the time in heavy fighting with the resurgent Poland. The occupation of Galicia forced him to join the Red Army, within whose ranks he commanded the 3rd Army during the ill-starred Polish Campaign of 1920. Ultimately, his political naiveté (or was it professional indifference?) did not stand him in good stead, making him into an exemplary target of the early Stalinist purges. He died in prison in 1936 from disease and mistreatment.

⁸⁶ Kakurin, *Kak srazhalas’ revoliutsiia*, v. 1, 155-156

The “echelon war” epitomized a striving to make do with what was at hand by giving some semblance of order to the flurry of *ad hoc* developments. It was a by-product of state attenuation and an homage to the corrosive powers of the revolutionary times – a type of a warfare bricolage *tout court*.

Judged from the carefully distilled world of the war maps, the entire Bolshevik undertaking against the Rada looked like an enthralling sprint from the rims of Ukraine inward with Kiev in the center as the much-coveted prize. In the west, that is, in the provinces closest to the frontline, the Bolsheviks attempted to profit from the demoralized troops trading trenches for home by keeping their movements within the time-grid of the planned operations. Recruited as many of them were from the heartland of Russia, soldiers billeted in Volhynia found the rumors of the Rada’s obstructionist measures sufficiently incensing to proceed against Lutsk (ukr. Luts’k) and Rovno in order to occupy those stations.⁸⁷ Yet, having quickly run out of steam, they let themselves be cowed by the troops of the former XXXIV Corps (I Ukrainian), who disarmed and dispersed the blundering attackers. Farther south, in the area of Zhmerinka (ukr. Zhmerynka), the bolshevized 2nd Guard Corps and the 2nd Finland division hovered menacingly over the Podolian transit arteries. Strong in numbers and still relatively disciplined, they were poised to advance as far as Znamenka and then, in strategic perspective, farther east to Don where they expected to sort out the quandary of Kaledin.⁸⁸ With few kilometers of advance behind, they balked on the threshold to Vinnitsa (Vinnytsia), tumbling over the unexpectedly spirited resistance from the Rada units there; losing a regiment to the act of disarmament, the units retreated in mid December to their original

⁸⁷ Tynchenko, *Ukrains’ki zbroini syly*, 23, 25-27

⁸⁸ Kakurin, *Kak srazhalas’ revoliutsiia*, v. 1, 164-165

positions.⁸⁹ Following this discomfiture some of the armed men left precipitously; the rest lolled in the area till January 10 (23), 1918, when the Bolshevik-inspired uprising of the railways employees provided them with a second chance, realized this time around, to occupy the Volhynian capital.⁹⁰

If anything, the sporadic attempts to gain control over Podolian and Volhynian towns demonstrated how far the soldiers of the once respectable Russian Imperial Army had fallen. Insofar as the fighting was concerned, the Russian troops heading north and west were worse than pitiful; the units at the disposal of the Rada easily bested them, yet less by dint of the superior discipline, as one Austrian observer believed to have explained,⁹¹ than simply by virtue of being closer to their native grounds. Although producing no impact on the outcome of the war, these largely bloodless clashes between the pro-Bolshevik and pro-Rada forces merit mentioning for giving the foretaste of power to the individual who in one year's time would come to dominate the surrounding terrain – Nikofor (or Nychypir) Grigoriev. An appointed commissar of the Central Rada in one recently Ukrainized regiment, he gathered at the Zdolbunov junction 150 daredevils and led them against the garrison at Rovno on the night of January 12, 1918 (December 30, 1917). The attackers carried the day, taking hold of the city along with the countless wads of the azure five-ruble notes that the Bolsheviks amassed for their Headquarters at Mogilev. How Grigoriev's band disposed of the money is not known, but Rovno in any event fell back into the hands of the Bolsheviks the very next

⁸⁹ Tynchenko, *Ukrains'ki zbroini syly*, 28

⁹⁰ Bosh, 191

⁹¹ PA Karton 1041 Die Ukraina. Ueberblick über die wirtschaftliche, historische, politische und militärische Entwicklung

day.⁹² Small as it may have been, the feat of Grigoriev did not pass unnoticed as he was to find out months later when the reestablished Rada compensated him with a high rank in the yet non-existing Ukrainian army.

In stark contrast to such lackluster performance in the Right-bank Ukraine, in the east the forces allied to the Bolsheviks acted with speed and perseverance which brought them the sought-after triumph. This was no accident, for the Kharkov regime, in the absence of other means, had to rely on the individuals who did not welter in the war fatigue of their frontline compatriots; made up of the local Red Guardsmen and the gun-toting volunteers from central Russia, they demonstrated their combined worth before the SR-Bolshevik Kievan exiles had a chance to gather breath and reflect upon their changed circumstances. On December 9, 1918, hundreds of the militants from VEK and the Shimansky metalworking factory united with the recently arrived crew of the sailors sans fleet commanded by Nikolai Khovrin and a much larger unit of Rudolf Sievers (Sivers), a Petrograd scion of the Baltic German family. They besieged and took a casern with the parked armored autos, appropriating its valuable contents to the accolades from their Party patrons.⁹³ Encouraged by this success, the Red Guards went on to disarm the 2nd Reserve Ukrainian Regiment known for its pro-Rada (“chauvinist” in the Bolshevik terminology of the time) disposition. The detachment, a prodigious body of few thousand armed men, offered only a token resistance, surrendering as soon as the two companies from within its own ranks opened fire at their fellow-soldiers. With this last bastion of the Rada’s support reduced to a helpless addle crowd, the 300 Bolshevik breakaways formed a new unit, the modest beginnings of which hardly measured

⁹² Tynchenko, *Ukrains'ki zbroini syly*, 28-29

⁹³ Tynchenko, *Ukrain'ski zbroini syly*, 30; Doroshenko, v. 1, 225

up to its long and eventful history. Entrusted to Vitaly Primakov, they took the name of the “Red Cossacks” (*Chervone Kozaki*) – in a conscious gesture of questioning the monopoly of the Free Cossacks over the “Cossack myth” with its protective aura.⁹⁴

Together, the Kharkov Red Guards, Primakov’s Red Cossacks, Siever’s “flying unit” (*letuchii otriad*) and the Moscow volunteers led by the former captain Pavel Egorov constituted the core of the Soviet forces in the region. In harmony with their piebald origin and appearance, they progressed in no single direction, with some troops engaged against Kalidin’s Don and others fighting the Rada government. A certain unity of purpose was imposed with the arrival of Kremlin’s principal troubleshooter, Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko, whose cumbersome title of the People’s Commissar for the Struggle against the Counterrevolution in the South of Russia divulged both the extent and the vagueness of his prerogatives. Author of the overarching strategic plan, Antonov charged Mikhail Muraviev, his Chief-of-Staff, with the execution of its Ukrainian part. The nominally distinct Ukrainian Executive Committee limited itself to coloring the war with the Rada in national hues, its incursions into the operational realm inevitably kept at the level of suggestions. Yet, even in that advisory capacity the Kharkov Bolsheviks rarely challenged Antonov’s choices, trying as they did to keep up with the pace of Muraviev’s small army.

In all fairness to the Bolsheviks in Kharkov, it is worth noting that Antonov could have not found a leader for the Ukrainian troops more intractable than Muraviev even if he were deliberately looking for one. A member of the Left S-R party, Muraviev offered his services

⁹⁴ “Iz istorii Sovvlasti na Ukraine,” 183-184

to Lenin's government in Petrograd as it was still writhing in the post-birth convulsions.⁹⁵ This war-time officer, whom life in trenches endowed in equal measure with wounds, ranks and decorations, was undoubtedly a courageous and a gifted soldier, but those traits seemed more like transient shades cast by the permanent figures of illimitable ambition and unbridled violence. His was indeed the world of Manichean struggle, one in which he assumed the role of Virtue's faithful lieutenant, called forth by History itself to be pitiless towards the partisans of Vice. In Poltava, for example, he ordered "to slaughter without mercy all defenders of local bourgeoisie,"⁹⁶ an injunction that, though not carried out verbatim, cost tens of captured cadets their lives.⁹⁷ Trotting on the outskirts of Kiev but already savoring the taste of its immanent fall, the Bolshevik "Commander-in-Chief" (as Muraviev liked to call himself) admonished his soldiers to be firm lest they show signs of dispensable humanity toward their enemy. Destroyed were to be "all officers and cadets, haidamaks, monarchists and all the enemies of revolution"⁹⁸ and so it was, in fact, that when the Bolshevik "bands" finally entered the prostrate city on January 27 (February 9), 1918, many of its residents were made to forget, in the words of one observer, "the nightmare and horror of the [preceding] nine-day long bombardment."⁹⁹ Hundreds if not thousands of officers, students or otherwise suspiciously looking bystanders were murdered in front of Muraviev's Headquarters and in the Mariinsky Park nearby, their naked bodies left to rot for days on, consigned but to the questionable care of stray dogs.¹⁰⁰ Riding on the coattails of the

⁹⁵ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski o Grazhdanskoi voine* (Moscow: Vysshii Voennyi Sovet, 1924-1933) v. 1, 78-80

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, v. 1, 136

⁹⁷ Tynchenko, *Ukrain'ski zbroini syly*, 71

⁹⁸ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 1, 153

⁹⁹ N. Mogiliansky, "Tragediia Ukrainy" in *1918 god na Ukraine*, S. Volkov, ed. (Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf: 2001), 32

¹⁰⁰ P. Stefanovich, "Pervye zhertvy Bol'shevistskogo massovogo terrora" in *1918 god na Ukraine*, ed. S. Volkov (Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf, 2001), 25; although no precise figures are available, the number of dead varies between 3 and 5 thousand persons, murdered within one week of Muraviev's presence in Kiev.

army into their new capital, the People's Secretariat attempted to remonstrate with the excesses of the Red Guardsmen, but succeeded only in adducing some pro-forma rebukes that the all-powerful chief addressed his men.¹⁰¹ Hardly softened by such belated mea culpa, Muraviev's reign of arbitrary terror ended only when the events around Odessa compelled him and his riffraff troops to abandon Kiev for the prospects of new exploits opening up on the Black Sea shores.

Before Muraviev could set out eastward along the Kharkov-Kiev railway, a 1300-strong assemblage from the Red Guards of Kharkov and Moscow under the united command of Pavel Egorov seized the key junction of Lozovaia, Pavlograd and Sinelnikovo (between December 30 (17), 1917 and January 1 (Dec 19, 1917), 1918)¹⁰² and after a few days of repose rolled straight on to Yekaterinoslav. From January 3 (Dec 22) onward this bristling city of 250 thousand residents became the scene of dogged street fights pitting local worker militias from the Briansky, pipe manufacturing and other factories against the Rada supporters in the guise of the haidamaks and the Free Cossacks.¹⁰³ Rather characteristically the regular units stationed there resolved to abstain from the conflict, attending quietly for a convenient moment when one of the sides could provide them with the indisputable proof of its ascendancy. Six days later, with victory careening mercurially from one side to another, the arrival of Egorov's men finally adjudicated the sanguinary debate in Bolshevik favor. The next stop on the itinerary, Aleksandrovsk, fell on January 2 (15), 1918 to one of Egorov's adjutants, who then duly incorporated the so-called "free combat retinue" of the notorious Marusia (Mariia) Nikoforova into the ranks of the pro-Kharkov forces. From that

¹⁰¹ Bosh, 206

¹⁰² Antonov-Ovseekno, *Zapiski*, v. 1, 73-74

¹⁰³ Lobodaev, 175

time the first Bolshevik contacts with another regional celebrity, Nestor Makhno, a kind of revolutionary pontiff in his native Gulai-Pole, marching at the head of the peasant column to Alexandrovsk to settle scores with the entrapped urban bourgeoisie.¹⁰⁴ Yet, in contrast to Marusia, sailing unhindered from place to place as an urban brigand with the invisible banner of the revolutionary *Umwertung aller Werte* unfurled high aloft, Makhno did not follow the Red Guards, tied to the place as much by reason of unresolved conflicts in the countryside as by the angst in the face of Cossack echelons approaching from the fronts of the increasingly irrelevant war.¹⁰⁵

In the end, the attack on Kiev assumed the form of a baleful trident. On January 7 (20) Egorov brought his troops back to Muraviev, whose own offensive consisted in disarming “the Ukrainian garrisons unwilling to fight with whoever it was.”¹⁰⁶ In this manner fell Poltava, Romodan, Kremenchug, Lubny and finally Grebenka junction, bringing Muraviev’s agglomerate army within less than 100 miles from their final destination. On the north the brunt of the war was borne by the regiments of Reinhold Berzin and the so-called “unit of special purpose” of Andrei Znamensky; the former, commanding the unstable construction from the Siberian shards of the erstwhile Imperial army, set out from Gomel toward Bakhmach, capturing the city without encountering resistance on January 14 (27), 1918.¹⁰⁷ The Red Guards of Znamensky, who apparently left Moscow “on their own initiative,”¹⁰⁸ arrived to Ukraine’s north-eastern border just in time to supply the last props and the few missing extras before the drama of Hellenic intensity could regale the taste of the ‘nationally-

¹⁰⁴ Makhno, *Spovid’ anarkhista*, 138ff

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*, 152ff

¹⁰⁶ Kakurin, *Kak srazhalas’ revoliutsiia*, v. 1, 166

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*, v. 1, 166

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*, v. 1, 165

conscious' posterity. On the 16th (29th) of January all three columns of Muraviev's army (led, respectively, by Egorov, Berzin and Znamensky) closed in around Kruty railway station where the few companies of the cadets, university students and grammar school pupils, 420 men *in toto*, decided to make their stand.¹⁰⁹ Here, after a couple of hours of confused shooting, the youngsters betrayed and abandoned from the get-go by their commanding officers, found themselves surrounded by the overwhelming Bolshevik forces and were compelled to retreat, leaving 36 prisoners at the victor's mercy. The losses among the Rada's defenders must have certainly been high, and yet, they were far from being "completely annihilated" in the style of the three-hundred Spartans – a myth, cherished by the political exiles and diasporic historians.¹¹⁰ Exaggerated too was the strategic significance of the "Ukrainian Thermopiles" with the Bolsheviks showing no signs of fatigue throughout the remaining days of campaign. They reached the threshold of Kiev on January 23 (February 5) to discover it astir with the throngs of the haidamaks and the Red Guards combating each other in and around Arsenal. The city was then subjected to a thorough and skillful bombardment and finally surrendered when the Ukrainized units, neutral for the time being, began to flock over to the Bolshevik side. The departure of autos with the Rada ministers on the night of January 26 (February 8) signaled the end of the war, or at least the closing of its first act, for neither the Bolsheviks rapt in their triumph, nor their opponents immersed in the visions of German deliverance could safely count on the fidelity of ever-equivocating Future.

¹⁰⁹ Tynchenko, *Ukrain'ski zbroini syly*, 81

¹¹⁰ Literature on Kruty and its myth is too extensive to be reduced to a footnote; suffice it to say that without belittling the heroic idealism of the Ukrainian youth, modern historians bring down the total losses to 50 dead and perhaps 60 wounded (the number of those who lost their lives include the 29 individuals, captured and murdered in the immediate wake of the battle). Tynchenko, *Ukrain'ski zbroini syly*, 86

On the surface the result of the conflict appears nothing short of surprising: the Rada in Kiev, formally supported by hundreds of thousands of well-armed soldiers, distributed among the plethora of Ukrainized divisions, succumbed to the onslaught of a few thousand Red Guardsmen, many of whom were receiving their first schooling in war-making as they went. The problem with the Rada was precisely in that reliance on the army at the time of its accelerated disintegration. The Ukrainian (or Ukrainized) *frontovik* was chary to fight; moreover, he found his position in the army increasingly onerous, the fact that, combined with the absence of the binding power of the officers, made his desertion a simple question of time. “The weak resistance offered by the Rada in the struggle against the Bolsheviks,” reported an Austrian council one month after Kiev’s fall, “reveal that none of the forces of the country (*Kräftegruppen des Landes*) stand decidedly behind it. The few available troops were strongly afflicted by Bolshevism (*waren stark bolschewikisch durchwühlt*) and failed in parts completely.”¹¹¹ Categorical, the judgment of the Austrian diplomat found enough examples in the conduct of the regiments stationed in Kiev, Odessa and beyond to make it into a near-truism.

Prominent Ukrainian economist and a defense minister at the time of Bolshevik offensive Mykola Porsh was not alone in recognizing the fateful shortcomings of the army, when, raising his voice in lament, he placed the hope for the Rada’s salute squarely with the Free Cossack volunteers.¹¹² For months on such emblematic figures of the Ukrainian national Left as Mykhailo Hrushevsky, Volodymyr Vynnychenko and Symon Petliura took many opportunities to speak out against regular armed forces, convinced in their early roseate anti-

¹¹¹ PA Liasse XI Karton 152 Bericht über die politische Lage in der Ukraine, Kiev, 12. März, zu Czernin, von Konsul von Hoffinger

¹¹² Doroshenko, v. 1, 279

militarism that the volunteer militia complied better both with the revolutionary tasks at hand and the Ukrainian national character.¹¹³ The same idea entered with lapidarian precision into the text of the Fourth Universal, that crowning achievement of the Rada's legislative term. "[I]n lieu of the standing army (*postiinoi armiiu*)," it proclaimed, "[we are committed] to introduce people's militia, so that our host (*nashe viisko*) would serve the purpose of defending the working masses and not the vagaries of the dominant classes."¹¹⁴ Yet, the Rada remained heedless of its own recommendations, being compelled, as the most obvious heir to the toppled Provisional government, to *act like the proper state* when its radical eradication was so vividly embossed on the agenda of the day.

By the same token, the Bolsheviks – being more the Party than the State, more the Spirit than even the Party – were in a better position to seek the alternatives to the state and the army. In Ukraine, where – in spite of what they might have asserted – they embodied the mutineer faction arrayed against the government, the Bolsheviks worked in the direction indicated by the vector of decay. Dissolving armies and fronts, abolishing distinctions and authorities, the Bolsheviks rallied to their cause not only the explicitly anarchist elements akin to the brigades of Nikiforova or the Black Guards of Yekaterinoslav, but also the forces of latent disintegration – most obviously the workers' militias. "All my victories in Ukraine," Muraviev cabled to Lenin, "the taking of Kiev I owe to the Red Guard but not to the soldiers, who brought me and the People's Commissar Antonov plenty of inconveniences in our efforts to form and organize the South-Western front."¹¹⁵ Everywhere entropy held sway at

¹¹³ Lobodaev, 95-100

¹¹⁴ See full text in Vynnychenko, 332; it is hard to render the word *viisko* correctly, but the difference with the word *armiiu* is clear to the extent that it is intentional.

¹¹⁵ TsDAHO f 57 op 2 d 150 ll 35-38

the order's expense, and, in the manner more metaphorical and ritualistic than many of its observers were willing to admit, the terrible slaughter staged by the Bolshevik forces in Kiev feted that ultimate triumph of the purposeful *Entstaatlichung* over the vestiges of Imperial statehood.

Yet, no adherent of latent disintegration proved of greater service to the Bolsheviks than the Ukrainian village, engrossed in its own developments and uncompromisingly deaf to the urban drama nearby.

Intermission: Impressions of the Bolshevik Domination in Ukraine

“On the morning of January 26 Bolsheviks entered the city. They remained in Kiev only for three weeks and that first image of the Bolshevism that we beheld in such a short period of time was not bereft of brilliance and of certain demonic force.” Speaking with the mildly camouflaged admiration, Aleksei Gol'denveizer, a Kievan jurist, thought less of the Bolshevik Party than of the conquering army and its commander, “the legendary colonel Muraviev.”¹¹⁶ This Left S-R band leader became in essence the embodiment of the Bolshevik authority in Kiev elevating through word and deed the continuance of ‘pitiless’ terror to the top in the priority list of the so-called ‘Bolshevik politics.’ With the excise of power bared of all the mediating layers to its irreducible (and admittedly morbid) core, the remaining issues seemed easy to resolve, left as they were to the simple and aboveboard arbitration of a gun.

¹¹⁶ A. Gol'denveizer, “Iz Kievskikh vospominanii” in *1918 god na Ukraine*, 79-81

Kiev now teemed with the armed servitors of the new order – or, given the plight of city, of the new disorder. The Red Guardsmen and the grim-looking subjects in the navy blue jackets with emblems of their maritime provenance patrolled the streets of the subdued metropolis, antic guards too anxious to indemnify themselves for the years of want and oppression to be wheedled away by the concerns for civic security. In the open or through the crannies of their concealments, residents observed with trepidation as cars and phaetons drove by, carrying Muraviev’s subordinates to the venues of lark and debauchery.¹¹⁷ No one felt sure in their presence, not even members of Ukraine’s nominal government, the People’s Secretariat of the recently founded republic. Yevgeniia Bosh, for example, recalled how on the day of her arrival to Kiev she and her colleagues were accosted by the group of five or six armed men, who, their guns directed point blank at the apprehended party, commanded them to raise their hands and began searching for the identity papers. Bosh’s position as Ukraine’s Secretary of the Internal Affairs did not baffle those overzealous “inspectors” in the slightest; unperturbed, they finished their business, leaped back into their auto and speeded away without expressing apology let alone remorse.¹¹⁸

For as long as Muraviev hovered around, the Bolshevik-SR coalition in the Secretariat had to contend themselves with the role of a ghost government. His departure, however, added neither to their prestige nor efficiency. The city needed a force of 4,000 men for the maintenance of order, a demand that the Bolsheviks had no hope of meeting.¹¹⁹ Their failure, wrote Nikolai Mogiliansky, an ethnographer who swapped his tenure in Petrograd for a political exile in Kiev, meant that “burglaries counted in hundreds every night, [b]urglaries

¹¹⁷ N. Mogiliansky, “Tragediia Ukrainy” in *1918 god na Ukraine*, 34

¹¹⁸ Bosh, 210

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*, 210

accompanied by insults, humiliations, abuse of all kinds [leveled at] the most unassuming and inoffensive dweller classified (*qualifié*) as a ‘bourgeois’.”¹²⁰ The inhabitants were left to face the endemic crime on their own and had to deal with the bandits according to the temperament or circumstances, with some succumbing into apathy and others, on the contrary, opting for an active resistance. Self-defense units sprung up to life, usually organized by the special housing committees responsible for the procurement of weapons, selection of the officers and the drawing up of duty schedules for the residents. Although mostly neighborhood-bound, formations such as the “Georgian free squad” represented a type of a mobile guard-on-call, promptly arriving girt for war to the location in distress.¹²¹ Involving at times tens of individuals from either side, the clashes between the armed citizens and the assailants approached antecedent street melees not only in form but also in content, insofar as they sustained the still unresolved power conflict just a notch below the level of the Bolshevik official presence.

Swarmed by solicitous crowds, entrapped within the routine of daily management, the Soviet government had little control over the comportment of the city revkoms and commissariats established pell-mell in the commotion of the preceding months.¹²² Some of those municipal governments took on rather grotesque appearances of the quasi-medieval fiefdoms wholly given over to the vagrancies of a Red Guard *primus*. According to Mogiliansky’s short memoirs, the town of Glukhov (ukr. Hlukhiv) exemplified precisely that category. A vibrant district center of the Chernigov province, the place had a misfortune of falling into the hands

¹²⁰ GARF f 5787 o 1 d 31 l 2

¹²¹ N. Mogiliansky, “Tragediia Ukrainy” in *1918 god na Ukraine*, 33-34

¹²² Bosh gives an evocative account of the conditions under which functioned the People’s Secretariat and of the insuperable challenges it faced during its brief sojourn in power (Bosh, 205-242)

of a certain Tsyganok, another Kronshtadt sailor of questionable sanity. His brief rule, a chain of “indescribable horrors,” reached its odious climax when Tsyganok resolved to slaughter children of the murdered landlords – out of persuasion that the “bourgeois” convictions would flourish in their midst like the inherited character traits. A mishandled bomb ultimately stopped him from carrying out such experiments in social pruning; exploding in Tsyganok’s hands *la machine infernale* dispatched him straight to the pantheon of revolutionary martyrs while delivering Glukhov’s dwellers from the agony of their own domestic hell.¹²³

Glukhov’s was an extreme case. On the other end of the spectrum stood the Bolshevik authorities of Yekaterinoslav, who seemed to have succeeded in imposing some order after defeating their opponents. Ensclosed in the city, whither he was driven by the increasingly hostile countryside of the Kherson province, Hans Limbach recalled how surprised he was to discover “that the same forces, the Bolsheviks with their Red Guards, which menaced our existence in the hinterland, here came to signify our protection, even saving our lives once.”¹²⁴ No doubt, the fact that most of the militiamen were recruited from the workers of local factories played its role in shaping Bolshevik thinking and their conduct, but so did their ongoing competition with the brigades of the self-styled Anarchists. Although both the Bolsheviks and their black banner-waving allies held it for their sacred duty to live off the city “bourgeoisie,” the latter developed a tendency to fall upon shops in broad daylight, bringing the commerce of this trading hub to a standstill. The Bolshevik authorities had none of this; apologists of imposing scheduled ‘contributions’ upon their victims, they tried to

¹²³ N. Mogiliansky, “Tragediia Ukrainy” in *1918 god na Ukraine*, 34

¹²⁴ Limbach, 74

keep their partners within limits through cajolment and threats, but it was to little avail. In the end, however, despairing at the anarchists' recalcitrance, the Bolsheviks restored civic self-defense squads, whom they had helped in dismantling earlier.¹²⁵ By drawing the line separating the 'legitimate' means of extortion from the 'illicit' ones, the newly established powers evolved into the defenders of public security – in a rather circuitous fashion and perhaps even despite themselves.

All in all, in towns and cities the Bolshevik clout was most commonly restrained by the presence of other groups and institutions with a stake in public management. As in the aforementioned instance of Yekaterinoslav, the anarchist groups would frequently divulge themselves to the terrified public as the uncouth and gun-wielding emissaries of the new dawn. To be sure, few of them employed concepts required for the sustenance of authority and even the Bolsheviks had to admit that the “flag of anarchism” was often used as a cover-up for “the common criminals.”¹²⁶ In addition to that brand new species of political animals, the Bolsheviks had to reckon with the extant components of the administrative apparatus inherited from the old regime and left to handle the issues that the Bolsheviks were unable or unwilling to handle themselves. City Dumas kept on operating in Kharkov, Kiev and most of the provincial capitals with land committees standing just a rung below; Polish, Jewish and German organs of self-rule formed networks of their own as they attended to the interests of their respective communities. What is more, short of cadres, the Bolsheviks had to rely on the state employees of the ousted Rada despite the fact that the latter, in the acrimonious remark of Yevgeniia Bosh, “made the vilest (*gnusneishee*) impression and inspired

¹²⁵ *ibid.*, 76-78

¹²⁶ TsDAHO f 57 o 2 d 209 l 50

absolutely no confidence among the majority of comrades.”¹²⁷ This cohabitation and even collaboration between the antagonistic elements, a regrettable but necessary concession from the Bolshevik point of view, created a unique atmosphere, wherein some observers could even descry a certain charm. Thus, invoking the image of Bolshevik soldiers sauntering alongside the banished landlords through the boroughs of Starokonstantinov, Zofia Kossak-Szczucka felt the need to resort to a simile: “Between the Bolsheviks of the earlier years and those that followed lay so great a difference as between a regular stray dog and a dog touched by rabies.”¹²⁸

The Bolsheviks commanded the strongest presence in Kharkov and in Kiev, although even there it was compromised by the constant factional strife. It grew weaker as one moved away from the capital cities to the provincial centers and then still farther down to the district towns. In the hinterland, away from the main arteries, the impact of the Bolshevik government was as good as nonexistent. Skirted by the contesters, the village was accustoming itself to living on its own, a situation evocatively described in the memoirs of Mykola Kovalevs’ky. One of the leading members of the Ukrainian S-R party and a convinced opponent of the Bolsheviks, he was on his way to joining his comrades as soon as he heard the news of the approaching German troops. His path went through the territory controlled by the Red Guards, yet, wisely warned against putting too much trust in the railroad, he left his train at Znamenka and completed the rest of the journey in a sledge. On the outskirts of the first large village he was stopped by a group of armed men, whom he had to explain the where’s and the why’s of his travels. He soon realized that he stood in front of

¹²⁷ Bosh, 213

¹²⁸ Kossak, 75

the local militia organized “to preempt brawls and robberies.” Feeling sufficiently assuaged by this discovery, Kovalevs’ky quizzed his interrogators about their political leanings – i.e. whether they were for the Central Rada or for the Bolsheviks. “We recognize neither of the two (*ni tych, ni druhykh*),” they answered, a smirk of superiority on their faces. “We only preserve order in our village.”¹²⁹

Later that day Kovalevs’ky was received by a peasant eager to cull out whatever information his guest possessed about the world outside the village. In his own turn the peasant apprised Kovalevs’ky that

There were no Bolsheviks in that village. Our welcoming host told us that the Bolsheviks never appeared in other villages either... Everybody lived by rumors and daily awaited the arrival of news. Combined with the lack of reliable information, this detachment of our villages left its mark: people were disoriented and did not know what they needed to do. This is why they limited themselves to addressing the most urgent issues, such as defense of the village from the bandits... But since it was unknown which regime would come tomorrow, [the villagers] behaved with shrewdness (*trymalysia khytro*), without revealing their convictions, cleaving rather to the ‘none of my business’ principle (*moia khata skraiu*).¹³⁰

In the Bolshevik language that meant that the “real Sovietization” failed to take roots in 1918, being postponed for another year until the “second coming of the Soviet power” lay a firmer groundwork for the integration of the countryside into the nascent polity.¹³¹

It would be unfair to say that the village sequestered itself from the drama of the echelon war to the point where it might be immune to the temptation of synchronizing its own development against the results of the struggle. Yet, the reigning misinformation made the

¹²⁹ Mykola Kovalevs’ky, *Pry dzherelakh borot’by: spomyny, vrazhennia, refleksii* (Innsbruck, 1960), 461-462

¹³⁰ *ibid.*, 462

¹³¹ “Iz istorii Sovvlasti na Ukraine,” 176

exercise of keeping abreast of changes in Kiev appear risible. The peasants of the Kherson province, claimed Limbach, had great difficulties distinguishing the pro-Rada haidamaks from the Red Guard, reading in the red pompons of the haidamak cap messages of their Bolshevik disposition.¹³² Maria Dunin-Kozicka remembered too how the residents of her native Tarashcha district reacted to the news of the Bolshevik triumph. Her diary entry from February 1 (14), 1918 contained the following passage:

This morning a great peasant assembly took place voting pro and contra the Bolsheviks. Peasants asked each other, ‘What sort of people are those Bolsheviks? What do they give and what do they want?’ Some would answer, ‘Who they are – we don’t know! They sit in Kiev and give the land of the lords for free to the people. [Since] they conquered the Central Rada, who are we going to listen to?’

Faced with the disconcertingly rapid succession of events, the villagers were primarily interested in having their recent gains legitimated by whatever regime that was currently in power. Bearing that in mind, added Dunin-Kozicka, “the largest part of the village signed up (zapisala się) for the Bolshevik party” as if hedging one’s bets and propitiating spirits of the unknown.¹³³

In those villages where the Bolsheviks did make an appearance, the relationships between them and the peasants could be tense, at times even hostile. According to Limbach, the Red Guards near Nikolo-Kozel’sk got off to a very bad start after letting their leader declaim against the bourgeois essence of the peasantry and then clamor for its immediate extirpation. This speech reaching solicitous ears, the peasants hurried to their rifles lest the Bolshevik firebrand carry out his intention.¹³⁴ Yet, more than such careless remarks, the villagers

¹³² Limbach, 24

¹³³ Dunin-Kozicka, 78

¹³⁴ Limbach, 40

chafed at the comportment of the pro-Bolshevik troops, finding the practice of “arbitrary requisitions” (*samochnnye rekvizitsii*) particularly vexing. In the region of Yelisavetgrad (ukr. Yelysavethrad), for example, presence of Marusia Nikiforova with her chaps, much too unrestrained even for their own anarchist good, resulted in a full-blown rebellion. Although it started in the city itself, peasants from the neighboring villages began to flock to the insurgents’ secour as soon as they discovered that they are fighting Marusia herself. The prospects of complete annihilation looming over her, Marusia took to her heels in the direction of Muraviev’s troops.¹³⁵ Naturally, units of Marusia’s type contributed little to the legitimacy of the Kharkov regime in the Ukrainian countryside; instead, looking more like autonomous raiding parties than the vanguard formations of the regular army, they gave substance to such Rada-issued pamphlets, which bid peasantry of the Uman and Yelisavetgrad districts to stand up “in defense of the revolutionary conquests against the Bolshevik predatory bands and the bourgeoisie.”¹³⁶

The four months that the Bolsheviks stayed in Ukraine was one uninterrupted race in which the participants would switch alternatively from being the pursuers to being pursued. Too short to merit the name of the rule, their term in power bore all the signs of the true interregnum, as Colin Ross, the Foreign Service liaison officer and a well-known war-zone tourist, noted in his “Impressions in the Ukraine” submitted to the Ober Ost Command on March 10, 1918. Spending preceding twenty days in the Bavarian Corps of General Knörzer as it advanced from Lutsk to Zhitomir, he compared what he saw with the Mexican

¹³⁵ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 2, 65-68

¹³⁶ *ibid.*, v. 2, 39-40

circumstances on the morrow of Victoriano Huerta's fall (1914). Further he graphically elaborated:

The land is divided into separate dominions (Herrschaftsbereiche), which spread over districts, cities, partially even only market towns and villages. The authority (Herrschaftsgewalt) there is in the hands of the most diverse party groups as well as political adventurers and dictators. There are villages which surrounded themselves with trenches, waging war against each other over a piece of expropriated land. There are atamans, who carved spheres of influence (Machtsphären) for themselves at certain places, where they rule with an assistance of life guards and mercenary troops. They dispose of machine guns, cannons and armored autos since weapons are scattered all across the country.¹³⁷

In perspective, the instability of the first post-revolutionary winter could have ossified into a kind of warlord particularism, which would come to dominate the Ukrainian political landscape in 1919 and, to a lesser extent, 1920. That this did not take place owes to the arrival of the Germans and, more specifically, to the fact that the vital interests of the Central Powers were inextricably linked with the reestablishment of the functioning and pervasive administrative apparatus on the occupied territories.

Part III: Austro-German Intervention and Bolshevik Efforts at Organizing Resistance

The locomotive-propelled advance of the Red Guards, spectacular though it might have been, ultimately proved to be a little more than a sideshow to the peace negotiations that set the beribboned and bemedaled delegates of the Austro-German coalition against the tie- and tuxedo-clad Bolshevik "parvenus." Choosing Brest-Litovsk as a meeting place, they put aside their sartorial differences (despite the loud symbolism thereof) to make space for the discussion of differences in geopolitics. It turned out to be a drawn-out affair, with Germans

¹³⁷ R 14362 Bericht über Eindrücke in der Ukraine, von Oblt. d. Res. Colin Ross; Verbindungsoffizier der militärischen Stelle des Auswärtigen Amtes.

insisting on obtaining parts of Poland, Lithuania and Courland and their opponents adhering with tenacity to the unprecedented diplomatic formula of “peace without annexations and contributions.”¹³⁸ It was certain that from a purely military standpoint the Central Powers could impose their terms as victors in the war, but the Bolsheviks, quite correctly, counted on the disagreements between the allies and, in particular, on the desire of the Austro-Hungarian government to obtain the treaty with Russia at the earliest prospect, perhaps even without consulting its senior partner. With its population starving, industry paralyzed by strikes, army command fighting for the last vestiges of strategic autonomy, the Danube Monarchy was hardly in the position, as the Emperor Charles wryly remarked, “to go on fighting simply in order that Germany should receive Lithuania and Courland as prizes of victory.”¹³⁹

The arrival of the Rada emissaries to Brest-Litovsk introduced a number of new considerations into the complex welter of negotiable issues. Oleksandr Sevriuk, Mykola Liubin'sky and Mykola Levits'ky were dispatched by the government of Vsevolod Holubovich to plead with Count Czernin, the Austrian Foreign Minister, for the immediate help against the Bolsheviks.¹⁴⁰ Ukraine with its inestimable resources, its rich agriculture and developed ore and coal industries was the payment offered for the liberation and neither the Germans nor their Habsburg ally were so dimmed by their private concerns as to let this opportunity go unexploited. They pounced upon it with great speed, signing a separate treaty with the Ukrainian People's Republic on February 9, 1918, and recognizing the latter as a distinct political player. Simultaneously they regulated the amount of raw materials that Ukraine would have to procure for the Central Powers and settled the proportions in which

¹³⁸ Fritz Fischer, *Germany's aims in the First World War* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1967), 487 ff

¹³⁹ cited in Fischer, 497

¹⁴⁰ Doroshenko, v. 1, 296

those deliveries would be divided between the allies.¹⁴¹ Trotsky's last-ditched attempt to place four delegates from the "other" – i.e. Bolshevik – Ukraine at the negotiation table in hopes of confounding seasoned diplomats foundered ignominiously after the Major-General Max Hoffman, the representative of the German High Command (OHL) at the parleys, unambiguously offered the selfsame individuals to return whence they came.¹⁴² His other diplomatic ruses missing the mark, the Head of the Soviet Delegation decided to break off the talks throwing his "no war, no peace!" utterance in lieu of a more ceremonious farewell at the stunned audience of ministers and generals. At that point, the evidence of Bolshevik intransigence in their hands and the implorations from Sevriuk and Co growing more stentorian every minute, the Germans believed to possess an excuse sufficiently strong to proceed with the military intervention.

On February 18, 1918 the German troops of Colonel-General Alexander von Linsingen began their progress in the direction of Lutsk, Rovno and Zhitomir. The Austrians were abstaining at first, but, warned that they might forfeit their share of the spoils should they remain inactive, grudgingly joined ten days later.¹⁴³ "The march," wrote Rudolf Kiszling, an Austrian participant and a historian of these events, "was characterized ... as the movement (*Vorrückung*) on and along the tracks," mirroring in reverse the previous advancement of the Bolshevik forces.¹⁴⁴ From its outset, the Austro-German offensive (in reality two separate military undertakings) revealed that the remaining rump of the Russian Army accounted to

¹⁴¹ R 14360 Friedensvertrag zwischen Deutschland, Oesterreich-Ungarn, Bulgarien und der Türkei einerseits und der Ukrainischen Volksrepublik andererseits, 9.2.18; KA Alfred Krauß B/60 Nr 11 „Die Ukraine“; Erde, 211

¹⁴² Erde, 218

¹⁴³ M. Rauchensteiner, „Oesterreich-Ungarn“ in *Encykopädie Erster Weltkrieg*, ed. Gerhard Hirschfeld, Gerd Krumeich and Irina Renz, (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2012), 81

¹⁴⁴ KA Ms. Wk. R/1 Obstlt. Rudolf Kiszling, "Der österreich-ungarische Vormarsch in die Ukraine"

little more than a throng concentrated along the frontiers of the fallen Empire. Thus, with days of its glory long behind it, the “Brusilov’s” 8th Army clambered the cars of east-bound trains before coming into contact with the enemy. Armies of the Romanian Front, demoralized by the continuing harassments by the Romanian authorities, were forming lines of stragglers meandering back home through the Bessarabian and Podolian countryside.¹⁴⁵ Formations that stayed at their positions were duly disarmed, sometimes by units only a fraction of their size; such was, for instance, the fate of the three regiments of the Russian 78th Infantry Division (of the XXIX Corps) which surrendered their weapons to two puny companies of the Austro-Hungarian 54th Rifle division.

In the meantime enormous stocks of the war materiel, abandoned and unattended, fell into the hands of the forward-pressing Austro-German troops. The first three days of uninterrupted marching brought the XII Imperial and Royal Corps of the Lieutenant-General (*Feldzeugmeister*) von Braun into possession of 650 cannons, 700 ammunition wagons, 2100 machine guns, two airfields with airplanes, etc. In Kamenets-Podolsk, the spoils of this war without struggle rose by additional 300 cannons and 35 mortars.¹⁴⁶ Within less than two weeks of the operation, the Russian Army, once a central pillar of the Tsarist regime and now a substanceless register of losses and desertions, finally followed suit of its imperial patron.

Try as they might, the Bolshevik leaders had little success in holding on to the Army’s fragments. The role that they played in causing its dissolution, the manner whereby the conquest of power in Ukraine was accomplished, the anarchy, spreading in the streets and

¹⁴⁵ Antonov-Ovseenko, v. 2, 10

¹⁴⁶ KA Ms. Wk. R/1 Obstlt. Rudolf Kiszling, “Der österreich-ungarische Vormarsch in die Ukraine“

cutting to the quick of the dying state – all these factors put them at great disadvantage, that no caboodle of agitators could ever hope to offset. Antonov's desperate order to have the echelons of the 8th Army stopped at Kharkov, its soldiers disarmed and its officers sent to Donbas¹⁴⁷ had a ring of a biblical *Vox Clamantis* in it and was just as effective: the soviet of the army, charged with the execution of Antonov's instructions failed to do so and so the trains rolled on unimpeded, carrying their homesick and war-weary cargo away from the fields of the decisive battles.¹⁴⁸ The behavior of the professedly bolshevized troops equally left no room for optimism. Forgetting the lofty promises – if there were any made – the personnel of the 4th Artillery brigade (of the Romanian front) melted away, bequeathing upon the overwrought Bolshevik command scraps of inoperable guns; the fate of the 13th heavy artillery battalion followed the same trajectory.¹⁴⁹ Even the Latvian riflemen, whose commitment to the regime became the matter of encomiastic accounts and morbid tales (depending on the perspective) succumbed to the temptation of abandoning the crippled ship of Bolshevik power while it still drifted afloat; thus, with further resistance appearing as futile, both the 1st (Ust'-Dvinsk) and the 4th (Vidzeme) Latvian regiments decided to take off without any authorization to defend the Revolution where risks were lower and prospects brighter.¹⁵⁰

With the Army in the state of final disintegration and without the hope of retaining any remnants, the Bolsheviks had to fall back on the heterogeneous detachments of the Red Guards, sailors and nondescript daredevils, no more than 15,000 men altogether thinly

¹⁴⁷ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 2, 31

¹⁴⁸ GARF f r-8415 o 1 d 6 l 163

¹⁴⁹ Antonov-Ovseenko, v. 2, 44

¹⁵⁰ TsDAHO f 5 o 1 d 5 l 25; Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 2, 44

stretched between the Dniester's left embankment all the way to the Don River bend.¹⁵¹ Sufficient to defeat the Central Rada with its paper divisions, this force proved flat-out inadequate for the tasks at hand. Amateurs pitted against the top professionals, the Red Guards lacked discipline, leadership, knowledge of the terrain and the basic understanding of the tactical coordination. Their subordination to Antonov often being only of the most nominal nature, they operated, as Makhno attested in his memoirs, "at their own risk, frequently in the sectors where there was no adversary."¹⁵² This did not always result from the bad faith of the Red Guard commanders, more interested in their private aggrandizement (or salvation) than in the honest service to the common cause; rather, such abstention stemmed from a simple fact that very few, the Bolshevik leaders including, knew where the Germans exactly were, how fast they were progressing and whether they were coming in strength or were sending off only reconnoitering parties.¹⁵³

No doubt, many of the men fighting in the ranks of the Red Guards possessed great reserves of courage and self-sacrifice, but the first discouraging encounters against the superior numbers, superior technology and superior organization produced, to put it mildly, dampening effects on their spirits. Thus, after sustaining heavy losses at Kholodnaia Gora outside of Kharkov on April 8, troops began to clamor for the immediate decampment into the "rear" in order to get the "reinforcement" and go through "additional training;"¹⁵⁴ mass-rallies (*mitingovanie*) with identical requests took place on March 31 in the 1st Kharkov

¹⁵¹ Kakurin, *Kak zrazhalas' Revoliutsiia*, v. 1, 177

¹⁵² Makhno, *Spovid' anarkhista*, 220

¹⁵³ On the state of Bolshevik misinformation, see Erde, 187ff; Bosh, 235, 265ff; Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 2, 18; memoirs add a personal touch, A. Gol'denveizer, "Iz Kievskikh vospominanii" in *1918 god na Ukraine*, 83; Limbach, 87-90 (his conversation with Serafima Gopner, one of the leading Bolsheviks of Yekaterinoslav), etc.

¹⁵⁴ I. Lokotosh, "Kharkovskie kommunity v boiakh s nemtsami", *Letopis' Revoliutsii* v. 3 (1924), 77-78

Proletarian regiment and other units of the so-called “Kremenchug group,” with “rear” defined as some comforting spot beyond Ukraine’s borders (Saratov or Tsaritsyn representing the most common options).¹⁵⁵ No blandishment seemed adequate to calm their overtaxed nerves and no threat of an abstract revolutionary retribution was even remotely comparable to the immanent menace embodied by the advancing and impregnable enemy. Units naturally shriveled in this oppressive environment, as workers, in Bosh’s euphemistic expressions, were harrying back to their lathes, or simply defecting;¹⁵⁶ no easy replacement for them could be found either, since rumors, those panic mongering emissaries, dammed in advance the inflow of volunteers.¹⁵⁷ Witnesses of the rapid diminution of available forces, some Bolshevik leaders resorted to morose witticisms symptomatic of exhaustion and pending nervous collapse. “I am going off on vacation to the tundra to form the troops from the Samoyeds,” was Reinhold Berzin’s snappy response to Moscow, unduly exacting in its demands of “positive” developments.¹⁵⁸

In a singular twist of irony a temporary relief for the Bolshevik distress arrived from the men, who in two months’ time would transform into a menace to the Soviet regime on par with the present incubus of the Austro-German offensive. Formed in the autumn of 1917 from the Austro-Hungarian POWs, the two-division strong Czechoslovak Corps observed the tumultuous Ukrainian epics from the front seats of the encampments in Volhynia and Poltava; its political and military leaders nevertheless were determined to maintain the minimal

¹⁵⁵ V. Morgunov, “Organizatsiia i bor’ba Krasnoi Gvardii na Ukraine v 17-18 g.g.” in *LR* 1925, v. 5, 161; Antonov-Oveenko, v. 2, *Zapiski*, 132, 179-180

¹⁵⁶ Bosh, 219

¹⁵⁷ *ibid.*, 268

¹⁵⁸ TsDAHO f5 o 1 d 5 l 172

distance needed to keep the spectators from stumbling onto the main stage.¹⁵⁹ For a while they excelled in it, yet, the approach of Linsingen's troops, who judged the Czechoslovaks guilty of a double crime of enmity and treason, spliced for the time being their fate with the Bolshevik survival. They possessed arms, experience and numbers to assume the leading role in the war with Germans, taking a stance at the threshold to Kiev and then further east in the Left Bank Ukraine.¹⁶⁰ Everywhere, as the newly appointed German ambassador to Kiev Alfons Mumm admitted, the Czechoslovaks fought well,¹⁶¹ but nowhere as well as at Bakhmach, where they held the Germans at bay for more than a week.¹⁶² The Czechoslovaks, however, could not defend Ukraine, neither did they fancy this idea very seriously, their engagements consisting only of the skillfully executed rear-guard actions aiming to extricate the Corps from the surrounding quagmire. Beyond lay the heartland of Russia, Urals and Siberia, the endless space to be harrowed before attaining the Flanders fields – and it was there, not in Ukraine, that the Czechoslovaks could make a run for victory with its high reward of national sovereignty. Most of them finally left Ukraine between March 10 and 14, adducing from Antonov expression of unconditional gratitude:

The revolutionary armies will not forget the brotherly service rendered by the Czechoslovak Corps in the struggle of Ukraine's working masses against the bands of predatory imperialism. Weapons handed over by the Czechoslovaks to the revolutionary armies are accepted as a brotherly gift.¹⁶³

Oddly positioned within the story of the ensuing Czechoslovak revolt, the kowtowing of the Bolshevik leaders before the Corps stemmed from the dire predicament of the former; with

¹⁵⁹ Denikin, *Ocherki*, v. 2, 254-256

¹⁶⁰ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 2, 52-54

¹⁶¹ R 14364 Der K.Botschafter an Ausw. Amt. Kiew, den 24. März 1918

¹⁶² Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 2, 51-54, Bosh, 284, 291-293

¹⁶³ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 2, 47

no space for maneuver and no time for second thoughts, they were hardly in the position of being picky about their allies.¹⁶⁴

Now, once the Czechs were gone and their irregular militias proving themselves incapable of holding themselves together – let alone pupating into a proper army – the Bolsheviks were truly desperate. They appealed to the “broader masses,” but heard only an ominous silence in return, experiencing on their own back the disenchantment of which the Rada was the victim less than a month before. More effective were the attempts to arm the foreign nationals, which gave the Red Guards an aura of a truly polyglot force. Battalions from the Magyar POWs fought against their former allies alongside the Serbian and Romanian formations (although not too close to each other to avoid provocations). “Here I must not leave it unnoticed,” reported a Swedish emissary in Kharkov on March 9, 1918, “that not an unsubstantial number of German subjects serve in the Red Army, but at their own request and only to protect the interests of the Revolution.”¹⁶⁵ The Chinese migrant workers brought to Russia during the Great War to meet the problems of labor shortage represented another rich source of human material. With the Revolution bringing industries to a stock-still, many of them found the incertitude of military life far preferable to the certainty of personal ruin; the fact the Bolsheviks remunerated the Chinese for their efforts must have also helped in

¹⁶⁴ Besides the Czechoslovaks, there were also Polish National units stationed in Ukraine – the so-called II Corps, led at first by General Stanisław Stankiewicz and later by Colonel Józef Haller. In contrast to the Czechoslovaks, however, the Poles refused to cooperate with the Bolsheviks, whom they identified with the rebellious Ukrainian countryside and the anti-Polish pogroms perpetrated by the peasants; their attitude aligned rather neatly with that of the displaced and shattered landlords. Left alone to face the Germans, the Polish II Corps was surrounded near Kanev (Kaniv) and after a one-day battle compelled to a capitulation and a dismantlement (May 11, 1918).

¹⁶⁵ R 14367 Abschrift des Berichts des schwedischen delegierten Gösta Olson Blomber in Charkow über die politische Lage in der Stadt und Gouvernement Charkow

making a decision.¹⁶⁶ Antonov charged a certain “comrade Sheng Chit Ho” (*Shen-Chit-Kho*, in Russian transliteration) with the formation of the “revolutionary battalions” in the Donets basin¹⁶⁷ adopting a mobilization plan of a Lugansk engineer Ka Ou Hong (*Ka-Ou-Khun*).¹⁶⁸ By Antonov’s own account, the undertaking unfolded very smoothly, Chinese workers joining with enthusiasm and fighting with resolve. In the southwest a sizable Chinese unit was organized and commanded by Iona Iakir, a twenty-one year old native of Bessarabia, an Imperial province presently under Romanian control. That future top officer of the Red Army and a decorated hero of the Polish and Wrangel campaigns did not stint on the praises when remembering his erstwhile subordinates: “The Chinese is staunch, he is not afraid of anything... [he] will fight to the last drop.”¹⁶⁹ According to a contemporary Ukrainian historian, there may have been over 5 thousand Chinese volunteers,¹⁷⁰ in addition to hundreds, if not thousands of other internationalists – a number, which despite its imprecision intimates at the paramount role they played at the earliest stages of the Civil War.

Taken as a whole this was hardly a material suitable for any serious military endeavor and it still remains rather surprising that the Red Guards resisted the 300,000-strong army of the Quadruple Alliance as long as they did. Equally astounding was the fact that those disjointed forces, braving terrible odds, occasionally managed to carry out feats of hardihood and

¹⁶⁶ N. Karpenko, “*Kitaiskii Legion*”: *uchastie kitaitsev v revoliutsionnykh sobytiakh na territorii Ukrainy (1917-1921)* (Lugansk: Al’ma-mater, 2007), 86

¹⁶⁷ RGVA f 103 d 512 l 65; according to Iakir, this Sheng Chin Ho was a consummate mountebank. Parading around as the plenipotentiary of all Chinese workers, he would take the money from the Bolsheviks allegedly to distribute it among those who were willing to join the Red Guard. He would bring the Chinese, but swindle them of their share. Although chased away by Iakir, he still kept on hovering around other ‘mobilization staffs,’ ‘selling’ the brawn of his compatriots to the hard-pressed Bolshevik commanders (I. Iakir *Vospominaniia o grazhdanskoi voine* (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel’stvo, 1957), 22).

¹⁶⁸ Antonov-Ovseenko, v. 2, 245

¹⁶⁹ Iakir, 12

¹⁷⁰ Karpenko, 113

audacity. A heavy fight, for instance, ensued near Birzula junction where the Austrian 30th Division suffered a total loss of 800 men before capturing it.¹⁷¹ In the south, where two of Muraviev's three "armies" were concentrated, the Bolsheviks compelled a small German force to evacuate Nikolaev (ukr. Mykolaiv) and then, profiting from the uprising in Kherson, wrestled that port-city from the Austrians; both ports, defended with tenacity by the local Red Guards, were retaken only in the first week of April.¹⁷² Another notable success was scored on the 15th of March at Tsibulevo, 30 miles north of Yelisavetgrad, where a German cavalry regiment led itself into an ambush and was subsequently destroyed by Egorov's men.¹⁷³

These few minor setbacks notwithstanding, the eventual success of the Central Powers never provoked any doubts. The Germans and the Austrians took cities as a matter of course, often to the jubilation of the relieved dwellers. Rovno fell on the 21th of February, followed by Zhitomir four days later. Kiev was abandoned on the 1st of March, the whole city transformed into a gigantic thoroughfare, with the Czechs and the booty-laden Bolsheviks leaving it at one end and the German Landwehr troops entering it from another. A place apart, Odessa attempted to toy with the idea of a polis-like sovereignty, but succumbed all the same in mid March to the Austrian 2nd Army of Field-Marshal Böhm-Ermolli. Next came the turn of Yekaterinoslav, occupied by the Bavarians of General Knörzer on April 5, 1918. Passing in steady rows before the gawking crowds, the Germans in their gray undress uniforms inspired respect and curiosity as the no-nonsense embodiments of the empire which stood in defiance to the whole world. Their Austro-Hungarian partners, coming to replace the

¹⁷¹ KA Ms. Wk. R/1 Obstlt. Rudolf Kiszling, "Der österreich-ungarische Vormarsch in die Ukraine"

¹⁷² Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 2, 76, 120, 155

¹⁷³ *ibid.*, v. 2, 146

Bavarians few days later, looked on the contrary almost caricaturesque. “The foppish officers with their corsets, their collars, their uniforms over-embroidered with marks of distinction (... as if it were an army of undeniable heroes) – this all seemed ridiculous and even disconcerting against the martial inconspicuousness of the Germans,” recalled Limbach his first reaction to the Army of His Apostolic Majesty.¹⁷⁴ That, however, sufficed for the present purposes, for the Bolsheviks did not even have a fighting force worthy of the name. Steadily pushed further east, they let Kharkov go on April 8, Taganrog on May 1, and finally Rostov on May 4.¹⁷⁵ On that same day, 500 miles to the north, a group of three German officers met their Russian counterparts in the small railroad junction of Korenevo with an aim of drawing up new borders; leaving no place for the intermediaries between Moscow and Berlin, that small-scale diplomacy with potentially far-reaching consequences marked a definitive end to the Bolshevik first brief appearance on the stage of the Ukrainian political life.¹⁷⁶

The Bolsheviks succumbed, as they had to, to the overwhelming power of the organized state. That they let the Germans advance as far as they did owes not only to the determination of their opponent (never a thing of certainty with the Austrians), but also and principally to the apathy of the village; to put it differently, the Bolshevik original triumph and their final undoing stemmed from the same seed planted in the autumnal soil of the passing year. “The *muzhik* did not wish to fight, could not, he was tired” wrote Iakir about the Bolshevik phenomenal retreat. “Our rallies, persuasions at the railroad stations were not yielding any

¹⁷⁴ Limbach, 104

¹⁷⁵ Antonov-Ovseenko, v. 2, 273

¹⁷⁶ See the text of the agreement in *Grazhdanskaia Voina na Ukraine*, ed. S.M. Korolivskii, N.K. Kolesnik, I.K. Rybalka (Kiev: Naukova dumka, 1967), v. 1, 136-137

positive results; only a handful out of thousands was staying with us.”¹⁷⁷ Contrary to the expectations, the *tolstoyan* “bludgeon of the popular war” remained unraised, the peasant savoring the comfort of his perquisites despite the lack of clarity about German intentions. He was straining to size up this new authority, tantalized as he was to discover if he would be allowed to keep both the land and the inventory of his former lord. Forced to lie low, the Bolsheviks were engaged in a similar exercise, albeit for a slightly different reason: the German initiatives with regard to land, requisitions and administration, acting directly on peasant sensitivities, made up the core of the altered political sortilege wherein the Bolsheviks were learning to read prescriptions for their return.

Dilemmas of Occupation

“Once they arrived to Kiev,” wrote Nikolai Mogiliansky, “the Germans first of all cleaned up the train station, defiled beyond belief during the Bolshevik stay.”¹⁷⁸ Seen as an example of German pedantry, the act epitomized the imperative need of the occupying powers to have the infrastructure repaired and buttressed by the functioning bureaucratic apparatus. The war in the West dictated the simple logic: to survive the Central powers and especially Austria-Hungary required foodstuffs; to win on top of that – coal, iron, manganese and oil.¹⁷⁹ Ukraine, appearing as manna from the sky, possessed almost everything in abundance, and might have readily surrendered its treasures – but for the months of misrule rendering the land ungovernable and hence unexploitable. Thus, as Ludendorff put it later, “we had to

¹⁷⁷ Iakir, 8

¹⁷⁸ N. Mogiliansky, “Tragediia Ukrainy” in *1918 god na Ukraine*, 37

¹⁷⁹ Fischer, 486

strengthen it so that it could benefit us.”¹⁸⁰ He and the planners in his entourage saw clearly that the profits reaped would be commensurate with the investments made.

As straightforward as it may be, this programmatic assignment clashed with a number of considerations which had to be addressed before the exploitation of the occupied territory could commence in earnest. The most serious of them was the dilemma posed by the peasantry, that of its reintegration into the revived administration and, most importantly, into the broader market. Sheer numbers gave the peasant the key to popular legitimacy, but it was in his productive capacity, that he evolved, in the words of one Austrian civil servant, into “the most important factor in our food provisioning in general and grain supply in particular.”¹⁸¹ To their great distress, however, the occupation powers soon realized that the peasant had no intention to plant above his consumption needs and those of his family.¹⁸² Alarming too was the discovery that the village, while possessing substantial grain supplies, “either hidden, or buried beneath the earth,”¹⁸³ showed little inclination to part with them. To extract what the peasant kept became the order of the day – but how if not by resorting to coercion?

Under the present circumstances cash alone exerted little swaying power over the peasant. Rampant inflation driven by the conspiracy of the industrial collapse and money printing politics made the paper ruble nearly worthless, causing its virtual disappearance from the

¹⁸⁰ Ludendorff, 500

¹⁸¹ KA Ms Allg. Nr 58 Bericht über die Reise in die Ukraina, ertattet von Roman Zalozieckyj, k.k. Regierungsrat

¹⁸² PA Liasse XI Karton 152, Auszug aus dem Bericht eines Vertreter der k.u.k. Mission in Kiew vom 10. März 1918

¹⁸³ R 14362 Bericht über Eindrücke in der Ukraine, von Oblt d. Res Colin Ross; Verbindungsoffizier der militärischen Stelle des Auswärtigen Amtes.

circulation in Ukraine.¹⁸⁴ Austrian crowns and German marks fared little better, as was evinced by the rapid depreciation of the mark to the ruble – the exchange rate of 1.5 rubles to one mark set by the military at the outset of the campaign sank to about a third of the original value by March 7, 1918.¹⁸⁵ “The good, old Russian money” – the silver rubles and kopecks – might have worked as a possible means of exchange had the peasant not ended up owning its entire stock in the course of the war, development transpiring “in parts without the [input from the] special money-hoarding practices (*Geldhamsterei*), otherwise so common to peasantry.”¹⁸⁶ This aberrant situation, where the primary producer held most of the currency, had to be remedied, preferably by making the peasant spend his rubles in order to enable the subsequent purchase of his grain. In the report submitted on the 10th of April, Roman Zaloziacky, a member of an Austrian economic commission dispatched to Ukraine, provided a comprehensive list of means whereby money was to be extracted. It included:

Tax payments, land sales, reintroduction of the monopoly on alcohol (already with the view on suppressing the unauthorized and wasteful alcohol distillation (*Spiritusbrennens*) from the grain on the land), [establishment of] markets for the needs of the rural population with the commonly used articles: sugar, salt, tobacco, petroleum, candles, tools for house and cottage industry (cobblers, tailors, skimmers, smiths, wainwrights, potters), then household appliances and agricultural equipment and machines of every kind, such as: knives, shears, scythes, sickles, axes, hatchets, spades, saws, harrows, grain cleaning machines, plows, roller screws (*Planeten*), threshers, etc.¹⁸⁷

An undeniable product of a meticulous mind, this catalog of recommendations and commodities overlooked a proposal made in March of 1918 by Count Johann Forgách, the

¹⁸⁴ PA Liasse XI Karton 153 „Unsere Politik in der Ukraine“

¹⁸⁵ R 14362 Bericht über Eindrücke in der Ukraine, von Oblt d. Res Colin Ross; Verbindungsoffizier der militärischen Stelle des Auswärtigen Amtes.

¹⁸⁶ KA Ms Allg. Nr 58, Bericht über die Reise in die Ukraina, ertattet von Roman Zaloziacky, k.k. Regierungsrat; among the many factors enabling peasants to accumulate such quantities of hard cash were the irregularity of tax collection, the prohibition on the sale of alcohol, the deterioration of industrial production, finally the appreciation in the value of agricultural products relative to the industrial goods.

¹⁸⁷ KA Ms Allg. Nr 58 Bericht über die Reise in die Ukraina, ertattet von Roman Zaloziacky, k.k. Regierungsrat

Austro-Hungarian diplomatic representative in Ukraine. As a close ally of an influential Polish lobby in Vienna, he believed that the peasants should offer the compensation for the property seized earlier. The threat of bringing the land into the state ownership or of restituting it to its former owner would discourage the country folk from evasion provided, of course, that the threat was not seen as a mere bluster.¹⁸⁸

One could equally pursue the path of a minimum resistance, so to speak, and snatch from the tight grip of the peasantry what one needed without any officiating and temporizing; this option appeared to be the one that the Austrians were especially inclined to taking up. With the starving empire behind them, the Habsburg military became increasingly impatient maintaining the veneer of good will in the provinces under their control (parts of Podolia and Volhynia, Kherson and Yekaterinoslav). The reluctance of the peasantry to trade their grain for crowns, wrote Alfred Krauß, successor of Böhm-Ermolli on the post of the Austrian Army Commander, “compelled one to rely on the troop-driven requisitions.”¹⁸⁹ The eventual results fell far below set targets as Field Marshal Lieutenant von Böltz, the Commandant of Odessa, informed his superiors, pointing to the example of the 30th Infantry Division which barely scraped together some 22,000 poods of grain (ca 360 tons) in a period of two and a half months.¹⁹⁰ Transport greatly curtailed the scope of deliveries, for the freight cars found in Ukraine, if not in the state of disrepair, had to be run at first on the inefficient wood in the absence of precious coal.¹⁹¹ In addition to such infrastructural hurdles, the Austrian

¹⁸⁸ PA Liasse XI Karton 153 „Unsere Politik in der Ukraine“

¹⁸⁹ KA Alfred Krauß B60 “Die Ukraine”

¹⁹⁰ KA Spannocchi B760 Politischer Bericht

¹⁹¹ PA Liasse XI Karton 152 Bericht über die Verhältnisse in der Ukraine, am 2. April

requisitioning teams had to reckon with the peasants' habit of running to the defenses of the alembic, converting the bushels of the sought-after grain into the liters of moonshine.

The Germans, whose predicament on the whole was not as dire as that of their allies, could afford greater flexibility in their interactions with the locals. For that same reason the problem of obtaining existing stocks bothered them far less than did the fate of the future harvest. From their headquarters in Kiev, the leading German military and diplomatic authorities – the commanding dyad of Field Marshall Hermann von Eichhorn and his Chief of Staff Wilhelm Groener, ambassador von Mumm and the entourage of the region's experts – saw with increasing anxiety that the Ukrainian village was not rushing to the cultivation of the newly acquired land, confining itself instead to the satisfaction of its narrow subsistence needs. “Not even a third of the normal acreage is set aside for farming. Should one fail with the springtime works, the entire region would be threatened with the most terrible famine by winter of 1918.”¹⁹² Apocalyptic scenarios and matter-of-fact reports agreed in that regard, often buttressed by an aside exegesis into the peasant psyche: “The South Russian does not like to toil. He prefers trade and shipping transactions. From the outset of the war he began to learn how to make cash with his carriage. The field lies fallow – but he keeps amassing on end ... copious amount of ruble bills,” “as he swims in money, the peasant remains too indolent to work without need,” etc.¹⁹³ The peasant behaved no better than a child – exhibiting a fatal faiblesse for glitter and heedless of his chores.

¹⁹² R 14365 “Die wirtschaftlichen Probleme der neubesetzten Ostgebiete” von Fürst Alexander Drucki-Lubecki

¹⁹³ R 14365 Abschrift von Hauptman Fischer

However important the newly-acquired taste for lucre or the rural work ethics might have been, the radix of the matter lay in the dynamic of the agricultural revolution itself. After the property was seized and landlords were driven out, it entered into the stage where the land and inventory had to be divided between community members. David Erde dubbed this the period of “dekulakization” (*raskulachivanie*) as the time of confiscating surpluses from the wealthier peasants for the benefit of the less affluent ones.¹⁹⁴ The threat of redistribution threw the existing agrarian property relations (*Agrarverhältnisse*, or *Besitzverhältnisse*, one of the favorite words of the Austro-German policymakers) in disarray, a situation, wherein “the propertyless peasants want[ed] to retain the best and the most high-yielding parcels, and leave the bad pieces to their neighbors.”¹⁹⁵ The result was that, as reports tirelessly stressed, the peasant no longer knew who would reap what he had sown. Repeated for the umpteenth time, the old line acquired now a slightly different ring: “The peasants want to grow only so much as they can consume, because they fear that their own fellow-villagers would take the harvest for themselves.”¹⁹⁶

Peasants coveting their neighbor’s share were not the only ones to be feared; whole villages would enter into noisy squabbles with each other, trying their best to prove the legitimacy of their respective titles over the illegitimately expropriated land. Their arguments did not need to involve sophisticated reasing since both weapons and resolute men with time on their hands were in abundant supply. “All peasants are equipped extensively with guns and hand

¹⁹⁴ Erde, 16-17; without using Soviet terminology, Makno confirms Erde’s observations: „The months of February and March [of 1918] [was] the moment of distributing the livestock and equipment seized from the landlords in the autumn of 1917.” (Makhno, *Spovid’ anarkhista*, 196)

¹⁹⁵ PA Liasse XI Karton 152, Bericht über die Verhältnisse in der Ukraine, am 2. April 1918

¹⁹⁶ PA Liasse XI Karton 152, Auszug aus dem Bericht eines Vertreter der k.u.k. Mission in Kiew vom 10. März 1918

grenades,” noted a young German diplomat Wilhelm von Bülow. “Villages possess numerous machine guns, which they set against each other as soon as the dispute over the land distribution arises.”¹⁹⁷ The undefined property claims became thus powerfully entwined with the issue of arms, dangerously complicating the dilemma of spring sowing: set on curing the neglectful peasant of his dereliction, the occupation authorities had to start by disarming the village first, an operation that ran the risk of provoking resistance and thereby of jeopardizing the gains on which Germans and Austrians were wagering when embarking on the Ukrainian campaign.

As days grew warmer, anticipating the advent of the sowing season, the initial unease of the Central Powers attained the level of urgency, and soon became barely unconcealed panic. Division of spoils took a clear precedence over the tasks within the conventional peasant routine, contributing to the widespread sense of the order placed on its head. The silent muzhik, trudging through ridicule and accepting exactions with the seemingly congenial forbearance, now seemed ready to turn the tables against his former abusers, condemning the city to lean times while he himself was thriving on easy rubles and luxury goods from the despoiled manors. That same fluke of the moment, which had buried the state and the regime that embodied it, sheltered the village from its own devastating impact, and made it, in fact, incomparably stronger with the lavish donations of arms and acres. However unstable and transient, this new upturned balance betrayed one of the revolution’s multiple avatars – that of the carnival, vigorously executed in hopes of jostling the mocked reality into the chasm of ruptured times.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷ R 14362 Der K. Legationssekretär an AA, am 10. März

¹⁹⁸ Schnell, 158-163

The Germans and the Austrians decided to put an end to that carnival of Revolution lest they let the opportunities presented by Ukraine slip through their fingers. To accomplish this, one had to start by restoring private property rights abrogated through the Universals of the Central Rada; peasant gains could be partially recognized, but only on the condition that the future owners, in their novel faculty of *individual proprietors*, would agree to compensate the landlords banished earlier.¹⁹⁹ Although this measure could eliminate an element of uncertainty from property relations, it offered no guarantees with regard either to the efficiency of production or to the timeliness of grain deliveries.

Here, anti-peasant prejudices converged with scholarly studies of the Russian experience to convince the occupation authorities of the benefits of estate-run economies.²⁰⁰ Facts seen previously as unrelated – primitive cultivation techniques, ascribed penchant for violence, and reigning chaos of property relations – were lumped offhandedly together to characterize the essentials of the peasant’s soul, indicting him for his “low cultural level” and attributing to him a congenital inability to be his own master.²⁰¹ “If, nevertheless, the agricultural production in Ukraine and its food exports are very significant,” ran the lines of one learned treatise, “it should be credited to the great fertility of the soil as well as the business acumen of the large landowners.”²⁰² The disenchanted representatives of the Quadruple Alliance

¹⁹⁹ See, for example, KA Ms Allg. Nr 58 Bericht über die Reise in die Ukraina, ertattet von Roman Zaloziemyj, k.k. Regierungsrat

²⁰⁰ R 14362 Bericht über Eindrücke in der Ukraine, von Oblt d. Res Colin Ross; Verbindungsoffizier der militärischen Stelle des Auswärtigen Amtes; R 14365 “Die wirtschaftlichen Probleme der neubesetzten Ostgebiete” von Fürst Alexander Drucki-Lubecki

²⁰¹ KA Ms Allg. Nr 58 Bericht über die Reise in die Ukraina, ertattet von Roman Zaloziemyj, k.k. Regierungsrat

²⁰² PA Karton 1041 Die Ukraina. Ueberblick über die wirtschaftliche, historische, politische und militärische Entwicklung

were warming up to the idea of the landlord's indispensability all the more so because the bounty from the Ukrainian cornucopia was proving harder to obtain than was originally expected.

Resolving to back the agrarian *ci-devants* was by no means an easy matter, especially since the latter included a very substantial Polish element, considered unreliable and even inimical to the Reich's interests by the German High Command (Pole bashing in general being one of Ludendorff's favorite pastimes).²⁰³ Yet, as ambassador Mumm emphasized on March 23 in his memorandum to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Should the execution of the immediate and the most comprehensive grain procurement be placed ahead of the political factors, our stance on the land reform must be different from the one adapted when purely political standpoints appear as the most important. If the grain procurement stands at the vanguard of priorities, it is not Poland that we should behold in the landowner, but rather a factor that must not be hindered considering [the need for] the development and export.²⁰⁴

It could not have escaped the occupation authorities that such 'reactionary' politics was bound to provoke dissent not only in Ukraine and but also among Germany's Social-Democratic circles, individuals of political import akin to Matthias Erzberger and Albert Südekum, who took a lively interest in eastern affairs. Yet, considering the role that the Ukrainian grain played in the calculus of Ludendorff's last offensive, negotiations with the critics of the occupation appeared wasteful. After all, in the spring of 1918 one staked everything on the victory in the war, or, to employ the term of the time, on the "dignified peace," which promised to offer a belated exoneration for the transgressions committed in its name and drive present reservations into the hazy corners of the moment.

²⁰³ Fischer, 539; the Austrians, on the contrary, found in the powerful Polish presence another reason to support the landowners, counting to employ their benevolent attitude in the on-going discussions of the so-called Austro-Polish solution (of the Polish Question).

²⁰⁴ R 14363 Der K. Botschafter an Auswärtiges Amt, an 23 März 1918

On the 6th of April, 1918 Field Marshal Eichhorn released an order, marking a clear *prise de position* with respect to the urgent issue of agricultural management. Its innocuous name – *Feldbestellungsbefehl*, “the sowing order” – belied a number of far-reaching stipulations. First of all, against the socialization schemes of the Rada government it reasserted the principle of private ownership, stressing the inalienable rights of those who plant and plow to retain the harvest from their plots. That, however, did not mean that the peasants had free hand in deciding what they wanted to plant and how much of the land they could allocate for sowing; on the contrary, abstention from cultivating arable pieces was declared a cardinal crime to be countered with condign retribution. Most important was the third point of the order, which protected remaining landholders from the abuses and encroachments of the peasantry:

There, where the peasants cannot accomplish the sowing of the entire arable land of the community, and where landowners are still available, the latter should attend to the sowing themselves without herewith infringing onto the lawful division of the land among the peasants through land committees. In such cases the landowners must not be prevented from sowing by the peasants. For the purposes of cultivation and harvesting the land committees should provide them with horses, agricultural equipment as well as seeds upon request. As in the case of the peasants, the crop should belong to the person, who planted it.²⁰⁵

Eichhorn, Groener and others in the military headquarters were ready to go the distance necessary to support the surviving landowners for the sake of having fields sown on time. The price of jettisoning the Central Rada in Kiev did not struck them as unpardonably high especially since that *de jure* government of the reestablished Ukrainian People’s Republic preferred to boycott Eichhorn’s order rather than put up with the opprobrium of his anti-socialist undertaking.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵ R 14367 Abschrift, O.H.L. Politische Abteilung, den 18. April 1918

²⁰⁶ Doroshenko, v. 2, 16

It would not be fair to say that the Germans and the Austrians intended to do away with the Rada's vexing presence from the first hours of occupation. After all, the Central Powers brought it back into position of formal responsibility in hopes of finding in it an obliging advocate of their interests. The national Ukrainian orientation thought to be predominant among the Rada members created a nearly positive aura around it, donning upon these political vagabonds appearance of a no-nonsense association willing to bargain over the price of protection and autonomy. "A party of the sky assailants (*Himmelsstürmern*) and world improvers, without whom the great step of severing Ukraine from Russia would not succeed" – such was the poetic characteristic given to the Rada by Roman Zalozieckyj in his otherwise somber account of the Ukrainian conditions.

It is a great merit of this party of young revolutionary minds, that in the difficult times of disorganization and dissolution of the old powers they... still evidenced so much understanding for the actual needs and possessed enough spirit of statesmanship that in the environment of unripe national condition they were able to secure upon the unstable grounds the foundation of a new state.²⁰⁷

Although presently feeble, the Rada was expected to become stronger in the long run with the population readjusting itself in the direction of the nationalist (as opposed to social) moment. That anticipated development in itself, wrote Colin Ross, a Foreign Service liaison officer, would make any projected attempt to replace the Rada "inopportune" (*untunlich*) insofar as it might mar the Germans with the unwanted reputation of conquerors and leave them without much credit of confidence in the country. To be sure, one could never rule out the possibility of the Rada's "unruliness" (*widerspenstig*) as a result of its becoming aware of its own authority; at the same time, however, the experience gained at the helm of the state could lead the Rada to abandon its own 'fantastic' socialization platform and adopt in its

²⁰⁷ KA Ms Allg. Nr 58 Bericht über die Reise in die Ukraina, ertattet von Roman Zalozieckyj, k.k. Regierungsrat

stead a “bourgeois” conventional mode of management – a transformation to be lauded and encouraged from the perspective of the Rada’s provisional patrons.²⁰⁸

This indulgence towards the Ukrainian government did not last very long. On a personal level, staid diplomats and army men from the Imperial capitals could hardly stomach the idea of working either with “the inexperienced lads” and “the impractical dreamers (*Phantasten*)”²⁰⁹ of Holubowich’s mold, or even with the seemingly respectable Hrushevsky, “a helpless, meaningless doter, who serves as an external cover for the young and ambitious upstarts.” With the exception of few military men, claimed Major Moritz von Fleischmann, a plenipotentiary of the Austrian High Command (AOK), “ministers and party leaders are by no means to be taken seriously, individuals who abandon themselves to the unfeasible socialist ideas, by and large immature men of student age without a single clue about the management of the State apparatus.”²¹⁰ The Rada’s ministers were appearing as privately incapable and historically accidental blunderbusses, an impression retrospectively strengthened by the memory of the abasing entreaties for help with which they turned to the mighty delegates while the latter brooded over the Eastern Europe’s future shape.

Of course, personal antipathy played a far less important role in alienating the Central Powers from the Rada than did the political regime it embodied. That the Rada cut a miserable figure – that of a powerless institution divested of technical and bureaucratic means to carry out its end of the deal (collecting and exporting the raw materials and

²⁰⁸ R 14362 Bericht über Eindrücke in der Ukraine, von Oblt d. Res Colin Ross; Verbindungsoffizier der militärischen Stelle des Auswärtigen Amtes.

²⁰⁹ R 14362 Der K. Legationssekretär an AA, am 10. März

²¹⁰ PA Liasse XI Karton 152 Politische Lage in der Ukraine, an Ottokar Grafen Czernin, am 4. April 1918

foodstuffs) – was received as a self-evident and unavoidable aspect of prevailing conditions.²¹¹ More alarming was the fact that the Ukrainian Government inspired little legitimacy either among the city-dwellers or among the villagers, who were often only dimly aware of its existence.²¹² In the view of an Austrian diplomat, the Rada's composition “represent[ed] neither...the upper class ... nor the broad masses in the hinterland, nor the industrial proletariat.”²¹³ The administrative impotence of the Rada coupled with its lack of moral authority – in other words, its combined inability to act upon population through force or example – jibed conspicuously well with the “rampant anarchy” to the point where the Rada was seen both as the progenitor and the extension of that misrule. To the foreign eye it was the perfect government – for the ungovernable times.

Such was the conclusion at which leading German and Austrian officials began to arrive towards the end of March of 1918. “Whether the government has a substantial part of the population behind cannot be asserted,” wrote Mumm to the Reich Chancellor Georg von Hertling. “In fact, the peasantry sympathizes with the government to the extent that it allows robberies to take place and grants them a certain degree of legal sanction.”²¹⁴ In a gesture of verbal conciliation some Rada members were ready to recognize the socialization of the soil as “inexpedient” for the time being – at least according to the account of the Odessa District Commissar Semen Komorny;²¹⁵ yet, when placed under the examination of Eichhorn's order, these allegations betrayed their essential disingenuity, the key Ukrainian ministers rushing to

²¹¹ PA Liasse XI Karton 153 „Unsere Politik in der Ukraine“; R 14363 Leg. Sekr. v. Lersner an Auswärtiges Amt, den 20. März 1918

²¹² PA Liasse XI Karton 152, Auszug aus dem Bericht eines Vertreter der k.u.k. Mission in Kiew vom 10. März 1918

²¹³ PA Liasse XI Karton 152 Politische Lage in der Ukraine, Konsul von Hoffinger Seiner Exzellenz Herrn Grafen Ottokar Czernin, 12. März 1918

²¹⁴ R 14366 Telegramm von Mumm zu Hertling, 11. April

²¹⁵ PA Liasse XI Karton 152 Bericht von 4. Armeekomando zu AOK, 2. April 1918

defend Rada's agricultural politics even at the risk of antagonizing their mighty benefactors. Moreover, in view of creating its own armed forces, the Ukrainian government felt entitled to the contents of ammunition depots scattered across the land and looked disapprovingly as the troops of Wilhelm and Charles scoured villages for arms, taking possession of their finds as battle spoils. At one point, with the resentment giving way to sheer audacity, it attempted to forestall further delivery of war materiel to the Command of the Austrian 4th Army, causing something of a minor crisis as a result.²¹⁶ Few extra coils of this expanding spiral of disagreements were added on when the Ukrainian Minister of Justice Mykhailo Tkachenko issued a circular letter remonstrating with the German usage of their field courts in adjudicating matters involving Ukrainian citizens. To the Austro-German authorities, who were yet to recognize the sovereignty of the Ukrainian People's Republic, the functioning court system, even if staffed by not sufficiently punctilious military men, constituted the core element in the administration of occupied territories; the Ukrainians, on the other hand, regarded it as an intolerable offense, an intrusion into internal affairs of an independent state, an odium on par with Eichhorn's demand of compulsory work on the fallow fields.²¹⁷

Deviating from the anticipated grateful complaisance, the Rada was proving to be an intransigent body of radical politicians who were taking their tutelary role of Ukraine's national leaders far too seriously for their own good. The Rada was doing remarkably little to motivate the peasantry to grow and deliver the grain, apprehensive as it were not only of the reaction that such measures might trigger in the countryside, but also of the urban disgruntlements in connection with the possible bread shortages and rises in living

²¹⁶ KA Spannocchi B760 Bericht an Stadkmdo, Odessa, am 30. März 1918

²¹⁷ Khrystiuk, v. 2, 163

expenses.²¹⁸ In matters pertaining general disarmament of the population or the setting up of the military courts, it conducted itself with dignity of a sovereign state unwarranted by the reality of foreign occupation, assuming the language that grated sensibilities of the Austro-German representatives with its “insolent” spirit.²¹⁹ Having repeatedly asserted that the “[German] regiments would remain in Ukraine as long as our government has a need of them” (Hrushevsky),²²⁰ the Rada ended up believing its own rhetoric. Rada’s obstructionist tendencies made “collaboration... impossible,” concluded Groener, Mumm, Forgách in a small conclave of venerable gentlemen, convened on April 23 to discuss Ukraine’s difficult dilemmas.²²¹ Nothing short of a death warrant, the verdict complemented the decision made at the highest level of political responsibility in Berlin and the Oberost Headquarters to lift the veil of innocence and proceed with the reorganization of land on one’s own initiative.²²²

Between the powerless yet unreasonably self-consequential Rada and the recalcitrant masses lay a corps of administrators, or rather that part of it, which withstood the initial storm of the revolution. In the first ten weeks of the Austro-German presence, public functionaries as whole did not distinguish themselves in the manner the occupying authorities might have wished, manifesting capacity for strife and sabotage far superior to the talents exacted by the need for good management. Numerous city and town dumas, for example, representing a predominantly non-Ukrainian (*fremdnational*) urban population, skeptical and even hostile towards the Ukrainizing initiatives of the Kiev government, experienced no qualms subverting authority of the Rada. Odessa, a polyglot metropolis with autonomist aspirations,

²¹⁸ R 14365 Telegramm, Gr. Hauptquartier, den 3. April 1918

²¹⁹ R 14367 Abschrift, O.H.L. Politische Abteilung, den 18. April 1918

²²⁰ Vynnychenko, 360

²²¹ R 14367 Der K. Botschafter a.D. an Auswärtiges Amt, Kiew, den 24. April 1918

²²² Fischer, 539-540

provided an exemplary case in that respect with the City Duma vying for the right to control local militia against the wishes of the Rada commissar Komorny.²²³ Although described as three-quarter ‘Bolshevik’ and as representing the “ill-disposed Jewry,”²²⁴ the Duma appeared to have recruited the support of the Austrian commandant Field Marshal Lieutenant von Böltz (married allegedly to an Odessite), who prevented Komorny from dissolving the militia and ultimately forced him to quit his office.²²⁵ Similarly, as one Austrian report stressed, the Podolian functionaries ranged themselves decidedly against all Ukrainian state-building undertakings,²²⁶ here, as in the neighboring Volhynia, such attitude was rooted not only in the region’s remoteness from the center, made more pronounced by the rapid infrastructural decay, but also in the weakness of the “nationalist” moment within the otherwise powerful agricultural movement of the most recent past.

The Central Powers, never at fault for treating the Rada with excessive decorum, might have shut their eyes to the analogous behavior few rungs below had the habit of parrying instructions from the center not spilt over to the areas deemed vital to the occupiers. Hurrying to the protection of the polonophile Austrians, count Grocholski, a magnate with extensive landholdings both in Podolia and Volhynia, filed a complaint against the local administration, which had taken the peasants’ side in their conflict with the landlords, paralyzing land cultivation and dangerously deterring gathering of the existing crops.²²⁷ The disarming of the rural populace progressing at a snail’s pace, the authorities discovered that

²²³ KA Spannochchi B760, Politisches Bericht an das k.u.k. 12. Korpskommando in Odessa, am 18. März 1918, Op.Nr. 77/5

²²⁴ KA Spannochhi B760, Politischer Bericht an das k.u.k. Armeegruppenkmdo. Cherson in Odessa, Feldpost 638, am 27. März 1918

²²⁵ R 14372 Ohneseit, Die Lage in Odessa, den 20. Mai 1918

²²⁶ PA Liasse XI Karton 152 Politische und wirtschaftliche Zustände in den an Galizien und die Bukowina angrenzenden ukrainischen und bessarabischen Gebieten

²²⁷ PA Liasse XI Karton 152 Ueber die Polen in der Ukraine, von Ugron an Burián, Warschau, 1. Mai 1918

their frustration owes less to the irresolution or weakness of troops involved in gun-searching operations, as to the dereliction of the state agents, comportment bordering on sabotage:

A barefaced trade in arms, wrote Major von Fleischmann in the last week of April, is conducted at numerous delivery-points (Ablieferungsstellen) under connivance of the civil servants, with the latter receiving [weapons] with one hand and giving away with another. The delivery affair is very superficial, the registration incomplete. The result of such conduct is that decent people (anständige Leute) end up being disarmed. [On the other hand] even the notorious thieves receive permission to own the guns.²²⁸

In his memoirs, Iurko Tiutiunyk went beyond confirming Fleischmann's observations by incrusting them into the conspiratorial ring of anti-German activities. Left by oversight of the occupiers to serve as the demobilization commissioner of his own Zvenigorodka district, he lulled the Germans into a false sense of security with a series of meaningless reports while extracting weapons from the populace in exchange for the fabricated certificates of surrender. By his own account he managed to amass a truly incredible collection of arms: 10,000 rifles, 43 machine guns, two artillery pieces, one armored car and a "significant quantity of ammunition." Enough to equip a division or two, this impressive panoply of war materiel waited to be disinterred from their secret caches and redistributed among the disgruntled populace.²²⁹

From the perspective of the Austro-German authorities, the country was gravely ill, the depressing state of its administration exemplifying one of the principal symptoms of that illness. The old apparatus was burned down to the ground and the new one had to be built on its ashes often by the selfsame forces that stoked the flames of the revolution. Consequently, asserted one contemporary observer, "young and inexperienced people were put in place of

²²⁸ PA Liasse XI Karton 152 An das K.u.K. Ministerium d. Aueßern, K.u.K. Armeeeoberkommando, Baden, am 23. April 1918

²²⁹ Tiutiunyk, *Revoliutsiina stykhiia*, 57-58; I. Kapulovsky, „Organizatsiia vosstaniia protiv Getmana“, *Letopis' Revoliutsii*, v. 4 (1923), 98

the murdered or absconded civil servants ... inadequately informed either about the economic or political conditions of the land.”²³⁰ What is more, judged an anonymous Austrian intelligence officer, most of the novices happened to graduate from the ranks of the imperial Russian Army, having “adopted its indiscipline while losing all sense for subordination.”²³¹ Although often at odds with one another, in a certain sense the Rada in Kiev and the new functionaries at the provincial level represented developments of the shared parentage so much so that the conflict between them looked more like a quaint compromise promoted by the moment of political vacancy; tendency to insubordination, decentralization and the “dangerous” tampering with the social and economic structures provided plenary evidence of the deep propinquity between the two. Both Berlin and Vienna were aware of this, for on the day when the Rada was tried and convicted in absentia, its five judges, the weightiest voices of the Central powers, turned to the Ukrainian government with a peremptory demand: to remove “the unwholesome elements” from the state bureaucracy and, a true *sine qua non* in light of the ongoing grain uncertainties, to replace village land committees (in pair with the undefined “other committees”) with a set of “reliable or communal administrative organs.”²³² Since the Rada was relentlessly approaching the end of its short stint in power, it remained a question of finding that new government, nimble enough to walk the thin line between the fulfillment of the Austro-German conditions and the need for maintaining a modicum of social and national cohesion.

Part IV: Hetmanate and the illusory return to normalcy

²³⁰ PA Liasse XI Karton 152 Bericht über die Verhältnisse in der Ukraine, am 2. April 1918

²³¹ PA Liasse XI Karton 152 Nachrichten aus der Ukraine, am 20. Mai 1918,

²³² R 14367 Der K. Botschafter a.D. an Auswärtiges Amt, Kiew, den 24. April 1918

The arrest of the Rada members in the afternoon hours of April 28 was the first and the least arduous step towards reorganizing the country for which Eichhorn, Groener and ultimately Ludendorff were pressing with all urgency. On the next day a congregation of 8,000 prosperous peasants – not the nondescript *seliane* (“villagers”), but the dignified *khliboroby* (“cultivators/grain-growers”) – transported specifically to Kiev by the anxious Germans in spite of the height of the sowing season, proclaimed the former tsarist general Pavel Skoropadsky to be the new “Hetman of all Ukraine.” Described as “the bearer of the Ukrainian national idea [and] an opponent of land socialization”,²³³ he appeared to the Germans as the perfect solution of the Ukrainian quandary, a man whose politics aided the transfer of Ukraine’s resources into the feed of the Central Powers’ war machine, sparing it the trouble of imposing direct military rule in the spirit of General governments (*Generalgouvernements*). Although his personal record was not bereft of services rendered to the Revolution (involvement in the Ukrainization of the XXXIV Corps, flirtation with the Free Cossacks, etc.), he stood for the return of the old order, attenuated by official disclaimers and concessions though it might be. Accordingly, the regime ushered in by his election was a type of reaction with few caveats – a Restoration outfitted in Cossack uniform, as a modern Polish historian figuratively put it.²³⁴

Bringing back the regime of land relations based in parts on the pre-revolutionary practices was a task of paramount importance to the new Hetman and his German protectors. On the day of the coup Skoropadsky issued his “Manifesto to the Entire Ukrainian People,” in which he declared the Rada dissolved and its most important legislations void. “The right of private

²³³ PA Liasse XI Karton 152, Telegram, von Princig, Kiev, den 30. April 1918

²³⁴ Włodzimierz Mędrzecki *Niemiecka interwencja militarna na Ukrainie w 1918 roku* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo DiG, 2000), 163

property, as a foundation of culture and civilization, are restored in the full measure and all decrees of the former Ukrainian government as well as those of the Provisionary Russian Government, [which had either negated or limited that right], are abrogated.”²³⁵ Taking direct aim at the Third and the Fourth Universals of the overthrown Rada, the Manifesto in theory contained nothing that should have upset the equanimity of the villagers considered to possess an inborn ownership instinct; to assuage possible doubters, the first Hetman government of Fiodor Lyzohub issued a program, stating that it “shall shrink from no sacrifice in order to create a healthy peasantry endowed with land and capable of highest possible productivity.”²³⁶ In practice, however, the restoration of the property *rights*, when understood as the restoration of *property* per se, placed a big question mark over the status of latest acquisitions, clearing the stage for the return of the dispossessed landlords to their pillaged estates and dispersed inventory.

The abolition of the land committees followed up as a natural corollary of Hetman’s manifesto, for, brought to life to administer and divide the recently seized land, these institutions epitomized in the eyes of the new regime the arbitrariness of property relations sanctioned by the revolution. In their stead came land commissions, which used pre-revolutionary agrarian laws as their *vade mecum* for getting through the imbroglio of gnarled affairs. Comprised of the former *zemstvo* personnel, members of the Stolypin’s land surveying commissions (*zemleustroitel’nye komissii*), agrarian experts and state representatives, they were elaborating the mechanism for restoring the land to their former

²³⁵ Doroshenko, v. 2, 59-60; words „which had either negated or negated that right“ are only found in the German translation of the Manifesto (R 14369 Offizielle Bekanntmachung an das ganze ukrainische Volk, 30. April 1918)

²³⁶ Doroshenko, v. 2, 94-96

owners and determining the size of compensation if the stolen property was either damaged or destroyed in the course of the pogroms.²³⁷ In case of the latter, entire villages might be presented with a single bill to be paid off at once; depending on the degree of responsibility established by special investigations, private fines could be placed upon peasant households, although, as Kossak-Szczucka remarked in her memoirs, “the passive peasant crowd, terrorized by the bandits and apprehensive that the greatest burdens would fall upon them, would concede to everything, but only on the condition that the compensation would be levied on the whole community.” Persuasions and threats proving insufficient, she added, the government agents could do little but agree to impose a lump sum contribution.²³⁸

In the absence of reliable documentation and with legal procedures devouring precious time, land commissions relied largely on the good faith of the estate owners and of their depositions. But whether it was good was another question. Speaking on behalf of her native Starokonstantinov district, Kossak-Szczucka felt justified in asserting that “the cases of power abuse by the landlords took place very rarely... In the extensive territory of our region I recall names of only three individuals, whom the public opinion accused of having submitted exaggerated figures of losses and of having collected extravagant indemnification.”²³⁹ For Maria Dunin-Kozicka from Lemeshovka (ukr. Lemeshivka), such moderation, not to mention generosity, was a virtue upheld only on seldom occasions and by individuals of exceptional probity:

The rest, passing a despairing glance over the ashes of their native domiciles or starring in stupor at the sepulchral troughs... could not bring themselves to

²³⁷ Khrystiuk, v. 3, 52; R 14376 Richtlinien für die Militärische Mitwirkung bei der Ernte 1918. Heeresgruppe Eichhorn, Kiew, den 30. Juni 1918

²³⁸ Kossak, 108-109

²³⁹ *ibid.*, 109

the height of Christian ideals. Shadows of the murdered and humiliated relatives loomed in front of them as they covered their faces with hands in feeble torture. Their hearts began to burn with a feeling of vengeance and passionate desire for retaliation.²⁴⁰

Nikolai Mogiliansky positioned himself somewhere in the middle of those accounts, recognizing how important the disposition of a local German garrisons was in bringing the disputes to a just issue as their commanders saw it. In Kanev district, for instance, they conducted themselves with full propriety and, by curbing the landowners' thirst for revenge, created no bad blood in their wake. Yet, Mogiliansky admitted, "there were cases in multiple places when the landowners took advantage of the German force with an aim of restoring their rights and especially of reclaiming their looted movables. This often led to such conflicts that the Germans were compelled to avail themselves of the artillery."²⁴¹

The planned restoration of property to their former owners did little to encourage the return of civic peace announced as the regime's major goal at its inaugural hour. No more reassuring were the effects of replacing functionaries of the revolutionary hour with the old tsarist technocrats. Without thinking twice about it, the new authorities dissolved the city dumas in their latest form, deemed as giving too much voice to the quasi-Bolshevik extremists, and placed dumas of earlier convocations in their lieu: in Nikolaev and Yekaterinoslav, for instance, the legislative duties were taken over by the bodies elected in 1916 and 1914, respectively.²⁴² Old governors, provided they weathered the storm of the past months, were recalled from the dungeons of obscurity to assume their pre-revolutionary functions – a measure underwritten by the decision of Ihor Kistiakovsky, the Hetman's Minister of

²⁴⁰ Dunin-Kozicka, 82

²⁴¹ Mogiliansky, "Tragediia Ukrainy" in *1918 god na Ukraine*, 62

²⁴² PA Liasse XI Karton 152 Böhm-Ermolli über die politische Lage in die Ukraina, 16. Mai 1918

Internal Affairs to remove at one stroke all existing provincial and district commissariats.²⁴³

Motivated by ideological considerations, this decree created new problems in place of the old for the reason that the regime lacked enough bureaucrats to fill the vacancies created.

In the end, however, the want of cadres mattered less than the instruction issued to the German civil and military authorities enabling them to act independently of the Ukrainian administration upon perceiving a menace to the “general security.” Released one month after Skoropadsky’s ascent to the summit of formal power, that same instruction made it imperative for all appointments of the new Ukrainian *starostas* to go through the preliminary review by the German commandants of the concerned districts; although socially moderate and professionally competent, the new Ukrainian administrators remained too *Russian* in German eyes, individuals of unaccountable loyalties, perhaps even at odds with the designs of the occupying powers – credentials to questionable for them to operate without supervision.²⁴⁴

The support offered to the landlords in reclaiming their land and inventory coupled with the project of massive administrative overhaul undertaken by the Ministry of Internal Affairs betokened the conservative, even “counterrevolutionary” nature of the Hetmanate; creating its own police force gave an additional evidence that the regime was less interested in reconciling groups with opposing interests than in helping the elements “intoxicated” by the revolution to “sober up.” To promote order, or a certain version thereof, on May 18 Skoropadsky’s government sanctioned the establishment of the State Guard, or *Varta* in

²⁴³ Mędrzecki, 174

²⁴⁴ R 14372 Anweisung an die deutschen Dienststellen über den Verkehr mit den ukrainischen Behörden für Aufrechterhaltung der öffentlichen Ordnung, Ruhe und Sicherheit, den 29. Mai 1918

Ukrainian. According to its statute, *Varta* was to be set up at all administrative levels – provincial, district and volost – and be divided respectively into municipal, railroad and countryside (*sel'skaia*) detachments. Considering the distances separating villages and the vast expanses of unsettled territory between them, forces patrolling the hinterland were equipped with horses; their strength was fixed at the level of one policemen per two thousand residents.²⁴⁵ In its prospective form, the statute contained a special paragraph that, stressing the military nature of the organization, expressed the “extreme desirability” of “employing as many cadre army officers as possible.” Judged too controversial for the exposed public nerve, the paragraph was excised from the final draft of the document - an act of circumspection without much practical import, for the principle of relying on former officers was not to be easily abandoned.²⁴⁶

Far from it in fact. Ukraine literally teemed with the officers of the former Tsarist army, divested of any employment and lacking prospects of gaining one (*brotlosen*) as one German diplomat put it.²⁴⁷ With about 90,000 of them distributed among five major cities of the country²⁴⁸, the officers represented the natural pool from which the newly decreed *Varta* could and did build its human mainstay. If personal or structural reasons stood on the way to entering Hetman's police, there remained an option of joining volunteer formations, known collectively as the “officer squads” (*druzhiny*) and financed, as was often the case, by local authorities and estate owners. Although their position vis-à-vis the regime was never fully

²⁴⁵ Their town and city counterparts differed first in that they remained on foot and in the fact that their total number was estimated by the ration of one policeman per 400 residents; it was obvious that the solicitude for control grew with population densities.

²⁴⁶ TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 16; Mędrzecki, 174-175

²⁴⁷ R 14372, Ohnesseit über die Lage in Odessa, am 20 Mai 1918

²⁴⁸ *1918 god na Ukraine*, 4

clarified, they served alongside the *Varta* detachments throughout the whole period of the Hetmanate, carrying out instructions of their superiors (or patrons) and maintaining order as they saw fit.²⁴⁹

It seems fair to assert that few if any of those men, who imputed a real face to the abstract government in Kiev, either identified with the ‘Ukrainian cause’ and or shared much sympathy for the peasants’ plight. The 12,000 officers found in Odessa at the time of the coup were described “as almost entirely Great Russian-minded” – a vague epithet designating a gamut of personal choices from a pointed preference for the Russian language and culture to the fanatical and active support of Russia United and Indivisible with a hereditary monarch at its head.²⁵⁰ According to Kossak-Szczucka, such officers were primarily motivated by the desire to avenge themselves, since

Each of them had a close relative killed either by soldiers or by peasants; each had suffered most terrible wrongs at the hands of the revolution. They went on to become volunteers with an aim of restoring the old order, harboring greatest conceivable hate towards the revolution [przewrotu], recognizing in every revolutionary agitator they beat up a murder of their mother, wife or brothers.²⁵¹

Months of persecutions, horrors of Muraviev’s purges, odium of flagrant and boastful insubordination impelled the metamorphosis of the front-line camaraderie into the association of grievances to which many Russian officers must have succumbed. As a “natural outgrowth of the coeval state of affairs,” the *Varta* and the closely tied volunteer squads embodied an opportunity for social counteroffensive, a venue at reciprocating violence with an antidote of hatred.

²⁴⁹ Mędrzecki, 175

²⁵⁰ R 14372 Ohnesseit zu Reichkanzler von Hertling, Odessa, 27 Mai 1918

²⁵¹ Kossak, 107

Alone or in tandem with the Austrian and German troops these men were bringing the countryside back within the purview of state control. The visits of the military were mostly of the punitive character, designed to extract the inventory of arms, assure the payment of compensation to the landlords, supervise the fulfillment of Eichhorn's instructions concerning the illegally appropriated land and, when needed, drive the malingering peasant laborers back into the fields. These operations did not invariably degenerate into licentious and cruel bacchanalias, described with inimitable gusto by the leaders of the ousted Ukrainian Left;²⁵² still, often – all too often – they were conducted without much regard for the sensibilities of the peasant populace.

The Germans, as the strongest and the most disciplined of the allies, could afford to maintain a degree of professional distance in their contact with the rural “delinquents”; they acted preferentially through fees, exacting, as the instruction to Eichhorn's troops from May 31 suggests, 600 poods (about 10 tons) of grain or the equivalent quantity of livestock for each *desiatina* (slightly above one hectare) of damaged field land.²⁵³ It was not, however, beyond them to seize upon the old and humiliating “techniques of repression” – such as public birching – abolished, apparently for good, together with the regime, which made such a generous use of them. According to the German General Counsel in Odessa Ohnesseit, the ruthlessness of the German troops in the region shocked even the landowners in whose name “disciplinary actions” were carried out. Relaying their concerns, he wrote:

It is stated that in accomplishing the task of driving the predatory peasants away from the estate lands and of forcing them to return stolen objects, the [German troops] proceed with unnecessary cruelty against the peasantry,

²⁵² For an example of a graphic but largely anecdotal account of the landlords' cruelty, see Vynnychenko, 397-398

²⁵³ R 14372 Heeresgruppe Eichhorn-Kiew, betreffend Sabotage, 31. Mai 1918

beating them up in a particularly inhumane fashion. The peasants were not so bad, they were only seduced and the landlords would have probably been able to persuade them amicably to surrender their loot. One should have killed those poor peasants immediately instead of beating them up so horribly.²⁵⁴ The author of the cited dispatch could not contain his anger at the sign of landlords' ingratitude, who should have known better whom to thank for preserving their life and sources of livelihood. All the same, the rumors, exaggerated or not, kept on circulating unchecked, welling up to a surge that caused early consternation among the Left-oriented parliamentarians in Germany.²⁵⁵

Owing to the progressing state of demoralization in their army, the situation on the Austrian side of the hill was markedly worse. Mogilianski recalled that the conflicts there flared up more often than in the German zone; more frequent too were the cruel reprisals, which "were causing deep anarchy and disintegration of the village life."²⁵⁶ Far from chivalrous deliverers of the propaganda leaflets, the Imperial and Royal troops stepped into the boiling cauldron of rural politics as the instrument of retaliation at the disposal of the aggrieved old order. As was the case with the small village of Strazhgorod (ukr. Strazhhorod) near Gaisin in Podolia, the standard ritual of reestablishing authority consisted of two acts – first the villagers would be enjoined to surrender weapons in possession and then, granted the fulfillment of the former demand, be summoned to the market place to receive the corrective therapy of knouts and ramrods.²⁵⁷ Should the resistance be offered, an extraordinary and sanguinary third act of mass execution might be added to the usual procedures, with the Hungarian units in particular showing an untrammelled alacrity for participation. Their zeal in bringing the

²⁵⁴ R 14375 Keiserlich Deutsches Generalkonsulat in Odessa, 17. Juni 1918

²⁵⁵ R 14373 Abschrift „Das Verhalten des deutschen Oberkommandos und der deutschen Behörden gegenüber den Ukrainern“, 14 Juni 1918; R 14374 Erzberger an Trautmann, Berlin 15. Juni 1918

²⁵⁶ Mogilianski, „Tragediia Ukrainy“ in *1918 god na Ukraine*, 63

²⁵⁷ *1917 god v derevne*, 118-119

‘rebellious’ countryside back to its ‘senses’ unduly impressed Hetman, to the point, in fact, where he was asking the Habsburg ambassador if it were possible to employ exclusively the Hungarians or, at least, to fortify the more hesitant Galician and otherwise Slavic detachments with the Magyar contingent.²⁵⁸ As for the landlords themselves, admitted Kossak-Szczucka, those among them wishing to live in peace with peasantry, “having tried [the Magyars] once shrank away from their help as if offered by the Satan.”

For the reasons partially alluded to, Hetman’s own *Varta* and the auxiliary officer squads were by far the worst mediators of order, compromising for the most part the regime they purported to serve. In contrast to the regular Austro-German units, venturing from their urban bases to the hinterland for short sojourns, they were often permanently attached to the villages and as such were charged to bring the not fully accomplished justice to its dramatic finale. In the aforementioned Strazhgorod, for instance, arriving after the Austrians, the *Varta* pressured the village into turning over all principal “instigators of turmoil”; the culprits once seized, *Varta* officers subjected them to strenuous torments: the apprehended were hanged to the trees, flogged and mauled with some losing their teeth as a result.²⁵⁹ Throwing them into the prison, the *Varta* at least allowed them to get away with their lives, an act of leniency to be sure. Several residents of Gulai-Pole, including Makhno’s brother and a war cripple Yemelian Makhno, had less luck with the Hetman’s police: accused of assisting the “notorious bandit” Makhno, they ended their days facing the firing squad.²⁶⁰ In Gulai-Pole as in uncountable other villages and hamlets sequestered for pacification, the executioners knew their victims personally, perhaps even in the capacity of victims themselves at the time when

²⁵⁸ PA Liasse XI Karton 153 Forgách an Zitkowsky, Kiew, 5. Juli 1918

²⁵⁹ *1917 god na Ukraine*, 119

²⁶⁰ Makhno, *Spovid’ anarkhista*, 429-233

the latter seemed to be having the upper hand; naturally, that codependency of recriminations adulterated the act of justice (whatever it meant) by spicing it with the condiments of private vendettas.

Moving in lockstep with the demoralization of the forces involved, the violence evinced in policing actions revealed the clout that the old political prejudices exerted over the making of the new regime. The Hetman's government did not stint on liberal stock phrases, stressing tirelessly its commitment to the program of rights and reforms; moreover, Skoropadsky himself believed that only the peasantry organized along the Stolypin lines of small but sound homesteads could provide the necessary foundation for the Ukrainian state-building efforts. Yet, notwithstanding those designs, the Hetmanate proceeded against the peasantry as if it were in the state of rebellion, condition calling for the immediate corrective measures. The *fait accompli* of the agrarian pogroms and the ensuing lull had little bearing on the decisions made in Kiev as the state was meting out punishments *belatedly* and *retroactively* for the transgressions decriminalized several times over by the antecedent power-holders (Provisional government, the Bolsheviks and the Rada). In contrast with its official declarations, Skoropadsky's regime pretended to ignore the disruption of the revolutionary months, picking up the threads of the repressively-paternalist agrarian politics where the Tsarist State abandoned them in March of 1917.

Hetman's *retroactive* reprisals found their *ex post facto* justification in the spring resurgence of the peasant militancy. Gauges of public mood, provincial reports were relaying news of arson, pillage and insubordination back to the center, evoking images all too redolent of the

autumnal pogroms. In early May of 1918 villagers of the Kupiansk (ukr. Kup'ians'k) district in the eastern part of the country took up arms in the manner of an old-fashioned Russian *bunt*, leaving twenty burned manors in their blazing wake.²⁶¹ In Sumy district a sumptuous palace of count Stroganov as well as the house of his steward went up in flames, burying a fortune of few million rubles underneath its rubble.²⁶² The notorious “red rooster” – the old Slavic symbol of premeditated conflagration – traveled further west and south, to Verkhnednieprovsk (ukr. Verkn'odniprovs'k), Konstantinograd (ukr. Kostiantynohrad), Chigirin, Zvenigorodka and other districts.²⁶³ Annihilation of existing estates was complete with the destruction of inventory, livestock and harvests; in Iziaslav district of the Volhynian province peasants were reported to be destroying the seeds set aside for the fields; peasants of the Kherson province accomplished the same ‘maneuver’ by feeding their cattle with the sowing seeds.²⁶⁴ Varying in intensity, these destructive acts converged in the grand strategy, not unlike scorched earth, rendering the land uninhabitable and menacingly uninviting for the landlords who might have thought otherwise.

Those among them who were not dissuaded by lunges of hostility and decided to come back did so often at their own risk. On June 6 Starosta of the Yelisavetgrad province reported the murder of a certain Moiseev, a squire from the Aleksandriia district.²⁶⁵ His peer from the region of Kremenchug, a large landowner Gusev, met similar fate at the hands of local peasants, with whom he had an altercation “on the ground of land relations.” Another

²⁶¹ TsDAVO f 1077 o 1 d 35 139

²⁶² TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 16 1 1

²⁶³ Khrystiuk, v. 3, 54-55; TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 16 1 4

²⁶⁴ R 14373 Abschrift „Das Verhalten des deutschen Oberkommandos und der deutschen Behörden gegenüber den Ukrainern“, 14 Juni 1918

²⁶⁵ TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 16 1 11

returnee, left undisclosed by the official communiqué, fell victim to the peasant disturbances on his estate near Radomysl during the first week of June.²⁶⁶ True enough, the wave of killings never reached the proportions of earlier outbursts, kept in check as it were by the mounted *Varta* units or the regular army detachments stationed nearby; yet, if anything the presence of these restraining factors served to bring out the conditionality of the landlords' return and augmented the opprobrium that it signified in the villagers' eyes.

The Ukrainian peasant who was lapsing back into the rebel's posture had many reasons for resentment, the state-sanctioned restitution of property providing certainly an important but not an all-encompassing impulse. It is true, as Kossak-Szczucka wrote, that many landlords, upon receiving "on paper" all of their possessions back, had to confront a team of surly villagers, equipped with rifles and bombs, cutting their progress to the ruined manors with the simple "we won't let you in."²⁶⁷ At the same time, she admits, these very peasants from the Novoselitsa (ukr. Novoselytsia) village land committee, wary of the new regime's policy, arrived to Starokonstantinov to plead with their former *pan* ("master") to make him hasten his return and reclaim the old house.²⁶⁸ Similar episode with the villagers voluntarily surrendering "the lord's goods" (*pańskie dobro*) is described in Dunin-Kozicka's memoirs; in fact, the residents of Rachki near Tarashcha went beyond giving back what they seized, additionally agreeing to compensate through their work the value of the lord's wheat and rye consumed in his absence.²⁶⁹ As one Austrian intelligence officer pointed out, there was more than just fear of retaliation standing behind these manifestations of compliance. Commenting

²⁶⁶ Khrystiuk, v. 3, 54-55

²⁶⁷ Kossak, 106

²⁶⁸ *ibid.*, 104

²⁶⁹ Dunin-Kozicka, 84-85

on Hetman's intention to have the estates of the squires sold to the peasantry, he wrote that "the peasant, being afraid of speedily losing the easily obtained land, himself pushed for the land purchase" in order to establish "a seemingly more secure form of land acquisition."²⁷⁰ Difficult as it must have been for many peasants to part with the riches of the rich, their relinquishment could have been borne with less bitterness had the regime genuinely adhered to that plan and not set prohibitively high interest rates, making the 'legitimate' transfer through sale as good as unfeasible.²⁷¹

Although less weighty than the restitution of property to their former owners, the requisitioning parties, the rifling for rifles and other arms, the ramrods and birches, even the insufficient sensitivity to the 'Ukrainian-ness' of the peasant all contributed their share to the upsurge of countryside violence. When seen together as parts of a complex, they betrayed the paramount ambition of the recently recreated State to force its way back into the village grown accustomed to the autonomous existence. It was in fact precisely this phenomenon, that crude intrusion of the far-away center into the hitherto neglected periphery which accounted in the final analysis for the resentment and subsequent resistance of the rural populace. Thus as if accentuating this profound opposition to the principle personified by the figure of Hetman, the 2,000-strong peasant delegation in Kiev resolved to counter the effects of the earlier *khliboroby* congress by openly disavowing Skoropadsky and his regime – well before its restorationist platform began to make itself felt elsewhere.²⁷² On a more modest scale but with the results all the more tangible because Kiev lacked the means to challenge them, similar acts of symbolic dethroning were reported from Ukraine's many corners: in the

²⁷⁰ PA Liasse XI Karton 152 Nachrichten aus der Ukraine, Trauttmannsdorff an Burián, 20. Mai 1918

²⁷¹ Mędrzecki, 180

²⁷² R 14372 Kaiserlich Deutsches Konsulat, Bülow an Hertling, 24. Mai 1918

village of Brovki of the Skvira (ukr. Skvyra) district where the peasant assembly made it clear that they “will recognize no Hetman Skoropadsky and will not submit to any powers (*vлады*) of his”;²⁷³ in the vicinity of Berdichev, where, according to the official communiqué, two *volosti* were living in a deliberate and determined denial of Hetman’s authority;²⁷⁴ in Zvenigorodka and Yekaterinoslav districts, where the resurrected “Free Cossack” units were brazenly making a stand against the representatives of the “legitimate order” and its *Varta*, etc.²⁷⁵ To Skoropadsky’s summoning to duty the peasant retorted with the language of rights; against his evocation of “civilizational values” he put up the bulwark of class antagonisms; with Hetman’s eulogies of order he remonstrated by dreaming of *svoboda* - that freedom, as he saw it, to live in a world without the lord and the publican.

Before long the opposition to the state, declamatory at first, began to take a concrete form of armed confrontations with the troops of the occupying powers and the detachments of the newly organized Hetman *Varta* – often with casualties on both sides. In Lubny, stated the issue of *Nova Rada* from May 21, local population attempted to balk the German military from coming to collect the available stock of arms. This effort did not amount to much, the peasants finding themselves compelled to comply as soon as the guns at German disposal made their booming presence clear.²⁷⁶ Three days later another German detachment ran into a stiffer resistance around Pogreby near Kremenchug, losing two dead and seven wounded as a result.²⁷⁷ At the beginning of June the Austrians had some trouble with the villagers of

²⁷³ TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 72 l 525

²⁷⁴ TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 72 ll 15-16

²⁷⁵ PA Liasse XI Karton 152 Lage in der Ukraine Mitte April 1918, 30. April 1918; TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 96 ll 1-2

²⁷⁶ R 14373 Abschrift „Das Verhalten des deutschen Oberkommandos und der deutschen Behörden gegenüber den Ukrainern“, 14 Juni 1918

²⁷⁷ TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 75 l 27

Okna in Kherson province, who, having defied the orders of the Austrian command, opened machine gun fire at the troops; the peasants ultimately yielded to the superior pressure, with their leader, a former sailor, opting for suicide in the face of victors' questionable justice.²⁷⁸ Flaring up here and there, the instances of resistance bore an accidental and spontaneous character for the time being, since the peasants, amply supplied with arms, but removed from the major communication highways, could not abet their actions with the commensurate and far-reaching organization. That missing element – the talent for coordination and conspiracy – eventually came from the direction of the banned Left, transforming, once applied to proper circumstances, the short-lived sparks and pent-up steam into the serious work for grinding down the German-backed apparatus of State power.

Part V: Birth of Insurgency

Escaping in the nick of time from the closing ring of the Austro-German troops, Nestor Makhno with few of his comrades successfully crossed the Russian frontier and, after a long and circuitous journey through Rostov, Tsaritsyn, Saratov and Astrakhan, reached the capital of the Red Republic. Here, left to himself, he headed off straight to Kremlin hoping to meet the man who masterminded the Revolution. Whether it was his all-conquering naiveté which recognized no obstacles or the spirit of unmediated democracy that the Bolsheviki had not yet given up, Makhno made his way into the office of the Leader, who received him in the presence of the Party Secretary Iakov Sverdlov.

²⁷⁸ *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v. 1, 171-172

In the course of the notable if partially apocryphal conversation, Makhno went on to elucidate to both Lenin and Sverdlov the major reason behind the failure of the Ukrainian peasantry to lend support to the retreating Soviet troops when they needed it most. For him it was as much a matter of tactical as of political choice.

It should be known to you, he said, that the Red Guard groups and units, regardless of their numerical strength, were undertaking their offensives against the opponent along the railroad lines. A space of 10 to 15 versts from the roads was left vacant; it could contain either supporters of Revolution or counterrevolutionaries. In most cases the success of the operation depended on that. Only on the approaches to the key junctions, cities or villages, traversed by the railroad, did the Red Guard detachments assume front-line positions and made their sallies. Yet, neither the rear area nor the surrounding territory was properly explored. The offensive task of the Revolution suffered from that. By conducting it [the offensive – M.A.] in that manner the Red Guards could not appeal to the populace of the region before the counterrevolutionary forces would switch to the counteroffensive, compelling oftentimes the Red Guards to flee for tens of versts on end – flee again along the same railroads, inside the echelons. In consequence the village population did not even see them. And this is why they could not back them up...²⁷⁹

Not unjustifiably Makhno reversed the causality of the old postulate – namely that the collapse of the infrastructure and of other means of control tied the Bolsheviks to the tactics of the echelon war. Without challenging any of the practical consequences of the five-month struggle, he saw the echelon war as responsible for the disengagement of the countryside – and in fact, for the general mismanagement of the demographic resources – in the task of revolutionary defense.

The Bolsheviks, especially those in the combat zone, agreed with Makhno – at least to the extent that from March onwards they did what they could (admittedly not much) to oppose the German rolling war machine with the obstruction of the *muzhik* war.²⁸⁰ Recognizing the

²⁷⁹ Makhno, *Spovid' anarkhista*, 373

²⁸⁰ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 2, 16

necessity of mobilizing peasantry against the invading regular armies, Antonov-Ovseenko, the Commander-in-Chief of the Republic's forces in the south, charged Kharkov Telegraph worker Innokenty Kozhevnikov with the job of organizing and training partisan detachments within the Sumy, Lebedin, Akhtyrka, Gadiach, Zenkov and Bogodukhov districts of the country.²⁸¹ Simultaneously he sent a telegram to his northern colleague, the Western Front Commander Reinhold Berzin, whom he asked for the Ukrainian-speaking troops, whetted to cut deep into the enemy's rear, causing havoc and inciting rebellion in the hinterland.²⁸² Despite increasingly desperate situation of the Bolshevik "armies," Antonov himself remained optimistic about the possibility of throwing the weight of peasantry onto the scales of the battle. "Ukraine shall engulf the invader in the flame of the great popular war," he said addressing the delegates of the 2nd All-Ukrainian Congress of Soviets. "Not one accomplice of the imperialists shall leave the Ukrainian soil alive."²⁸³

The virulence of Antonov's words could not belie the puny results of his efforts. The 100 partisan cells allegedly founded by Kozhevnikov had about 1,500 members between them – a figure, which turned into a joke all talks of the popular vengeance *à la* Tolstoy.²⁸⁴ The peasant did not want to fight and had little to fight for, espying in the activities of the disjointed detachments (such as those of Marusia Nikiforova) a source of great nuisance rather than an example worthy of emulation. Those peasant formations that did join the Bolsheviks – Makhno's Gulai-Pole Regiment among them – proved to be of little value: they tended to stay close to their own villages, or, when venturing beyond their turf, to succumb

²⁸¹ *ibid.*, v. 2, 42-43

²⁸² *ibid.*, v. 2, 57; TsDAHO f 5 o 1 d 5 l 25

²⁸³ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 2, 80

²⁸⁴ *ibid.*, v. 2, 110

to the moody recalcitrance once the inexorable power of the German divisions became manifest to them.²⁸⁵

The lack of success in rousing the countryside under the banner of Revolution did not discredit the idea of the people's war; on the contrary, it became the focus of discussion at the Bolshevik Conference in Taganrog whither the Soviet Ukrainian Government relocated in April of 1918. Prodded or provoked by their left S-R partners in power, the Ukrainian Bolshevik leaders had to decide what form to assume and what actions to undertake now that the loss of Ukraine seemed inevitable. Three positions crystallized in the course of the debates. The so-called Yekaterinoslav group, represented by the regional Party cell secretaries Emmanuil Kviring and Iakov Iakovlev (Epshtein), warned against the "flare-throwing" (*vspyshkopuskatel'stvo*) in the style of the Socialist Revolutionaries, but they refused to proffer any constructive alternative to it.²⁸⁶ The iconoclastic Left, on the other hand, led by such Bolshevik firebrands as Georgy (Iuri) Piatakov, Andrei Bubnov and Iuri Kotsiubinsky, pushed for an immediate action, defining "the principal task of the party of the proletariat" to be "the organization of the armed uprising of the proletarian-peasant masses of Ukraine against the oppressors."²⁸⁷ More ambiguous was the stance of the Centralists, exemplified by the Chairman of the People's Secretariat Nikolai Skrypnik. Without denying either the inevitability or the desirability of the "insurrectional rebellious movement," Skrypnik's theses placed emphasis on "the creation of the class-based party organizations" inside Ukraine, which in perspective could evolve into the operative nodes of the rebellious

²⁸⁵ the fate of Makhno's detachment is an instructive example of that (Makhno, *Spovid' anarkhista*, 229ff)

²⁸⁶ Erde, 259

²⁸⁷ See their resolution in Erde, 260-261

network.²⁸⁸ Although Antonov, who observed those arguments from the distance, sided with the radicals on the left, the Party gave a marginal advantage to the views of Skypnik's group, accepting their platform as the general guideline for its own development in the interim period between the forced exile and the projected return.²⁸⁹

The Left, however, did manage to prevail in one important aspect. Judging that the *Tsikuka* in pair with the People's Secretariat became technically superannuated and politically superfluous, the Left successfully argued for their dismantlement; from the materials thus freed, they intended to build a more compact bureau with an unwieldy title: "All-Ukrainian Bureau for directing insurgent struggle against the German occupiers." With four Bolsheviks, four Ukrainian Left S-Rs and one Left Ukrainian Social Democrat on its board,²⁹⁰ the "Insurgent Nine" (*Povstancheskaia deviatka*), as the Bureau came to be known, combined features of the revolutionary Government-in-Exile and the overarching Insurgency Staff, a body responsible for the logistical, tactical and strategic questions of the Ukrainian anti-German Underground. At the 1st Congress of the Communist Party (of the Bolsheviks) of Ukraine (CP(b)U)²⁹¹ held in Moscow in July of 1918, the Bureau was reorganized again, receiving a designation better suited to its true functions: All-Ukrainian Central Military Revolutionary Committee. By that time too the last vestiges of ambiguity, contained in the original Skypnik's program, were discarded, leaving the space for the aboveboard Leftist formula: with its task circumscribed to "the organization of working masses" and "the

²⁸⁸ *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v. 1, 125-126

²⁸⁹ Erde, 264-265

²⁹⁰ Bolshevik members: Skrypnik, Vladimir Zatonsky, Bubnov and Piatakov; Left S-Rs: Evgenii (Evhen) Terletsky, Opanas Odoevsky, Sergei Mstislavsky and Semushkin; Nikolai (Mykola) Vrublevsky belonged to the Left Social Democrats.

²⁹¹ created, incidentally, at the Taganrog Conference

direction of the class struggle,” the Party had to assume the leading role in the future uprising, providing the rebels with the necessary expertise and equipping them with the lacking materiel.²⁹²

The coup that swept the Rada off the stage and brought Hetman to power terminated the quaint alliance between the German militarists and the non-Bolshevik Ukrainian Left, the Social-Democrats (USDRP) and the Socialist-Revolutionaries (UPSR) in particular. Now they were left to rummage through their political conscience searching for an answer to the question that the Bolsheviks themselves resolved with ease thanks to the preexisting clarity of their status. Each of the parties had to articulate their position towards the new regime and adopt a course of action in accordance with its temperament and ambition. Thus, although they condemned the coup as a deadly threat to the Ukrainian Statehood, the Social-Democrats, as the more moderate of the former partners, opted for the constitutional means of resistance, pursuing the line “of organized political work” that was to culminate in the convocation of the Constitutional Assembly. At its Fifth Congress held in mid May of 1918 the Party explicitly swore “to keep the proletariat from falling onto the path of anarchic struggle,” in advance exculpating itself from charges of mutinous intent. The more extreme wing of the Party tried to demur, yet, with its feeble voice drowning in the choir of conciliatory demands, it had to submit to the conservative resolution of the majority and desist from advocating active and violent insubordination to Hetman’s authority.²⁹³

²⁹² *Kommunisticheskaia Partiiia Ukrainy v rezoliutsiiakh i resheniiakh s'ezdov i konferentsii, 1918-1956* (Kiev: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo polit literatury, 1958) 13-14

²⁹³ Khrystiuk, v. 3, 17-19

In contrast to the Social-Democrats, the critical mass of the Ukrainian S-Rs placed their principles above the necessity of preserving fractional unity. They too convoked a congress on the morrow of the coup (May 13-16), in the course of which the line of the future rift between the left and the right factions was etched out with exactness of a Damascus steel blade. The two opposing wings stepped out with their own resolutions, the rightists arguing for an ambiguous and innocuous-sounding “democratization of the political and social life of Ukraine” and the left demanding nothing short of the active struggle with the counterrevolution – “according to the socialist-revolutionary tradition.”²⁹⁴ Although the right succeeded in getting its program voted for, the newly-elected Central Committee of the Party consisted almost exclusively of the committed leftists. That in itself was enough to take the force out of the rightist resolution, replaced a fortnight later by the “Platform of the Central Committee of the Ukrainian Party of the Socialist-Revolutionaries.” Even more than the similarly worded Bolshevik proclamations of the period, the document represented a formal declaration of war to the Hetmanate, limning out the plan for the battles to follow:

Aiming to launch a revolution...UPSR will on one hand – conduct a relentless and active agitation and fight in that direction, upsetting forces of reaction, its government, its military and socio-political basis at the center and local levels, grouping together all disorganizing partisan detachments, which actively defend the idea of land socialization [and] stand on guard for freedom... on the other hand [the Party will] at the same time carry on with the propaganda, preparation and organization of the revolutionary centers of the peasantry and working class... in order to topple through the joint and unanimous uprising in the center and localities ... the reactionary government and pass the power to the forces of democracy.²⁹⁵

With this decision to go back to the barricades the Ukrainian S-Rs found themselves brushing shoulders with their one-time Bolshevik adversaries. The repudiation of the

²⁹⁴ *ibid.*, v. 3, 20-22

²⁹⁵ *ibid.*, v. 3, 91-94

Hetman's coup became therefore that crucible wherein the alliance between the two radical left organizations was forged and their resources pooled together to reach the shared aim.

The situation on the ground – within the provincial interstices only mildly affected by the city-based Austro-German garrisons – mirrored the decisions made by the Bolsheviks in Taganrog and the Left S-Rs in Kiev. This connection was not necessarily causal, flowing unperturbed from top to bottom or from the center to the periphery; it was rather conjectural, owing as much to the ramifications of the Hetman's coup and his incipient activity as to the predicament in which the radical Left suddenly found itself. For once, the change of government alienated a substantial part of the administrative corps, especially those who came in riding the revolutionary tide and whose existence depended on the continuation of the sanctioned decentralization – some would say, of “the legalized anarchy.” As a result, wrote Field Marshall Böhm Ermolli to the Austrian High Command (AOK) in Baden on May 16, “certain commissars, who feared losing their employment with the advent of the new Government, got carried away agitating against it (*ließen sich zu Agitationen gegen dieselbe hinreißen*).”²⁹⁶ According to the ambassador Count Forgách, those of the commissars who wanted to express their resentment without attracting too much attention, could do so by simply keeping the peasantry uninformed about the events in Kiev – hardly an incredible feat given the state of infrastructure and news media.²⁹⁷ Such forms of administrative resistance seemed not only widespread but methodical – to the point where the occupation authorities began to suspect a grand plot conceived to undermine their position. Mumm, a man otherwise keen on separating confirmed information from the

²⁹⁶ PA Liasse XI Karton 152 Böhm-Ermolli über die politische Lage in die Ukraina, 16. Mai 1918

²⁹⁷ PA Liasse XI Karton 152 Forgách zu Burián „Politische Stimmungen und Parteien in der Ukraina“, Kiew, am 26. Mai 1918

rumors, apprised the German Foreign Service of the three-month advance pay that the Ukrainian functionaries putatively received from the former Rada ministers “for the purposes of encouraging sabotage activities.”²⁹⁸ Although the most obvious choice, the toppled Ukrainian Government did not exhaust the list of possible candidates for the role of the principal instigator, as the Germans and the Austrians let their imagination roam freely to the places where the yarns of conspiracy were thought to entwine in a single knot – in the direction of Moscow and then farther yet to London, Paris and Washington.

The simple fact that conspiracies efface the traces of their tracks makes it hard to say where the guided administrative sabotage ended and the banal bureaucratic incompetence began. Moreover, the establishment of the activity directed at a deliberate disruption would not in itself reveal the limits of the conspiratorial network; neither does it always allow one to identify the network’s epicenter, especially since the participants were often kept in the dark about the designs and the whereabouts of the ‘superior will.’ The task of unraveling the narrative Gordian knot is further compounded by the existence of numerous competing accounts produced when the former partners from the anti-Hetman “*Front Populaire*” – to use an evocative if anachronistic analogy – turned against each other with more rancor than the Skoropadsky’s regime was ever deemed worthy of receiving. With such nearly insurmountable obstacles at hand, any meaningful statement bereft of self-doubt looks rather suspect and only a conjecture – hopefully, an intelligent one– gives proof of the highest attainable virtue – that of the historical verisimilitude.

²⁹⁸ R 14369 Der K. Botschafter a.D. an Auswärtiges Amt, Telegram, Kiew, 4. Mai 1918

Yet, by setting the bar lower – certainly below the illusory mark of “truth” – one could get a glimpse of the logistics involved in re-inscribing the peasantry back into the grand style politics and, in fact, in transforming it into a key instrument of the all-Russian political struggle. To this end it will prove instructive to look closer at three regions roughly corresponding to the major breeding grounds of the anti-Hetman activities in the summer months of 1918: the southern half of the Kiev province, which provided the stage for the large Zvenigorodka-Tarashcha peasant uprising, the central part of the Chernigov province, where the Nezhin (ukr. Nizhyn) partisans operated and the region of Yekaterinoslav, most closely associated with the name of Nestor Makhno.

Notwithstanding the extent and the intensity of the uprising in Tarashcha and Zvenigorodka districts of the Kiev province, available materials do not liberate it from the enveloping aura of obscurity. In so far as the absence of a clear triggering order is concerned, it remained a spontaneous revolt, yet it would have been nipped in the bud without the prior work that went into organizing. The south, that is, Zvenigorodka and its environs, was predominantly the domain of the non-Bolshevik Ukrainian Left – or, to put it differently, of the “ideologically-loaded” functionaries, who won their posts from the Rada and kept them under Hetman. Thus, as mentioned earlier, Iurko Tiutiunyk served as a demission commissioner of the district;²⁹⁹ Ivan Kapulovsky, another key personality of the conspiratorial ring, became the District Military Commander (*uezdnyi voinski nachal'nik*) shortly before the coup.³⁰⁰ Their activities unfolded under the protective umbrella of the District Commandant M. Pavlovsky, instructed in his turn to back them by Mykola Shynkar,

²⁹⁹ Tiutiunyk, *Revoliutsiina stykhiia*, 56

³⁰⁰ I. Kapulovsky, „Organizatsiia vosstaniia protiv Getmana“, *Letopis' Revoliutsii* v. 4 (1923), 97

a notable Ukrainian S-R and the Commandant of the entire Kiev province.³⁰¹ Together they managed to build up a system of support and patronage, covering up each other's deeds (or misdeeds) within the framework of impermeable officialdom.

It was thus with the official blessing and under the Germans' very nose that Kapulovsky, Tiutiunyk, Shynkar and others had called for a conference of all left parties, Ukrainian and not, in order to articulate the stance with regards to Hetman and discuss the future of the Revolution. From of the ranks of the participants emerged a new organization with an allusive name of the "Young Ukraine," encompassing fifteen Socialist-Revolutionaries and Ukrainian Social-Democrats. As a cultural association with the self-ascribed educational mission, it resurrected the old S-R paper *Zvenihorodska Dumka* and transformed it into the local mouthpiece of the anti-Hetman opposition.³⁰² Yet, as Kapulovsky pointed out in his recollections, its "cultural-educational" activities provided only the decorous shell to the task of creating peasant fighting brigades.³⁰³

During the months antecedent to the German occupation, Zvenigordka district was the home of the first, largest and organizationally most sophisticated "regiment" (*kish*) of the Free Cossacks. Barring Pavlovsky, all of the aforementioned conspirators played an outstanding role in the movement, especially Tiutiunyk, whose contribution was recognized when he became the regiment's elected commander (*koshovoi*).³⁰⁴ Although disbanded, the Free

³⁰¹ *ibid.*, 97; it is important to note that Shynkar, the staff captain of the Tsarist army, played a central role in the defense of Kiev against Muraviev. That experience, however, did not render the idea of collaborating with the Bolsheviks unpalatable for him, as the events of the uprising were about to show.

³⁰² Tiutiunyk, *Revoliutsiina stykhiiia*, 57

³⁰³ I. Kapulovsky, „Organizatsiia vosstaniia protiv Getmana“, 97

³⁰⁴ Tiutiunyk, *Revoliutsiina stykhiiia*, 53

Cossack militia left in its wake a substantial pool of cadres familiar with the challenges of leadership and organization, a population accustomed to a para-military life and, of course, mounds of unregistered weapons dispersed across the land. These assets proving critical to the “Young Ukrainians,” they made sure to derive full advantage out of them before the new authorities got wind of their activities. Regularly bypassing the Germans, arms were being deposited on Tiutiunyk’s writ to the designated storages, guarded on top of it by the wards long initiated into the insurgents’ secrets. To shield peasant households from the untoward curiosity of the German and Hetman search parties, Kapulovsky handed out official receipts testifying that the village in question is loyal and arms-free. Large stocks of firearms and ammunition were amassed in that manner; kept inside for a few weeks, the weapons quickly made their way back into the open when the conspirators, disguised as robbers, broke into Tiutiunyk’s depots and cleaned them of their valuable content. That stratagem forced many of its participants to go underground, but Tiutiunyk, who gained an alibi by informing his German superiors of the accident, came out blameless and retained his post till the very outbreak of the uprising.³⁰⁵

While the weapons were being collected, Kapulovsky and others journeyed to and fro the villages of the Zvenigorodka, Tarashcha, Uman and Kanev (ukr. Kaniv) districts, organizing their residents into separate ‘battalions’ under the pretext of peasant congresses. Altogether the conspirators churned out 18 of such “battalions” with a reported number of 25,000 armed partisans.³⁰⁶ It seems unlikely that all of them or even the majority were privy to the military craft, yet the core of these detachments – or “bands” as they were dubbed in the official

³⁰⁵ I. Kapulovsky, „Organizatsiia vosstaniia protiv Getmana“ 98-99

³⁰⁶ *ibid.*, 98

sources – was professional enough, consisting as it most often did of the Great War veterans.³⁰⁷ Between their private grievances and shared difficulties in transitioning to peaceful life a wide gamut of reasons existed which made the former front-line soldiers particularly susceptible to the rebels' suasions. For one could have not escaped them that the landlord's authority returned clothed in a gray German uniform with a *Stahlhelm* set squarely on a shaven head. In a sense, therefore, the future uprising combined the old duty of repelling the "Teuton invader" with the search of communal justice, accomplishing in one stroke the long-sought fusion of nationalist discourse and socialist agenda into a coherent whole.

Given the illegal status of their party and the respectively greater need for secrecy, the Bolshevik activities were even harder to track. Working mostly within the Tarashcha district north of Zvenigorodka, they made a display of their achievements only after the fact – i.e. once the upheaval of the uprising brought to the surface the subterranean layers of clandestine life. The Bolsheviks had certainly much to be proud of, for when the signal was given, 14 villages of the Tarashcha district at once rose up in arms.³⁰⁸ According to the canonic Soviet history, their operations in the region were directed by the underground Kiev Provincial Committee headed by a twenty-year old Nikolai Vrublevsky, one of the "Insurgent Nine" and, incidentally, not a Bolshevik but a Left Ukrainian Social-Democrat.³⁰⁹ In view of the profound commitment to remain silent about the deeds of the other, one could only surmise what types of rapports existed between the Bolsheviks in Tarashcha and the

³⁰⁷ R 14374 „Die innerpolitische Lage Rußlands“ 18. Juni 1918; PA Liasse XI Karton 152 K.u.K. Beigeordneter bei der deutschen Etappenverwaltung in der Dobrudscha und Verbindungsoffizier bei der 3 Armee, Constanza-Wien, 23. Juni 1918; TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 70 l 17

³⁰⁸ TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 72 l 17

³⁰⁹ S. Khromov, ed., *Grazhdanskaia voina i voennaia interventsiiia v SSSR*, (Moscow: Sov. Entsiklopediia, 1983), 218

Zvenigorodka plotters. Yet, what is clear is that the Bolshevik-armed peasants of Tarashcha openly challenged Hetman's authority six days after their neighbors were provoked to do the same in Zvenigorodka. From that moment on, the question of whether the Tarashcha rebels acted in fulfillment of a certain preliminary agreement or in recognition of an opportune moment lost much of its practical value, as the population of the two districts shuttled back and forth from the role of the accomplices in the dispatches to Hetman's administrators to that of the champions of the shared cause evoked by their opponents on the left.

At one point the information about the Zvenigorodka underground became known to the authorities, who decided to apply the pressure of reprisals to force the conspirators to a premature stand.³¹⁰ On June 3 these efforts reached their aim when the District Commandant turning to the population, urging them to an armed rebellion.³¹¹ The response was powerful and immediate with more than 15,000 peasants going on the offensive against the Hetman's punitive detachments around Lysianka, less than 20 miles north of Zvenigorodka.³¹²

Considering the developments in the countryside, the Field Marshal Eichhorn resolved to cancel his trip to Odessa – where he was supposed to meet his Austrian counterpart Alfred Krauß – and stay closer to the main operational theater.³¹³ On June 9 Austro-Hungarian Ambassador Forgách wrote of the heavy losses suffered by the Germans in their melees with the peasants, a note seconded by Mumm's remark that "the affaire at Zvenigorodka is more serious than is officially admitted."³¹⁴ On that same day, after forty-eight hours of fighting, the peasant units broke into Zvenigorodka and captured its entire German garrison. The

³¹⁰ I. Kapulovsky, „Organizatsiia vosstaniia protiv Getmana“, 99

³¹¹ Mędrzecki, 222

³¹² TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 16 l 6

³¹³ PA Liasse XI Karton 152, Forgách, Kiew, 9. Juni

³¹⁴ R 14373 Der K. Botschafter an Auswärtiges Amt, Kiew, den 10. Juni 1918

Germans speedily retorted, reclaiming the town on June 13 and arresting one of the rebels' leaders, Levko Shevchenko, a former Tsarist pilot and a descendant of Ukraine's national poet.³¹⁵ This setback allayed tensions in the region for a short time as the rebellion's center of gravity shifted northeastward, to the region around the town of Stavishche (ukr. Stavyshche) in the Tarashcha district of the Kiev province.³¹⁶

There the situation for the authorities took a turn for the worse almost at once. Arriving in well-formed groups from the surrounding villages, peasant rebels converged on Tarashcha, investing and seizing it on June 12, 1918. The retreating German and Hetman ("Officer") units had to pass through the narrow road as the insurgents showered them with bullets, sowing more than just confusion in their ranks. In the course of five days, wrote Tarashcha district starosta, the Government troops lost 7 men near Ianishevka (ukr. Ianyshivka), another 7 at Dengofovka and 15 at Cherepniano.³¹⁷ On the 19th of June, acting on behalf of a mysterious "Head Military Revolutionary Staff" certain Fiodor Grebenko, an ensign of the Russian Imperial Army,³¹⁸ proclaimed himself the "Supreme Commander of all armed forces of partisan troops of Ukraine" and issued a mobilization order that matched the ambition of the title.³¹⁹ Peasants from the nearby Skvira districts began to flock to Tarashcha on their own impulsion or in response to Grebenko's appeal³²⁰ as he and his men, now a formidable body of 4,500 strong with 13 machine guns and a cannon were exporting the revolution back

³¹⁵ *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v. 1, 193

³¹⁶ TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 72 ll 62-63

³¹⁷ TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 72 ll 62-63

³¹⁸ TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 72 l 174

³¹⁹ TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 72 l 50

³²⁰ TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 70 l 45

to Zvenigorodka.³²¹ Counter-state activities having resumed there, by late June that district boasted as many as 30 thousand rebels, equipped with machine guns and even disposing of several captured artillery batteries. From its double epicenter, the uprising spread concentrically to Uman, Skvira, Kanev and parts of the Yelisavetgrad and Kremenchug districts, where the martial law was imposed with full powers delegated to the German military.³²² This was still a far cry from the type of a peasant war fancied by the planners, yet alarming enough to haunt such cool-headed and experienced German politicians as Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg with images of a near elemental violence, perpetrated by a peasant army of 200,000 strong, all amply armed and determined to terminate German presence in Ukraine.³²³

At the time when the Germans were concentrating their forces against the peasant insurgents in Tarashcha and Zvenigorodka, a ground for the new rebellion was being prepared in the Chernigov province. This area, overrun by the Bolsheviks in January of 1918, offered some of the most dramatic sights in the expressive landscape of the agrarian movement: manors ransacked, landlords banished or killed, property distributed in the spirit of the egalitarian radicalism.³²⁴ Village squads, grown out of the peasant unrest, transformed the leveling impulse into a solid practice, leaving little to the vicissitudes of the public mood and remonstrations of the village well-to-do's. Analogous in many ways to the Free Cossacks, a number of these units survived the arrival of the German troops to Ukraine by absconding

³²¹ *Istoriia pokhodov i boevykh deistvii 131-go Tarashchanskogo polka* (Zhitomir: Tipo-litografiiia Gospoligrafob'edineniia Volyni, 1925), 7

³²² Mędrzecki, 226-227; TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 75 l 48

³²³ R 14378 Bethmann Hollweg, Bern, 1. August 1918

³²⁴ *1917 god v derevne*, 130

behind the thick screen of marches and groves.³²⁵ Drawing these detachments out of their hiding places and subjecting them to a common plan seemed a natural venue to pursue for any anti-governmental organization found in the region – an undertaking that in theory should have not raised too many objections since the continued existence of those forest mavericks largely depended on the guidance and support from the outside.

The Chernigov Bolsheviks must have thought along similar lines when they resolved to convoke an underground congress in the provincial capital with an aim of uniting all underground forces under the aegis of one agency. For a while the Provincial Revolutionary Committee, elected at the congress, filled the role of such unifying center. With its mission vaguely circumscribed to the consolidation and intensification of the revolutionary work, it acted as a lynchpin between the existing revolutionary committees as well as a progenitor of the new ones.³²⁶ Since it was brought to life on a local initiative, the Committee persisted in a vacuum, modified but by the flair of its members to intuit the shape that the curvature of the general Party line was about to assume.

This guessing game came to an end with the arrival of Nikolai Krapiviansky, a high-ranking officer of the Tsarist army and a native of the Chernigov province. Sent down south from Moscow by the “Insurgent Nine,” he held the mandate for sorting out the military aspects of the anticipated uprising.³²⁷ Once in the town of Nezhin – where the Chernigov Bolsheviks established their informal headquarters – Krapiviansky proceeded by creating the Central Staff with a commanding competence extending as far as Priluky district of the neighboring

³²⁵ Naum Tocheny, „Krasnye partizany na Nezhinshchine,“ *Letopis' Revoliutsii*, v. 2 (1926), 65

³²⁶ *ibid.*, 65-66

³²⁷ *ibid.*, 66

Poltava province. Beyond that pale the Staff was carrying out reconnoitering operations in the direction of Zolotonosha and Cherkassy, hoping to secure permanent ties with the local revolutionary cells and to win them ultimately over to the prospect of a synchronized action.³²⁸

While abandoning provincial and district revolutionary committees to the nitty-gritty details of the preparatory work, the Central Staff arrogated upon itself the right to keep the count of the available resources and to supervise the manner of their utilization. In the first order issued on June 19, Krapiviansky as the head of the Staff “proposed” (*predlagaiu*) that all revolutionary organizations within the domain of the staff’s competence send him the information concerning the quantity of weapons and ammunition on hand, size of the pecuniary means as well as the number of able-bodied insurgents ready to present themselves at the first call to arms.³²⁹ Reminiscent of the user guides, the four orders that followed (Orders nr 2 to nr 5) instructed the revolutionary committees how to maintain “comradely discipline” among the rank-and-file, take a good care of the precious guns, attend to the all-important questions of supply and, finally, recruit competent and trustworthy commanding officers.³³⁰ Conspiratorial solicitude, keeping Krapiviansky’s Staff always on the move, complicated the relaying of orders to the underground cells, yet the four affiliate staffs, conveniently located along the perimeter of the Nezhin district, could always step forth and act as its proxies. Eventually, through the skillful use of the dedicated party cadres, the Central Staff obtained control over an extensive military network, encompassing in the Nezhin district alone a total force of 6 thousand registered peasants with 14 officers and 200

³²⁸ A. Bubnov, „Istoriia odnogo partizanskogo shtaba,“ *Letopis' Revoliutsii*, v. 2 (1926), 94

³²⁹ *ibid.*, 94-95

³³⁰ *ibid.*, 96

NCOs at their head.³³¹ As a sacristan primed to pull the bell ropes at the dawn before service, the Staff kept these men in the state of suspenseful expectancy, apprehensive of the ringing signal and the subsequent command to proceed with an all-out offensive without further ado.

From July onward the operational centers of the insurgency began to incrementally increase the scope and the intensity of the anti-governmental activity in the region. By releasing Order Nr 5 (mid July) the Central Staff spelled out the necessity of doing away with the undefined “enemies of the people,” an appeal powerful enough to provoke a campaign of terror against Hetman functionaries, Varta members, estate owners and the officers of the volunteer squads. Few notable attacks took place at Nosovka, Drozdovka and Verkievka, where the government troops, according to the figures provided by Bubnov, lost as many as 113 men.³³² In this yet undeclared war the partisans of the Chernigov province had the support of the similarly structured insurgents from the 10-mile wide strip of land beyond the Ukrainian border, commonly referred to as the ‘neutral zone.’³³³ Although their raids were largely confined to the region of Starodub and Novgorod-Seversk, the two districts adjacent to the frontier, they managed to divert the gaze of the administration away from the interior of the Chernigov province into that obscure area of questionable jurisdiction.³³⁴ However small the actual damage caused by the attacks was, the region saw itself transformed into the zone of smoldering warfare, with the population gradually habituating itself both to the friable nature of authority as well as the eventuality of personal involvement in undermining it.

³³¹ *ibid.*, 97

³³² *ibid.*, 98; Naum Tocheny, „Krasnye partizany na Nezhinshchine“, 67-69

³³³ For the origin of the zone, see Chapter 3

³³⁴ TsDAHO f 5 o 1 d 151 l 111

Drafted on July 17, Order nr 6 with an open call to arms might have thus found a troupe of well-rehearsed actors and an audience sympathetic as if comprised of the potential participants. Its practical value being deliberated over at the highest level of political responsibility, the right and the left wings of the Ukrainian Bolshevik Party wrangled with each other as they cleft to their customary views: the right (Kviring and Iakovlev) stressed that the time is hardly ripe for any serious action whereas the left (Bubnov, Piatakov and Zatonksy) saw the uprising as long overdue. At the moment this fractious wavering seemed as inopportune as it was irrelevant, for the pressure, mounting underneath the strictures of conspiracy, was threatening to blow off the cover and expose the entire underground to the government countermeasures when it would be least prepared to defend itself. Eventually, with the smaller detachments prodding the revolutionary committees, and the revolutionary committees passing on this impatience further up to the Central Staff, CP(b)U made up its mind in the leftist sense, deciding to proceed with release of the order and fixing the 6th of August as the date of the announcement.³³⁵

Krapiviansky, however, was not able to wait that long, taking the field with the 500-men detachment one day ahead of the plan. He came within a hair's breadth to seizing the town of Nezhin and an adjacent train station, but, the resistance of local German garrison proving too strong and his ammunition running low, he had to beat a retreat.³³⁶ The Germans, who had

³³⁵ Naum Tocheny, „Krasnye partizany na Nezhinshchine“, 70; Bubnov, „Istoriia odnogo partizanskogo shtaba,“ 97-98

³³⁶ Piotr Tocheny, „Epizody avgustovskikh boev 1918 goda na Nezhinshchine“, *Letopis' Revoliutsii*, v. 2 (1926), 79

reacted to the news of the uprising with the celerity that took the rebels by surprise, brought in the reinforcements and went in pursuit of Krapiviansky's troops. Pressed by the overwhelming skill and numbers, Krapiviansky disbanded the Staff, leaving only 50 men in his entourage.³³⁷ That put an effective end to managing the operational aspect of the uprising, yet the partisans showed themselves as capable of acting in isolation from the overarching plan as they were when guided by the center.

Left to their own devices, the peasant insurgents were acting as the partisan detachments are expected to act, cutting off communication lines, waylaying smaller Varta units, and killing supporters of the regime while purveying their own cause to the population at large. Vitaly Primakov, hero of the winter battles rustivating with his mounted Red Cossacks in the confines of the neutral zone, shook off his abeyance and galloped straight to Novgorod-Seversk (ukr. Novhorod-Siversky) on the Ukrainian side of the border. His force, growing from a few hundred to a few thousand mostly unarmed peasants, was checked at Vorobievka (ukr. Vorob'ivka) 25 miles north of the target.³³⁸ Primakov turned back, yet the mission did not qualify as a failure for the smaller groups were splintering off the main body, spreading the message of insubordination to the outlying villages. Another rebel formation of the ex-tsarist officer Piavka, having ensnared the strategic stretch from Nezhin to Chernigov into the spiral of its serpentine movements, kept on eluding the German garrisons stationed there, while assailing and dispersing smaller columns dispatched without proper intelligence.³³⁹ By mid August, according to the official press, the peasant uprising reigned in seven out of

³³⁷ Mędrzecki, 235

³³⁸ Naum Tocheny, „Krasnye partizany na Nezhinshchine“, 73-75

³³⁹ Piotr Tocheny, „Epizody avgustovskikh boev 1918 goda na Nezhinshchine“, 88-90

fifteen districts of the province.³⁴⁰ Although Chernigov itself together with the major towns remained under solid German control, they were being excised from the rest of the country so that for days on no one in Kiev knew with certainty their exact predicament.³⁴¹ Deriving advantage from this confusion, the Ukrainian Bolsheviki actually published the news, according to which not only Chernigov and Nezhin, but also Poltava were either taken or on the brink of falling into the rebels' hands – a simple device of informational warfare which succeeded in planting a seed of doubt in the highest diplomatic circles of the Austro-German alliance.³⁴²

Similarly organized albeit by a different set of individuals, uprisings in the Kiev and Chernigov provinces followed a nearly identical narrative path, at the end of which their various protagonists saw themselves sharing the same terrain. After three weeks of heavy fighting the Germans managed to get the better of the rebels in the area of Tarashcha-Zvenigorodka, holding on to Tarashcha against the rebel force of 4,000 strong on the night of June 30, and then meticulously working to squeeze the remaining bands out of the province.³⁴³ Under superior pressure thousands of the insurgents accompanied by the refugees began to move towards Dnieper, crossing the river in early August at Tripol'e (ukr. Trypillia),³⁴⁴ Rzhishev (ukr. Rzhyshev)³⁴⁵ at its wide bend across from Pereiaslav³⁴⁶ and through the fords leading to Zolotonosha. Once on the left bank, the groups were splintering into smaller units, which minimized their striking power but maximized their mobility and

³⁴⁰ KA Spannocchi B760, Auszug aus den Odassaer Morgenblättern von 14. August 1918

³⁴¹ KA Spannocchi B760, Auszüge aus den Odassaer Morgenblättern von 13. August, 14. August, 15. August 1918

³⁴² R 14380, Der K. Botschafter an Auswärtiges Amt, Kiew, 19. August

³⁴³ TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 72 l 77

³⁴⁴ TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 72 l 193

³⁴⁵ KA Spannocchi B760, Auszug aus den Odassaer Morgenblättern von 13. August, 1918

³⁴⁶ TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 75 ll 101-102

raised the chances of reaching the northern border. Losing men and equipment to the relentless opponent, the rebels of Grebenko, Shynkar and others retorted by setting off uprisings in the areas of their passage; with four districts up in arms against the execrable regime, the region of Zolotonosha proved to be particularly receptive to the idea of emulating their neighbors' example.³⁴⁷ On August 12 at Goltva (ukr. Hovtva) and at Liutenka six days later (Poltava province) the retreating rebels, reduced to a few hundred stragglers, were dangerously close to being fully annihilated,³⁴⁸ yet, making up with luck where the skill was lacking, they succeeded to break through the enemy rings and make their final sprint for safety. Their travails were finally over in the last week of August as the surviving core attained the border and the neutral zone beyond, which greeted them with an offer of rest and convalescence. There the rebels from Tarashcha and Zvenigorodka –led as before by their old and trusted commanders³⁴⁹ - would persevere through the rest of the summer and the autumn only to reenter Ukraine under a modified guise when the armistice in the West threw into disarray the fate of Germany's political creations on the opposite rim of the continent.

Taking a sober view of their own predicament, the Nezhin rebels resolved to seek refuge in the unclaimed corners of the neutral zone. Compared to the retreat from Tarashcha, their own trek seemed less dramatic if only by virtue of being substantially shorter and laying across heavily-wooded areas of the northern *Chernigovshchina*. It was not a walk in a park either, since the German troops controlled the greater part of the province as well as the bridges

³⁴⁷ KA Spannochhi B760 Auszug aus den Odessaer Abendblättern vom 8. August 1918; TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 75 l 92

³⁴⁸ TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 75 l 123, l 125

³⁴⁹ Convinced that his mission in Ukraine did not yet run its full course, Grebenko decided to stay behind, giving his men to the care of an old Bolshevik Balias; he would reappear in the neutral zone shortly afterwards, taking command over an unformed regiment of Red cavalrymen.

over the frontier river of Desna. With this in mind, many insurgents preferred to bury their weapons and travel light, hoping to be mistaken for the Russian POWs by the German patrols.³⁵⁰ That trick worked well – albeit at a price of valuable equipment – as the groups of the partisans began to filter through the cordon, *en masse* or separately, arriving to the neutral zone towns of Pochep and Seredina Buda at the finishing stretch of their journey. The old “Insurgent Nine,” which in the meantime changed its name to the All-Ukrainian Central Military Revolutionary Committee and moved into the zone to be closer to the fray, was found there waiting for the tattered incomers; Nikolai Krapiviansky was also around, charged by the selfsame committee with the reorganization of the insurgents into battalions and regiments of the regular army mould.

The line running obliquely down from Volhynia to the Donbass region split Ukraine in two with each half reflecting the character of the occupying power even more precisely than that of the individual population enclosed within. If the German-administered north could still muster up sufficient evidence of legality to substantiate hopes of eventual normalization, the south was a place of endemic disorder neatly conjoined with the arbitrariness of the Austro-Hungarian military rule. Although Ukraine was believed to offer the Dual monarchy the “only hope” of emerging from its own dire supply situation,³⁵¹ nothing in the methods practiced by the Habsburg Army betrayed the desire to set the economic exploitation of the land upon a solid and reliable footing. On the contrary, they were colored by the imperative impatience of the High Command no less than by the demoralization of the rank-and-file and

³⁵⁰ Naum Tochony, „Krasnye partizany na Nezhinshchine“, 75-76; Piotr Tocheny, „Epizody avgustovskikh boev 1918 goda na Nezhinshchine“, 92

³⁵¹ Alfred Krauß, *Ursachen unserer Niederlage: Erinnerungen und Urteile aus dem Weltkrieg* (München: J.F. Lehmann, 1920), 253

as such were much better suited for provoking peasant backlash than for making Ukraine's agrarian producers amenable to the demands of the starving burghers in Vienna, Prague or Budapest. "The peasantry [of the Yekaterinoslav province]," wrote one Ukrainian Left S-R, "...universally detested the Austrians" to the point where the hatred became an axis "around which united all strata of the village."³⁵² The ruthlessness of requisitions fed into the smoldering discontent through the old resistance-reprisal cycle, producing a climate propitious to the growth of the insurgency yet highly deleterious for the rickety body of the occupying force.

One of the first of such uprisings triggered by the insensitive and inconsistent policies of the Austro-Hungarian occupation regime took place in the Kanezh (ukr. Kanyzh) district of the Yekaterinoslav province and it was only after the twenty days of fighting that the Austrians managed to put it down.³⁵³ Before it was over, cases of peasant unrest were registered in Verkhnedneprovsk district (beginning of June),³⁵⁴ followed by the "peasant tumults" in the villages of Podolia³⁵⁵ and the "growth of bands" in the Kherson (mid to late June)³⁵⁶ province. Different shades of intensity aside, these events constituted a uniform map of rural violence, striated, as if to break that general monotony, by the increasingly futile campaigns of pacification.

Into the midst of this ever-mutinous countryside stepped Nestor Makhno, a "bandit" of notoriety whom even Wilhelm of Habsburg, an Austrian prince with Ukrainophilic

³⁵² A. Topolsky, "Na Ukraine v epokhu Getmanshchiny", *Letopis' Revoliutsii*, v. 2 (1925), 41

³⁵³ Mędrzecki, 221

³⁵⁴ TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 96 ll 14-15

³⁵⁵ PA Liasse XI Karton 152 Telegram von Graf Forgách, Kiew, 25. Juni 1918

³⁵⁶ R 14374 „Die innerpolitische Lage Rußlands“ 18. Juni 1918

persuasions, wished to bring to his side.³⁵⁷ His homecoming commenced, ironically enough, in the same place, where the Bolsheviks and the Left S-Rs were making their final preparations before releasing themselves from the chores of a progressively fictitious Ukrainian government – Taganrog. There, assembling in April in the headquarters of a local anarchist federation, he and his comrades resolved first of all to meet up again in their native Gulai-Pole either in late June or early July, just in time for the field work, when most of the villagers would be outdoors and hence open to hear “seditious” talks.³⁵⁸ Furthermore, without losing precious time on lengthy deliberations, the small conference set up the tasks to be addressed by its participants upon reaching their destination. Foremost among these was the organization of the so-called “initiative groups (*initsiativnye gruppy*),” “of a purely fighting character,” with an average strength of 5 to 10 villagers. Those groups would then be used as instruments “merciless individual terror” conducted against the commanding officers of the Austro-German and Ukrainian troops as well as the landlords reemerging from depths of their exile in hopes of reclaiming lost property. With weapons in short supply and no external source of support in sight, the problem of equipping rural fighting brigades had to be solved locally – at the opponent’s expense.³⁵⁹ If carried out with due diligence, the triple task – of forging fighting units from the body of the peasantry, of keeping the occupier permanently harassed by the effective terror attacks, and of gathering arms needed for the forthcoming struggle – held the promise of converting the rebels’ numerical advantage into a force sufficiently powerful to counter enemy’s better organization and his superior skill.

³⁵⁷ Dmytro Dontsov, *Rik 1918, Kyiv* (Toronto: Homin Ukrainy, 1954), 14

³⁵⁸ Makhno, *Spovid' anarkhista*, 255

³⁵⁹ *ibid.*, 253-254

On his way back home, a journey that took more than two months to accomplish, Makhno passed by Moscow, where he was received by the principal figures of the young Soviet republic. One of those individuals was Vladimir Zatonsky, who as a member of the “Insurgent Nine” was personally involved in guiding revolutionary underground inside Hetman’s Ukraine. After a long interview Zatonsky provided Makhno with a false passport issued to a certain Ivan Shepel, a teacher and an officer. Describing the boons of the Kharkov region for the conspiratorial work, the Bolshevik official attempted to veer Makhno away from heading to the environs of Yekaterinoslav, but, witnessing his arguments bounce off Makhno’s firm resolve, he relented.³⁶⁰ Yet, even with this concession from Zatonsky Makhno remained essentially a Soviet agent, dispatched like tens of other “francs-tireurs” (*Freischärler*) with false papers down south, where, as one Austrian diplomat claimed, “they are organized into bands with an aim of breaking the foreign dominion of the Central Powers in Ukraine.”³⁶¹ Equipped with those credentials Makhno must have had a place reserved for himself in the neutral zone, which he, hypothetically, could have taken up had his undertaking gone the way of the Zvenigorodka-Tarashcha and Nezhin rebels.

It did not go that way, however, with Makhno and supporters being saved by the incompetence of the opposing forces and the scattered character of their initial anti-governmental acts. Arriving in accordance with the plan in early July to his native Gulai-Pole region, Makhno set himself down to work as outlined in their Taganrog discussions. “Our first task, he wrote to his friends around that time, should consist in distributing our people in

³⁶⁰ *ibid.*, 381-385

³⁶¹ PA Liasse XI Karton 152, Trauttmansdorff an Burián, Baden, 24. Juni 1918; TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 70 l 43

such a manner that each hundred [*sotne*] (a separate segment of the village) would encompass a sufficient number of them.”

On those people lies the responsibility for rallying around themselves the greatest possible number of energetic and brave peasants prepared for sacrifice. Next, from those groups they should pick out especially courageous peasants and together they should carry out attacks, in multiple places and preferably at the same time, against the estates of landlords and kulaks with a purpose of driving away both the owners and the German-Austrian guards that the latter summoned to their protection... If those attacks cannot be accomplished simultaneously in different places, they should be taking place, at the very least, with short intervals one after another and be repeated again. Attacks shall not have the character of a robbery.³⁶²

Everything, therefore, hinged on the constellation of the “initiative groups,” which functioned as kernels of greater formations – being in a way analogous to the revolutionary committees with an additional bonus of increased mobility. Organizationally simple, they soon sprouted in Gulai-Pole, Voskresenskoe (ukr. Voskresens’ke), Ternovka (ukr. Ternivka), Novo-Gupalovka (ukr. Novo-Hupalivka) and other villages of the Yekaterinoslav province, tagging Makhno’s halts in his unceasing flight from the anxiety-ridden authorities.³⁶³

Shortly afterwards, assemblies of armed peasants organized around small circles of committed Makhnovites began appearing before the manor houses, insisting on the immediate departure of their unwanted inhabitants and the disbandment of the troops sent to protect their lives and property. If a show of force fell short of dissolving the landlord’s obstinacy, as in the village of Ternovka some 80 miles away from Gulai-Pole, the reaction was often patterned on the pogroms of the not so remote past with the commensurably predictable results for all participating parties.³⁶⁴ At the same time, as their fellow villagers were renegotiating the future of the land, the rural daredevils were laying ambushes on the

³⁶² Makhno, *Spovid’ anarkhista*, 421

³⁶³ *ibid.*, 436, 443, 446

³⁶⁴ *ibid.*, 444-446

government units, *Varta* “hundreds” and the Austrian detachments arriving to the scene to address the problem of peasant unrest. Thus, an armed band from Voskresenskoe, named *Makhnovsky* after Makhno himself, descended on the passing “Germans” (Austrians most likely), dispersing them and killing an officer along with several soldiers.³⁶⁵ Despite the ring’s appellation, Makhno was not directly involved in staging that attack – but he was in the whole series of others, carried out against *Varta* in the months of August and September with ingenuity indicative of his budding genius for the guerilla war.³⁶⁶ Those acts, dotting the map of the Yekaterinoslav province with escalating frequency, did not correspond to a well-thought-out plan, for the “initiative groups” remained tactically independent from each other, united but through their shared inspiration; the harm, however, caused to the regime both in material and propagandistic terms, was not made any less acute as a result.

The response of the Austro-Hungarian occupation authorities was immediate, often brutal but ultimately ineffective. Sure enough, the punitive detachments, especially those consisting of the Magyars, showed great energy in instilling order in the quarantined areas touched by the spirit of mutiny – too great even, as the commanding officers were known to proceed without much regard for the actual guilt of the peasants lined up before the firing squads. On July 4, for example, the staff of the 5th Hungarian Cavalry division stationed in Yekaterinoslav informed their superiors in the XII Corps about the execution of nine individuals – apparently all “Bolsheviks, robbers and murderers” through and through;³⁶⁷ two weeks later the same unit executed 21 peasants, of whom “only” eleven were qualified in the above

³⁶⁵ *ibid.*, 436

³⁶⁶ *ibid.*, 460, 463, 466

³⁶⁷ TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 96 l 157

fashion.³⁶⁸ That summary trials of such nature led nowhere was understood by the Austrian functionaries themselves, at the very least by the more sensible among them. Referring specifically to the region around Yekaterinoslav, Dr. Johann Kavčič, a lieutenant of the Austrian army, wrote in his report on August 1 that “the enforced military law in combination with the punitive expeditions against the recalcitrant villages created a lot of bad blood in the population.”³⁶⁹ As a result, maintained another official in the tone of polite understatement, “the mood of the peasants did not swing during the last month in our favor.”³⁷⁰

On the other hand, when not chastising the unquestionably guilty or those culpable only by association, the Austrian troops were evincing an unpardonable lack of initiative. “In their remaining time,” wrote Yekaterinoslav provincial starosta on June 29, 1918, “the troops left behind at certain points of the district conduct no reconnoitering whatsoever around the areas of their disposition.”³⁷¹ That negligence in performing one’s duties applied particularly to the units recruited from the Slavic parts of the Habsburg Empire with the Galicians being by far the worst in that regard. “There, where such troops are used for the pacification and the disarming [of the population – M.A.],” ambassador Forgách appraised his colleague in Odessa, “they go out of their way to let residents receive timely warnings, abetting the concealment of stocks of weapons.”³⁷² Linguistic and cultural affinities no doubt played their part in informing the Ukrainian, Czech and Slovak soldiers with an attitude of excessive

³⁶⁸ TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 96 l 158-159

³⁶⁹ AdR Brochure 326 Bericht über Ukraine, Oblt. Dr. Joh. Kavčič, Wien, am 1. August 1918

³⁷⁰ PA Liasse XI Karton 153, Abschrift, „Politische Strömungen an das k.u.k. Armeeeoberkommando,“ am 23. Juli 1918

³⁷¹ *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v. 1, 198-199

³⁷² PA Liasse XI Karton 153 Forgách an Zitkowsky, Kiew, 5. Juli 1918

leniency; even more important, however, was the real and often openly professed sympathy to the plight of peasantry coupled with the fascination for the emancipatory cause of the Revolution. Ukraine, with its challenges and its opportunities, tested the ground on which the allegiance of the blue-mantled subjects of Emperor Charles stood; having found it all too brittle, it gave a good measure to the disintegrating tendencies of the army.

Combining brutality with lassitude, the Austro-Hungarian army could not succeed in bringing order to the territories under its custody. Unsurprisingly, the peasant uprisings were still raging and bands – including that of Makhno – continued to grow in strength and number by the time the dissolution of the Habsburg military apparatus in Ukraine entered into its final and irrevocable phase.

For all their differences due to geography, demographics or leadership, the rebels of the summer months as a whole bore little similarity to the reckless locomotive riders whom the Germans and the Austrians encountered on entering Ukraine. Thanks to the network of well-situated underground revolutionary committees and the Makhnovite “initiative groups,” the insurgents acquired a direct access to the countryside with its untapped resources: villagers willing to share the rebel’s lot, weapons kept hitherto hidden from the search parties, and food that the Central Powers tried but failed to obtain. True enough, appeals to the population akin to Grebenko’s Order Nr 4 from June 19 or Order Nr 1 issued by the All-Ukrainian Military Revolutionary Committee on August 6 could not have the impact of a genuine mobilization order that they purported to be.³⁷³ However, they were not meant as a mere pose taking assertion either, flowery in form yet vacuous in content. The peasants

³⁷³ TsDAHO f 57 o 2 d 76 l 88 (Order 1); TsDAHO f 57 o 2 d 76 l 89 (Order 2)

called to pick up arms and form battalions often did so – on a semi-voluntary basis – flocking to the banner of the partisans in numbers of which the earlier Red Guard leaders could only dream in their most ambitious plans.³⁷⁴ The connections between the rebels and the rural population were still by and large informal, but they did yield respectable results through the skillful exploitation of grievances that the political parties came to share with the peasantry.

The converse of this informality was that the peasant detachments, led more often than not by the former soldiers and capable, therefore, of “conducting proper operations against German troops,”³⁷⁵ could “deflate” as fast as they “inflated,” vanishing in the amorphous rural mass without discernable trace. A German grain trader dispatched by his Hamburg boss to the Zvenigorodka district when it was still ablaze with the unrest, saw this faculty of the rebels to switch between roles as lying at the heart of the “partisan war,” a “genre” of warfare, calling for “the combat methods (*Kampfmethoden*) entirely different from those which proved valuable in the past four years.”³⁷⁶ The German punitive expeditions tended to adopt the practice of meting out punishments to the entire villages all the more because the real opponent seemed both ineluctable and invisible. Yet, such course of action, as the Hamburg businessman pointed out, was largely counterproductive, as the peasants, visibly penitent but quietly murmuring that “our time will still come,” were taking to the forests, driven less by vengeance than by the desire to protect themselves from future reprisals.

³⁷⁴ An observer who could not be suspected of sympathy towards the rebels, estimates that Grebenko alone commanded an ‘army’ of 30 thousand men, nearly twice the number that Antonov-Ovseenko had at his disposal at the outset of Austro-German offensive (*Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v. 1, 190-191)

³⁷⁵ GARF f r-446 o1 d 14 19

³⁷⁶ R 14379 Abschrift an Herrn Otto Friedeberg, Hamburg, von Swenigorodka, 31. Juli 1918

What needs emphasizing here is that the “partisan war,” emerging in response to the superior force of an organized power, did not lose its relevance with the defeat of Germany and the subsequent withdrawal of its troops from the occupied territories. On the contrary, the two key elements cited in the above discussion – the voluntary basis of popular “conscription” (*dobrovolcheskoe nachalo*) and the flexibility (or interchangeability) of cadres – solidified into the sacred precepts of the revolutionary Red army. Identified with the cherished Marxist ideal of the “people in arms” (*vooruzhennyi narod*), they persisted for many months against the mounting pressure from the apologists of the more conventional – *regular* – style of war-making and mass mobilization.

Taking great pains in tracing the lineaments of the enemy’s real visage, the insurgents brought into sharp relief the anti-governmental sentiments of the peasantry. “[T]he mutineers,” reported one frightened teacher from the village of Smelianka of the Zvenigorodka district, “came out with an address, indicating that they are fighting not against the Germans, but only against the Russifying (*russifikatroskogo*) government of Hetman.”³⁷⁷ According to the official documents, the agitation was directed almost exclusively at “the existing regime” (*protiv sushchestvuiushchego stroia*) and the idea it epitomized; passed on through the spoken word and printed letter of “the former members of the abolished land committees, village teachers, sailors, [and] ensigns promoted from the semi-literate Cossacks-villagers,” this activity united those layers of the population, who saw their fortunes sink in the aftermath of the April coup.³⁷⁸ In the light of this event the occupation itself seemed no more than a secondary source of discontent, its principal motivation

³⁷⁷ *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v. 1, 191

³⁷⁸ TsDAVO f 1077 o 3 d 1711

resulting from “the lack of confidence in Hetman” and the repeal of the Rada’s Land Law.³⁷⁹ The relationship between the Ukrainian State and the Austro-German military became thus unexpectedly inversed, for, however burdensome and exacting the latter might have been, their actions unfolded within stringent limits, bedecking like a semitransparent screen the unmistakable signs of the native entourage with its determined desire of the *ci-devants* to condemn the Revolution as History’s nightmarish aberration.

Consequently, the popular ire, suppressed until now by fear, turned against the local supporters of the Hetmanate. “We shall wipe off all the *katsaps!*” an old Zvenigorodka rebel thundered in Tiutiunyk’s presence, his rusty saber brandished high in the air.³⁸⁰ Exhibiting but a limited ethnic identification, that derogatory term for the Russians (*katsap*) denoted, as Tiutiunyk freely admitted, a composite category from “the punitive troopers, police [and] administration.”³⁸¹ In contrast to the Germans regarded with admiration and treated with esteem even in captivity, the latter could not expect to be given quarter by the victors. On June 30, for example, the rebels of Tarashcha slaughtered eighty officers of the *Varta* who refused to abjure their loyalty oath to the regime.³⁸² Two weeks later the “peasant throng” from the Volhynian village of Moshchanitsa attacked the *Varta*, killing few and taking the rest as prisoners. “The officers were bullied and tortured,” wrote the starosta of the province. “The head of the volost *Varta* Mindak was severely beaten and received heavy wounds. Several times the peasants led them to the execution spot and only the unexpected arrival of

³⁷⁹ TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 72 l 277-278; 477-478

³⁸⁰ Tiutiunyk, *Revoliutsyina stykhiia*, 61

³⁸¹ *ibid.*, 63

³⁸² TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 72 l 77

the Germans and mounted *Varta* saved them.”³⁸³ They were lucky in a certain sense, at least in comparison to their colleagues from the neighboring Starokonstantinov district (including the head of the district *Varta*), murdered in the last week of July by the rebellious peasants of the Avratin and Bazaliia *volosts*.³⁸⁴ This targeted terror was effective enough to cause difficulties with the recruitment into the *Varta*; it became a byword with such a sinister repute that even the most staunch supporters of the regime thought it better to remain under the shade of anonymity than face the risks of public lynching.³⁸⁵

Still, staying quiet indoors while the storm was raging outside could not guarantee that one would get away unscathed. The rebels launched a veritable hunt against internal enemies, real or potential – or simply against the individuals whose revolutionary record might have been tarnished in one way or another: “kulaks” (*khliboroby*), informants, former officers, etc. Piotr Tocheny, one of the participants of the August battles in Nezhin district, recalled how the insurgents executed “some of the kulaks (*kulach’ia*) and the officers” – leaving, however, women alive – when the Germans forced them out of the village of Verkievka. Ensnaring in the forest, they killed a few more “kulaks-spies” brought along with their leader, a member of the local “*Khliboroby* Union”, Pavlushka.³⁸⁶ The fate of a certain K. from Lysianka, near Zvenigorodka, was no less exemplary in its tragic end; son of a member of the 3rd State Duma, he was seen helping a punitive detachment sent down to tackle the problem of peasant

³⁸³ TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 73 l 19

³⁸⁴ TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 73 l 20

³⁸⁵ TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 75 ll 24-25

³⁸⁶ Piotr Tocheny, „Epizody avgustovskikh boev 1918 goda na Nezhinshchine“ in *LR* 1926 v. 2, 84

disobedience. That collaboration branded him as a traitor in the eyes of the neighbors, who vented out their hatred for K. by murdering him along with his entire family.³⁸⁷

This target-specific violence, equated with “the general massacre of intelligentsia and supporters of the existing regime” by the state bureaucrats,³⁸⁸ exposed the paradoxical nature of the stability that Skoropadsky’s government prided itself on bringing. Built at the expense of one group for the benefit of another, it only intensified the internal antagonisms which were tearing the social body apart. Arriving in the wake of a rapid and radical turnabout, the Hetmanate offered a restorationist model of order, combining discourses of paternalism and privilege with rabid anti-Bolshevism and becoming, in essence, the first *crypto-fascist* regime in Europe months before Horthy in Hungary inaugurated the trend. As the regime’s negation, the peasant unrest attempted to exact retribution upon those whose culpability was palpably established through their involvement in and capitalization on that vision – the “former people” made doubly former by succumbing to the temptation of Skoropadsky’s brief hiatus. Although temporary unsuccessful in eliminating the regime and its servitors, the rebels resuscitated the spirit of civil war in the fullest sense of the word – as a fight to the death of class against class militated for with lucidity of a Lenin and practiced with the sanguinary unscrupulousness of a Muraviev.

Skoropadsky had given this war an additional impetus and provided it with a retroactive justification, which was turned to account in November 1918 when the peasants resumed

³⁸⁷ Tiutiunnyk, *Revoliutsyina stykhiia*, 62

³⁸⁸ TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 72 l 77

their attacks on the “agents of state power” abandoned to themselves by their German protectors.

Yet, while reinserting the civil war dynamic back into the political rhythm of the day, the summer uprisings were not a mere sequel to the old show of the echelon war. They drew the countryside into the grand contest, opening new fronts and breaking new grounds on which the multi-dimensional struggle could now unfold. Its scope had changed and so did its composition, as the mostly city-based – if not city-oriented – radical Left began to work hand in hand with the peasantry, shedding its urban trappings along the way. With the shift in the center of gravity to the countryside, the old tactic of power conquest by small groups of armed revolutionaries – really an expression of the militarized party politics³⁸⁹ – was abandoned in favor of a fully-fledged partisan war with thousands of peasants participating. This transition from parties to partisans meant that the period of disintegration was superceded and that the first important steps leading to the consolidation of authority were being undertaken. Subjected to the narrow regional confines and gestating among men wary of any “old-regime” discipline, this inchoate authority had naturally a long way to go before evolving into a bureaucratic abstraction; instead, it expressed itself in the form of a primal obedience to a charismatic figure, a practice surviving expediency of the moment. This proved of paramount significance, since those “band leaders” (*Bandenführer*) of the official communiqués and the atamans of subsequent lore would soon become the central feature of

³⁸⁹ It is worth remembering that the fights over railroad junctions and the street melees between champions of diverse causes took place while preparations were made for the convocation of the all-Russian Constitutional Assembly. In a sense these earlier confrontations represented a type of an election campaign conducted by paramilitary party organizations constrained in means but unbridled in methods.

Ukraine's complex landscape and the indispensable ally of the Bolsheviks in their endeavor to fill the void left in the wake of the German departure.

Post Scriptum

In the second half of September, with only one week between them, two watershed events occurred, proffering a symbolic closure to the developments of the past months. The neutral zone, for some time the major destination area for many discomfited Ukrainian insurgents, became the scene of a spirited activity undertaken to impute upon the zone's newcomers appearance of a proper army. The task, technically supervised by the Ukrainian Bolsheviks with their shop set up nearby, was entrusted to the same old rebels, who had been with other insurgents through all the ordeals of the retreat and whose authority for that reason seemed beyond any doubt.

Released on the 22nd of September, the Order Nr 6 formally recognized the results of their efforts. Scattered across a 500-mile narrow stretch, of varying strength and quality, disjointed insurgent groups were to be assembled into two divisions, christened inconspicuously the First and the Second Soviet Ukrainian divisions.³⁹⁰ The former of the two was placed under the command of Krapiviansky, flush with honors and already oblivious of the earlier misadventures. Vladimir Aussem, an old Bolshevik and a former member of a deceased *Tsikuka*, received the command over the 2nd, by and large skeletal, division. Whether this arrangement was harking back to the hybrid nature of the force aborning, or, on the contrary, whether it intimated at the program of overcoming the insurgency by dint of *collaborative* effort was not clear from the Order itself. This point, which would become increasingly more

³⁹⁰ TsDAVO f 2 o 1 d 104 l 10

important with the passage of time, was overshadowed by the urgencies of logistics for the time being, as those present on the ground were stirring themselves up in a nearly euphoric commotion in foretaste of return.

Far in the south, on the external edge of the Dnieper's great bent, Makhno and his comrades were making a name for themselves as audacious raiders of the Austro-German outposts and merciless exterminators of Hetman's domestic supporters. Ineluctable as always, he appeared where no one thought he would dare to appear – first in Marfopol, where he destroyed a police platoon,³⁹¹ then in his native Gulai-Pole, taking the Austrians stationed there by complete surprise, capturing most of them and then, in a gesture of eccentric generosity for which he would become soon famous, releasing them all, having presented each with fifty rubles and a bottle of vodka to boot.³⁹² His popularity grew as did his numbers – going from the order of few individuals to tens and finally into the hundreds. When another local celebrity sailor Shchus' joined up with Makhno, bolstering him with his own men, repute and experience, Makhno evolved into a serious threat for the authorities, who began assembling substantial forces lest the 'bandits' roam unpunished.

Sometime in late September, at the end of their remarkable run of successes, Makhno, Shchus' and hundreds of other peasant rebels (three quarters of whom were without arms) found themselves surrounded in Dibrivka forest by a large Austrian detachment. The prospects of surviving, let alone of a breakthrough, seemed bleak and even Shchus', courageous and resolute as a rule, let the despair get the better of him. Makhno, however, in

³⁹¹ Makhno, *Spovid' anarkhista*, 474-476

³⁹² A.V. Belash and V.F. Belash, *Dorogi Nestora Makhno* (Kiev: RVTs "Proza," 1993), 35

ostentatious defiance of dolorous realities, remained cheerful, devising plans of attack and exhorting his comrades to follow his lead. He aimed at nothing short than his enemy's utter rout, astir with vengeance and aglow from excitement.

Seeing him act and hearing him talk, men around him – including Shchus' – felt as if electrified, ready to slough their doldrums and make a determined lunge for victory. It was at that point that Makhno's comrades, the fellowship of the equals thus far, approached him with a key announcement. "From now be our Little Father, our *Bat'ko*," they said. "Lead us thither where you alone know."³⁹³ Next morning, before the sunbeams could betray the furtive movements of the sylvan hostages, Makhno struck with every available man, breaking through the *Varta* cordon, reaching the village and then turning back to hit the Austrians from the rear. Outnumbered and outgunned, the law-defying desperadoes carried the day absolutely, dispersing the Austrians and shoving their "kulak" allies into the waters of the Volchaia river. Although over forty huts were set alight by the fleeing side, the sentiment of unhindered jubilation reigned among the peasants. They gathered around Makhno, now rapt in some inflammatory speech, and chanted in unison – as did his lieutenants on the eve of the battle: "Be our *bat'ko*, free us from the tyrants' yoke!"³⁹⁴ Before long the new honorific title rang in all neighboring villages, replacing Makhno his given name and gaining in a powerful mystic of its own.

³⁹³ Belash, 38; in Makhno's own rendition the phrase is slightly altered: "From now one you are our Ukrainian *Bat'ko* and we will die alongside you. Lead us into the village against the enemy!" (Makhno, *Spoivid' anarkhista*, 500); for other versions of this Makhnovite gospel, see Piotr Arshinov, *Istoriia Makhnovskogo dvizheniia (1918-1921). Vospominaniia. Dnevnik G.A. Kuz'menko* (Moscow: Terra, 1996), p 40 as well as the deposition of Chubenko, one of Makhno's lieutenant, found in V. Danilov et al., ed. *Nestor Makhno. Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie na Ukraine 1918-1921* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2006), 737.

³⁹⁴ Belash, 38

Marking the birth of Makhno's legend, the moment signaled the advent of great insurgent atamans, capable not only of surviving the onslaught of the state, but also of challenging its organized power and of assuming some of its functions in its absence.

With the partisans poised to enter Ukraine from the north and the insurgents gnawing the regime from the inside, two leading participants of the pending Bolshevik campaign arrived on the stage. Seizing on the great opportunity presented by the German Revolution, they would meet up in the interior of the country and create in the act of fusion the Red Army of the Soviet Ukraine.

Chapter II

***“Petliura ide na Hetmana”*: Anti-Hetman Uprising and the Ukrainian Revolution**

Standard histories of the Russian revolution begin with February and October 1917 in Petersburg, then segue into the Civil war beginning in the Volga in the summer of 1918 and expanding to involve the fight with Kolchak in the east, Denikin and Wrangel in the south, Mannerheim in the northeast. Peasant uprisings are not ignored (including Makhno's coming role in the defeat of Denikin), though the greatest attention is given to the Siberian uprisings and the Antonovshchina that follow the defeat of the Whites. Central Europe and its own revolution appear only with the Polish invasion of 1920 and with Bolshevik dreams of a successful German revolution, and fears that its failure would doom them. This unified narrative, centered around the Russian revolution of 1917 and its fate through the final Bolshevik victory in 1921, does not leave room for a distinct Ukrainian revolution. This chapter's close analysis of the Ukrainian November helps us see the distinctiveness of the Ukrainian process, for Ukraine was the place where the Russian revolution of October 1917 and the Central European revolution of November 1918 came together. In Ukraine, the Central European revolution was not an external event, but an integral part of the revolutionary process with Galicians fighting with "Russian Ukrainians", Poles pursuing their national dreams, German and Austrian troops providing arms to all sides, and distinctively all-Russian political parties and movements seeking to maneuver in the unique complexity of the Ukrainian revolution.

Part I: On the Eve

From the moment of its rather histrionic inception, Hetman's regime had its destiny intimately tied to the outcome of Ludendorff's gamble in the West. Its ability to survive the crisis of the summer 1918 only reflected the relatively advantageous position of the Germans

in the global conflict and their continued will to keep the gains of the Brest-Litovsk to themselves. Similarly, its vitiation in the late fall of 1918, more farcical than tragic, stood in a direct relationship to the defeats, suffered by the armies of the Central Powers in France, Italy and the Balkans.

The German Soldier in Ukraine began to betray his all-too human weaknesses – to a perspicacious eye, to be sure. Following the visit of the German army barrack in Kiev in October of 1918, Vsevolod Petriv, the future minister of defense of the Ukrainian People’s Republic (or Ukrainian National Republic – the UNR), had an opportunity to remark on the growing hostility and misunderstanding between the sergeants and the privates, subordinated to them. “Secretly from other officers, he claimed, [sergeants] were expressing fears that the rank-and-file would soon stop obeying them, held, as they are, by a mere hope of home-coming.”¹ Many openly described regime in Kiev as a puppet of the German reaction, necessary evil that needs to be tolerated for the time being. Otherwise, “the war weariness... the desire of rest at all price and the pining for the homeland – such were the principle characteristics of the German army mood in Ukraine.”²

On a concrete level, the war fatigue manifested itself in the increased frequency of insubordination, especially among the units that were culled out to be transported to the Western Front. The first egregious case of disobedience took place in the late September, when a unit in Kiev, fully boarded and on the brink of a seemingly inevitable departure, took control over the train and refused to budge any further. The train had to be subsequently

¹ Vsevolod Petriv, *Spomyny z chasiv ukrains'koi revoliutsii*, (L'viv: Chervona kalyna, 1927-1931), v. 4, 92-93

² *ibid*, p. 93

cordoned off with machine guns and the refractory soldiers were compelled into surrender.³

It must be admitted for the sake of fairness that the German Army remained a functioning and relatively monolithic body; despite all odds, the Revolution, as one contemporary asserted, “did not take them in.”⁴ Yet, its offensive spirit, the bravura that donned its reputation petered out into the air of the Ukrainian yellowish autumn.

Corrosive developments of the far more dramatic character had overtaken the Austro-Hungarian Army during the last months of the Great War. Comprised of eight infantry and two cavalry divisions – about ninety-three thousand soldiers altogether⁵ – the Imperial and Royal Ukrainian Contingent literally began to crumble under the combined duress of the news from without and mutinies within. As early as of August 28, the entire 20th Rifle regiment revolted in protest against its transfer to the Italian front – and had to be forcibly disarmed.⁶ Particularly peremptory were the Hungarian troops, whose conduct compelled Army Command “Ost” to order the speedy evacuation of the Yekaterinoslav province.⁷ Turkey’s approaching surrender and the anticipation of the Allied landing on the Black Sea littoral divested the continued participation in the war of all practical sense – such was at least the widespread reaction among the servicemen and younger officers upon receiving the news of yet another debacle. What was intended to be a measured and organized retreat from the occupied territories by the last week of October took the form of an improvised flight.

³ Mędrzecki, p 282

⁴ cited in Mędrzecki, p 285

⁵ *ibid.*, p 276

⁶ PA Karton 153 d 3

⁷ PAAA R14385

An observer of those days would likely be startled by the celerity with which the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Army proceeded – the fact that hardly jibes with the painful perseverance of the Empire through the years of the European slaughter.⁸ On October 29th, the Ukrainian municipal government of Odessa was accosted by the delegation of soldiers and low-ranking officers from the 76 Infantry regiment, a predominantly Hungarian unit.⁹ Ostensibly incensed by the arrears in payment, the delegates, nonetheless, demanded to be sent back home, being placated only when concessions were granted. Zitkovszky, the Imperial council in Odessa reported on the similar scene in the quarters of the Army Command – the Hungarian 6th Hussar Regiment appealed for “an evacuation without delay,” elucidating it, quite significantly, by the minatory developments to which their Fatherland, Hungary presumably, found itself exposed.¹⁰ Within two days the spirit of insubordination spread to other units of the 2nd Cavalry Division, forcing the commanding personnel of the Army “Ost” to abandon Odessa in the direction of Winnitsa.¹¹ The journey of the Army top brass looked more like an exodus and some, including Field Marshal Lieutenant von Böltz, the former commandant of the Odessa military district, never managed to reach their destination. Traveling alongside the mutinous troops, emaciated and powerless, he shot himself dead in the vicinity of the Razdelnaia (ukr.Rozdil’na) station under the circumstances which had grown only more occult with the passage of time.¹²

⁸ Here, perhaps, one should analyze the psychological impact of perceived demobilization; interesting observations concerning the effect of demobilization were found in Richard Bessel’s article “Mobilization and Demobilization in Germany, 1916-1919” in *State, Society and Mobilization in Europe during the First World War*, ed. John Horne (Cambridge: Cambridge U Press: 1997), 212-222

⁹ KA Karton 760

¹⁰ PA Karton 153 d 3

¹¹ PAAA R14385

¹² KA Alfred Krauss B/60 14c

It is fair to say that the order of Alfred Krauß, the nominal commander of the Army “Ost,” to commence the withdrawal of all occupying forces from Ukraine proffered but a formal articulation of the *fait accompli* – that decision being taken, rather characteristically, on the same day (November 7th) that Zitkovszky laconically informed his superiors in Kiev and Vienna: “All the remaining parts of the XVII and XXV Corps which had not yet left Ukraine are in the full uprising; Bolshevik sentiments reign.”¹³ The departure – if that word is deemed suitable to the disorderly commotion of the soldierly masses – was accompanied by acts of violence, directed equally at the officers and the local populace. Emil Prinz Fürstenberg, the Habsburg diplomat in Kiev, did not fail to remark, that, with the officers either apprehended or chased away, men of the 5th Rifle Regiment, easily yielded to the temptation of making an easy profit at the expense of the civilians.¹⁴ Writing in her diary on the 5th of November, Elżbieta z Zaleskich Dorożyńska confirmed the verity of Fürstenberg’s incriminations, in her role as a victim to be sure: “The soldiers, infested with Bolshevism, retreat and plunder just as during the best Bolshevik hours. [They] desolated the pear orchard, took the cereal; destroyed the entire estate; furniture, those pitiful remnants that were returned by the peasants, was reduced to splinters.”¹⁵ Frustration with the moment, fatigue with the war strangely coupled with the simultaneous habituation to its bellicose solutions – that usual litany of factors must have certainly contributed to the misconduct of the army; but so did the complete break-down of communication between the units and the Army Command.¹⁶

Stranded in the Steppes of the southern Ukraine, abandoned in the decrepit railroad stations,

¹³ PA Karton 153 d 3; of Bolshevism – or, rather, of “Bolshevism” – more will be said below; for now it seems noteworthy to recall that the same Zitkovszky, reporting on the soldier mutinies in Odessa, disavowed the possibility of the “Bolshevik influences” – and that only a week before the Telegram quoted above (PA Karton 153 d 3)

¹⁴ PA Karton 153 d 3

¹⁵ Elżbieta z Zaleskich Dorożyńska, *Na ostatnije placówce* (Łomianki: LTW Wydawnictwo, 2008). 44

¹⁶ Graf Lelio von Spannocchi, KA Karton 723

deprived of all external guidance, the soldiers of the moribund Danube Monarchy saw the monster of the peasant revolt arising before their eyes. Akin to the ten thousand of *Anabasis*, yet without the benefit of Xenophon's pathos, they had to extricate themselves from the hostile territory and find their way home.

The situation was further aggravated by the sheer financial inability of the successor states to defray the costs of transportation. To pay for their return trip, all too often the rank-and-file had no other recourse but to sell their uniforms and weapons,¹⁷ nullifying the rather unimpressive results of the eight-month long efforts at disarming the populace. The reports of the district elders, sent in early November to Kiev, are riddled with images of the soldiers purchasing their passage with the appurtenances of the non-existing Army – a splendid testimony of the powerless solicitude plaguing Ukrainian Authorities. “The Austrians on their way home, read the typical telegram to Akkerman from the head of Hetman's Varta in Volhynia, abandon, sell the state property, arms and machine guns...”¹⁸ Medium size railroad stations – Rovno, Dubno, Radzivilov (ukr. Radyvyliv) – suddenly became sites of the thriving arms trade, attracting inhabitants of nearby towns and villages alike.¹⁹

Such “casual” treatment of state property could hardly be reduced to mere acts of individual dereliction – substantial part of the responsibility should be attributed to the Army Command in Odessa and, indirectly, the Army High Command (AOK) in Baden. Caught by the speedy disintegration of the Army, unwilling or unable to maintain order and to nip mutinies in the bud, commanding officers in Odessa, Zhmerinka (XXV Korps) and Yekaterinoslav (XVII

¹⁷ PAAA R14387

¹⁸ TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 73 l 71

¹⁹ TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 73 l 109

Korps) simply left the entire military inventory in the hands of local authorities and the Germans – putatively “against receipt.”²⁰ Yet, as Graf von Spannocchi, the Imperial and Royal military plenipotentiary acrimoniously remarked in his memorandum, “... the Army Commando ‘Ost’ did not demonstrate sufficient care for the ... salvaging ... of the rich... military stock,” forsaking therefore all possibility even of its partial recovery.²¹ Its value appraised somewhat conservatively between 2 and 3 billion German Marks,²² the property left behind was seen by the retreating troops as a legitimate compensation that would cover their expenses and enable them to reach their destination; Spannocchi went on to assert that, once the support from the Ministry of Finance was no longer forthcoming, the Army Command left the property lie idle with a deliberate, albeit implicit intention of letting the Army men avail of the resources in the manner they knew best.²³

The Ukrainian population had certainly profited from the distress of the retreating Army, purchasing, purloining and, wherever possible, coercing the soldiers into surrendering their weaponry. Given the demoralization of the Austrians,²⁴ the task of coming into possession of the army inventory – which, weapons aside, included grain, vegetables, flour, straw, clothes, rubber, leather wares, etc²⁵ - did not seem to raise insuperable obstacles. What cannot however be ignored is the fact that the nominally sovereign Ukrainian State, whose officials were explicitly entrusted with keeping an eye over the property of the Habsburg Army, failed so dismally to turn the situation to its advantage, or even to recognize the possibility of such

²⁰ KA Spannocchi Karton 723

²¹ *ibid*

²² PAAA R14386

²³ KA Spannocchi, Karton 723

²⁴ *ibid*

²⁵ PAAA R14386

action. That passivity of the State appears all the more astounding – and instructive – against the alacrity, with which its subjects were arming themselves. To what end? For the purposes of protecting themselves, as was averred by the members of the Jewish squad (*druzhina*) in Kiev’s Podol?²⁶ Out of the relatively innocuous admission that the State had failed to provide for the necessary defense of its citizens, or, what appeared more likely, in order to forestall the prospect of being caught by surprise once the social war breaks out? In any event, “lacking faith in the firmness of regime” as the Bundist Moshe (Moses) Rafes put it,²⁷ all the nameless inhabitants of Skoropadsky’s Ukraine were only expediting its imminent collapse.

Inefficacious and weak as it was, the regime in Kiev was certainly conscious of the parlous situation in which it found itself once the defeat of Central Powers became inevitable. To prevent the eruption of the civil disorder, tantamount in the parlance of the time with the advent of “Bolshevism,” Skoropadsky’s government appealed to Berlin and Vienna with a plea of postponing the withdrawal of occupying forces from Ukraine – “until the efforts of the current regime would...succeed in establishing sufficient armed forces of its own...”²⁸

Through its emissaries in Paris, Washington and Jassy (Iași) in particular (Romania technically being neutral), Hetman’s Foreign Ministry attempted to establish rapports with the Entente with a double intention of soliciting its permission for the continued German presence and of expediting the arrival of the victorious troops to replace the flagging and exhausted armies of the German-Austrian bloc.²⁹ Similar steps in the direction of reaching an understanding with Wilson on the issue of German troops were taken by private

²⁶ TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 71 l 128

²⁷ M. Rafes, *Dva goda revoliutsii na Urkaine: evoliutsiia i raskol „Bunda”* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo, 1920), 41

²⁸ KA Karton 760

²⁹ PA Karton 153 d 3; See also Denikin’s *Ocherki*, v. 4 331-334

organizations – namely, by the Union of the Agriculturalists, the association of Industrialists *Protofis* as well as the conclave of the Russian political Émigrés with a cumbersome name “Assembly of the members of the legislative chambers.”³⁰

In the course of the few weeks preceding the outbreak of an uprising, Skoropadsky’s government feverishly sought to augment its scanty military means through the politics of unabashed class favoritism. Although its previous project at creating a guard unit, recruited exclusively from the sons of wealthy peasants (the *Serdiuk* division) fell short of expectations,³¹ on October 16, 1918 the regime announced the resurrection of an ancient Cossack Host – “...in all of the places of its historical existence in Ukraine, founding its pillars upon the rebirth of the chivalrous Cossack traditions that our history preserved for us from the bygone days of ... Ukraine’s struggle for its freedom...”³² Written in the language that was at once populist and paternalistic, the *Universal* postulated the establishment of eight Cossack settlements (*Kosh*), each consisting of several regiments. Led by the Cossack atamants, these regiments would draw its personnel from the certified scions of the Cossack families; under certain conditions exceptions could be made to other orthodox subjects of the Ukrainian State.³³ Despite the fact that the newly established institution was subordinated directly to the persona of Hetman, it revealed an aspiration to devolve defense responsibilities from Kiev to the periphery, and simultaneously to concentrate means of defense within the reputedly conservative, pro-government elements of the social body.

³⁰ Denikin, *Ocherki*, v. 4, 333

³¹ Denikin, v. 4, 344; See also Petriv, v.4, 83-85; that latter writes that the soldiers of the division could “march well, yell out ‘Glory to Ukraine! Glory to Hetman!’... but by no means were the equal of the seasoned soldiers from the Front, which were widely represented among the Insurgents...” (p 84)

³² TsDAVO f 1092 o 2 d 55

³³ PAAA R14386

Simultaneously, the regime endeavored to tap the resources of the unemployed Russian officers, dawdling idly “between the restaurants and the cabarets” in provincial capitals and *mestechkos*.³⁴ To that end, it had created the so-called “Special Corps” with an aim of parrying possible attack from the north – or, “of fighting the anarchy in the frontier zone,” in the language of Hetman’s officials.³⁵ The feature that rendered this military formation distinct from all other units of the Ukrainian Army laid in its overt appeal to the “anti-Bolshevik” forces, who were otherwise unwilling to serve under the banner of the Ukrainian State and Ukrainian Sovereignty; operating according to the principles of the Imperial Russian army, clothed in its uniform and subjected to its ranking system, the Corps would be intentionally sequestered from the Ukrainian regular troops, lest the contact proves detrimental to its far from unquestionable loyalty.³⁶ However consistent with the new national politics of the Hetmanate, that project with its stentorian, “Great Russian” overtones stemmed to no small degree from the sheer desperation of the regime, which had neither succeeded in becoming an embodiment of the nation, nor in striking felicitous bargain with one of its key classes.

Not that it had greater fortune in courting the apologists of Russia “One and Indivisible”; the officers of the former Tsarist army preferred either to persevere through the hardships or to join forces of Denikin in Kuban. Few privately financed *druzhinas* (squads) came into being

³⁴ cited in Skrukwa, 297; Ukraine was literally flooded with the officers of the former Imperial Army; by summer 1918 about 50 thousand of them seemed to have resided in Kiev alone (*1918 god na Ukraine*, 4).

³⁵ cit in Denikin, *Ocherki*, v 4, p. 344-345

³⁶ PAAA R14386

as well – those led by colonel Sviatopolk-Mirskyi, generals Kirpichev, Rubanov and others.³⁷ Small and often at loggerheads with each other, they would, ironically enough, be among the last defenders of Skoropadsky's state, the uncanny witnesses of its ignominious collapse.

The erosion of the Hetman's authority, engendered by the approaching defeat of Germany and its allies, manifested itself not only in the aforementioned proliferation of the para-military officer squads, the growing inability to keep the immense traffic of men, arms and goods under benevolent surveillance of the State or in the numerous instances of insubordination within the institutions nominally subordinated to Skoropadsky's government. On the level of reception, so to speak, the process of political and administrative "rarefaction" was accompanied by the widespread sense of uncertainty and insecurity. Reports containing hardly credible information permeated diplomatic correspondences of the highest order and were often taken at their face value. On October 18th Hauschild, the General Council of the *Wilhelmine Kaiserreich* in Moscow apprised his colleagues in Kiev that the Soviet government had amassed a force of ten thousand strong on the border with Ukraine;³⁸ three days later that unit, dangerously skulking behind the screens of official politics, grew into the army of 40,000 volunteers, definitely poised to march on Kiev;³⁹ Antonov-Ovseenko, the person who probably knew the actual state of affairs better than anybody else, placed the combined strength of the two Insurgent regiments at 3,500 men.⁴⁰ Zitkovszky, an otherwise reliable and conscientious source, presents an altogether eccentric

³⁷ Petriv, v. 4, 97-98; Denikin, *Ocherki*, v 4, 345-346

³⁸ PAAA R14385

³⁹ *ibid*

⁴⁰ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 3, p 12

figure of 250,000 in ascertaining the size of the Denikin's force,⁴¹ magnifying its real numbers by the factor of eight.⁴²

Such consistent proclivity to dwell in the realm of tendentious, phantasmagoric data, reflected more than a failure of the intelligence as an epiphenomenon of an ubiquitous institutional deterioration. Having communicated to the Austro-Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs the information, derived from the "Ukrainian-national parties," Emil Fürstenberg recognized that "the depicted situation, by no means free of hyperboles... characterizes after all the reigning sentiments inside the national circles..." Adverting to the dangerous proximity of the two Don Army Corps, he describes them to be products of "the lively fantasy of the local Publikum, overly susceptible to the alarmist news" ("*...der lebhaften Phantasie der für Alarmnachrichten überempfindlichen hiesigen Oeffentlichkeit entsprungen...*").⁴³ The charged environment of an impending clash produced quasi-apocalyptic expectations, granting herewith the authorization to lurid, sensationalist rumors – rumors, in fact, that looked too implausible to be untrue.

Kiev, the city beset by fears of immanent Bolshevik invasion, relieved by hopes of the salutary Entente intervention, was growing oblivious of the distinction between the facts and hearsays. A coup appeared all the more likely that the Germans were turning deaf ear to the Ukrainian affairs – the principle question being: who will dare the strike first? A war of words, the prefatory sparring between the Nationlists and "the Great Russians" ensued, with one side incriminating the other plans to subvert current mode of government. Dmytro

⁴¹ PA Karton 153 d 1

⁴² S. Karpenko, *Belye generaly i krasnaia smuta* (Moscow: Veche, 2009), 172.

⁴³ PA Karton 153 d 1

Dontsov, inspired or incensed by the descent of the “Muscovite” politicians from the north, by the proliferation of recruitment agencies, exhorting population to embrace the idea of Imperial restoration, even posited the day of the putsch – the fateful 7th of November.⁴⁴ On 18th of October he entered in his diary: “The rumors of the coup d’état by the monarchists are not subsiding. The Russians are becoming ever more impetuous...”⁴⁵ The date of an anticipated “monarchist” action arrived without much commotion, precipitating no sigh of relief however. A certain mysterious Russian General suddenly entered public imagination. Sent by Denikin himself,⁴⁶ he was putatively charged to coordinate activities of secret officer organizations with an ultimate objective of throwing them into the fray of the battle when the opportune moment would come.⁴⁷ The mystery surrounding Denikin’s emissary acquired qualitatively new dimension, when on the 13th of November *Golos Kieva* (“The Voice of Kiev”) published an order, attributed to Denikin himself (to the great astonishment). “On this day,” so the order went, “I take the command over all armed forces... All officers, found on the territory of the former Russia, are declared mobilized.”⁴⁸ The Austrian chargé d’affaires echoed this “order” in his weekly account of Ukrainian events, supplementing it with new, admittedly picturesque and entertaining details – namely, that Denikin decided to move his headquarters to Kiev and that Hetman as a result would have to content himself with a position of a mere Corps Commander – Lieutenant General, presumably.⁴⁹ How Hetman agreed to such *capitis deminutio*, mused the diplomat, still remains an unresolved riddle.

⁴⁴ Dontsov, *Rik 1918*, 76

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, 78-79

⁴⁶ Rafes, 47

⁴⁷ PA Karton 153 d 1

⁴⁸ cited in Denikin, *Ocherki...* v. 4, 346; Denikin never found out the author of the order, although the Ukrainian historian Iaroslav Tynchenko attributes this provocation to Ihor Kistiakovs’ky, Hetman’s minister of the Interior (Ia. Tynchenko, *Belaia Gvardia Mikhaïla Bulgakova* (Kiev, 1997), 3)

⁴⁹ AdR Karton 720

The “Great Russians” attempted to reciprocate in kind, thought with less success. Most of the information, concerning antigovernment activities of the “National forces” – the Ukrainian National Union in particular – originated in the province, accentuating, therefore, the depth of the urban-rural divide that was to play such a crucial role in the dynamic of subsequent events.⁵⁰ Against the urban landscapes of Kiev or Odessa, putatively dominated by the forces of restoration, was juxtaposed Ukrainian village, whose population had shown itself dangerously receptive to the ideas of Vynnychenko and his followers. The rumors of the uprising, planned by the National Union ultimately reached Hetman’s Ministry of Interior, and Vynnychenko, fearing the arrest, went to see Skoropadsky to assure him of his loyalty to the regime and of his admiration for the persona of Hetman.⁵¹ That visit seemed to have acted as a poultice on Hetman’s overexerted nerves – if provisionally so – but the press remained unconvinced and continued to treat the reading public with unambiguous insinuations of the forthcoming cataclysms.

What in that unremitting circulation of rumors was the result of “oversensitive imagination” and what should be seen as a carefully-staged provocation is impossible to ascertain and, for that matter, secondary to the conspicuous willingness in lending attentive ear to the oft-unsubstantiated information. One, of course, could immediately advert to the failure of the news agencies in maintaining control over the distribution of the reputedly reliable data.

“These are all grapevine news” wrote a contemporary, “for we are cut off from the world:

⁵⁰ Dichotomies, metonymically related to the aforementioned City-Village divide abound; to that latter one could add the most obvious “Great Russian-Ukrainian” binary, “Reactionary-Revolutionary,” “Coup-Uprising,” and, perhaps less obvious yet most important of them all – “Establishment-Bolshevism.”

⁵¹ PAAA R14384; Vynnychenko’s own account of an event differs somewhat; rather than demonstrating his obeisance, the future chairmen of the Ukrainian Directorate asked Skoropadsky in the straightforward manner whether Ihor Kistiakovsky, the Minister of Interior has plans of arresting him. “Hetman... began to assure me ardently that this is a mistake and that he immediately would issue a relevant order [to countermand Kistakovsky’s intention]...” (Vynnychenko, 423)

neither railroads, nor mail, nor telegraphs or telephones, nothing functions.”⁵² Mysterious *doppelgänger* of an approbated fact under normal circumstances, the rumor transformed itself into an exclusive ersatz in the absence of anything else. In Kiev, moreover, it served to fabricate an atmosphere of suspicion, evolving into the motive force behind the acts. Hetman and his entourage, Generals and the bevy of “imperialy-minded” officers, Ukrainian socialists and their Galician instructors – all were taking part in a complex game, trying to outwit each other, to execute the counter-strike before the strike, the counter-putsch before the putsch. “You know,” Skoropadsky confided his fears on the eve of the November events, “they – the “genuine Ukrainians” (“*shchyrye*”) – wanted to arrest me the other day, but I told them, that it would not be worth an effort, since the disturbances would only grow in strength as a result.”⁵³ On November 15 all the heightened anxieties of political actors converged in a single point: Hetman issued his famous Charter, proclaiming unity with Russia on the federal basis and simultaneously, the members of the newly-established Directorate declared his government to be deposed.

But what about the provinces? How was the country-side affected by the German misfortunes in the Argonne Forest and the Austrian on the banks of Piave River? Which informative misinformation conditioned decisions of the peasants and which – of the landholders? Did the experience of the summer 1918 and the brutal suppression of the Tarashcha-Zvenigorodka uprising convince the population in the hinterland of the inefficacy of an armed struggle against the resolute authority – fear that was shared by many a member

⁵² Dorożyńska, 49

⁵³ Denikin, *Ocherki*, v. 4, 349; interestingly enough, there is no confirmation of this intention in the memoirs of the Nationalists.

of the Ukrainian National Union?⁵⁴ Despite continued requisitioning and punitive raids, peasantry, however, remained highly receptive to the vicissitudes of the regime; by no means reconciled with the return of former landowners, the villagers were living in anticipation of an suitable moment to “right the wrongs” they had suffered under the politics of the Hetmanate. Zofia Kossak-Szczucka, remembering ostensibly tranquil and warm autumn days in Volhynia, unmistakably recognized the weightiness of the situation:

...and yet, despite all these charms, we were not – I remember that well – beguiled even for a minute by their illusory and calm safety... Our eyes were accustomed to seeing through. The face, smiling in the moment of our arrival, would turn into a growling grimace behind our backs. Some peasant women said: ‘When I see that the lord (pan – M.A.) passes through the village, I start bleeding inside.’ Others added: ‘I had tasted the hour of freedom –we do not need more. Now we know what to do.’⁵⁵

The peasants quaffed with relish words of the National-minded propagandists, still, as Zitkovszky observed in his memorandum to Burian, the Imperial and Royal Minister of the Foreign Affairs, they evince preference “not only for the Nationalists (“*Nationalukrainer*”) but rather... for everyone, who would promise them landed estates, as soon as possible against [the wishes] of the despised current government of the land magnates.”⁵⁶

That this government, buttressed otherwise by the strength of German-Austrian arms, would be taken down as a “theatrical decoration”⁵⁷ the moment one of the partners loses the mettle to defend it was a truism that needed little justification. Commenting on the impending removal of the Austrian XII Corps from the Yekaterinoslav province, Berchem, the legation council of the German Foreign Ministry, marked with heavy premonition: “... the evacuated

⁵⁴ Skrukwa, 343

⁵⁵ Kossak, *Pożoga*, p 117

⁵⁶ PA Karton 153 d 1

⁵⁷ Kossak, *Pożoga*, p 120

districts would become undoubtedly the focal point of the Bolshevik bands and revolutionary disorder, which would thus render the maintenance of order in the German-occupied territories all the more difficult.”⁵⁸ And so it was indeed, “when the Austrians were gone, the bands started to raise their heads up again”⁵⁹ for the collapse of the Austrian army sent an immediate signal of regime’s fatal internal weakness. The soldiers, as was indicated above, were not only unwittingly encouraging growth of the peasant militancy – by selling or exchanging weapons – but were often consciously exhorting villagers to action – by spreading proclamations or inciting discussions in “the sprit of definite Bolshevism.”⁶⁰

Unsurprisingly, a series of peasant uprisings broke out in the southern, Austrian-occupied, part of Ukraine – or, better put, the peasant militancy entered a qualitatively new stage, for the land was blighted by the smoldering civil war through the entirety of the Hetmanate’s existence. Now, with his harvesting duties behind him (the great Feast of the Intercession of the Theotokos, *Pokrov*, symbolizing the end of the harvesting season and the beginning of winter took place on the 1st (14th) of October), denizen of a village in Yekaterinoslav province or in Podolia could consider taking up his gun and joining one of the errant bands – in the name of the revolutionary justice as he comprehended it. Makhno, for instance, active again since his return from Moscow in July of 1918, broke out of the encirclement and defeated a large Austrian punitive expedition in late September of 1918.⁶¹ Encouraged by that success and buttressed by the good will of local peasants, by now *bat’ko* Makho declared an ambitious offensive against “1) German-Austrian-Hetman armed counter-revolution 2)

⁵⁸ PAAA R14385

⁵⁹ Dorożyńska, p 44

⁶⁰ TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 73 l 108

⁶¹ Arshinov, 39

the Cossack formations of the White Don 3) the Drozdov's unit [coming] from the direction of Berdiansk and 4) the troops of the kulaks and landlords, led by the agents of general Tillo [arriving] from the direction of Crimea.”⁶² On the 16th of October, his army, 200 strong with four machine guns defeated Hetman's Varta and entered Makhno's native village, Guliai-Pole.⁶³ Ten days later, having allegedly suffered a setback at the hands of the Austrians, “the remnants” of his band somehow counted 500 well-armed men.⁶⁴ In reality, of course, Makhno's resources were, by comparison to those of Hetman, practically inexhaustible, with every village within the purview of his actions constituting something akin to the reserve army.

Around that time another figure began claiming leadership in the peasant antigovernment movement – Nikifor (Nychypir) Grigoriev. Having already established his reputation during the turbulent winter of 1918, he receded from the forefront of history, ensconcing into the comfortable position of Hetman's Colonel. Yet, sometime in the last weeks of September he proceeded to organize a rogue force of 120 daredevils from the village of Verbliuzhka in the Cherson province,⁶⁵ which was destined to become the core of his multitudinous army. Taking advantage of the decomposition that was steadily ruining Austro-Hungarian occupation Army, Grigoriev managed not only to conduct a series of raids against sundry representatives of authority, but to establish functioning contacts with numerous peasant armed bands of the South-western Ukraine, succeeding, it seems, in becoming the nominal commander of these disjointed units. It is questionable, whether he had nearly six thousand

⁶² Makhno, *Spovid' anarkhista*, p 559

⁶³ TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 96 l 237

⁶⁴ TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 96 l?

⁶⁵ RGVA f 33221 o 2 d 217 l 36

men under his command by the time of the Uprising,⁶⁶ yet that he and his likes had eliminated traces of Hetman's presence from the country-side of *Khersonshchina* remains beyond doubt.

In October of 1918 Makhno and Grigoriev were two peasant guerilla leaders among many, showing perhaps greater promise than the rest. The enigmatic bandit Kudla (alternatively referred to as Piotr Ivanovich Golik or Petrovski), mentioned for the last time on July 31, 1918⁶⁷ and since then considered to be dead, suddenly reappeared, yet not in his native Kanev district on the Right bank of Dnepr, but rather "somewhere in the Poltava province."⁶⁸ That territory, in fact, became one of the centers of the Insurgent activities, not least due to the fact that many participants of the ill-fated Tarashcha-Zvenigorodka uprising found their refuge in villages of the Left-Bank Ukraine; the old bands, added provincial starosta Noga, were augmented by the new ones, bands counting up to 100 men, as was the case in the Vasilkov (ukr. Vasyl'kiv) volost on the eastern border of the province.⁶⁹ In the German-held Right Bank Ukraine, away from the Russian frontier and the southern Ukrainian steppe, most of the antigovernment activity originally took the form of an *agitation* in favor of an uprising against the regime, rather than uprising itself;⁷⁰ large-scale assaults, however, did take place, if not directly against the German troops, then against members of the despised Varta.⁷¹ Danilo Terpilo from the small town of Tripol'e south of Kiev, the future ataman Zeleny, was certainly responsible for some of these deeds; more cautious than his South Ukrainian

⁶⁶ V. Horak, *Povstantsi otamana Hryhor'eva, serpen' 1918-serpen' 1919 rr: istorychne doslidzhennia* (Fastiv: "Polifast", 1998), 17

⁶⁷ TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 72 l 502

⁶⁸ TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 72 l 506

⁶⁹ TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 75 l 219

⁷⁰ TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 72 ll 497-498

⁷¹ TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 72 ll 607-608

counterparts and still seeking refuge in the thickets of the Dnepr luxuriating flora, Zeleny nonetheless enlarged the original coterie of 10 to a rebel detachment of 180 strong in the month of October alone;⁷² bristling with hatred for the regime and its regional epigones, they were poised to reemerge from the tenebrous forests into the light of an open power struggle.

Before proceeding any further, it may prove instructive to emphasize certain parallels between the Ukrainian situation on the brink of the anti-Hetman Uprising and that of Russia before the Bolshevik coup – if only perfunctorily so. Conditions that rendered it possible for Lenin to take up power, lying derelict on the street were all reproduced in Ukraine with rather befuddling precision. First, the relentless demoralization and dissolution of the armed forces, represented in Ukraine by the troops of the Central Powers, signified that the regime had lost its privileged position in maintaining internal order of the state. Concomitant with this was the dissipation of the last traces of the regime’s legitimacy even among those classes – landlords and wealthy peasants in particular – that greeted news of Skoropadsky’s coup with unmistakable glee. That the Hetman no longer exercised much power began to manifest itself in the profusion of paramilitary squads and unfurling conspiracies; his inability to preclude the coup of the Nationalists, despite possessing full knowledge of the ongoing preparations⁷³ – so redolent of Kerensky’s as he was facing the prospect of the inevitable Bolshevik takeover – further contributed to the sense of political transience. Into those glaring gaps in the political structure of the Hetmanate entered the armed peasant, long aggrieved by Skoropadsky’s reactionary land politics; the November Uprising, therefore, just as the opening salvos of “Aurora” one year and a week before that, took place against the

⁷² R. Koval’, *Otaman Zelenyi* (Kyiv: Vydannia istorychnoho klubu ‘Kholodnyi Iar, 2008), 24

⁷³ Vynnychenko, 422-425

background of the incipient peasant *jacquerie*. Rather than bringing about collapse of Skoropadsky's state, members of the Directorate had simply performed funeral rites over its body, long defunct to the fateful ignorance of its remaining partisans.⁷⁴

Part II: Tale of the Uprising: Rashomon principle

First, a minor “lyrical-philosophical” digression:

Although but an illusion, persistence of one, internally consistent narrative is approbated with less dissent in the time of civic peace. The establishment of “events,” “incontrovertible facts,” “paramount developments” and the subsequent concatenation of “hundred visions and revisions” into the story of unambiguous becoming could well be foisted upon the populace by unabashed use of force, but could also creep into the spirits (from the outset receptive, as one knows, to experiencing “time” as progression of causes and effects) by means far less violent and all the more effective. The famous dictum of the liberal society in the state of halcyon accord with itself, one that enjoins its members to “agree to disagree” accomplishes exactly that: a smooth integration of competing worldviews into a common story, wherein the “discord” itself, the vaunted pluralism ossifies into the vertebra of yet another meta-narrative.

On the other hand, the eruption of the civil strife renders the task of monovocal narration close to impossible. The internal war, in particular when it eviscerates the social body with

⁷⁴ Vynnychenko admits as much when he claims that the Hetmanate had ceased to exist on the very day the Directorate declared it illegitimate. (Vynnychenko, p 436)

perverse creativity, dividing it along the geographical, social, generational or even gender lines, represents more than the categorical rejection of a mere possibility of consensus; a watershed event, it proffers its participants not only the opportunity to seize the future, but to define the past, to discover it in fact, obfuscated hitherto by the systematic sabotage of the opponents. That struggle for the past, manifesting itself in an uncanny profusion of historically-minded subjectivities and *a fortiori* historically-oriented accounts of the present, engenders the split of the narrative nucleus into constituent, yet qualitative distinct elements – each claiming to be the pole of the new organization.

Ukraine, from November 1918 on fully in the throes of the declared Civil War, exemplifies the complexity of this polyphonic situation. With the outbreak of hostilities, Skoropadsky had not only lost control over the land, but was equally divested of whatever privilege he possessed in disseminating information and thus in warranting the continuous passage from the past into the present. The difficulty, however, emerging from the proliferation of accounts, none more legitimate than the rest and all illegitimate to a commensurate extent, shall not be resolved by an imposition of a single storyline – all the less so that this contrivance of unity occludes the aforementioned key feature of the internecine conflict.

Instead, one could attempt to overcome chaos of the age without creating the false sense of order by employing the narrative technique of Kurosawa's *Rashomon*, that is, by recounting the story of the Uprising from three different perspectives: that of the nationalists (and, as a corollary, of the sparse supporters of the Hetman's regime), that of the Germans, and finally, that of the armed peasantry.

The story of the armed conflict between the Ukrainian National Union on one hand and the Hetman forces on the other is probably least difficult to recount due on one hand to the relatively limited scope of operations and on the other to the articulate garrulousness of its participants. It is a tale, after all, of a military coup that Vynnychenko, Mykyta Shapoval, Symon Petliura and the number of officers of the Ukrainian army (col. Vasil Tiutiunik and gen. Oleksandr Osets'kyi in particular) began to prepare once Hetman declared his intention to build a new, reputedly pro-Russian ministerial cabinet (October 19).⁷⁵ While Vynnychenko and Shapoval were trying at once to create an impression of their loyalty to the regime and to convince more hesitant members of the Socialist-Federalist party to support the anti-Hetman coup,⁷⁶ the military was infiltrating the “nationally-conscious” units of the Hetman Army with an aim of probing their readiness to fight and die for “the independent Ukraine.” One counted on the participation of the Railroad guard (*zaliznycha viiskova varta*), formed under the auspices of gen. Osets'kyi, the so-called Black Sea regiment (*Chornomors'kii Kosh*), stationed in Berdichev, the Zaporozhian division (*Zaporizhska dyviziia*) with the elements of the disbanded Gray division (*Sirozhupannyky*) on the eastern frontier of the Ukrainian state and, above all, on the recently recreated Sich Riflement regiment in Belaia Tserkov under the command of col. Evhen Konovalts.⁷⁷ They were all indeed created within the last few months as heralds of the Ukrainian national consciousness – and in that manner they stood in marked contrast to the eight territorial Corps of the Hetmanate, which in their core remained but the slightly modified and renamed units of the old Imperial Army.⁷⁸ The Sich Riflemen, the 1,500-strong body, consisted, of course, largely

⁷⁵ PAAA R14384; Vynnychenko, 417

⁷⁶ Vynnychenko, 424

⁷⁷ Petriv, v. 4, 87, 92; Vynnychenko, 421-422; Skrukwa, 343

⁷⁸ *1918 god na Ukraine*, p 5

of the Galicians – the fact that, despite the exemplary discipline of the unit, high level of literacy and the indisputable commitment to the national idea (as they understood it) was not of an unmitigated boon to the future Ukrainian Directorate.⁷⁹ The defeat of the Austro-Hungarian empire appearing more certain every day, the Council, or, Rada of the Galician Sich Riflemen opted nonetheless to stay within the “Great Ukraine,” maintaining that “Kiev is more important than Lviv and that the transfer of one part of the regiment could lead to the situation, whereby Kiev is not taken and Lviv is not kept.”⁸⁰ Even though the available forces even under most auspicious circumstances could not have exceeded five thousand troops, the Ukrainian National Union decided to proceed with the revolt. On the 13th of November representatives of the composite parties elected the 5-member Directorate (Vynnychenko, Petliura, F. Shwets, A. Makarenko and P. Andrievs’kyi) and on the 15th, now safely settled in Belaia Tserkov under protection of the Sich Riflemen, the Directorate issued its famous Appeal,⁸¹ disarmed the Varta and commenced its movement in the direction of Kiev.

Two days later colonel of the Zaporozhian division Petro Bolbochan⁸² arrested the entire staff of the division and took power in the city Kharkov, opening thereby another theater of military operations.⁸³ On the morning of the 18th in the vicinity of Motovilovka (ukr. Motovylyvka) one of the battalions of the Sich Riflemen met with the Hetman forces, comprised of the volunteer officer squad of Sviatopolk-Mirski (“Great-Russian” in its

⁷⁹ Vynnychenko seemed to have recognized that, high national consciousness aside, the Galicians did not exhibit commensurate commitment to the ideals of the social revolution; they “were not in position to understand (the tasks) of the revolutionary hour.” (Osyp Nazaruk, *Rik na Velykii Ukraini: Konspekt z Ukrain's'koi Revoliutsii* (New York: Hoverlia, 1978), p 66)

⁸⁰ Nazaruk, p 8

⁸¹ Full text in Vynnychenko, 433-436

⁸² In many contemporary documents as well as in Vynnychenko's *Vidrodzhennia* one finds different slightly different spelling of his name: Balbachan.

⁸³ Denikin, *Ocherki*, v. 4, 352

composition) and the Ukrainian Guard Serdiuk regiment; the Galicians defeated their opponents so thoroughly that several days later the bulk of the Serdiuk division switched sides and joined the insurgents.⁸⁴ With those debacles – the loss of Kharkov and the subsequent occupation of Poltava, defeat at Motovilovka, the defection of the Guards to the side of the enemy, etc – Hetman’s state was reduced to Kiev, its environs and few centers at the intersections of major railroads.⁸⁵ Skoropadsky’s armed forces – consisting almost exclusively of the private officer squads, 3-4,000 men altogether – relinquished last trappings of the national Ukrainian army, as became evident from the appointment of the general F. Keller, a Russian nationalist (“*ganz grossrussisch gesinnter General*”)⁸⁶ and a staunch monarchist, to the position of the Supreme Commander with quasi-dictatorial prerogatives. At the same time, the number of the insurgents was growing exponentially, thanks to the influx of the peasants from the nearby villages. By the 21st of November the regiment of the Sich riflemen was upgraded into a division; fortnight later a 50,000 strong Siege Corps of the Sich Riflemen was established that now included, besides the original Galician unit, the expanded Black Sea Division (formerly a regiment) and two peasant “Dnieper (ukr. Dnipro) divisions,” led by the atamans Zeleny and Oleksandr Danchenko respectively⁸⁷; all in all, the Galicians comprised now about three percent of the original Sich Riflemen.⁸⁸ In *Novorossia* too, Ataman Grigoriev announced his allegiance to the Directorate and together with the partisan formation, dubbed in its newly acquired

⁸⁴ Nazaruk, p 35; Denikin, *Ocherki*, v 4, 352; Skrukwa, 343-348

⁸⁵ Petriv, v. 4, 104

⁸⁶ PAAA R14387

⁸⁷ Skrukwa p 349; Petriv v. 4, p 94

⁸⁸ Petriv, v. 4 p 117

“staidness” the Kherson Division, entered into the Southern Army Group of the Ukrainian People’s Republic, headed by general Grekov.⁸⁹

“The Hetmanate was only waiting for a minor push to founder...[and] Kiev could have fallen two or three weeks sooner,” thought retrospectively Vsevolod Petriv.⁹⁰ Nonetheless, Skoropadsky held out till the middle of December. Rather than pressing forth to certain victory during the first week of the Uprising, forces of the Directorate floundered desultorily on the threshold of the “golden-headed” Kiev. Such indecisive circumspection shown by the troops of the Directorate, standing in such striking foil with their original *élan* could be exhaustively explained by one factor – the fear of German reprisals.

That fear was anything but exaggerated, for, after all, against the few thousand that the Nationalists could originally rally to their cause, the Germans possessed an Army of over 20 divisions, well-armed and still relatively well-supplied.⁹¹ The Army Group “Kiev” was certainly the master of the situation, in comparison to which the spats and melees between the forces of the Ukrainian Peoples Republic and those loyal to Hetman looked petty and theatrical – an impression strengthened by the fact that those skirmishes were taking place with an implicit permission of the German High Command. The Army controlled all the major cities and towns in the Northern, Central and Eastern parts of the country as well as the main railroads that it intended to retain at all costs – such at least was the meaning of the order issued by Kirchbach and the High Command in the immediate wake of the

⁸⁹ Horak, p 20

⁹⁰ Petriv, v. 4, p 113

⁹¹ PA X Russland Karton 153 d 1

Directorate's coup (Nov. 15th),⁹² and although news of the revolution at home and the growth of the Soldiers' Soviets was undermining the fighting abilities of the German soldiers, the officers still commanded authority among their men – exploiting, it seems, the feeling that without their expertise the entirety of the Army would be stranded in Ukraine and ultimately engulfed by the tsunami of revolution.⁹³

Yet, despite the efforts of the High Command, the Army proved itself unable to remain monolithic in the face of the rebellious countryside. Stationed in all major railroad centers, the disjointed units of the German Army Group “Kiev” had to come up with the improvised solutions to the problems presented by the situation independently of the center. “Our connection with the center in Kiev becomes broken from time to time,” so began the German officer as Osyp Nazaruk was asking him to grant the Ukrainian troops an access to the ammunition depots in the village of Popel'nia, near Zhytomir.

“Besides there is a infighting taking place up there between us, as you may know. For that reason we ourselves need to decide our position in the localities. As for your uprising, forgive me for saying this, but we do not know, if yours isn't the most ordinary mutiny of the bandits, although you dub it ‘national’.”⁹⁴

This skepticism concerning the nature of the Uprising aside, the German units in the province tended to assume “favorable neutrality” vis-à-vis the Directorate, above all during the first few days of the uprising, when the representatives of the Ukrainian Peoples Republic still exhibited necessary degree of ‘stateliness’ – so reckoned in the eyes of the officers and the soviets alike.⁹⁵ The agreement between the representatives of the Sich Riflemen and the German garrison in Belaia Tserkov, stipulating the non-involvement of the German soldiers

⁹² Deninkin, *Ocherki*, v 4, p 353

⁹³ Nazaruk, p 13

⁹⁴ *ibid*, p 32

⁹⁵ *ibid*. 30; Denikin, *Ocherki*, v 4, 353.

in the pending power struggle in exchange for the assistance in transporting German troops out of Ukraine,⁹⁶ set an early important precedent for the similarly worded concords with the plethora of other, isolated and home-sick, units of the German Army.

All too often, however, neutrality remained but a formal word with no practical significance. The soldiers' soviets, sympathetic to the revolutionary rhetoric of the insurgents, would often succumb to the temptation of assisting those latter in their conflict with the "Reaction." An outstanding example of such support had taken place in Kharkov, where Bolbochan executed a coup with a connivance of the local garrison.⁹⁷ It is however rather characteristic that in Kharkov the said garrison remained all-powerful⁹⁸, forcing Bolbochan to evacuate the city once the soviet grew convinced that his reactionary politics would not warrant them a safe passage home.⁹⁹ They continued, nonetheless, to supply the insurgents with arms and ammunition, which proved crucial in the subsequent operations against Poltava and Chernigov.¹⁰⁰ On more than few occasions the German garrisons joined the ranks of the rebels.¹⁰¹

It seems that the task of remaining aloof in the unfolding struggle between the *Petliurovsty* – as the troops formally bound to the Directorate came to be known – and the motley concoction of a force (Volunteer squads, Varta, remnants of the territorial Corps) loyal to Skoropadsky's regime was substantially easier in the province than in Kiev. Whereas the

⁹⁶ Nazaruk, 15

⁹⁷ PAAA R14387; Denikin, *Ocherki*, v. 4, p 352

⁹⁸ GARF f P-446 o 2 d 43 l 259-260

⁹⁹ Denikin, *Ocherki*, v. 4, 356; on Bolbochan's politics see Vynnychenko, 452-453

¹⁰⁰ Skrukwa, 348-349

¹⁰¹ TsDAHO f 5 o 1 d 151 l 57-58

German garrisons in Kharkov, Yekaterinoslav or Zhytomir could pretend to indwell the world untouched by the revolutionary developments in their environs, soldiers of the XXVII Corps and the Great Soldiers' Soviet found themselves under the double duress from the Hetman Government and the Entente powers. Although the Soviet in Kiev expressly confirmed its desire to stay outside the "internal political conflict,"¹⁰² the need to keep order within Kiev itself – "in the interests of the German troops"¹⁰³ themselves - gave Skoropdasky's government enough leeway to start pressing the latter into the quagmire of the domestic war. Having recognized the value that the order possessed in the eyes of the Germans, Adrianov, the Kiev provincial starosta, composed on Nov 21 an appeal to the Soldiers' Soviet wherein he intentionally accentuated the purely destructive essence of the Uprising:

If in the action of the Sich riflemen one could discern certain political coloration, which in the light of decision undertaken by the Germany army hinders them from taking the side of the truly legitimate authority, then ... the looting and murders, currently perpetrated in districts by the licentious and inebriated bands of peasants **left without supervision on their own** [emphasis is mine], could not be classified under the rubric of a political uprising, having as an aim the reconstitution of another regime on the Ukrainian soil...¹⁰⁴

When on Nov 23rd a group of fifty strong suddenly appeared in the Podol district of Kiev and disarmed Hetman's Varta, Adrianov's words acquired an unpleasantly physical manifestation; even though no one interrogated the provenance of the gang, one automatically presumed it to be the van of the advancing Directorate troops.¹⁰⁵ Frequent news of German units being stopped and disarmed on their way home only further contributed to the growing solicitude of the German soldiers in Kiev.

¹⁰² PAAA R14386

¹⁰³ PAAA R14387

¹⁰⁴ TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 72 l 592-593

¹⁰⁵ AdR Karton 720

On the 22nd of November, a man with “a mysterious name” – Emile Hennot – claiming to represent Entente powers in Ukraine released a declaration, whereby Germany was enjoined to “preclude any infringement upon the cause of restoring order and reorganizing Russia”,¹⁰⁶ as a consequence, the German Army stationed in Ukraine was charged with a hardly concealed task of suppressing the nationalist revolt.¹⁰⁷ Whether Hennot possessed any credentials of Entente’s plenipotentiary at all was doubtful,¹⁰⁸ but in those heady day one prudently decided to trust him – lest the recalcitrance in executing his will (or that of Entente) would lead to “an invasion from out of Rhine” or the imposition of a “hunger blockade,” as Major Jarosch, the chairman of the Soldiers’ Soviet in Kiev expressed it in his conversation with Osyp Nazaruk.¹⁰⁹ Combined, Hennot’s injunctions and the unremitting implorations of the Hetman’s government temporarily produced the desired effect: on Nov 25th a small German force moved against “bands threatening Kiev,”¹¹⁰ which had wisely avoided the battle.¹¹¹ A day later, however, troops of the XXVII Corps faced the regular troops of the Republicans, the Sich Riflemen namely; even if ultimately successful, the Germans were impressed by the performance of their opponent.¹¹² Following that incident, soldiers began

¹⁰⁶ PAAA R 14388

¹⁰⁷ PAAA R 14387

¹⁰⁸ Formerly vine salesman married to a woman from Odessa, Hennot hews one of the most interesting personalities of the time. He appears on the political horizon in the early days of November – just a few days before the Armistice on the Western Front was declared; although rarely seen by anyone, he exercised constant presence in the minds of the leading Ukrainian statesmen and the German top commanders; adventurer through and through, symbol indeed of those turbulent times, the “self-appointed French consul” disappeared in mid January as quickly and resolutely as he appeared, not even deigning to leave to the posterity the proper French spelling of his name; the Germans at least write it alternatively Henno, Henot, Henaut, Hennaut, Ennot, Enno, Hennot and even the monstrously incongruent Hainnaut.

¹⁰⁹ Nazaruk, p 39

¹¹⁰ PAAA R 14387

¹¹¹ AdR Karton 720

¹¹² AdR Karton 720

revealing “growing reluctance... to fight Petliura’s followers”¹¹³, the development that constrained the Great Soldiers’ Soviet and the High Command to seek diplomatic *modus vivendi* with the representatives of the Ukrainian Peoples’ Republic. According to the final draft of the agreement, parties involved established a demilitarized zone around Kiev; the few squads at the Hetman’s disposal were to retire into city, whereas the republican troops were required to move 20 kilometers westward of the besieged capital; the Germans, responsible for defending the population of Kiev, were given the right of using Ukrainian railroads without any hindrance from the newly established local authorities.¹¹⁴ With Germans having thus tacitly recognized gains previously made by the Directorate, it became but a matter of time before Hetman would be abandoned to countenance his own doom. To be sure, the agony of the regime lasted yet another two weeks, but nothing, not even the lachrymose appeals of Skoropadsky’s Foreign Minister Afanasiev to governments in Berlin and Paris¹¹⁵ could have altered its fate. When on December 12 a new agreement was signed in Kazatin (ukr. Kazatyn), whereby the Germans promised to desist from all further resistance to the troops of the Ukrainian People,¹¹⁶ “everybody realized,” as Denikin apodictically wrote, “that the end had arrived.”¹¹⁷

On the surface level “the issue [of the anti-Hetman uprising – M.A.] was settled by the Germans.”¹¹⁸ Yet, the decision to forsake Hetman was anything but the result of the internal power struggle between the Soviet and the High Command; it stemmed rather from the

¹¹³ PAAA R 14387

¹¹⁴ PAAA R 14387

¹¹⁵ PAAA R 14387

¹¹⁶ Full text is found in AdR Karton 720

¹¹⁷ Denikin, *Ocherki*, v. 4, 365

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*, v. 4, 365

apprehension, dread indeed, conceived at the sight of the “Bolshevik-anarchist” popular unrest.¹¹⁹ That fear only grew in force insomuch as the strength of Army Group Kiev was diminishing and the demoralization of units, hitherto disciplined and obedient, began reaching distressing proportions. Daily assaults on the German trains, the chilling stories of the strayed soldiers being robbed, mutilated and killed by the rebellious peasants, the loss of communication with Berlin and finally, the seemingly incontrovertible evidence of Entente’s reluctance to become involved in the Ukrainian affairs conjured up the stygian perspective of a complete annihilation. The Directorate was certainly aware of those fears, aware of the hatred – “the primeval hatred and the thirst for vengeance, only the Slav is capable of feeling” as one contemporary put it¹²⁰ - and used it barefacedly as its most valuable trump card in the dealings with the Germans. Thus Osyp Nazaruk recalled not without relish having to mention the proximity of “bandit Shabelnik” in order to preclude local German garrison from abandoning their outpost and leaving the nearby ammunition stores in the hands of Hetmans supporters. The name of Shabelnik, true bugaboo of small German detachments, strewn across Ukraine, had its effect, for not only the guard in Popelnia (ukr. Popil’nia) (where the depot was located) “but also the crews in Khvastov and possibly in neighboring [towns]” were alarmed lest they be attacked unprepared.¹²¹

The story of Shabelnik had an almost anecdotal quality, but the frequent allusions by the members of the Directorate to the capacity of the “peasant masses” of turning violent and destructive unless the Germans stay neutral were only too substantial and grave.¹²² This was

¹¹⁹ AdR Karton 720

¹²⁰ Friedrich Schrader, *Eine Flüchtlingsreise durch die Ukraine* (Tübingen: Verlag von J.C.B. Mohr, 1919), 68

¹²¹ Nazaruk, p 31

¹²² *ibid.*, p 18

more than an example of diplomatic blackmail. Uncertain of its own strength, the parallel government of Vynnychenko tried to create an impression that it alone possessed enough authority to keep riotous peasants under control. In this respect, the text of the agreement, signed in Kazatin, is revealing, for in exchange for Kiev, still held by Hetman, it obliged the “Ukrainian-republican Directorate” to assist the evacuation of the remaining German troops by all possible means. “The reciprocal relationships between the German and Ukrainian troops,” the text solemnly declares, “should be determined by the respective higher military authorities in the spirit of friendly cooperation (*im Sinne eines freundschaftlichen Verhältnisses*).”¹²³ In other words, desperate to leave the land that threatened to devour them, Germans yielded to the simple principle that any government, however objectionable its agenda may be, is preferable to chaos.

Nonetheless, neither this agreement, nor the previous one, drawn and signed on Nov 28th, could have done much to stench the wave of peasant aggression against the Germans. The very opportunity of fighting the German, broached by the anti-Hetman insurrection, as Nazaruk freely concedes, constituted one of the sources of popularity that the Directorate initially enjoyed.¹²⁴ Conciliatory appeals of the Ukrainian People’s Republic to “the soldiers of the liberated German nation”¹²⁵ proliferated side by side with excoriating, minatory ultimatums, similar to those that the ataman Grigoriev, technically acting on behalf of the Directorate, sent to the Soldiers’ Soviet of Nikolaev (Mykolaiv):

In the name of the proletarian troops, commanded by me, and also in the name of the People that rose up against the bourgeoisie, I declare that you are not democrats but traitors of Russia. If in the course of four days you do not

¹²³ AdR Karton 720

¹²⁴ Nazaruk, p 55

¹²⁵ cited in Mędrzecki, p. 275

leave Nikolaev and Dolinskaia, not one of you would see your homeland again; at the first provocation you will be annihilated as flies, without leaving a trace, as flies.¹²⁶

Overwhelmed by such verbal barrage, the Germans thought it prudent not to try their luck and left the city without any resistance to the self-styled “ataman of Kherson and Taurida.”

Not all members of the rapidly dwindling German army in Ukraine were fortunate enough to leave the land relatively unscathed – far from it. Friedrich Schrader, well-known German orientalist, left a unique account of the journey through Ukraine that he had to undertake in December of 1918. Reaching Nikolaev on Dec 18 – incidentally retaken by the Germans – he and the thirty odd civilians boarded a train that carried units of the 15 Infantry division towards Brest-Litovsk. On the way he encountered German soldiers who had been disarmed by the roaming bands. “Their courage is broken,” Schrader wrote of the soldiers that arrived from Yekaterinoslav. “Thirst for life, the burning longing for home grappled them. This is the tragedy of the German Army in the South East.”¹²⁷ His own trial – his and that of the civilians and soldiers traveling along – came on December 27, as the train, inching forth towards Kiev, reached Fundukleevka junction, 40 miles to the north of Yelisavetgrad. There, in the vicinity “made for an ambush,”¹²⁸ the company found itself enveloped by hundreds of *petliurovtsy* dressed “in the yellow gray Cossack frocks.”¹²⁹ Their demand to surrender all available weapons was met shortly after the soviet had taken a vote. As if to emphasize the depth of dejection, Schrader thought it apposite to remark: “Some frightened spirits among

¹²⁶ cit in Denikin, v 4, 355; Denikin, however, mistakenly assigns Dec 18 as the date of the telegram. Kakurin corrects him by stating that the ultimatum was delivered on Dec 9, that is, before the agreement in Kazatin. (Kakurin, *Kak srazhalas' Revoliutsiia*, v. 2, p. 83)

¹²⁷ Schrader, 66.

¹²⁸ *ibid.*, 77

¹²⁹ *ibid.*, 78

the Germans remind their comrades to give away everything and to conceal nothing. For it was announced, that anyone, who retains weapons and ammunition, would be shot by the Ukrainians.”¹³⁰ One of the leaders of the *petliurovtsy* approached the disarmed Germans, mare astride, looking “more like a gang boss in his sheepskin, yet, with his tall fur cap akin to the commander of regular troops.”¹³¹

Their tribulations were hardly over at that point. Few miles further down the road, the train of disarmed and crestfallen Germans was stopped again and all the civilians were ordered out and goaded into the last wagon. There, shivering from cold, fear and hunger, one realized that their collective fate was about to be decided. With no signs of hope divulged by the surly Ukrainian guard, Schrader wrote, he and other alleged representatives of the German Capital, were bidding farewell to their lives.¹³² They were, however, salvaged by the courage of one Swedish nurse, who blandished her way to the Commandant. From that latter she managed to obtain a promise that he would protect the hostages, “if he is capable of it.”¹³³ He was indeed, but at a high price: the innocently named “custom revision” turned out to be but a mere euphemism for the renewed plunder. That did not seem to have mattered much, since the travelers were grateful to have come alive from that “true Nibelung abode, where murder and cruel guile reign.”¹³⁴

To say that the German authorities were unpleasantly surprised by the relentless assaults on the returning troops even after the Directorate installed itself in Kiev is a grotesque

¹³⁰ *ibid.*, 79

¹³¹ *ibid.*, 80

¹³² *ibid.*, 85-86

¹³³ *ibid.*, p 88

¹³⁴ *ibid.*, p 81

understatement. When a large detachment of the German soldiers reached the station of Goloby “without any provision and almost without any clothing on,”¹³⁵ Berchem issued his strident protest in Vynnychenko’s presence, warning that if those attacks would continue, he “would have to renounce any responsibility for the future stance of the [German] troops and would have to consider undertaking further steps.”¹³⁶ The righteous indignation of the chargé d’affaires and his threats, by all means empty, were misplaced, since the Directorate was hardly ever in the position of imposing its will on armed peasant formations; it bore only partial responsibility for the authorization of the peasant violence, providing the peasant more with a pretext than a cause of action. Conversely, one could question, together with the Polish historian Włodzimierz Mędrzecki, the extent to which armed countryside proved beneficial to the advancement of the Nationalist agenda.¹³⁷ In the light of subsequent events, in fact, it is tempting to say that the popular revolt was at the root of the Directorate’s ultimate undoing.

What was the mechanism that set the countryside ablaze and how did members of the Directorate managed to convince first the Germans and then themselves that the peasant masses were decidedly on their side? As was shown above, Ukrainian province was already a witness to the scenes of sanguinary confrontations between variegated representatives of the formal authority – Germans, Hetman troops, self-defense squads, organized by solicitous squires – and the errant peasant bands. Issued on the first day of the uprising, Petliura’s *Universal* to the Ukrainian People with its summon to arms, was somewhat redundant; yet, the *Universal* was used by the peasants, even if retrospectively, as a justification for the

¹³⁵ AdR Karton 720

¹³⁶ PAAA R 14388

¹³⁷ Mędrzecki, 276

onslaught on the most despised embodiment of Skoropadsky's *ancien regime* – the landlord. That “Petliura is marching on Hetman” (*Petliura ide na Het'mana'*) or that “Petliura is calling up against the Germans” was often all one needed to know about the reality of the anti-Hetman insurgency to feel the urge of partaking in it.¹³⁸ In his report to the director of the State Varta Akkerman, Kiev provincial starosta captured the simple and simultaneously efficacious proceedings of the rural revolt:

It has been established that on the road Romanovka-Mikhailovka all is quiet; there are ... no troops of Petliura, yet he declared mobilization in all of Belgorodskaia volost; male population from 20 to 35 years of age is being called up, but de facto not more than a half responds... the populace expect Petliura's arrival and is ready to join up with his bands at any moment; there is even a possibility of an unauthorized action (*samochnoe vystuplenie*)¹³⁹ Such “unauthorized actions” brought into relief the nature of peasant self-mobilization.

Caught by the spreading conflagration of the peasant *jacquerie*, the government of the Ukrainian People's Republic found itself compelled to appropriate slogans of the rural insurrection, confirming the impression among its opponents of being fundamentally “Bolshevik” in its core.¹⁴⁰

Vynnychenko correctly regarded the surge in the peasant “unsanctioned” participation as an example of the so-called *Petliurovshchina*, albeit he anachronistically discerns in that phenomenon manifestations of Petliura's own dictatorial ambitions.¹⁴¹ In November and December of 1918, Symon Petliura represented an opportunity to avange the social wrongs of Skoropadsky's order; he was a slogan and “a myth” in Bulgakov's phrase, splicing together sundry parts of the land through the informal willingness of the rebels to see

¹³⁸ Vynnychenko, 439

¹³⁹ TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 72 l 622

¹⁴⁰ Denikin, v 4, 354; Vynnychenko's belated remorse of not being adequately “soviet” and “Bolshevik” is known well enough.

¹⁴¹ Vynnychenko, 438-441

themselves and be seen as “Petliura’s boys” (*petliurovtsy*) – and so, as indicated above, without any substantive prodding from the Directorate. Thus, on November 30, Hetman’s Varta spotted in the vicinity of Darnitsa (ukr. Darnytsia) a group of 50-60 men who razed an estate of a local landowner under the pretense of being “*petliurovtsy*.” A few days before that – on November 21 – another group of local peasants perpetrated a similar deed, except that in their case the aim of declaring oneself *petliurovtsy* consisted in murdering the volost alderman (*golova*).¹⁴² The comportment of a 30-person strong band, operating in the Novomoskovsk (ukr. Novomoskovs’k) district, articulated the meaning of early *Petliurovshchina* with clarity bordering on cynicism; still as nameless “marauders,” they distinguished themselves by laying waste to the mansion of some Bergman; yet, the attack on the outpost of local Varta was preceded by the timely declaration of loyalty to Petliura - an operation at political “camouflaging” all the more luring that its execution brought no change to the band’s complete autonomy.¹⁴³

In the environs of Kiev, however, the peasant militants were acting within the framework of the inchoate Republican army, ultimately as a part of the Siege Corps. “Masses of the Ukrainian insurgents flocked to us from all sides,” wrote Nazaruk in his recollections,¹⁴⁴ converging in Belaia Tserkov, the peasants more often than not tended to bring along their own weapons, providently buried under the ground in the aftermath of the summer debacles.¹⁴⁵ Initially, the officers of the mutinous Republic, Galicians by and large, tried to inform them with some semblance of the regular army, dividing the newly arrived into

¹⁴² TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 l 72, l 700

¹⁴³ TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 96 l 289

¹⁴⁴ Nazaruk, 25

¹⁴⁵ Skrukwa, 350; Vynnychenko, 441

companies and regiments¹⁴⁶ and even providing some of the luckier ones with few available military uniforms.¹⁴⁷ Yet, as the numbers of the rural insurrectionists grew first into thousands and later into tens of thousands, the problem of keeping order became simply intractable. With only a thin patina of proper military organization, detachments of armed peasants were essentially left to their devices, fully responsible for the procurement of provender and ammunition.¹⁴⁸

Under those circumstances peasant para-military formations, embodied by their atamans, retained complete operational – and *a fortiori* political – independence from their nominal superiors in Belaia Tserkov or in Winnitsa. Ataman Grigoriev represents a classical example of a peasant warlord, who, despite his formal affiliation with the Directorate pursued his own agenda right up to the moment of his defection to the Bolsheviks; given his importance for the forthcoming months, the story of his evolution is best left for the subsequent chapter. Case of Zeleny is no less interesting, especially in the light of his geographic proximity to the centers of the Directorate's power. Hiding in the forests of the southern *Kievshchina*, he reemerged in the second half of November to take control over Tripol'e, Rzhishchev and Obukhov (ukr. Obukhiv), while the local German garrison – so read one of the dispatches to Skoropadsky's ministry of the Interior – looked away with conspicuous indifference.¹⁴⁹ The mastery over his native turf thus assured, Zeleny moved north in the direction of Borispol with an alleged intention of severing communication between Kiev and Poltava.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ Nazaruk, 25-26

¹⁴⁷ Vynnychenko, 441

¹⁴⁸ Nazaruk, 25; that inability to subordinate peasant units to the single commanding center was possibly the major reason why the siege of Kiev proper was never entrusted to them, remaining till the last day of the Hetmanate the prerogative of the Galician regular troops.

¹⁴⁹ TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 72 l 697

¹⁵⁰ TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 71 l 197; TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 72 l 650

Meanwhile his force – 1,500 well-armed men – became recognized as the 1st Dnieper Division and that of his lieutenant Danchenko as the 2nd Dnieper Division. Reckoned as a part of Evhen Konovalts’ Corps, Zeleny’s men were stimulated as much by the visions of the Soviet power as by the perspective of loot in the event of Kiev’s fall; when refused the entrance into the vanquished capital, Zeleny hoisted the flag of mutiny and without further ado declared himself on the side of the Communists.¹⁵¹

The superficiality of the formal rapports established between the Republicans in Belaia Tserkov and the entire motley slew of local atamans was reflected in the diverse nature of their political strivings. It was clear, though not always admitted by the Directorate, that, as one anonymous agent of Shulgin’s AZBUKA put it, “the peasantry will not be swayed by [mere] reclamations of sovereignty (*samostiinymi lozungami*).”¹⁵² On the contrary, the countryside operated under the vague amalgam of ideas and practices alternatively designated by their adversaries as “Bolshevism” or “Anarchism”; Schrader called it “nationalist Bolshevism,” an alleged “*contradictio in adjecto*,” which, nonetheless, manifested a certain political truth.¹⁵³ Other observers, equally hostile to the Ukrainian Republicans and their self-mobilized rural allies, cognized the inherent tension within the “movement,” prophesying, quite correctly, the triumph of the “Bolshevik tendencies” over the “Nationalist elements” – that triumph expressing itself either in the collapse of the Directorate or its subsequent radicalization in the direction of the extreme left.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Skrukwa, 402-404; Koval, 27-31

¹⁵² GARF f P-446 o 1 d 14 ll 13-16

¹⁵³ Schrader, p 69

¹⁵⁴ TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 72 ll 702-703; AdR Karton 720

That phrase – peasant “Bolshevism” – should be treated with utmost circumspection if to avoid grafting upon it features of a coherent ideology. The problem in defining the politics of peasant militancy stems from its allegedly inconsistent, desultory, apolitical character – for, bereft of the apposite terminology, the carriers of urban culture, our main purveyors of observations, were inclined to misconceive peasant actions and thus to associate them either with impervious irrationality or with the aboveboard and brutal practicality. “In the vicinity of Poltava district” stated the provincial starosta in his telephone exchange with the Deputy Director of the State Varta “one notices the formation of the robber gangs of the fairly significant size, possessing nothing in common with the political movement, but striving to benefit from the opportune moment for looting in the district all the same.”¹⁵⁵ At once cause and consequence of the state collapse, this opportunism of the otherwise “platform-less” peasantry became the axis around which the revolt in the province, as experienced by diverse types of rusticated urbanites (former zemstvo members, squires, large landowners, etc) had been understood and subsequently narrated. Commenting on two raids by peasant “brigands” that took place in early November around Starokonstantinov, Kossak-Szczucka had given this narrative its most laconic form: “The two assaults, though devoid of the political background, inaugurated days of crisis for our environs. From that moment on, misfortunes upon misfortunes befell us – like a runaway horse.”¹⁵⁶

Although often distorted by class-based prejudice, the oft-repeated affirmations of the supposedly apolitical essence of peasant insurrections betoken, nonetheless, the quintessential fact of the peasant political life – namely, the staunch denial of the urban

¹⁵⁵TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 75 ll 315-324

¹⁵⁶ Kossak, 122

politics, of the rules it established for the execution of political moves and of the language it proffered for their justification. It is precisely that denial that reveals itself in the persistence with which authorities designated peasant troops as “bands.” The provenance of documents may well change, the language remains invariable – “*die Banden*” of the German reports became *bandy* and *shaiki* in the affidavits to Skoropadsky’s Ministry of Interior; respectively, the uprising was often qualified as the “mere bandits’ riot” (*zvyhajnyi bunt banditiv*).¹⁵⁷ The use of the term signified more than readiness to violate limits of legality, delineated by the rapidly expiring Hetman’s regime; the Directorate’s regular troops, after all, were also culpable of committing treason and thus of transgressing the law, yet the epithet of a “band” was hardly ever applied to them.¹⁵⁸ Rather, rhetorical functions aside, the notion of a “band” mirrored the essentially improvised and self-reliant character of the armed peasant organizations, the absence of any higher authority, responsible for coordinating activities of the rebels – the phenomenon closely related with the “elemental,” or, to use another much-abused term, “anarcho-syndicalist” vision of the Soviet democracy.

While the pillaging of the estates, burning of the mansions, assaults on representatives of the central, city-based, authority seemed to have divulged naked opportunism of the rural insurgents, the cruelty of the bands invoked the specter of bestial irrationality, inherent in the popular revolt. Examples abound; “in dozens male colonists [in the area of Aleksandrovsk - M.A.] are murdered, shot, hacked to pieces, decapitated and hanged by the local Russian populace,” stated the report of the District Committee of the Black Sea Germans, submitted

¹⁵⁷ Nazaruk, 32

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.*, 35

to the Association of the German Settlement and Migration in Berlin;¹⁵⁹ Kossack-Szczucka graphically described the tragic fate of the local notables and their families from some small hamlet in the vicinity of Avratin.

The three men, the woman and the child were tortured in the most frightening manner for hours on; their skin flayed, piece by piece and without their toes and heels, walking on bleeding stumps instead of feet they were driven across the snow, as their tormenters were cutting off their remaining members. The dolorous cadavers... were thrown off in the woods ... where they remained for few days before being found by the relatives.¹⁶⁰

As he was waiting to encounter formidable “colonel Malishevs’kyi,” Nazaruk was reminded of the rumor that the said ataman “likes to carry around his belt the recently severed head.”¹⁶¹ The head was not flaunted this time and the peasant leader actually happened to be “a cultured and experienced person” – but that hardly changes the point. Real or imagined, the acts of violence were meant to be seen and talked about – they had to appear spectacular. No doubt emanating from the morbid exhilaration of being unfettered by the Revolution and its karamazovian imperatives, signifying to no small extent the collapse of norms and the subsequent Dionysian relish in license, the ostentatious cruelty functioned as the reservoir of “bad repute.” Spearheading the advance of the peasant troops, their alleged penchant for torture and brutality was supposed to precipitate the flight of the “aliens” – landlords by and large – from the land, sparing them the necessity of actual violence.

Immensely complex by themselves, the themes, raised in the preceding discussion – the apolitical (or, anti-political?) nature of peasant uprisings, proliferation of disjointed and autonomous gangs, freshly severed heads and other gruesome details of peasant vengeance –

¹⁵⁹ PAAA R 14388

¹⁶⁰ Kossak, p 123; incidentally the only English translation of the book omits that passage, deeming it too graphic, if not pornographic.

¹⁶¹ Nazaruk, 56-58

all tropologically constitute what one could call peasant or “folk bolshevism.” An oddly consistent system, it bedizened in the drapes of the modern revolutionary language the ancient dream of the *Muzhitskoe Tsarstvo*, the kingdom of the *muzhik*, the world without the prison, knout and the noose. According to this vision, the land, forests and rivers – all the resources of the *nen’ka Ukraina* – were to belong to the cultivator, subordinate only to his own conscience and the will of his immediate community (expressed either through *skhod*, or the local rada, that is, the soviet); in this environment, the clout of the city, that epitome of the central power with its foreignness, its violence, its unrequited absorption of money and men – was to be reduced to minimum, the city itself ultimately starved to death. The “national moment” was either entirely absent (as Denikin would have it)¹⁶² or subservient to social issues, the language, that “*muzhyts’ka mova*” (the “muzhiks’ tongue”) serving only to accentuate the divide between the economic oppressor and the economically oppressed. Admittedly, the union between the nationalist Republicans in Belaia Tserkov and the “peasant masses” was anything but adventitious, for the Appeal to the citizens of Ukraine, made public on the 15th of November, provided the uprising in the countryside both with the pretext and legitimacy. Yet, that confluence of interests was at best transient, maintained for as long as the leaders of peasant armies – Makhno, Zeleny, Grigoriev and the bevy of lesser atamans – standing in an infinitely closer relationship with their men than Vynnychenko or even Petliura could ever hope to attain, bethought it apposite and opportune to fight under Directorate’s yellow-blue banner.

Before proceeding to the conclusion, it may be enlightening to “sublate” the artifice of the tripartite narrative division, introduced above. A brief look at the events in the ill-starred

¹⁶² Denikin, *Ocherki*, v. 4, 355

Yekaterinoslav and its immediate environs offers an occasion to splice narratives back together in order to see how the various actors – Hetman’s forces, urban self-defense, Germans, Directorate’s army and the peasants – operated under constraints of the “real-time” mode (so to speak).

Part III: Yekaterinoslav, city thrice besieged

The population of Yekaterinoslav, a great commercial center and a capital of an Austrian-occupied province, started to feel the breeze of the imminent changes sometime in the mid October 1918. The XII Corps of the Imperial and Royal Army, a unit hitherto marked by “the exceptional correctness,”¹⁶³ suddenly succumbed to the same disintegrating forces that were tearing empire asunder: news of the German defeats precipitated unalloyed mirth among the Czechs and the Poles, as well as the Hungarian officers of the “younger generations,” while causing sincere distress in the ranks of the “Austrian Germans” (*die Deutschösterreicher*) and all those who identified themselves “in the first place as the servants of the dynasty” – the remaining part of the Hungarians presumably.¹⁶⁴ The collapsing discipline led, on October 25, the Army Command “Ost” in Odessa to order the evacuation of the province.¹⁶⁵

The departure of the Austro-Hungarian troops, at first surprisingly orderly – especially in comparison to the mayhem in Odessa – was accompanied by the simultaneous arrival of the German troops, retrieved from the other theaters of war. That, combined with the declaration

¹⁶³ G. Sakovich “Ekaterinoslavskyi pokhod” in *1918 god na Ukraine*, ed. S. Volkov (Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf, 2001), p 286

¹⁶⁴ PAAA R 14385, report from Weidemann to Maximilian von Baden, Oct 19, 1918

¹⁶⁵ PAAA R 14385, telegram from Berchem to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, received on Oct 26, 1918

of the stage of siege in the second week of November seemed to have brought about temporary amelioration, as the most riotous elements of the former XII Corps were quickly neutralized and dismissed; significantly, a number of Austrian officers announced their intention to enter into the service of the German Army; few even endeavored to find employment in Hetman's Varta and the inchoate self-defense squads.¹⁶⁶ This relative tranquility was but the lull before the storm, for the city and the outlying countryside were clearly arming themselves to be soon engaged in the Hobbesian struggle of all against all. Thus, Hetman with the German half-hearted connivance could rely on the forces of the VIII territorial Corps, consisting, however, exclusively of the officer cadres – about 600 men *grosso modo* – as well as the squad of the Denikin-oriented Russian officers.¹⁶⁷ The Jewish self-defense organization emerged, abetted through the unrestrained selling of guns, horses, military apparel and even armed cars by the Austrians,¹⁶⁸ - all this taking place despite an explicit ban on arms trade, decreed by the provincial starosta Chernikov; the German diplomatic and military authorities, having recognized the futility of such steps, attempted to divert the flow of unclaimed weaponry into the hands of the German colonists, menaced by the peasant “banditry.”¹⁶⁹ This effort had only partially succeeded due to the “incomprehensible” hindrances from the soldiers' soviet, as the German Council in Yekaterinoslav Weideman ruefully admitted in his bi-monthly report.¹⁷⁰

The violence broke out the very moment the last train with the remaining Austro-Hungarian soldiers rolled westward away (November 19). By that time, Germans had limited their

¹⁶⁶ PAAA R 14387, report from Weidemann to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Nov 11, 1918

¹⁶⁷ V. Gureev “Ekaterinoslavskiy pokhod” in *1918 god na Ukraine*, 270

¹⁶⁸ PAAA R 14388, report from Weidemann to Reich Chancellor, Nov 24, 1918

¹⁶⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ PAAA R 14389, report from Weidemann to Reich Chancellor, Dec 6, 1918

duties exclusively to guarding railroads, train station and the bridge across Dnieper, for their own immediate departure was no longer matter of doubt.¹⁷¹ Hetman's fateful Manifesto, retorted right away by the Directorate's summon to arms split the VIII Corps into the "Great Russians" and the "Ukrainians"¹⁷²; the former, under the nominal command of the Corps General Vasilchenko joined the officer squads and, now about 2000 strong,¹⁷³ took over the post, the State bank, the Duma building, albeit only temporarily, and the city prison, from which the Germans had already improvidently released about 600 common criminals.¹⁷⁴ Simultaneously a powerful worker movement divested Chernikov of all practical importance; the general strike culminated in the election of a certain Vasiliy Osipov, self-proclaimed Socialist, to the position of a mayor. Publicly disavowing any affiliation with the Bolsheviks, Osipov's worker self-administration came to an understanding with the supporters of the Ukrainian People's Republic, interchangeably referred to as either "*Petliurovtsy*" or the "Free Cossacks"¹⁷⁵ by analogy with the improvised troops of the late Central Rada. The leader of the latter, captain Vorobiev, (having ukrainized his last name into Gorobets),¹⁷⁶ declared himself to be the Directorate's representative in the city and thus the supreme commander of all Yekaterinoslav-based troops.¹⁷⁷ On the night of Nov 20th the Free Cossacks succeeded in taking hold of the train station, and disarming the Varta.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷¹ PAAA R 14387, report from Weidemann to Reich Chancellor, Nov 14, 1918; PAAA 14388, report from Weidemann to Reich Chancellor, Nov 24, 1918

¹⁷² V. Gureev "Ekaterinoslavskiy pokhod" in *1918 god na Ukraine*, 270

¹⁷³ G. Sakovich "Ekaterinoslavskiy pokhod" in *1918 god na Ukraine*, 289; the Austrians registered altogether 11 thousand of the former Russian Imperial officers in Yekaterinoslav (I. Labinskiy "O Ekaterinoslavskom pokhode" in *1918 god na Ukraine*, ed. S. Volkov (Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf, 296)

¹⁷⁴ PAAA R14388 Weidemann to Reich Chancellor, Nov 24, 1918

¹⁷⁵ *ibid*

¹⁷⁶ The Russian Vorobej and Ukrainian Gorobets mean "sparrow"

¹⁷⁷ PAAA R14388 Weidemann to Reich Chancellor, Nov 24, 1918; interestingly enough both Osipov and Vorobiev-Gorobets served under the government of Golubovich as the mayor of the city and the commandant respectively; initially, therefore, the Ukrainian national movement appeared to be working towards resuscitating political situation as it existed before Skoropadsky's coup.

¹⁷⁸ *ibid*

While the city was being carved into the spheres of influence, the countryside grew simultaneously more distant and yet dangerously near. No one knew exactly what was taking place there, except that the land was periodically scoured by bands, “plundering, burning and murdering” without encountering any impediment on their way (after all, “the Ogre does what ogres can”).¹⁷⁹ First as an abstraction, albeit a frightening one, Makhno, the ataman of “the particularly sinister group” as one report rather flatteringly described him,¹⁸⁰ had routed small Austrian and German detachments to find himself menacingly abutting the left-bank rims of Yekaterinoslav. Both the local Bolsheviki, by now masters of the left-bank part of the city, as well as the “Free Cossacks” of Gorobets thought it expedient to bring Makhno to their side¹⁸¹ and sent their emissaries to his makeshift “staff.” Makhno temporized, however, aware that the time was working to his advantage.

By early December the confusion of the situation in the city was perfectly captured by the following dispatch to Denikin’s Information Bureau:

The city is divided into five districts. The upper part is tenaciously held by the volunteer squads; area around the municipal Duma is in the hands of the Jewish self-defense. The ring of the Germans follows further. The volunteers, self-defense, and the Germans are enveloped by the troops loyal to Petliura. Finally, the whole city is surrounded by the Bolsheviki and the Makhnovites.¹⁸²

That truly emblematic stalemate was soon disrupted by renewed outbursts of hostility.

Goaded by Makhno’s agitators, the more radically-inclined group of the *Petliurovtsy*

¹⁷⁹ PAAA R 14389 Weidemann to Reich Chancellor, Dec 6, 1918

¹⁸⁰ PAAA R 14387 Weidemann to Reich Chancellor, Nov 14, 1918

¹⁸¹ PAAA R 14389 Weidemann to Reich Chancellor, Dec 18, 1918; Makhno, *Spovid’ anarakhysta*, 591-592

¹⁸² cit in Denikin, *Ocherki*, v. 4, 356

attacked positions of the VIII Corps and forced those latter to seek refuge in the barracks.¹⁸³

Foreseeing sanguinary reprisals, the officers of the beleaguered corps, about 1000 strong, left the city on December 10th in the tenebrous silence of the night.¹⁸⁴ With Yekaterinoslav formally in their possession, the nationalists, nevertheless, had very little reason to celebrate, haunted as they were by the looming threat of Makhnovshchina.

Concluding remarks

Writing in the last week of October, Dr. E. Jenny, scholar of Eastern Europe and a self-avowed ukrainophile, pondered over the viability of the Ukrainian statehood. That Kiev had by default evolved into a “counter-pole” to Moscow – the red capital epitomizing “social upheaval, economic communism, absolutism of the mob (*“ochlokraitischer Absolutismus”*) [and] world revolution” – in itself could not warrant continuing existence of the new polity; essential to the success of the project was the well-developed national consciousness and that appeared to be sadly lacking. “The low people (*“das niedere Volk”*) became indifferent to the national idea and feel only their economic disadvantage and social oppression; [meanwhile] the upper estate had grown almost completely estranged from the people (*“Volkstum”*).” The lamentable inability of the peasantry to identify itself with the nation coupled with the centrality of the socio-economic grievances rendered it not only all too susceptible to the ideas of “agrarian communism,” but in fact inimical to the very notion of the state (*“staatsfeindlichen”*). The only alternative to the Moscow-imported Bolshevism and the home-grown anarchism, Jenny concluded, could be found in the reconstitution of

¹⁸³ Makhno, *Spovid' anarkhysta*, 595; PAAA R 14389, Weidemann to the Reich Chancellor, Dec 6th 1918

¹⁸⁴ V. Gureev “Ekaterinoslavskiy pokhod” in *1918 god na Ukraine*, p 271; PAAA R 14389, Weidemann to the Reich Chancellor, Dec 18th 1918

Russia, the process wherein Ukraine would be given the role of a nucleus without having to sacrifice its autonomy.¹⁸⁵

It took only a few odd weeks before one saw the full import of Jenny's sibylline words. The Hetmanate fell down like a house of cards, yet the instigators of its collapse, the Nationalists, did not find themselves in a much better predicament. Their error stemmed from the fact that they had attempted to build the new state or usurp the old one by relying on forces responsible for its erosion. To the hundreds of thousands of peasants, who rose up in arms against the execrable rule of the "Great Russian reaction," the uprising signified final emancipation from the callousness of the centralized authority; what they offered in its stead was the weak, consultative body of the village soviet, tuned in staunch defiance of the external world to servicing local needs. The centrifugal tendencies, inherent in the peasant military and political participation were not lost to the contemporaries; "having begun under the banner of the [Ukrainian] Sovereignty, the uprising metamorphosed into the solid Bolshevik movement," claimed the dispatch to Denikin's General Staff,¹⁸⁶ when asked to ascertain who the major beneficiaries of Hetman's downfall were, Aleksandr Kotletsov, a refugee from Kiev and an informant at the High Command of the Volunteer Army, retorted without a hint of hesitation – "Bolsheviks" – alluding to the unrestrained land seizures and the spread of the peasant self-rule in the countryside.¹⁸⁷

Yet, it would be completely amiss to judge "peasant Bolshevism" as the triumph of anarchy and disorder. What was at stake was not the destruction of authority per se as the reversal of

¹⁸⁵ PAAA R 14387

¹⁸⁶ GARF f r-446 o 2, d 43, l 259-260

¹⁸⁷ GARF f P-446 o 2, d 45, l 45-50

power relations between the city and the countryside. Of momentous importance, that shift in the center of political gravity was reflected in the unconditional failure of the Hetman's urban "praetorian guards"¹⁸⁸ to keep their high-ranking Kievan client in power; it found its most poignant symbolic expression on the evening of December 14, when Kiev saw itself vanquished by the Ukrainian village. On that day, wrote Petriv, "the black earth flushed away the outlandish silt."¹⁸⁹ No longer were the destinies of Ukraine decided in the metropolitan areas; they were replaced by a plethora of small railroad junctions, housing Ukraine's most powerful atamans: Znamenka, Guliai-Pole, Tripol'e, Lozovaia...

In the wake of Kiev's fall, however, one thought relatively little about those "ruffians with arms and armies," being instead engrossed by the impending arrival of the new government. For the next few days the order was maintained and the plunder averted, albeit with some difficulty.¹⁹⁰ Then again, the Germans had specifically allowed only the "trained (*ausgebildete*) troops" to enter into the conquered capital, placing the maximum number allowed at 15,000.¹⁹¹ The Directorate had no choice but to comply with those injunctions. Garnering together all the regular troops it could muster, the Directorate moved into Kiev on Dec 19 amidst pomp and jubilation (for some at least it was a festive occasion). German military observers, dawdling diplomats of the deceased Austro-Hungarian Empire and mere gawkers in civilian clothing were left unduly impressed by the show. "The troops of the Directorate which had entered Kiev and which are said to consist of the East Galician

¹⁸⁸ The phrase was used by Manuilski in his interview to *Pravda*, Dec. 5 (TsDAHO f 5 o 1 d 151 ll 65-69)

¹⁸⁹ Petriv, v. 4, p 116

¹⁹⁰ KA Karton 723 Fürstenberg an Ludwig Freiherrn von Flotow, Kiev, Dec 22 1918

¹⁹¹ AdR Karton 720, PAAA R 14388

regiments... evinced immaculate discipline..."¹⁹² wrote Austrian legation councilor von Duré; Fürstenberg seconded him, stating that "by and by the republican Military makes not bad of an impression, occasionally even a rightly impeccable one (*"recht strammen"*)."¹⁹³ Himself a witness, Bulgakov immortalized the parade in his *White Guard* with the following description:

In blue greatcoats and blue-topped astrakhan caps set at a jaunty angle the Galicians marched past. Slanting forward between bared sabers two blue and yellow standards glided along behind a large brass band and after the standards, rhythmically stamping the crystalline snow, rank on rank of men marched jauntily along dressed in good, sound German cloth. After the first battalion ambled a body of men in long black cloaks belted at the waist with ropes, with German steel helmets on their heads, and the brown thicket of bayonets crept on parade like a bristling swarm.

In uncountable force marched the ragged gray regiments of Sich riflemen and battalion on battalion of haidamak regiments; prancing high in the gaps between them rode the dashing regimental, battalion and company commanders. Bold, brassy, confident marches blared out like nuggets of gold in a bright, flashing stream.¹⁹⁴

Meretricious without being motley, spry yet disciplined – so remembered the urban populace Petliura's "uncountable forces" on the day they poured into the city.

It could have hardly occurred to anyone at that point that the multitudinous peasant division of ataman Zeleny had encamped on the western outskirts of the city like the pechenegs and the cumans in the days of yore. The villagers, who had performed indispensable services during the siege of Kiev, were looking forward to remunerating themselves at the expense of the city dwellers; many had brought their carts along to carry away the well-earned booty

¹⁹² AdR Karton 720 Lage in der Ukraina, von Duré (Reg.-Rat), Kiev

¹⁹³ AdR Karton 720, Fürstenberg an Ludwig Freiherrn von Flotow, Kiev, Dec 22 1918

¹⁹⁴ Mikhail Bulgakov, *The White Guard*, trans. Michael Glenny (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1971), 226

back to their hamlets.¹⁹⁵ Against their expectations, however, *Zelenovtsy* were kept at bay in Sviatoshino, separated from the center by the ring of German patrols. Sorely disappointed, aggrieved indeed by the unrequited desire at avenging the injuries they had suffered at the hands of the city, the peasant insurgent lost confidence in the regime, whose advent was being feted few miles away. The Directorate had instantaneously acquired trappings of the “bourgeois” government, no less iniquitous than the toppled Hetmanate.

For now Zeleny had to bid his time, yet his mind seemed to have been already set against the People’s Republic. With tens of thousands supporting him and his likes, the outcome of the forthcoming struggle would have left few in doubt.

¹⁹⁵ AdR Karton 720, Fürstenberg an Ludwig Freiherrn von Flotow, Kiev, Dec 22 1918

Chapter III

Between Bolsheviks and Atamans

And it was not the Russian government that was chasing us out of Ukraine, but our own people, without whom and against whom, let me repeat myself, the Russian Soviet troops could have not occupied even one district of our territory.¹

Volodymyr Vynnychenko

¹ Vynnychenko, p 485

“Makhno and Grigoriev – black scum, maddened froth of the muzhik anarchy, riot and gloom,” so wrote Evgeniy Trifonov (Brazhnev), a writer who shared a modicum of Babel’s talent and an fullness of his fate.² These words were penned down in the early thirties when forgetfulness and discriminatory remembering ossified into the measure of personal dependability, but in 1919 that seasoned revolutionary and high-ranking commissar of the Ukrainian Front knew very well that, for all their antic ways Makhno and Grigoriev exemplified the panache of the Revolution, the brutal spontaneity of its fighting spirit. The two, after all, basked in the rays of encomia on the pages of the Kharkov’s *Izvestiia*. “Send the regards of the 3rd Congress of the Ukrainian Communist Party to the Red Army Soldiers who fight for the Soviet Power...Long Live the Transdnieperian Division!” exploded the salvos of its booming lines, feting that most willful of a unit, one that had provided an organizational asylum to Ukraine’s great atamans.³

Eccentric as its commanders may have been, the Transdnieperian Soviet Division was certainly not unusual. In its composition and the practices employed by its ‘officers’ and rank-and-file, it reflected the nature of collaboration between the Bolshevik party and the armed Ukrainian countryside. “Soviet troops in Ukraine,” an investigator from the Ukrainian Peoples’ Commissariat of Military Affairs had tersely observed, “consisted by and large (about 90%) of the partisan detachments and insurgent troops, to which the Headquarters of the Front had hastily communicated a superficial form (*vneshniaia forma*) of regular units, but who had essentially remained partisans and insurgents with all their virtues and

² E.Brazhnev-Trifonov, *Kalenaia tropa* (Moscow: Moskovskoe tovarishchestvo pisatelei, 1934), 179

³ *IVRKPU* March 3, 1919 nr 59

considerable shortcomings.”⁴ So was it indeed, yet the continuing reliance of the regime in Kharkov on the resources of the Ukrainian insurgency – a phenomenon much bemoaned and searchingly panned by the subsequent commentators of the Bolshevik retreat – stemmed from a certain ‘logic of events’ and a confining necessity of the political moment rather than a suggested slapdash and precipitous work on the part of the Ukrainian Front or of its commander, Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko. The army, it must be admitted, was conceived in sin with an all too active participation of the Ukrainian rebel chiefs still months before the anti-Hetman uprising. With the frontier of Skoropadsky’s ephemeral state once crossed, the temptation to employ forces of the domestic rural *condottieri* acquired the dimension of strategic exigency: close to their native terrains, the atamans were the true purveyors of men and materiel. Short of its own regular troops, the Party had given in; yet, whatever reservation Kharkov may have originally born, it soon turned into euphoria as the war maps, like the tarot cards of the fortune-teller, seemed to prophesy victory and eternal life for the Soviet Ukraine while ringing the funeral tocsin to the authority of the ‘bourgeois-national’ Ukrainian People’s Republic (reduced by April of 1919, in Vynnychenko’s caustic expression, to a Gypsy encampment in wretched Volhynia).⁵ This chapter endeavors to present exactly that – a synthetic account of the Bolshevik experiments with the partisans in the pre-November days, of their encounter with the Ukrainian systemic rebellion and of the Red Army’s growing identification with the *atamanshchina*; in short, it narrates the story of the temporary symbiosis between Party and warlords, allowing itself an occasional hint in the direction of the fateful rupture to come.

⁴ RGASPI f 71 o 34 d 568 l 3

⁵ Vynnychenko, 536-537

Part I: Modest Beginnings of the Ukrainian Soviet Army (September 1918 – December 1919)

Historiographical tradition or common prejudice holds that decisions pertaining to the lives of the ‘greatest numbers’ be taken at the corresponding levels of political responsibility. By that token, the army of the Soviet Ukraine appears to owe its existence most of all to the forceful prose of one Antonov, one Zatonsky or one Piatakov, working in the dingy provincial town of Kursk (although not as provincial and dingy as, say, Sudzha) to overcome the stubborn resistance of callous *voenspetsy* in Serpukhov, embodied by Vatsetis. Such a narrative, centered on various expressions of epistolary flair (telegrams, dispatches and Antonov’s ‘lachrymose’ entreaties, *chelobitnye* being the major source of support and inspiration), could have boasted some degree of comprehensiveness had the infrastructural collapse and the civic sabotage of the young Soviet republic not vitiated to the extreme its fledgling administrative muscles; the cabled words, quite simply, no longer sufficed to arrange armed men in columns and force them to march. The Civil War, in a certain sense, had thus reinstated part of the lost immediacy to the art of governance, phenomenon of which the ambulatory Trotsky embowered in his armed train was the best evidence.⁶ This fact alone, it would seem, makes it all the more apposite to commence at the altitude of local politics and to recount the story of the Ukrainian front from the periphery inward – or from the ground up.

⁶ This idea should not be bypassed cavalierly; politics did revert back to the immediacy proper to the ‘charismatic regimes,’ just as the Declarative Art, or the poetry of declamation had entered into a period of efflorescence – assuredly the result of aesthetics, inaugurated by the Revolution, it responded too to the changed rapports between the governing and the governed that the collapse of the bureaucratic invisible state had engendered; just as the presence of Nicholas II in Mogilev was unnecessary and ultimately deleterious, so was the visibility of Trotsky and the audibility of Mayakovsky indispensable and advantageous.

The exigency to think ‘local’ brings the scholar to the thin strip of no-man’s land between the German-occupied Ukraine and the Soviet Russia – to the territory, known as the ‘neutral zone.’ The origin of the Zone remains rather unclear – Vladimir Aussem, the future commander of the 2nd Insurgent Division and the temporary head of Antonov’s Staff, recalled that the strip ‘was not established by an act of a definite kind.’⁷ Another participant of those events, Sergei Petrikovskiy (Petrenko), the head of staff of the 1st Insurgent Division, gainsays him in his memoirs by adverting to an enigmatic ‘special accord.’⁸ The German Political Archive does indeed contain a telegram dated May 8th with a text of an agreement anent the Zone, concluded and signed in its turn on May 4th of 1918.⁹ It stipulated the conditions under which the demarcation between the two negotiating agents could be set up: namely, the creation of ‘neutral zone ten kilometers wide which none of the parties would be allowed to traverse.’ The German line (of the Ukrainian frontier, of course) was to run north from Sudzha, Liubimovka, Korenevo, Ryl’sk, while the Soviet border followed the line south of Mazepovka, Stepanovka, Nizhnaia Grunia, cutting the railroad-line Korenewo-L’gov at the midpoint, Sipylevka, Kremianoe, Malaia Loknia etc.¹⁰ The corridor formed was to be free of all infractions; no foodstuff requisitioning was allowed, patrols were to keep themselves at the distance indicated, and even planes were beholden to circumvent that luminal stretch of land. One hoped, naively without a doubt, that the kilometers intercalated

⁷ RGVA f 1417 o 1 d 280 l 79; V. Aussem, „K istorii povstanchestwa na Ukraine,” *Letopis Revolutsii*, v. 5 (1926): 8

⁸ Sergei Petrikovsky-Petrenko “Neitral’na zona’ Chernihivshchyni vlitku 1918 roku” in *Borot’ba za peremohu Radians’koi vlady na Chernihivshchyni*, ed. A. Levenko (Chernihiv: Oblvydav, 1958), 120.

⁹ PAAA R 14370

¹⁰ The text only defines the borders in Kursk province; in the North, that is, in Mogilev and Chernigov provinces, the Soviet border was supposed to pass through Chechersk, Kamianka, Khmelevka, Birino, Ostrushki, Yesman’; the Ukrainian line was designed to lay through Shelukhovka, Robchik, Khomotovka, Khutor-Mikhailovskiy, Glukhov. (Bozhko, O.I. “Povstan’ska Armiia Ukrainy (Osin’ 1918 r.): Stvorennia, Organizacijna Struktura, Sklad,” *Ukrains’kyi istorichnyi zhurnal* 4 (2009): 109.

between the new polities of Bolshevik Russia and Skoropadsky's Ukraine would allay present tensions and preempt future hostilities once and for all.

The ideal encapsulated in the treaty had shown itself to be a sham before long. The form and the utilization of the Neutral zone were determined not in Berlin, Moscow or Kiev, but in the Zone and its adjacent regions; never steady, its width varied greatly, reaching forty kilometers in the vicinity of Oboian' and shrinking to about ten around Ryl'sk;¹¹ neither was it stable, as the townships would pass from one statehood to another in order to lapse at the end to the status of political non-affiliation – Starodub in the former Chernigov province was subject to such vicissitudes in early September as were multiple villages of the Novgorod-Seversk district.¹² Likewise, the border troops stationed there could rarely find a legitimate excuse not to procure 'all the necessities of life' at the expense of the local population – the trespassing was the order of the day and skirmishes, often with fatalities, were not uncommon.¹³ The populace paid back in kind – by creating armed self-defense units or by hiring others to fight on its behalf, a relatively easy task, for both weaponry and errant *francs-tireurs* were in abundant supply.

Of greatest importance to the future was the fact that the Neutral Zone with its ambiguous status evolved into a kind of refuge for the numerous "bands disavowing all authority" (*ne priznaiushchie nikakoi vlasti bandy*), as one contemporary document puts it.¹⁴ These were by

¹¹ RGVA f 1417 o 1 d 280 l 79; Adams presents similar figures – from 6 to 25 miles (Adams, 19); the oft-repeated interval of 5-15 km does not seem to correspond to the real situation.

¹² TsDAGO f 5 o 1 d 151, l. 8

¹³ RGVA f 1417 o 1 d 280 l 79; Petrikovskiy-Petrenko, "Neitral'na zona," 120; Aussem, "K istorii povstanchestva," 8-9

¹⁴ TsDAGO f 5 o 1 d 151, l. 8

and large disjoined armed groups, fragments of the Red Guard units, routed by the Germans in the earlier engagements, and as little aware of the central Ukrainian Bolshevik authorities as the latter were of them. These partisans, frontier once crossed, would not as a rule disperse among the local villages, but, on the contrary, would ensconce as a unit. In his recollections, Aussem gives a list of some of the most notable partisan conglomerations (or of those that fell within the ken of Bolshevik knowledge): the ‘battalion’ of “comrade Mikhaldyka” around Unecha (about 200-300 men), ‘battalion’ of Svistunov around Glukhov, ‘battalion’ of Mikhailovsky in the vicinity of Korochoa, unanimous associations clustered around Kulaga (150 men), Rozoreny Khutory (200 men), Oboian’ (up to 300 men), etc.¹⁵ The majority of the armed detachments consisted of the inhabitants of the Chernigov, Kiev and Kharkov provinces, although some ‘recruited’ denizens from the Zone itself.¹⁶ Deserters from the Red Army, that ready-made material for the organized banditry, cut frequent figures in these unclaimed corners as well – they too were almost exclusively of Ukrainian stock, just as eager to return to their native lands as they were loath to fight for the Soviet Republic on the hills of the remote Urals.¹⁷

Spilling over Ukraine’s frontiers, great peasant *jacqueries* of summer 1918 precipitated another wave of armed refugees. Thus, among the first large groups reaching the Neutral Zone in the aftermath of the uprising was a 400-men detachment of Fiodor Grebenko, settled, according to some sources, in the vicinity of the Zernovo junction (modern Sumy oblast in

¹⁵ Aussem, “K istorii povstanchestva,” 9

¹⁶ Petrikovsky-Petrenko, “Neitral’na zona,” 122-123; RGVA f 1417 o 1 d 280, l 107.

¹⁷ Aussem, “K istorii povstanchestva,” 9; RGVA f 1417 o 1 d 280 l 100-101; the companies of mobilized Ukrainians were apparently leaving lines of the anti-Czechoslovak Eastern Front en mass, as un-fractured entities; how they reached Russo-Ukrainian frontier – issue of great suspense – is not known to me.

Ukraine),¹⁸ according to others, near the township of Korenevo, about 80 miles west of Kursk.¹⁹ In late August – so claim subsequent official histories - Grebenko's insurgents coalesced with a worker squad from the Kiev area, whose obstinate yet popular *bat'ko* Vasily Bozhenko would soon assume the informal functions of commander and provider of the Tarashcha rebels.²⁰ From about the same time dates the arrival of the Nikolai Krapiviansky, the supreme commander of the Nezhin rebels and the expert in the art of partisan warfare to be reckoned with; for the sake of completeness one needs to mention Nikolai Shchors, a 23-year old youth, who had graduated from a Tsarist ensign into an organizer of the peasant guerilla in the Novozybkov uezd of the Chernigov province.

The Ukrainian Bolsheviks were very quick to recognize the potential of the Neutral Zone; the All-Ukrainian Central Military-Revolutionary Committee,²¹ assuming the functions of the earlier Insurgent Revolutionary People's Secretariat (the famed Council of 'nine' – *povstancheseskaia 'deviatka'*) moved to the region in the wake of the 1st Congress of the CP(b)U in July of 1918.²² Its headquarters were first in the small town of Seredina-Buda (ukr. Seredyna-Buda), currently on the Russian-Ukrainian frontier; later the Committee relocated

¹⁸ Aussem, op. cit., p. 8

¹⁹ The former is maintained by Petrikovsky-Petrenko (Petrikovsky-Petrenko, "Neitral'na zona", 115), whereas all official histories cleave pertinaciously to Soldatskoe as the final destination of the *tarashchantsy* (*Istoriia pokhodov i boevykh deistvii 131-go Tarashchanskogo polka* (1925), 8; the anonymous manuscript in RGVA f 1417 o 1 d 280 l 78); neither does the date of their arrival remain uncontested – the same Petrikovsky affirms that the Tarashcha insurgents reached the Neutral Zone in the "first half of August"; the German detachments sent after the insurgents register their presence on the soil of the Ukrainian State till at least as late as August 18th 1918 (TsDAVO f 1216 o 1 d 75 l 125). It seems likely that the party of the partisans had reached the Neutral Zone sometime after August 20– there they stayed for a week or two before being transferred for the reorganization to the Kursk province.

²⁰ *Istoriia 131-go Tarashchanskogo polka 44 Kievskoy divizii* (Zhitomir: Izdanie Politicheskogo Otdela 44-i Kievskoi Strelkovoi Divizii, 1928 p. 16); RGVA f 1470 o 1 d 280 l 112

²¹ Its members were Vladimir Aussem, Iuriy Kotsiubinskiy, Iuriy Piatak, Vladimir Zatonkiy and Andrei Bubnov, the chairman – professional revolutionaries of stature and experience.

²² RGVA f 1417 o 1 d 280 l 51

itself to the railroad junction of Zernovo.²³ If at the outset it preoccupied itself largely with the organization of local Revolutionary Committees (*revkomy*) aiming to provide organizational guidance and material assistance to the peasant rebels, from late August onwards – once the futility of an open confrontation with the occupying forces became manifest – its energies were unsparingly channeled towards the task of informing partisans stationed in the Zone with some degree of structure. A three-tiered nexus of informal rapports came into being, the Committee preferring to act upon the unruly body of armed ruffians through mediation of their commanders; few of those were outsiders, such as Gustav Barabash (‘Barabashev’), a Croatian officer and a future head of staff of the 2nd Insurgent Division; though native of Ukraine and veteran of the earlier struggles with Rada and the Germans, Vitaly Primakov could certainly pass for an outsider as well in his quality of a fully-fledged Red Army officer. Accompanied by his “hundred” of the Red Cossacks, he was dispatched to the Neutral Zone not only to proffer lessons in horse-riding to the tattered footmen, but to provide the neighboring Military-Revolutionary Committee with the necessary protection, lest some unscrupulous partisan leader would treat the emissaries of the International Revolution with less than condign respect.²⁴ The majority, however, were seasoned partisans themselves, flesh and blood of their men, veritable “field commanders” as one could dub them using the media parlance of today: the refractory ‘Red Colonel’ Nikolai Krapiviansky;²⁵ the “unsung” hero of the Tarashcha-Zvenigorodka uprising, former ensign of the Tsarist Army Fiodor Gribenko (or Grebenko); ‘*bat’ko*’ Vasily Bozhenko, native of

²³ Bozhko, “Povstan’ska armiiia Ukrainy,” 111.

²⁴ *ibid.*, 111; incidentally, in August and September of 1918 the ‘hundred’ of Primakov (actually, there were about 180 men in the unit) was the only regular unit at the disposal of the Committee.

²⁵ The sobriquet ‘Red Colonel’ or simply ‘Colonel’ was used by all warring parties – the Austro-Germans (PA X Russland Liasse XI Karton 153 d 1), the Volunteers (GARF f R-6497 o 1 d 4, etc) and the Reds, of course (TsDAGO f 57 o 2 d 76, ll 88-89).

Tarashcha district and a one-time carpenter in Kiev;²⁶ V. Balias; Kazimir Kviatek (Kazimierz Kwiatek), son of a Warsaw railroad worker and a long-standing companion of Shchors;²⁷ and, of course, Nikolai Shchors himself, that Gilgamesh of the Civil War and the “Ukrainian Chapaev,” personage so legendary that neither conditions of his birth nor the circumstances of his death could be espied in limpid light through the unctuous mist of Soviet hagiography.

The gathering of the disjointed rebel detachments into the units of the future Ukrainian army unfolded in accordance with the principles of the “small war.” Appointed to the defined segments within the Neutral Zone, all of the aforementioned ‘field commanders’ – Bozhenko, Shchors, Primakov and others – would start invariably by setting up a ‘staff’ in some village and then proceed by sending small parties in search of armed vagabonds. Mikhail Demchenko, the organizer of the 6th Korocha Regiment, commenced exactly in that manner: having encountered on his way to Zaiach’e a group of men commanded by the *frontovik* Grigoriy Molchanov,²⁸ he settled down in the village and asked Molchanov to establish contact with another local partisan chief, Besedin.²⁹ Zaiach’e had soon evolved into a center of gravity around which concentrated other chieftains and their men – assemblage large enough to claim for itself the name of the regiment sometime in September of 1918.³⁰ This ‘re-organization’, however, was very limited in its extent for the inner structure of formations, constituting newly-formed – and ‘numbered’ – regiments remained unaltered: more often than not the leaders and the *bat’ki* would simply acquire a parallel title of *kombat*

²⁶ *Istoriia 131-go Tarashchanskogo polka 44 Kievskoy divizii*, 16; RGVA f 1470 o 1 d 280 l 112

²⁷ *Istoriia 130-go Bogunskogo polka 44-y Kievskoy Strelkovoy Divizii* (Zhitomir: Izdanie Politicheskogo otdela, 1928), 5

²⁸ M. Demchenko, *Shestoi povstancheskii* (Moscow: Voen. Izd-vo, 1964), 25

²⁹ *ibid.*, 34

³⁰ Bozhko, 112

(‘commander of the battalion) or that of *kompolk* (‘regimental commander’). On occasions the commander would be elected by the soldiers, or ‘appointed’ from above – in recognition of the relative clout exercised by a given leader among his men (Balias, the first commander of the Tarashcha regiment, is the case in point).³¹ Elected – or at least approbated - were the candidates to the position of a military commissar as well as the members of the regimental Revolutionary tribunals; even the designation of the military formations that the partisans deemed worthy of themselves and of their ambitions tended to emerge in the course of the general discussion: most named their units after their leaders (Mikhailov’s battalion, squadron of Sakharov), locations where they were formed (6th Korochoa Regiment, 9th Insurgent Oboian’ Regiment, etc) or provenances of the partisans (Tarashcha Regiment, 1st and 2nd Sumy battalions). Some, however, did not content themselves with such jejune cognomens, preferring something declarative, bombastic, revolutionary – the Fourth Undefeatable Plastun Hundred, for instance.³² Whether by chance or by a deeply-felt affinity with the deeds of the 17th Cossack ataman, the men of the 1st Insurgent Regiment, formed and led by Shchors, quarried a name with which they would enter into the annals of history – the Regiment of Bogun, *Bogunskiy polk*.³³

It was indeed an antic army in the making. True to their partisan origins, men acquiesced only to the authority of their elders, circumscribed formally and informally, as in the times of

³¹ *Istoriia pokhodovo i boevykh deistviy 131-go Tarashchanskogo polka*; there is still some controversy about the first commander of the Tarashcha regiment; a later chronicle of the unit (1928) bestows upon ‘comrade Baron’ (the leading figure of the anarchist organization ‘Nabat’? Possibly) that privilege (*Istoriia 131-go Tarashchanskogo...*, 17) – foibles of memory, or fruits of political injunction?

³² RGVA f 1417 o 1 d 280 l 111.

³³ *Istoriia 130-go Bogunskogo polka ...*, 14; RGVA f 1417 o 1 d 280 l 103; in connection with this name other neologisms came into being – *boguntsy*, term, used in reference to the rank and file of the regiment and the division and *Boguniia*, almost a proper name, designation of the land, the *Geistesreich*, an ethos that survives the departed and saturates the newly-arrived ones.

the Cossack host, by the soldiers' Soviet. Unabashedly, they would harass German patrols on the other side of the frontier – much to the annoyance of the Central Military-Revolutionary Committee. Shchors seemed to have made those *razzias* into a daily – or rather, nightly – affair, the struggle apparently being marked by “the guerilla-reconnoitering character,” as the official history almost apologetically adduces.³⁴ Their real objective, nonetheless, was more banal - and vital. “At the beginning of September of 1918,” recalled Demcheko in his fictionalized memoirs, “the regiment passed, so to speak, to the regime of self-service...

... now we were compelled to undertake minor sallies against the bases of the Germans and the Haidamaks [Hetman's 'policing force' in the language of their opponents – M.A.]. Although officially this was done without the knowledge of the Staff, the commander of the regiment himself (Iakov Kisel' – M.A.) thought that the intention of the center to form an Insurrectional army had failed and, since Kursk had forgotten us all, began to accustom himself to the idea of an autonomous action...³⁵

Trivial pillage, or, as they were known in the language of military bureaucracy, ‘arbitrary requisitions’ (*samochinnye rekvizitsii*) became the major source of supply, acquiring, in fact, pestilential proportions once the insurgents of the Neutral Zone met the ataman-led insurgents of Ukraine.

Semi-autonomous vis-à-vis the external world, the partisans jealously guarded the right to regulate their internal affairs. That such matters which could arise between men and their commanders were mediated by anything but a stature was almost a truism; the syllogism “I will knock your block off (‘*mordu nab'iu*’) if you dare to disobey me,” widely applied by Grigoriev to instill discipline into his army,³⁶ found fervent apologists among the first

³⁴ *Istoriia 130-go Bogunskogo polka...*14-15

³⁵ Demchenko, p 49; Demchenko, however, is mistaken on two accounts: the Provisional Ukrainian Soviet Government with its first headquarters in Kursk, was only established in the late November of 1918; neither the ‘autonomy’ of actions was a sudden discovery – for it had never been abandoned.

³⁶ RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 557 l 5

insurgents of the inchoate Ukrainian army. Ostracism,³⁷ mauling and flogging were widely practiced by Shchors, *bat'ko* Bozhenko and their minions for the entire duration of the campaign.³⁸ Neither was one all too dainty to pull a trigger and call it execution as the following episode sometime in October of 1918 suggests:

Krapiviansky ordered to build a floating bridge in three days but since the pontoons were not available, one decided to use rafts, put boards one on top the other to enable the transportation of the artillery... Local populace had to be mobilized and in three days the task was accomplished... An order was given to start the crossing. But here a 'misunderstanding' took place. One unit, consisting of the Novgorod-Severski fellows, refused to budge... This was Primakov's regiment. The commander of the battery together with the artillerymen 'went on strike' as well... Piatakov and Krapiviansky arrived to the scene. With the first objection raised, Krapiviansky killed on the spot the commander of the battery and one more partisan. Confrontation flared up between Primakov and Krapiviansky, but, fortunately, everything was quickly settled. Primakov, having received an order from Krapiviansky, began to prepare for the crossing.³⁹

Krapiviansky was a thug but so were his colleagues, and this volatile mélange of Old Testament patriarchy and mafia-like rascality gave the partisans their eccentric morality and shaped their ethos.

Non-statutory they may be, these methods of countering refractory behavior were bringing certain fruits, for the regiments were growing in numbers (if not in quality), so much so that on September 22nd the Central Military Revolutionary Committee issued the so-called Order Nr 6 that brought the Ukrainian Army into official existence – for some, at least.⁴⁰ Signed by

³⁷ RGVA f 999 o 1 d 4 1 5

³⁸ RGVA f 167 o 1 d 39 1 22

³⁹ N. Tocheny, "Krasnye partizany na Nezhinschine" 76; similar episode with Krapiviansky occurred in August of 1918, when, still a nominal leader of the Nezhin rebels, he shot the commander of a detachment for failing to carry out his order; partisans, observing this, made an attempt to protest, but, encountering the blandishing rhetoric of the Communists present there, allowed their anger to quickly peter out (*ibid.*, p. 70).

⁴⁰ TsDAVO f 2 o 1 d 104 l 10; according to Oleh Bozhko, the term "Ukrainian Insurgent Army" was utilized within the closed-circuit administration of the Ukrainian Bolsheviks three days after the release of the Order Nr 6 (Bozhko, "Povstan'ska armiiia Ukrainy," 112-115); Vatsetis in Serpukhov could not have been bothered with

Aussem, Bubnov and Piatakov, the Order served to fulfill two functions. First, it recognized the *fait accompli*, namely, the successful establishment of the four regiments that would hitherto be known collectively as the 1st Insurgent Division. Primakov, Balias, Shchors and Kisel' all became regimental commanders, subordinated to Krapivianski and his head of Staff, Sergei Petrikovskiy (Petrenko). Stationed between Surazh and Glukhov, the unit stood facing Chernigovshchina as if to rile and inspire its rank and file with the visions of the proximate home.

Most importantly, by issuing that order, the Military Revolutionary Committee attempted to set the ground for the articulation of formal rules which it intended to follow in creating the 2nd Insurgent division, spread, according to the plan, along the eastern border of Ukraine from Glukhov down south to Kupiansk (almost 300 miles). Symptomatically, the division was to be headed not by some experienced rogue of Krapiviansky's mould, but by a member of the Committee itself – Vladimir Aussem.⁴¹ Almost simultaneously with Order Nr 6, the Committee issued a decree, prohibiting further autonomous and unsanctioned formation of the troops.⁴² This injunction appeared to have engendered mixed results and reactions; Krapivianskiy, for instance, proceeded with a minor purge in his unit in order to strengthen his position and that of his Nezhin cronies (known as the 'Nezhin company,' but the formalism of the designation is beguiling).⁴³ The eviction of the 'arbitrarily mobilized' soldiers (*samochnno mobilizovannye liudi*), that is, of the volunteers from the Neutral Zone,

such peccadilloes. For him the "Soviet Army of Ukraine" had to be born again – sometime in late December it seems (Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v 3, 57).

⁴¹ for the duration of its formation, it would seem; Aussem, however, was not a Bolshevik of an arm-chaired type (who was?), having been baptized by fire in the earlier Ukrainian campaign.

⁴² N. Tochony, "Krasnye partizany na Nezhinshchine," 76

⁴³ Lokotosh, the second commander of the Division, was particularly vociferous about Krapiviansky's flagrant cronyism (RGVA f 999 o 1 d 10, 12)

in full accoutrement as it were, precipitated a rebellion among the non-Nezhin partisans⁴⁴ - the conflict would not subside until the removal of Krapiviansky two months later.

Commanders with less talent for overt intrigue but with the commensurate thirst for self-aggrandizement preferred simply to ignore instructions from their local Military Revolutionary Committees as they kept on building their private armies from the neighboring populace. And although complaints were voiced to Moscow and Pochep (where the Staff of the 1st Division and the all-Ukrainian Military Revolutionary Committee were temporarily located) compelling the Center to interject and remind involved parties of the extent of their prerogatives,⁴⁵ these admonitions could only be of limited use and effect.

All in all, in those autumn months the hold of the Party over the Ukrainian insurgents remained at best precarious. When on October 25, Moscow, being neither too sympathetic with the homesickness of the partisans nor convinced of the sufficient weakness of the German arms, - when *that* Moscow decided to incorporate troops of the Neutral Zone into the Reserve Army in Orel with a prospect of employing them against Krasnov's Don Cossacks,⁴⁶ the two divisions began to shrink at an alarming rate. Thus, Krapivianskiy's unit, having swelled to almost 7000 bayonets by late October, lost over a half of its men in less than one week;⁴⁷ the changes in the yet unformed 2nd Division must have been more dramatic

⁴⁴ RGVA f 1417 o 1 d 280 l 106.

⁴⁵ TsDAGO f 5 d 151 ll 22-23; the resolution of the telegram from Pochep dated October 30, 1918 reads: "Inform that the Insurgents do not have a right to conduct mobilization without knowledge and approbation of the higher organs of authority."

⁴⁶ It is difficult to say what the original intentions of Moscow with regard to that pied assemblage of All-Ukrainian Insurrection had been; *Istoriia 130-go Bogunskogo Polka* claims that the idea of transferring Bogun regiment to the Don front came to preempt further provocations of the German authorities on the Russian-Ukrainian border (*Istoriia 130-go Bogunskogo Polka*, 15); Shchors was growing too foolhardy and dangerous for his own good and Moscow was understandably reluctant to throw away peaceful rapports with Germany for the ambitions of one unaffiliated field commander.

⁴⁷ Bozhko, "Povstan'ska armiia Ukrainy," 124

– from about 3000 men (that is, with the inclusion of Primakov’s Red Cossacks and Kisel’s 6th Regiment) to 500.⁴⁸ “I repeat,” stormed Zatonsky in a telegram to Lenin and Stalin, “Ukraine isn’t a springboard nor are the divisions chess figures... Throwing them into the fight with the Cossacks means to destroy them completely.”⁴⁹ The idea of fighting on the banks of Don and Donets was all the more unbearable in that it violated the implicit contract between the field commanders and the Party – namely, an exchange of brawn and expertise for the arms, clothing, *native* leadership and a ticket home.

Germany’s surrender salvaged the situation, exposing the occupied East to the flurry of renewed political turmoil. All of a sudden Ukraine became topical again and one had discovered that the land, in Zatonsky’s remark, is “not only densely populated by the followers of the Hetman or Petliura, but by common workers and peasants as well as German soldiers, who consider themselves to be citizens of the German Socialist Republic.”⁵⁰ The Ukrainian Bolshevik Party, lulling uncertainly on the periphery of Russia and History, now threw itself into the feverish work hoping to resume the interrupted progress of Revolution. Within two weeks of the Armistice the all-Ukrainian Central Military-Revolutionary Council was transformed into the Provisional Workers’ and Peasants’ Government of Ukraine – but not before it issued a strange and unrealizable directive to all insurgent forces within Ukraine and the Neutral zone, exhorting them to a full-scale offensive against “the counter-revolutionary bands.”⁵¹ On November 17, Antonov, Zatonsky, Piatakov and Stalin with

⁴⁸ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 3, 12

⁴⁹ TsDAGO f 57 o 2 d 150 l 39

⁵⁰ TsDAGO f 57 o 2 d 150 ll 39-41

⁵¹ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 3, 17

Vatsetis' blessing founded the Ukrainian Revolutionary Military Council in Kursk,⁵² setting the grounds for the subsequent "rivalry of competences" between the military and 'civil' authorities in Ukraine, a power cleft that would plague the functioning of the Bolshevik administration until the dissolution of the Ukrainian Front. Of the original four, Piatakov quickly recognized the impossibility of working simultaneously in the Military Revolutionary Council and the Ukrainian Government and opted for the latter. Stalin was soon recalled to Moscow to resume his work there as a member of the newly established Council of Workers' and Peasants' Defense under Lenin's direction.

It should be remarked that Stalin's sojourn in Kursk, although brief, was by no means episodic. In the persona of Stalin, the Ukrainian Military Revolutionary Council acquired a committed lobbyist, a stubborn *tolkach* in Moscow and an active apologist of the cause.⁵³ Zatonsky and especially Antonov frequently sought Stalin's intercession with the 'highest instances' as they pleaded for more money, clothing and ammunition. Stalin was instrumental in organizing Antonov's meetings with Lenin, Trotsky and Vatsetis when the former betook himself to Moscow. Of greater and more lasting importance was the arrival of Stalin's Tsaritsyn colleagues in Kursk, twenty persons altogether, among whom one could easily recognize figures of Klement Voroshylov and Efim Shchadenko; Ivan Lokotosh (the future commander of the 1st Insurgent Division), Nikolai Bobyrev (at first commander of the brigade and then of the 2nd Insurgent Division) and Aleksandr Belenkovich (organizer of the Reserve units and subsequently commander of the 1st Cavalry division) were found in that

⁵² *ibid.*, v 3, 14

⁵³ *ibid.*, v 3, 38

group as well, exporting attitudes, experiences and practices from the beleaguered “Red Verdun” to the plains of Ukraine.

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the methods used by the Revolutionary Military Council, its recalcitrant independence jibed all too suggestively with those of the notorious “Tsaritsyn gang,” as Trotsky’s derisively labeled Stalin’s coterie.⁵⁴ Preoccupied as they were by the developments in Don and Caucasus, the People’s Commissariat of Military Affairs and the Staff relegated Ukrainian troops to an ancillary role, at best as the supporting right wing in the planned offensive against ataman Krasnov.⁵⁵ Kursk, however, proceeded as if a march on Kharkov and Kiev were in the offing. Although greatly incensed and discouraged by the reluctance of Serpukhov to recognize the significance of the “Ukrainian tasks,”⁵⁶ Antonov, nonetheless, refused to subordinate himself either to Glagolev, the nominal head of the Reserve Army, or to Kozhevnikov, commander of a large partisan detachment destined for the Southern Front. His sole concern were the troops in the Neutral Zone. In his efforts in fielding the “autonomous Army” of the Soviet Ukraine⁵⁷ Antonov was seconded by the ‘separatist’ activities of Piatakov’s government, forcing even Lenin into a kind of irksome “temporary compromise.”⁵⁸

The position of the Ukrainian Bolsheviks could have perhaps been somewhat softened and the rapport of productive interdependence with Moscow inaugurated, had, paradoxically

⁵⁴ It may be useful to recall that the term of ‘partizanshchina’ was applied with enviable consistency by Trotsky when describing Stalin’s conduct of Tsaritsyn’s defense.

⁵⁵ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 3, 22

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, 51

⁵⁷ TsDAGO f 57 o 2 d 150 ll 39-41

⁵⁸ Adams, 64

enough, their demands for regular troops from the heart of Russia and for the steady supply of military ammunition and apparel been seriously heeded. Of the regiments and divisions promised, Antonov ruefully admitted, by early December the Ukrainian Soviet Army⁵⁹ received only some pitiful crumbs: “2 batteries (from Moscow), the infantry hundred of Iashvilli,⁶⁰ one echelon from Kozhevnikov’s troops (up to 500 men), of which one third unarmed,⁶¹ the 4th requisitioning Cavalry regiment with only one squadron fully formed... and a ‘hundred’ (up to 60 men) of Belenkovich (from Tsaritsyn).”⁶² In essence, therefore, Antonov was left with the same two insurgent divisions, “4000 strong each, poorly supplied, poorly organized, poorly disciplined ...spread along the 300-verst stretch”⁶³ – and, more importantly, unwilling to dawdle on the side while the Party Grands quibbled over the questions of strategy. Prodded by a mixture of audacity and impatience, often unaware of the fatidic events in the Central Europe, yet intuitively conscious of the malaise that was ruining the body of the German Army, they began to move westward and southward, across the Zone toward the frontiers of the crumbling Skoropadsky’s state. These were not the hit-and-run attacks of former days, akin to the temerarious raids of Primakov and Cherniak on Vorobievka in September of 1918, or to the fumbled melee around Starodub in the month

⁵⁹ In view of creating its own regular fighting force, on November 30th the Provisional Workers’ and Peasants’ Government of Ukraine decreed the foundation of the Ukrainian Soviet Army; Vatsetis, however, persisted on calling it, as before, the “Army Group of the Kursk Direction” – one would suppose, unconsciously (Antonov-Ovseenko, v 3, 57). Neither were the insurgents themselves aware of their changed status – as could be construed from the plaintive telegraphic exchange of Piatakov with Antonov’s new head of Staff, Aussem (TsDAVO f 2 o 1 d 104 l 6)

⁶⁰ Soon to lose all signs of military efficacy (Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 3, 52)

⁶¹ Kozhevnikov’s entire force of some 5,000 strong was soon diverted to the needs of the Southern front.

⁶² Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v 3, 42

⁶³ *ibid.*, v 3 26; on the December 8th he gave a more detailed picture of these troops: “These units comprise up to 8 thousand armed men, dispersed among 20 differed groups and ‘regiments’ from the railroad line Briansk-Gomel...through Miropol’e, Bogatoe, Belenikhino junction, Ol’khovatka II, Kozinka, Urazovo junction, Vendelewka, N[ovaia] Aleksandrovka; they have up to 20 poorly exploited guns and few hundred cavalry men.” (RGVA f 103 o 1 d 507 l 28)

October,⁶⁴ but methodical advances into territories abandoned by the occupying forces. Ryl'sk was taken on the 22nd of November, part of the German garrison apparently announcing the intention of a joint struggle; Sudzha fell the next day.⁶⁵ On the 25 November, Gomel⁶⁶ was surrendered by the German XX Division to the partisan forces on a mere hope that the new masters would expedite evacuation of the old ones.⁶⁷ To the south, one of the Sumy battalions had at first disarmed a garrison in Vol'fino and subsequently proceeded to Vorozhba, where it was balked by enemy fire. The maneuver of the 5th Regiment of the 2nd Division against Glukhov ended with a tactical defeat for the attackers,⁶⁸ yet a strategic victory for the Bolsheviks: following the incident, the German Soldiers' Soviet sent delegates to the insurgents themselves, declaring solidarity with their cause and willingness to cede the town into their hands.⁶⁹ Less promising was the venture of the 6th Korocho regiment against Belgorod: lacking proper arms, wrapped in gray military coats, yellow peasant sheepskin jackets and tawdry rags of all kinds, shod "in bast shoes, felt boots, women's footwear, [and] galoshes,"⁷⁰ that meretricious army crawled in the direction of the city only to cower back at the sound of the artillery cannonade.⁷¹ These operations, undertaken without official blessing, alarmed the Bolsheviks in Kursk as much as they did the Germans; having found themselves suddenly overtaken by events the former had to act along with some convincing determination, lest they lose once and for all whatever power to act that they still possessed.

⁶⁴ Bozhko, "Povstan'ska armii Ukrainy," 120

⁶⁵ M.V. Koval and Iu. V. Teliachiy, *Volodymyr Zatons'kyi: narys zhyttia I diial'nosti (1888-1938)* (Ternopil': Zbruch, 2008), 76

⁶⁶ Now in Belarus, in 1918 Gomel formally belonged to the Ukrainian State.

⁶⁷ PAAA 14388

⁶⁸ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 3, 52; losses suffered by the 5th Regiment were so high that the unit had to be disbanded

⁶⁹ TsDAGO f 5 o 1 d 151 ll 57-58

⁷⁰ Demchenko, 65

⁷¹ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 3, 29

In late November and early December the dialectic at work, evolving on one hand from the “statist” tendencies of the Communist Party, even in its peripheral form, and the proclivity to improvisation of the local power holders on the other, began to manifest itself with particular clarity. The Bolsheviks, of course, wanted to create a reliable fighting force, a veritable regular army – but that required time, one resource that all parties so fatally lacked. To be sure, within the stint of few weeks, the Military Revolutionary Council could still subject grumbling soldiers to days of strenuous training;⁷² dismiss Krapiviansky and few other partisan leaders with a history of disobedience and put less refractory figures in their place; bring in the expertise of the few military specialists, felicitously found in the area;⁷³ proscribe regimental and divisional commanders from appointing their own commissars;⁷⁴ and even pillory the most flagrant cases of marauding. Yet, “to expel the spirit of the partisan”⁷⁵ from the army – of that feat neither Antonov, nor any of his associates from Tsaritsyn were capable. Troops, put together by the field commanders, could only exist as their extension or as an embodiment of a principle born out of the guerilla war; their leaders had replaced the non-existing state in many a vital way, feeding, leading, clothing old comrades-in-arms and recruiting the new ones – and for that very reason proving themselves equally indispensable to their alleged superiors in the Party as to the ordinary partisans.

Antonov assuredly understood this, and, while sincerely wishing to impart upon that rickety crowd, known as the Army of the Soviet Ukraine, some semblance of conformity and

⁷² *ibid.*, v. 3, 35

⁷³ RGVA f 103 o 1 d 512 l 14

⁷⁴ Koval’ and Teliachyy, 80-81

⁷⁵ Lokotosh’s expression, RGVA f 999 o 1 d 10 l 2

coherence, he let other itinerant bands join in ‘wholesale’ and fundamentally unaltered. Such was the story of a certain Ryndin, whose unit of 1,500-strong, ‘discovered’ in mid December of 1918 in the area of Valuiki, had simply been rechristened into the 10th Regiment of a non-existing 3rd Soviet Ukrainian Division; in the subsequent distribution of titles, Ryndin received, quite naturally, that of its commander.⁷⁶ Similarly, with no true administrative apparatus to buttress proper mobilization, Antonov had to relegate the task of screening the “prodigious influx of volunteers”⁷⁷ to the partisans themselves, or rather to their leaders. The latter willingly obliged, for, habituated to the role of revolutionary demiurges, they were churning out one battalion after another, spreading thereby their fame and extending their clout within that tumble-weed and diaphanous empire, result of an informal medium, struck between bespectacled revolutionaries and hirsute “little fathers.”

Fourteen odd thousand bayonets, thirteen hundred cavalry, one hundred and thirty-nine machine guns and twenty cannons plus a six thousand throng of unarmed men – such were the official battle counts for the Ukrainian Soviet Army by December 24, 1918.⁷⁸ These numbers give the impression of uniformity or at least of comparability, concealing the fact of a mosaic-like and makeshift nature of the Bolshevik troops. Unlikely personages indeed found themselves harnessed together under a common collar: old-time terrorists, professional partisans, unemployed officers of a defunct army and, of course, bandits, akin to some Sakharov, “a puny sailor of a listless type”⁷⁹ with a talent for landed piracy, or to a Cheredniak, who blended illimitable love for lucre and an unallayed hatred for the Germans.

⁷⁶ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v 3, 45-46

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, v 3, 67

⁷⁸ RGVA f 6 o 4 d 60

⁷⁹ Antonov-Ovseenko, v 3, 48-49

Yet, whatever their origins, politics or level of conscientiousness may be, by Christmas of 1918 they found themselves irreversibly drawn into the mire of the Ukrainian struggle, rifle in hand, saber on the side and the banner of Revolution unfurled under the clear hibernal sky.

Part II: “Ukrainian October”

The offensive of the Soviet Ukrainian Army commenced *ad hoc*, without any meticulous directive or a sonorous declaration preceding it. As indicated, the partisans, neatly distributed on paper among battalions and regiments, began taking control of villages and towns in the Neutral Zone without any official sanctioning from above and often with a subdued assistance from the sympathizing Germans. Whatever resistance they encountered at first came from the demoralized Varta and a few officer volunteer brigades that remained loyal to Skoropadsky. These, however, quickly disappeared from the plane of action. In essence, the first few weeks of fighting represented a struggle for the unclaimed space, an effort to profit from the German abstention from power, ultimately a competition between the supporters of Petliura and the Red divisions for the vacated square miles. Iampol', Ryl'sk, Korenevo, Sudzha were all taken without much bloodshed (the last of the enumerated towns being incidentally chosen as a temporary seat of the newly formed Ukrainian Bolshevik government). Upon hearing about those developments, Vatsetis was beside himself; he fulminated, denounced, threatened that the demarcation line be respected; in vain, for the troops had long crossed their Rubicon and there was no force, as Antonov judiciously remarked, capable of turning them back.⁸⁰ Moscow and Serpukhov simply had to accept the

⁸⁰ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v 3, 53

fait accompli, as did their Ukrainian comrades, now endeavoring to derive greatest profit by collaborating with the over-enthusiastic “revolutionary elements.”

And they did, for, the resistance of the border troops once overcome, the march of the Soviet Army became nothing short of triumphant. Belgorod fell on December 20 to the same 6th Korocha Regiment, which had thereby avenged its earlier discomfiture.⁸¹ The much lionized Zaporozhian corps of Petro Bolbochan was soundly beaten by a substantially smaller 2nd Insurgent Division and was forced to abandon Kharkov on the dawn of the coming year. There, in the new capital of the new Soviet Republic, the Army of the Soviet Ukraine was transformed into the Ukrainian Front (January 4, 1919), although Vatsetis, true to his time-proven habit, refused at first to recognize the legitimacy of that action.⁸² It mattered little, however, for the pursuit of Bolbochan’s battered army continued until Poltava and farther and shortly after that erstwhile hero of the recently proclaimed Ukrainian People’s Republic was put under arrest by Petliura’s ataman Omelian Volokh – not for the last time, as it turned out.⁸³ Soon, the entire Left Bank was in the hands of the Ukrainian Bolsheviks, or, to be more precise, in the hands of the partisan detachments, subcontracted by the regime in Kharkov to fight for the cause of the Revolution.

While the 2nd Insurgent division was making short work of Bolbochan’s Zaporozhians, the 1st Insurgent division was breaking its way to the afflicted capital of the Directorate. It was a veritable homecoming for these men and many would have probably preferred to stay behind if not for the allure of the great prize ahead. Their patience and perseverance were rewarded

⁸¹ on the circumstances of Belgorod’s fall, see Demchenko, 87-94

⁸² Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v 3, 111-113

⁸³ Skrukwa, 425

and on February 6, 1919 Kiev opened its gates to the partisans of the Shchors' brigade. Having rested there for eleven days, as the official chronicle claims,⁸⁴ the 1st division advanced into Northern Podolia and Volhynia, where in tandem with the 2nd Division and the group of Belenkovich (collectively known "Army Group of the Kiev direction" under the command of Sergey Matsiletskiy), it took Berdichev (March 7), Uman (March 13), Zhitomir (March 14) and Zhmerinka (March 19), cutting the territory controlled by the UNR in two. Despite temporary reverse around Berdichev (last week of March), the Army Group, soon to be renamed into the 1st Ukrainian Soviet Army (Antonov's order from April 15th, 1919) resumed its offensive, reaching the left bank of Dniester just before the outbreak of the Grigoriev uprising.

In the south, the hero of the Russian October and the former Commissar of the Maritime Affairs Pavel Dybenko was sent forth with his "Special Detachment" (*Osobyi otriad*, a few hundred men and an armored train) to establish contacts with the insurgents of the Yekaterinoslav region and, in particular, with the long-standing ally of the Bolsheviks, *bat'ko* Makhno.⁸⁵ The latter, his attempt to take Yekaterinoslav on New Year's Eve fumbled by the prematurely festive infusions of moonshine, succeeded finally in occupying Aleksandrovsk (January 25, 1919),⁸⁶ Novomoskovsk and Pologi (ukr. Polohy) (February 6, 1919). Of even greater strategic significance was the defection of ataman Grigoriev with his troops to the Soviet side. All three, Dybenko, Makhno and Grigoriev, brought their units together into a loose organization known as the Transdneprian (*Zadneprovskaia*) division

⁸⁴ *Istoriia pokhodov i boevykh deystviy 131 Tarashchanskogo polka*, 13

⁸⁵ RGVA f 199 o 3 d 18 l 69

⁸⁶ Belash, 76

(Antonov's order N 17 from February 18th, 1919⁸⁷ and Skachko's confirmation a day later⁸⁸) under the nominal command of Dybenko. Disjointed, these potentates of the south Ukrainian steppes faced different kind of enemies than the troops led by Matsiletskiy, Shchors or Bozhenko; Makhno found himself operating against the White divisions of General Maevski and the Kuban Cossacks of Shkuro in Donbass (April 1919), Dybenko fought with success against the so-called Azov-Crimean Volunteer Army, an uninspired and insignificant assemblage of local anti-Bolshevik officers, whereas Grigoriev had to confront allegedly undefeatable Entente troops. To him ultimately belongs the credit of scoring the most impressive victories of the entire Ukrainian undertaking, for his much feared opponent, about 25,000 strong or even more, scudded back to the safety of their ships at the mere sight of his rustic army; the only case of resistance came from a few valiant but doomed Greek battalions. First Kherson (March 9) was taken, then Nikolaev (March 14), where several thousand disoriented German soldiers were still waiting for their turn to go back to the Fatherland. The fall of Odessa on April 6 with its immense deposits of war materiel stood as the incredible culmination of a vertiginous campaign. It was there, on the Black Sea littoral, that the gestating Versailles system, built on the smug sense of global impregnability, suffered its first setback, minor enough to be almost invisible, yet no less symptomatic and portentous.

By early May 1919 Bolsheviks had all the reasons to congratulate themselves on their achievements. Most of Ukraine was, nominally at least, under their control, and, in fact, at several points the Ukrainian Soviet Army had reached the frontiers of the former empire. Having learnt from the fiasco in Ukraine the extent of the demoralization both at home and in

⁸⁷ RGVA f 6 o 4 d 92 l 38

⁸⁸ RGVA f 103 o 1 d 50 l 11

the army, France resolutely withdrew from all future direct participation in the ‘Russian affairs,’ preferring to act hitherto through the Volunteers and the newly born allied border states. Crimean whites, never an opponent to be seriously reckoned with, were cornered in the hilly promontory of Kerch before being salvaged by Denikin. As for the Directorate, its situation was best described by a ditty, whose derisory tone bore an unselfconsciously ominous resemblance to a funeral dirge:

Гей висока Директорія
Де є твоя територія?
У вагоні Директорія,
Під вагоном територія!

(Hey, High Directorate
Where is your territory?
In the railroad car is the Directorate,
Under the car is the territory!)

The force of the Bolsheviks, having evolved from the puny two divisions into three armies of about sixty thousand bayonets and five thousand cavalry,⁸⁹ was strong enough evidence that the intentions of Antonov or Rakovsky to transform a Ukrainian undertaking into a Central-European crusade stemmed from past experience and well-founded prognostication.

Yet, military history alone, even when recounted with the meticulousness of Antonov or Kakurin, fails to account for the exchanges of considerable swaths of territory and the dramatic growth of the Soviet armies; after all, the engagements that had taken place were neither too dogged nor particularly sanguinary, the 2nd Division, for instance, suffering in the

⁸⁹ RGVA f 6 o 4 d 92 l 180; given the high incidence of desertion, proper to all armies of the Civil War, these figures could be but very approximate; nonetheless, in appraising the strength of the Soviet arms in Ukraine, one also needs to consider units transferred from the Ukrainian front to the anti-Denikin, i.e. Southern Front – about 8,000 bayonets, 3,000 cavalry and 2 armored trains all together (RGVA f 6 o 4 d 92 l 180rev); Antonov’s estimate of 70,000 men – men, of course, not tantamount with either ‘bayonets’ or ‘sabers’ for many would be dragging behind unarmed – appears to err on the side of caution if anything else.

month of February a total loss of 250 men from its overall personnel of 12,200.⁹⁰ The most important battles of the entire campaign were not those fought over some bridgehead on a river bank or a strategically important railroad junction, but those that had men's spirits at stake – in other words, the struggle implicated loyalties of the armed Ukrainian insurgency and those of the atamans as its most visible manifestation. In that crucial domain the Bolsheviks scored their most resounding victories, (even if they proved short-lived and ultimately deleterious), whereas the UNR saw its fortunes sink into the abyss of a near-biblical disconsolation.

But why? How could the Vynnychenko government, which positioned itself so gleefully as the spearhead of the anti-Hetman mass movement, find itself abandoned by those on whose behalf it allegedly spoke? Most of the major memoirists of the UNR era – from the closeted Bolshevik sympathizer Vynnychenko and the social-revolutionary Pavlo Khrystiuk to the moderate nationalists from Galicia of the Osyp Nazaruk's or Matviy Stakhiv's type – agree in the bout of collective *crise de la foi*, so remarkable and disarming in its candor: internal politics of the UNR itself, and more immediately, the comportment of the professional military men, the *fakhivtsi*, are at the root of the fatal alienation. These latter, exemplified first and foremost by Evhen Konovalts, the commander of the Siege Corps of the Sich Riflemen in Kiev, Petro Bolbochan, head of the Zaporozhian division, stationed in Kharkov, and even Petliura himself – more through his *Weltanschauung* than his 'relevant work experience' – had always been suspicious of the improvised peasant formations and of their

⁹⁰ Of these, 174 were either killed in action or died later from wounds; a sign of low battle intensity could be gauged from a figure of 4 bullets used by an average soldier of the 2nd Division per day; or from 5 shells fired by a gun daily in the same month of February (figures calculated on the basis of data available in RGVA f 6 o 4 d 92 l 48).

staunchly independent leaders. With Skoropadsky gone once and for all, the *fakhivtsi* began treating their amateurish allies as altogether unnecessary, hazardous indeed – to the fledgling state, to the civic order and, less expressly but more pertinently, to their caste and their privileges. From the very instant of the Republic’s promising birth, as the steady columns of the Galicians were marching down the streets of Kiev in celebration of their victory, Konovalts, Bolbochan, Oskilko and other General-governors of old in all but name,⁹¹ commenced working towards subordinating the insurgents to the strictures of the decreed army hierarchy or eliminating them altogether.

Thus, on December 31, 1918 the newly-established Ministry of the Military Affairs of the UNR issued an order, obliging all the commanders to receive agents of the so-called Control-Informational Department of the High Command of the UNR (“*Kontrol’no-informatsiynyy viddil*”), whereupon these agents, hybrids of political commissars and army inspectors, were to ascertain loyalties and to pass on corresponding recommendations to their higher-ups.⁹² A day later a directive appeared, signed by Petliura and the Head of the General Staff, Otaman Oleksandr Osets’kyi, according to which all units were placed under the authority of one of the four generals, incumbent upon their location; the freelance bands were debonairly ordered to dissolve (“*niiakyykh neshtatnykh chastyn istnuvaty ne povynno*”)⁹³ – as the

⁹¹ It is upon this precedence of the military authorities over the civil institutions that Vynnychenko bestows the name of *otamanshchyna* (*otamanshchyna* in Ukrainian) (Vynnychenko, 474ff). This confusion stems from a simple fact that the title *otaman* in the army of UNR was as much a formal designation corresponding to the title of the general as an informal sobriquet akin to a Russian *vozd*. In Vynnychenko’s terminology, therefore, *otamanshchyna* adverts less to the militarization of the countryside than to the advent of the military dictatorship, or, rather, of the oligarchy, comparable to many postcolonial regimes of the Third World.

⁹² V. Sidak, T. Ostashko and T. Vrons’ka, *Polkovnyk Petro Bolbochan: trahediia ukrains’kogo derzhavnyka* (Kyiv: Tempora, 2004), 42

⁹³ TsDAVO f 1075 o 2 d 8 ll 1-3

notorious Dnieper Division of Zeleny was to discover on January 6, 1919.⁹⁴ Furthermore, with an eye on restoring the mobilizational apparatus of the moribund state and on strengthening their own position vis-à-vis the self-organized bodies of armed peasantry, the colonels in power attempted to employ and win sympathies of the officers of the former Russian imperial army, that is, of the individuals with very questionable ‘revolutionary credentials’ in the judgment of the radicalized masses.⁹⁵ All these measures and decrees, designed to build a disciplined fighting force, yet carried out precipitously and half-heartedly, planted more than a seed of doubt in the minds of the atamans and cast more than a shadow of suspicion upon the intentions of the new regime in Kiev. To the former, brought into the limelight of history by the exigencies of the *social* revolt, the reintroduction of discipline, the forgotten language of commands, quarried from the ruins of the *ancien regime*, the gold-epauletted public with their cloying ‘elegant manners’ which began to whiz about erstwhile heroes of the anti-Hetman uprising – all that reeked of reaction and counter-revolution. To the dismay of the Ukrainian Left, neither Konovalets, nor Bolbochan, nor any of their likes were hastening to repudiate such an unseemly reputation.

In fact, both of the aforementioned figures had done their best to accentuate their enmity towards parties of the far Left, reneging on their platforms and restricting their clout on the shape of the Directorate’s politics. Thus, the Revolutionary Committee, created by the Ukrainian Social-democrats to fill in the power vacuum of the Hetmanate’s last days, and, in perspective, to provide a kernel for the future municipal and national government, saw itself

⁹⁴ V. Sidak, T. Ostashko, T. Vrons’ka, p. 42

⁹⁵ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v.3, 101; V. Sidak, T. Ostashko, T. Vrons’ka, 47

divested of all power once Konovalets with the Sich Riflemen entered into Kiev.⁹⁶ Although formally all authority rested with the Ukrainian National Union – the organization that sparked the revolt – *de facto* the city was ruled by the Galicians, less by the ‘soldierly masses’ than by the *Strilets’ka Rada*, a council of the junior officers, and, naturally, by Konovalets himself.⁹⁷ Despite the Directorate’s repeated assurances that it represented but a “provisionary authority [called forth by the] revolutionary hour” abetting the advent of a true dictatorship of the productive classes (peasantry and proletariat) in accordance with the so-called ‘laboring principle’ (*trudovyy printsip*),⁹⁸ Konovalets placed a ban on all “agitation against the existing state order” without so much as troubling himself with more precise definition of such an activity.⁹⁹ In practice, this supplied the *Sichovyki* with an excuse to inaugurate the hunt on the elements deemed ‘Bolshevik,’ forcing, in Khrystiuk’s recollection, the communists and the Ukrainian Left Socialist Revolutionaries back into the underground.¹⁰⁰ Under the pretext of protecting armed forces from the nefarious influence of socialist propaganda, Galicians ravaged the Central Bureau of the Professional Workers Unions, expropriating and subsequently burning all available books, leaflets, registration cards, organizational archives, etc; before the end of the year the attack was repeated at least twice.¹⁰¹ To preempt the possibility of a strike and to cover the ‘radicals’ into submission, Konovalets appeared to have sanctioned – surreptitiously – the shooting of the few local communists.¹⁰² Later, with the Bolshevik forces thumping heavily on the threshold of the

⁹⁶ M. Rafes, *Dva goda revoliutsii na Ukraine*, 108

⁹⁷ P. Khrystiuk, v. 4, 26; the same Khrystiuk reports that Vynnychenko had once proclaimed the will of the Siege Corps of the Sich Riflemen to be “the highest and the sanctified law.”

⁹⁸ Declarations from December 9 and December 26 1918; Text of the later declaration could be found in Vynnychenko, 465-470 and in Khrystiuk, v 4, 15-18

⁹⁹ Khrystiuk, v. 4, 24

¹⁰⁰ *ibid*, v. 4, 44

¹⁰¹ Khrystiuk, v. 4, 25; Rafes, *Dva goda...*, 117

¹⁰² Rafes, *Dva goda...*, 117

capital, the Riflemen decided to put an end to the on-going spectacle of the Socialist democracy by furnishing the land with a dictator, be it either Vynnychenko or Petliura; the two had refused that dubious honor, unwilling to be shouldering the burden of the Directorate's misrule while remaining entirely at the mercy of the 'praetorian guard' and their parvenu leader.¹⁰³

The interaction of Konovalets' Sich Riflemen with the so-called Labor Congress (*Trudovyy Kongres*) is instructive in many regards. Evoked in the Directorate's early addresses as an organ with the power to settle all questions of "social, economic and political life of the Republic,"¹⁰⁴ it was scheduled to convene on January 22, 1919 and henceforth to act in the stead of the Directorate itself. Characteristically, the deputies were to be elected from the three social strata (*curia*) –peasantry, urban proletariat and the "soldiers of the people's army" (*voiaki narodnoi armii*), i.e. rural insurgents – as the rest of the population, the *propertied classes*, saw its right to political participation revoked.¹⁰⁵ Yet, under pressure from Galician officers, "soldiers," that is, the most radical part of the armed countryside, were being struck off the voting lists and replaced with an ambiguous category of the 'toiling intelligentsia'.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, in view of the impending Act of Unification (*Akt zluky*) with the Western Ukrainian People's Republic (ZUNR), the Congress had to receive a delegation of sixty-five deputies from Galicia – again, hardly without the hints from the *Strilets'ka Rada*; each endowed with a voting right, the delegates were rendered all the more significant by the

¹⁰³ One must remember that Konovalets was 27 years of age at that time.

¹⁰⁴ Vynnychenko, 469

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*, 468; the text of the declaration reads: "the non-laboring classes, exploiting classes, which live and luxuriate off the work of the laboring classes... do not have a voting right in taking charge of the state (*poriadkuvanniu derzhavaiu*)"; the real and symbolic radicalism of this step is not to be missed, for the only other state that had dared to bereave the propertied layer of its political rights, as Rafes keenly observed, was Bolshevik Russia (Rafes, *Dva goda...*, 117)

¹⁰⁶ Khrystiuk, v. 4, 58

fact that of the 528 non-Galician representatives¹⁰⁷ only about 340 arrived.¹⁰⁸ The progressive domestication of that predominantly peasant assembly was accomplished with a carefully staged saber-rattling and a well-groomed rumor that the *sichovyki* could waylay the Congress at any moment with an aim of dissolving it. The possibility was probably never seriously considered,¹⁰⁹ but obstreperously and ostentatiously discussed, soldierly parleys ultimately flourishing around the question: “Shall we simply disperse the Congress, or shall we fish out those farthest to the left and forewarn the rest lest they turn to the left?”¹¹⁰ The deputies had taken the cue as they were supposed to, avoiding thus any ill-advised thrusts in the forbidden direction. Having conveniently forgotten the lofty standing bestowed upon it by earlier proclamations, the Congress expressed its unequivocal opposition to all forms of “class dictatorship,” confirmed its unflinching allegiance to the Directorate and finally pronounced itself adjourned. Prudently ignored, the resolution of the “social, economic and political questions” was left therefore to the vagaries of the wartime.¹¹¹

In fairness to him, Konovalets still preferred to communicate his will through covert intimidation, resorting to the use of open violence only under extraordinary circumstances, but such subtlety was cast aside by Konovalets’ peer in Kharkov, Petro Bolbochan. A former captain of the Russian Imperial Army, that “elegant gentleman of old-fashioned views”¹¹² managed to become a veritable boogeyman of the Left for all successive generations to come

¹⁰⁷ proportionally, peasantry was supposed to exercise the dominating presence, claiming 377 seats out of 528; despite the vocal protests from the Bund, requesting that at least a third of all seats be reserved to the workers, these latter obtained only 118 seats; ‘toiling intelligentsia’ received the rest, i.e. 33 seats.

¹⁰⁸ Skrukwa, 368

¹⁰⁹ Nazaruk, himself closely linked with the Sich Riflemen, does report a meeting of their Rada, in the course of which the possible dissolution of the Congress was discussed (Nazaruk, 108)

¹¹⁰ Vynnychenko, 502

¹¹¹ The resolution of the Congress signed on January 28, its last day in session, is found in Khrystiuk, v. 4, 66-67

¹¹² Nazaruk, 117

– largely in consequence of his heavy-handed efforts at ridding the land of the ‘revolutionary contagion.’ With Skoropadsky’s authority at once eliminated, he proceeded by declaring all political gatherings of either soviet or monarchist persuasion (sic!) illegal.¹¹³ These words were duly matched by actions. First Bolbochan arrested members of the Poltava Revolutionary Committee, consigning its chairman and a revolutionary with an enviable record, Mykola Shynkar, into the care of the firing squad; according to Khrystiuk’s dramatic report, Shynkar, already wounded, succeeded in making an escape.¹¹⁴ On December 1, Bolbochan curtly dispersed the Workers’ Congress, convoked by the local Mensheviks, arresting and apparently executing some of its leading participants.¹¹⁵ A similar fate befell the Peasant Congress in Poltava (Congress of *Selians’ka Spilka*), the only distinctive feature stemming from Bolbochan’s extensive use of birch rods, that preferred device of the tsarist avuncular well-wishers.¹¹⁶ In the meantime he surrounded himself with an entourage of the discredited *ci-devants*, Aleksandr Lignau, Skoropadsky’s commander of the VII Corps, being perhaps the most obvious example.¹¹⁷ Ultimately, fearing that further acts of a similar kind would destabilize the situation and endanger their home-coming, the reputedly neutral Germans stepped in and put Bolbochan and his staff under temporary arrest – to sober him up, so to speak.¹¹⁸ The scandal was soon resolved and the high-ranking detainees were released, yet the reputation of the Directorate on the Left Bank was tarred beyond recovery.

¹¹³ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 3, 79

¹¹⁴ Khrystiuk, v. 4, 25

¹¹⁵ Antonov-Ovseenko, v. 3, 80, Vynnychenko, 452-453

¹¹⁶ Vynnychenko, 453

¹¹⁷ Sidak et al, 45; Lignau, formerly a deputy war minister in Skoropadsky’s government, was actually arrested by Bolbochan on the day of the coup (November 19, 1918) (PAAA 14387); his confinement, a histrionic pose, assumed for the sake of decency, did not last long.

¹¹⁸ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 3, 80

Further examples of the pronounced rightist tilt of the Directorate's military could be easily proffered, but it would be redundant. The objective of the above record, so faithfully reproduced by the Ukrainian émigré literature, is to recall the two-folded nature of the events bedecked by an all-encompassing category of the 'Anti-Hetman Uprising.' What the Sich Riflemen endeavored to carry out with one powerful strike as they were leaving their barracks on the high noon of November 16, and what the Zaporozhian Division succeeded in executing on November 19 in Kharkov was a *putsch*, conceived, refined and led by professional soldiers. In the countryside, however, the Address of the Directorate had engendered – or inspired – a veritable peasant *jacquerie*, the extent and the violence of which had frightened many a member of the Ukrainian National Union out of their wits.

Immediately the clock of historical fate began to chime towards that hour when the two elements, one embodied in the *putsch*, the other in *jacquerie*, had to collide. This was the conflict of views on the revolution and its objectives, a struggle over the form that the future state was to assume and over the principles to be employed in the process of reconstitution. A pattern, vexingly familiar to all scholars of the Civil War, resurfaced here in Ukraine in its own particular hue: on the one hand officers, trusting Skoropadsky's ousted functionaries more than their own soldiers,¹¹⁹ sought to reestablish order, at the core of which would be national sovereignty (the "Galician" platform) or, at least, an affirmation of a certain social status quo (ideals of those steeped in the traditions of a Russian Imperial Officer Corps).¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ RGVA f 999 o 1 d 4 l 5

¹²⁰ Interactions between the Galician and the "Naddniprian'tsy (Ukrainian officers from the Russian Empire), and especially of their visions on the Ukrainian statehood, await to be explored; an interesting observation, however, was made by A.V. Ganin, the author of the recent comprehensive reference work on the destinies of the Russian General Staff officers during the Civil War: of the 430 that served in the Ukrainian Armed Forces – either under Hetman or the Directorate – more than half (218) ultimately finished in one of the Russian White Armies whereas only 76 (that is, less than 18%) joined the ranks of the Reds (A. Ganin, *Korpus ofitserov General'nogo shtaba Grazhdanskoi voiny 1921-1922* (Moscow: Russkii put', 2010), 129-130). Putting the important question of the representativity aside and ignoring the fact of a one-time mass defection in November

On the other hand, multifarious, disorganized, armed peasant insurgency, a throng mostly nameless but otherwise represented by innumerable *bat'ki*, atamans and party radicals, thought the Revolution far from accomplished. Nationally uninformed (*natsional'no neosvidomleni*) in the appraisal of the Galician Nazaruk,¹²¹ the armed peasantry couched its anxiety at retaining both the property and the power gained in the course of the recent turmoil in the pro-Bolshevik and anti-imperialist language of the class struggle. To the Western “parliamentarism” it opposed the slogan of Soviet power (*vlada Rad*) and the ideals of the bourgeois-liberal democracy it countered with the imperatives of the class-based dictatorship.

Anti-historical as it may be, in the end one is tempted to state that the Directorate was doomed – if not to a precipitous demise, to the fatality of choice. Having toppled Skoropadsky’s government with the forces created under the auspices of the overthrown regime,¹²² the UNR inherited perforce, albeit under substantially modified form, the attitudes and practices of its predecessor, namely, its reliance on the military cadres, a narrow, conventionally liberal understanding of the national sovereignty and a steady, yet unmistakable gravitation towards social conservatism. *Derzhavne budivnytstvo*, the “state construction” was not a mere shibboleth of the hour, but a central preoccupation of the civil authorities in Kiev, a field of strenuous application and a focus of converging hopes.

Although not merely adventitious, the link of the Directorate with the country-side insurgents

of 1919, one could timidly assume that a substantial part of the non-Galician Ukrainian officers espoused less a nationalist than a *restorationist* program of their Great Russian colleagues.

¹²¹ Nazaruk, 135; as for the Galicians, they were judged as “politically unenlightened” (*politychna neosvichenost'*) by none other than Vynnychenko (Vynnychenko, 475)

¹²² We shall recall that the entirety of the Hetman’s army with the exception of the VIII and VI Corps, (stationed in Ekaterinoslav and Poltava, respectively) had joined the Directorate in the course of the coup.

was of a highly equivocal, tenuous nature. Foreboding great challenges ahead, German and Austrian officials had shown themselves particularly prismatic, anxiously pointing out at the growing social radicalism of the ‘masses’ on the background of an otherwise lukewarm reception of the nationalist slogans. Indeed, the weekly communiqués of Berchem, Meissner or Fürstenberg to their superiors in Berlin and Vienna have an uncanny air of a well-constructed suspense novel, progressing with every throb of a line to the dramatic crescendo:

From November 24, 1918:

*...Petliura knows very well, that he brings into the movement not only nationalist, but also bolshevist and anarchist elements as well as the country-side proletariat...*¹²³

December 1, 1918:

*The minister of Internal Affairs (Kistiakovsky – M.A.)...had provided the evidence that the anarchist character of the Uprising in contrast to the nationalist one is becoming ever more prominent...*¹²⁴

December 11, 1918:

*The Directorate must without a doubt introduce measures of the most radical nature into its program in order to win over the popular masses (Volksmassen) and widen the basis of the uprising.*¹²⁵

Day after Hetman’s fall, December 15, 1918:

*Whether the leaders would be able to keep popular masses, peasants in particular, in check for some time (auf die Dauer), appears rather questionable, since the elements of indisputably bolshevist character had joined the movement in a hope of coming back to power.*¹²⁶

December 24, 1918

*Vynnychenko admits that the position of the current regime is gravely challenged by the menace of Bolshevism and that [this menace] stems more from within than from without.*¹²⁷

And, finally, communiqué sent on the day of Kiev’s fall, February 6, 1919:

¹²³ AdR Karton 720, Fürstenberg an Flotow, Die National ukrainische Aufstandsbewegung, Kiew, am 1. Dezember 1918.

¹²⁴ AdR Karton 720, Fürstenberg an Flotow, am 8. Dezember 1918, Kiew

¹²⁵ AdR Karton 720, Fürstenberg an Flotow, Der Sturz des Hetmans und seines Regimes, Kiew, am 16. Dezember 1918

¹²⁶ PAAA R 14388 Telegramm, Berchem, 15.12.18, Kiew

¹²⁷ PAAA R 14389, Fürstenberg über die Lage des Direktoriums, durch Berchem vorgelegt, den 24.12.18, Kiew

*The entire movement projects a thoroughgoing bolshevist character (einen durchaus bolschewistischen Charakter)... The national moment retreats entirely (tritt ... völlig zurück) behind the craving of the masses for plunder and self-enrichment.*¹²⁸

That same story fleshes itself out in the chronological concatenation of the resolutions of the multiple peasant congresses that were taking place in the wake of the Directorate's victory. The new government received initially a limited approbation on the condition that it: a) "accepts the position of the toiling classes", b) sanctions the establishment of the "local organs of power," c) subjects officers and generals of the former Hetman's Army to most stringent penalty (decisions of the Peasant Congress in Kiev, ratified on the December 24); soon, however, the tone of resolutions evolved to the categorical repudiation of the Directorate with an ultimatum-like impetration of surrendering all prerogatives to the local soviets in the due course of twenty-four hours (resolution taken by the Executive committee of the All-Ukrainian Soviet of the Peasant Deputies on the 15th of January).¹²⁹ The UNR had failed to carry out the radical program in its full and, as Makhno affirmed at one of the village gatherings, "the revolutionary insurgency will not brook replacing it (the program) with the tasks of the Directorate."¹³⁰ In the final analysis, therefore, the alliance between the Nationalists and the Peasant Insurgents was a simple marriage of convenience, maintained for as long as Hetman was around. The divorce proceedings, pursued with equal determination by all sides involved, commenced immediately afterwards.

¹²⁸ PAAA R 14390, Adolf Müller über die Lage der Ukraine, den 6.2.19

¹²⁹ texts of these resolutions are found in Khrystiuk, v. 4, 45-48

¹³⁰ Makhno, *Spovid' anarkhista*, 578

In the political realm, that process, activated by the comportment of the right-wing nationalist military and the increasingly peremptory demands of the Insurgents translated itself in the split of the Ukrainian Left, whereupon its radical fraction left the Directorate in favor of cooperating with the Bolshevik Provisional Government in Kharkov; the non-Ukrainian Left Parties, with the possible exception of Poale Zion, had done it practically ‘wholesale.’ The unity of the Ukrainian Socialist-Democratic Party, under serious strain ever since December of 1918, came formally to an end at the VI Party Congress (January 12-14, 1919) which resulted in the emergence of the strongly pro-Soviet Independent Socialist-Democrats (*nezalezhniki*)¹³¹; on the contrary, the Socialists Revolutionaries, divided into the Right (the so-called SR of the Central current, *tsentral’noi techii*) and the Left faction (also known as the *Borot’bisty*, the Borotbists)¹³² since May 1918, discovered a new *modus vivendi* by adapting platform of the Soviet power.¹³³ The Borotbists went further – together with the Independent S-Ds, the party strewed Ukraine with scads of insurrectional revolutionary committees, in order “to impute organized political form onto elementary dissatisfaction of the masses,”¹³⁴ that is, to capitalize on the present political moment and to secure for itself a place of honor in the impending division of spoils.

For, in all frankness, having decided in January of 1919 to throw down the gauntlet in front of the Directorate, the Central Committee of the Borotbist Party could only be seen as a latecomer. The land was continuously ravaged by the epidemics of mutinies and uprisings, which had fatally weakened the Republic’s frail body. It must be said that the distinction

¹³¹ Khrystiuk, v. 4, 49-56

¹³² Chapter 2 will hopefully render the vermiculated history of the Ukrainian Left less complex.

¹³³ Khrystiuk, v. 4, 74, See the resolution of the Ukrainian S-Rs of the Central current, especially point 2.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, v. 4, 75

between the two – that is, between an uprising (*vosstanie, povstannia*) of the alleged civil populace and a mutiny in some unit – is nearly impossible to establish, for once because the Revolution and the Civil War, after destroying the old army, apparatus of mobilization and the concomitant notions of discipline and subordination, had brought about a recompense in the form of a highly militarized, well-armed and pathologically alert society; one could thus speak of a certain convergence, eradicating the line between properly civil and military domains. Then again, all forms of popular resentment, within the army or outside its institutional boundaries, presuppose both a period of relative peace preceding the outbreak of violence and some degree of support lent to that agent *against* whom the revolt is directed; in other words, a government, which finds itself challenged by the mutineers or rebels should at least be seen as *potentially* legitimate either before or during events in questions. Neither conditions were present; Ukraine, the boiling cauldron enkindled by the unceasing fire since the mid-Autumn of 1918 had hardly furnished the UNR an opportunity at firmly establishing its authority. A group of 4,000 outraged peasants, who, upon arriving in Kharkov to discover that they were called to arms by the Directorate, had marched straight to the building of the Soviet, proclaiming their commitment to “stand and fight for the power of the soviets”,¹³⁵ many, more than we could ever hope to know, never fancied a thought of serving “the bourgeois chauvinist Ukrainian Republic.” Repudiation, therefore, of Hetman’s authority had merely been turned into the rejection of the Directorate’s. What could be concluded is that the populace was pouncing upon the levers of political reconstitution (and disintegration), with overt mutinies, desertions, refusals to carry out orders, unsanctioned establishment of the local organs of power and the disarmament of the police being manifestation of the same

¹³⁵ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v 3, 82

aspiration and of the same process, habitually parceled into distinct categories by the bureaucrats without the state.

Let the habitual line be reiterated, if only for the sake of the narration: Ukraine, on both banks of the Dnieper River, was shaken by uprisings. Particularly active were the residents of the old ‘rebel districts’ – Zvenigorodka, Tarashcha, Skvira, Obukhov, Tripol’e, Pereiaslav. In Zolotonosha, the peasants had established a revolutionary staff, disarmed few battalions of the Black Sea division stationed nearby and began building up troops of their own – adhering to the class-lines, according to Khrystiuk.¹³⁶ The insurgents, led by Anton Bogunsky, a youth of barely 19 years of age and a self-proclaimed communist,¹³⁷ entered into contact with the Commander of the Ukrainian Front whose official blessing augured the birth of the 1st Zolotonosha Regiment, the core of the future Bogunsky’s brigade.¹³⁸ The Iziium district of the Kharkov province saw the advent of some Chaplin and a certain Sablin, both left S-R’s, just as their colleague from Kupiansk, Ryndin.¹³⁹ Rebels around Konotop in Poltava province united around the figure of Grigory Bibik, a railwayman best remembered for the sonorous title he bestowed upon his retinue: “the flying unit of the Konotop combat revolutionary squad for the defense of the Moscow-Kiev-Voronezh (MKV) railroad.”¹⁴⁰ All of them had expressed their intention to serve under the banner of the International Revolution and all had their requests granted. With an order issued on January 30th, Antonov had refashioned the insurgents of the Poltava and Kharkov regions into the 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th infantry and the

¹³⁶ Khrystiuk, v. 4, 77

¹³⁷ RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 560, 12

¹³⁸ RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 560, 14

¹³⁹ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 3, 118

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*, v. 3, 154

3rd cavalry regiments.¹⁴¹ As the front line moved westward, the uprisings began inundating the knolls of Podolia, Volhynian forests and the steppes of the Northern Black Sea shore.

Proskurov rose up in rebellion on February 14; the insurrection was brutally suppressed whereupon the city became the scene of the largest Jewish pogrom of the whole war with hundreds if not thousands slain.¹⁴² Uman and Gaisin districts were soon lost to the rebels; in the latter district, as the Soviet dispatch from the February 25 claims, “even the small villages ha[d] revolutionary committees.”¹⁴³ In the eastern Volhynia volunteers organized a regiment; by mid March of 1919, that unit under the generic designation of the Volhynian regiment, was fighting alongside the Bogun and Tarashcha regiments of Shchors and *bat’ko* Bozhenko.¹⁴⁴ To the south, in the realm of ataman Grigoriev – of whose own dealings with the Ukrainian Bolsheviks more will be said shortly – operated a whole slew of lesser insurgent atamans: Maksim Kozyrev, a one-time sergeant-major (*feldfebel’*) of the Tsarist army and the organizer of what would be known as the 15th Regiment;¹⁴⁵ ataman Kachura from Chigirin, an NCO of the German war, who, despite his “lacking refinement” (*malaia intelligentnost’*)¹⁴⁶ managed to haggle out for himself a commanding post in the Red Army (naturally, of the so-called ‘Chigirin regiment’); Kozubsky, another former railroad employee from the Golta junction of Kherson province (present-day Pervomaisk in Mykolaiv (Nikolaev) oblast) operating along the railroad stretch Voznesensk-Cherkassy¹⁴⁷ who would join forces with Grigoriev’s refractory subordinate, Tkachenko under the aegis of the 2nd

¹⁴¹ RGVA f 103 o 1 d 512, l 119

¹⁴² TsDAVO f 1075 o 1 d 50, l 51

¹⁴³ RGVA f 167 o 1 d 15 l 16

¹⁴⁴ RGVA f 103 o 1 d 31 l 5; Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski* v. 3, 213

¹⁴⁵ RGVA f 103 o 1 d 23 l 6

¹⁴⁶ Antonov-Ovseenko, v. 3, 165

¹⁴⁷ *IVRKPU* nr 40, February 8th, 1919

Soviet Ukrainian division.¹⁴⁸ A local curio was ataman Popov, who, possessing a force of 400 infantry and 175 cavalry, fancied himself the supreme commander (*glavkoverkh*) of the “Southern Soviet Army.” He too, however, had shown himself willing to be courted by Antonov. Hailing Popov and his assemblage of men as the “valiant soldiers of the Red *Khersonshchina*,” Antonov, the real chief officer of the Ukrainian Front, remarked with perfect *bonhomie*: “You should not be addressing yourself with the title of supreme commander – it is rather amusing (*eto zabavno*).”¹⁴⁹

Under the nominal command of Kharkov, the insurgents were thrown into the fray – to battle the so-called “army” of the UNR, or whatever had remained of it after the first months of fighting. Admittedly there was not much, for the units raised in the course of the anti-Hetman revolt or mobilized in the forthcoming weeks were deserting Vynnychenko’s government *en masse*. “The Ukrainian troops,” reported Berchem on New Year’s Eve, “in their overwhelming majority would not budge to fight the Bolsheviks”¹⁵⁰ – on the contrary, many had actively strove to conjoin their alleged opponent. On December 14, 1918, for instance, the entire garrison of Glukhov went over to the Bolsheviks’ side – and so, having actually successfully repelled the attack of the red partisans.¹⁵¹ Neither did the 600 *petliurovtsy* around Gorodnia have to be told twice before deciding to throw their lot with the 1st Soviet Ukrainian division (December 30, 1918).¹⁵² The Taras Shevchenko Regiment, stationed in Sosnitsa, had done the same¹⁵³ - its imposing commander, a bearded, weapon-bedizened

¹⁴⁸ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski* v. 3, 213, 248

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*, v. 3, 239

¹⁵⁰ PAAA R 14389 Berchem, Kiew, 27.12.18

¹⁵¹ Antonov, v. 3, 135, 151

¹⁵² *ibid.*, v. 3, 135

¹⁵³ RGVA f 999 o 1 d 4 1 1)

sailor with the tellingly expressive surname of Zhivoderov (or Zhivoder, that is, “flayer” in Russian) had asked Antonov to let the regiment retain both its name and its current composition. Antonov courteously obliged.¹⁵⁴ As winter turned into spring, an army group of Petliura’s ataman (colonel) Paliy, body of 15 000 strong, had shriveled into non-existence.¹⁵⁵ Having refused to advance against Makhno, the Akhtyrka regiment was speedily disarmed. That unwillingness to fight the Bolsheviks accompanied by cases of mass defection spread further – to the Nalivaykovka regiment, the 1st Vynnychenko regiment, 14th Balta regiment, 10th Novograd-Volynsk cavalry regiment, 9th Odessa regiment, 1st Cherniakov regiment and many others. “The commanding officers are compelled to conceal from their troops the real reason for fighting the Reds; the soldiers are being told that the rank and file of the Soviet army consists of the Jews, Chinese, Turks, etc,” claimed the soviet report from the 15th of February.¹⁵⁶ That method was clearly of a limited efficacy and all of the listed units had to be ultimately broken up – when necessary, by the force of the Galicians. Yet, even that praetorian guard of the Ukrainian national revolution was not immune to the Bolshevik malaise, as was evinced by the intention of the Sich riflemen to negotiate with the Soviet military authorities on their own – that is, without the know-it-all intermediaries from the Vynnychenko-Petliura camp.¹⁵⁷

The Directorate had run into great difficulties trying to keep its newly assembled troops together; the problem was rendered all the more insuperable by the continuing practice of territorial mobilization, whereby regiments would be constituted of men recruited from the

¹⁵⁴ Antonov, *Zapiski* v. 3, 177

¹⁵⁵ TsDAGO f 57 o 2 d 281 ll 1-2; RGVA f 6 o 4 d 381 ll 3-5

¹⁵⁶ RGVA f 6 o 4 d 381 ll 3-5

¹⁵⁷ Antonov, *Zapiski*, v. 3, 258, 273

same locality. These units tended to whittle away within the few weeks of being called up, making off with whatever arms and clothing that the Ukrainian ghost state endeavored to procure. Thus, of the 300 residents of the Staro-Konstantinov district mobilized in January of 1919 to form the so-called “battalion of death” (*kurin’ smerti*) only 180 reached their final destination of Rovno, the rest having euphemistically ‘gone home’ (*razolshlis’ po domam*).¹⁵⁸ Two new regiments in Belaia Tserkov had to be struck off the strategic maps of the Ukrainian Army Staff when their fictitiousness became undeniably real (mid February 1919).¹⁵⁹ Peasants drafted from the Iampol (ukr. Iampil’) district of the Podolian province had followed the suit of other deserters except that their ultimate destination was not some home village one languished for but the bivouacs of the Soviet Ukrainian troops.¹⁶⁰ Well-informed of such disintegrating tendencies within the UNR army and of the irrefutable gravitation of the Ukrainian peasantry towards the Bolsheviks, V. Tkachuk, a departmental head in the Army Group of the Kiev Direction, submitted a memorandum on February 27 to Glagolev, the senior officer of Antonov’s Staff, in which he presented Petliura’s mobilization efforts as a development to welcome and rejoice at. “All of the [newly recruited soldiers] would anyway switch sides in our favor,” he blithely concluded.¹⁶¹ The Bolsheviks may have exaggerated the gravity of the situation in which the Directorate wallowed, but they rightfully knew themselves to be by far the stronger of the two, for the traffic of defection, that demographic gradient of ideological predilection, clearly pointed in one direction only –

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.*, v. 3, 258

¹⁵⁹ RGVA f 6 o 4 d 381 ll 3-5

¹⁶⁰ *IVRKPU* nr 59 March 4th, 1919

¹⁶¹ RGVA f 167 o 1 d 15 l 19

towards the east, where the rubicund and obsidian flags were undulating freely on the wind.¹⁶²

Turning their back on the Ukrainian People's Republic, the great atamans were approaching the finishing stage in their parleys with the government in Kharkov. A novel character on the picturesque horizon of the Ukrainian affairs, ataman Struk from the Gornostaypol' (ukr. Hornostaipil') *volost* on the southern fringe of the Pripyat Marshes abandoned Petliura for the Soviets when these latter landed ashore on the right bank of the Dnieper.¹⁶³ A former teacher according to some testimonies, trained *agitator* according to the others,¹⁶⁴ that scion of a well-to-do peasant family possessed enough acumen to make himself useful to all the regimes, kaleidoscopically succeeding one another. His impressive political resume would later include services to Denikin, Piłsudski and Savinkov; now, however, in February of 1919 he acted in the guise of a Red officer when he and his comrades from Ivankov (20 miles west of Gornostaypol'), hurriedly renamed into the 20th Communist Regiment, were transferred southward to cauterize their rupture with the UNR by the fire of battle.

A vital player of the November revolt, an embodiment indeed of the peasant victory over the forces of urban reaction, ataman Zeleny could not forgive the Directorate the opprobrium of being kept outside the limits of the vanquished capital. Vynnychenko and Petliura, on the

¹⁶² Perhaps the first case of a notable desertion to the other side – i.e. to the side of the UNR – had occurred in the first week of April in the context of the famous Gomel uprising of the Strekopytov's brigade. Strekopytov, however, was forced to join the Nationalist Army by the circumstances of his defeat; his subsequent defection to the Poles seems to indicate that he never seriously harbored any intention to fight for the Directorate's cause. The first defection true to the spirit of this word must have then occurred later, on the 18th of April when the entire 14th Mirgorod Regiment went practically wholesale over the Nationalist side. (RGVA f 167 o 1 d 38 l 5; RGVA f 103 o 1 d 31 l 43)

¹⁶³ RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 148 ll 147-148

¹⁶⁴ TsDAVO f 3204 o 1 d 171 ?

contrary, thought that Zeleny was encamped uncomfortably close to their seat of power and that one would assuredly better serve the republic by removing the ataman and his burly men farther to the west, preferably to Galicia to assist their hard-pressed compatriots.¹⁶⁵ The order to board the train destined for Lviv ultimately proved counterproductive, for Zeleny, far from executing the directive of the Chief Otoman, brought his ‘Dnieper Division’ back to Obukhov and Tripol’e where most of his men resided. Soon thereafter, in mid January a gathering of peasants in Grigorievka (ukr. Hrihor’ivka), presenting itself proudly as the regional congress, selected a revolutionary committee and appointed Zeleny to be the ataman of the makeshift peasant army.¹⁶⁶ On the 8th of February he sent his emissaries to Antonov’s ambulatory staff to deliberate over the conditions of his collaboration with the Bolsheviks.¹⁶⁷ These negotiations dragged on for weeks and were ultimately fruitless, yet even then the editorial board of the *Kievskiy Kommunist* felt confident enough to write at the beginning of March that “ataman Zeleny ... supports the Soviet power and maintains contact with the Soviet Army.”¹⁶⁸

Perhaps the greatest loss that the army of the UNR had suffered, an occurrence that had justly left the most profound impression on contemporaries, took place when ataman Grigoriev with his multifarious and multitudinous troops swore loyalty to the Soviet Ukraine. Veritable milestone of the entire campaign, that volte-face had probably been inspired by the efforts of the Ukrainian politicians to strike a note of accord with the Entente powers. If earlier the UNR government still had enough bravado left to admonish victorious Western

¹⁶⁵ TsDAGO f 1 o 18 d 63 ll 24-25

¹⁶⁶ Khrystiuk, v. 4, 76-77

¹⁶⁷ Antonov-Ovseenko, v. 3, 263

¹⁶⁸ Khrystiuk, v. 4, 131

allies for infringing on the sovereignty of Ukraine, by January it had turned to them as a beggar, cadging Entente representatives for help against the rapidly advancing Bolsheviks. Arriving in Odessa on January 20, Osyp Nazaruk and Serhii Ostapenko were treated by the French military authorities with unconcealed disdain – as the capitulating emissaries from the unrecognized government of a non-existing people.¹⁶⁹ Stipulations of the treaty, signed by general d’Anselme and the officers of his staff on one hand and by the generals Grekov (ukr. Hrekiv) and Matveev (ukr. Matviiv) on the other corresponded to the tone of the discussion: on the condition of expurgating its government of all the “bolshevik” elements (that is, Vynnychenko and Chekovs’koy primarily), Ukraine was to enter into the Entente-sponsored anti-Soviet military alliance, surrender the command of its own forces over to the officers of the Allied and the Volunteer Armies and formally concede to the *de facto* occupation of the Black Sea shore by the Entente troops.¹⁷⁰ So much for treasured Ukrainian independence.

It is difficult to ascertain how concerned Grigoriev was with the subtleties of the threatened national sovereignty. To him and his subordinates the presence of the Entente bore too strong a resemblance to the earlier Austro-German occupation and its violently anti-Bolshevik rhetoric (and policies) could only be seen as a preface to the return of the vengeful “reaction.” On few occasions he attempted to solicit Petliura into permitting him to launch an attack on the French, Greek, Polish and German forces in the area – in order to jostle that polyglot army into the sea once and for all.¹⁷¹ Fearing, however, that the beleaguered Republic may soon face the war on another front, Petliura ordered the tempestuous ataman to

¹⁶⁹ Nazaruk likened the treatment to the that of the colonial peoples, see Nazaruk, p 122-132

¹⁷⁰ Vynnychenko, 512-513; Horak, 38

¹⁷¹ Horak, 40; Nazaruk claims that the request to attack the Entente troops stemmed from Ivan Lutsenko, a hoary doctor that decided to try his hand in the craft of war – with lethal consequences. Strange indeed are the workings of Revolution on the fortunes of men. (Nazaruk, 118-119)

hold his breath. Grigoriev was not discouraged; that strange man, who combined Bonapartist megalomania, Panslavic nationalism, populist sentimentality with revolutionary commitment, simply started to look for another patron and he quickly found one in the persona of Antonov. Initially covert, his ties with the Bolsheviks became evident when he occupied Znamenka and sent his troops eastward – to Yelizavetgrad and thence to Dybenko.¹⁷² This union was formally consummated on the 18 of February, when Grigoriev's 'Cherson division,' about 11,000 strong, was transformed into the 1st Brigade of the Transdnieperian Division¹⁷³ and withal two of Ukraine's greatest warlords, Makhno and Grigoriev, found themselves working under the auspices of the same organization.

A question begging to be asked: in the end of an admittedly long day, who had risked staying behind the Directorate? No precise answer is available, neither should it be hoped for, as minds of men, macerating in the sanguineous marinade of the civil strife habitually leave accounting affairs in the state of desuetude. Kakurin, nevertheless, endeavored to produce a diagram, according to which of the 25,000 men constituting the army of the UNR,¹⁷⁴ by March 1st 1919 only 12 % (i.e. 3000) could be considered reliable, the rest having either deserted, defected or mutinied¹⁷⁵ - with all due respect, that figure could only be treated as that of impression than of precision. More useful, it would seem, are the testimonies which portray the Sich Riflemen as the exclusive hope of the vagabond Ukrainian government.

“The East-Ukrainian troops are not dependable (*ist... kein Verlaß*), reported Fürstenberg on

¹⁷² *IVRKPU* nr 40, February 8th, 1919; *IVRKPU* nr 42 February 11th, 1919.

¹⁷³ RGVA f 6 o 4 d 92 l 38

¹⁷⁴ This figure generally agrees with the results of the General Grekov's report, which puts the strength of the UNR force at 21,100 men at the end of January. That in itself represents a fifth of what the Directorate naively counted as its own army at the moment of its December triumph (Vynnychenko, 509).

¹⁷⁵ Kakurin, *Kak srazhalas' Revoliutsiia*, v. 1, 208

the 26th of January, “and last weeks had proven again how inapplicable this material is for the employment against Soviet troops. As soon as they are transported to the front, they commence to negotiate with their adversary, ending in fraternization. As a result of that, the Directorate is supported solely (*stützt sich ... lediglich auf*) by the Galician contingents, which are dispatched here at the fastest possible tempo.”¹⁷⁶ Moisei Rafes repeats this almost verbatim: “At the time when the units mobilized in Ukraine one after another were going over to the side of the Bolsheviks, the Galicians remained faithful to the Directorate until the end.”¹⁷⁷ Finally, Antonov, who had all the reasons to accentuate the difficulty of the task imparted upon him by the Revolution, confessed that “only the Galician detachments or those that disposed of substantive Galician cadres preserved some fighting efficiency (*boesposobnost*’).”¹⁷⁸ The Wheel of Fortune had thus run a full cycle and the Directorate landed in a situation not dissimilar to the pre-November days: in a crummy provincial town, amidst the chagrin of desultory disputes, with its present and its future buttressed by the thinning rows of His Imperial and Royal Apostolic Majesty’s former subjects.

Indirectly, the alienation of the UNR government both from the people that it purported to represent and from the forces of the armed insurgency that it was supposed to have harnessed manifested itself in a difficult, if not tragic predicament, in which the Galician Sich Riflemen were caught. In their allegiance to the Directorate they had very quickly arrogated upon themselves punitive functions once the peasants refused either to surrender the arms or to recognize the power of the Directorate. Thus, in January 1919 Galicians were used in bringing back some sense to the inhabitants of the Tripol’e when those had injudiciously

¹⁷⁶ AdR Karton 720, Kiew, am 26 Jänner 1919, von Fürstenberg

¹⁷⁷ Rafes, *Dva goda...*, 110

¹⁷⁸ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 3, 150

decided to establish the Soviet and elect the Revolutionary Committee with Zeleny at its head.¹⁷⁹ Simultaneously the Riflemen took part in the suppression of an uprising in the area of Zolotonosha, where they had managed to score a tactical victory but suffer an indelible moral defeat.¹⁸⁰ Exhausted and traumatized, they fared worse militarily attempting to liquidate the ‘Bolshevik’ uprising around Korostyshev (not too far from Zhytomir).¹⁸¹ Their opponents – the peasants who took up arms against the Directorate, or, more precisely, who had simply declined to put them down as the limited goal, the overthrow of the Hetman, was reached – paid back in the same coin. “Spell-bound by the Bolshevik propaganda, wrote Nazaruk of the days preceding the fall of Kiev, villagers began to view the Sich Riflemen as the ‘lords’ (*pans’kim*) army, which fights in the landowners’ interests! The wounded *Sichovyki*, which crawled to the peasant houses, were not even given water.”¹⁸² That animosity towards the Galicians survived, so it seems, the early thrill of the peasants’ romance with the Bolsheviks. When asked, for instance, who his opponents are, a certain ataman Shevchenko promptly responded, “Landowners, Jews and the Turks.” Upon catching his interlocutor’s surprised expression, the ataman casually explained, “Turks – that’s in our language (*tse po nashomu*). In yours – Galicians, or, what’s their name, Austrians.”¹⁸³ What was planned as a crusade against the Romanov, Great Russian or Bolshevik tyranny turned into a bona fide internecine domestic war with the Ukrainians (however they may have defined themselves) battling other Ukrainians, the chromatic interplay of Red and Black proving no less national that that of the Yellow-Blue.¹⁸⁴ The Directorate’s failure to keep

¹⁷⁹ Khrystiuk., v. 4, 77

¹⁸⁰ *ibid.*, v 4, 77; Skrukwa, 403

¹⁸¹ TsDAVO f 1075 o 1 d 50 l

¹⁸² Nazaruk, 141-142

¹⁸³ Mykhailo Sereda, „Kholodnyi Iar,” *Litopys’ Chervonoï Kalyny (LCK)*, nr 12 (1931), 14

¹⁸⁴ Without entering into the heat of the polemics, one needs to interrogate the validity of the terms, canonized by the contemporary Ukrainian historical practice – that of *Vyzvol’na viyna* (‘War of Liberation’), *Vyzvol’ni*

Ukraine unified, therefore, was Galicia's failure to become Ukrainian Piedmont and Galician Riflemen - to welter in the aura of Garibaldi's Red Shirts.

Part III: a tentative portrait of *partizanshchina*

In the contest over the loyalties, the Directorate was out-paced, out-matched and check-mated by the Bolsheviks in all spheres and on all accounts. The rapid diminution of the Directorate's military potential was accompanied by the precipitous, avalanche-like growth of the Bolshevik troops. Elemental in fact seemed the advance of the partisans to the contemporaries – hence the profusion of the torrential metaphors, that pandemonium of the violent gales, destructive conflagrations, all-absorbing eddies brought into the gaze of the contemplating posterity. “The blizzard was already approaching.” recalled Nazaruk, “From the eastern and southern direction loomed Bolshevik forces. One cannot say ‘armies,’ only – forces.”¹⁸⁵

What was startling was the multifaceted nature of these forces, the possibility of cohabitation and cooperation between individuals with differing visions of the Revolution; after all, the Party had not yet construed Bolshevism into a calcified administrative practice – nor had the insurgents invented their proverbial ‘third way’ in opposition to the ‘magisterial’ Red or White currents. Troops formed still in the Neutral Zone contained probably the largest

zmahannia (‘Emancipatory Endeavors’) or *Ukrains'ko-radians'ka viyna* (‘Ukrainian-Soviet War’); none of them could lay great claim to sense unless one acknowledges the Soviet Ukrainian troops as well as a substantial part of the Ukrainian population as a thoughtless tool in service of Red Moscow.

¹⁸⁵ Nazaruk, 116

number of the Communists, or at least the best-organized party cells – so one is led to believe. Alliance with Makhno brought into the army “anarchist elements” – a political concoction begging an easy definition due to the emphasis of its apologists on the spontaneous ‘praxis of Revolution.’ The defection of Zeleny, Grigoriev, Struk and other atamans, previously connected with the UNR, spiced up the communist-anarchist amalgam with a plethora of representatives from the Ukrainian and non-Ukrainian Left Parties, the Borotbists and the Independent Social-Democrats in particular. Their role in the functioning of the Kharkov government may have been marginal, yet, protected by organized bodies of armed men, their presence in the local affairs seemed powerful and permanent.

Later, in attempting to explain the outbreak of mutinies among their tessellated troops, the Soviet authorities thought it adequate to advert to the machinations of the former Petliura officers (Grigoriev for instance), who had not abjured their nefarious opinions even when surrounded by the virtuous Bolsheviks; equally Manichean and unapologetically *revanchist* nationalist literature of today arrives at a similar conclusion, dividing the Ukrainian army by a lethargic legerdemain into the “heart-bleeding patriots” (again Grigoriev) and a suggestive group of “callous foreigners.” The reality is, naturally, simultaneously more complex and simple. For all their diversity, the units of the Soviet Ukraine, partisans from the Neutral Zone, rebellious Volhynian peasants, ataman-led troops in the Cherson province, Insurgents of the Left Bank regions, shared much in common: a certain affinity of practices, true “consubstantiality” of human matter, finally, a psychological and spiritual kinship of their leaders. In short, what the Bolshevik troops in the first half of 1919 embodied was exactly

that nexus of attitudes which one designated as either *partizanshchina*, or, more pointedly inimical, as *atamanshchina*.¹⁸⁶

The phenomenon of *Partizanshchina*, the ‘partisan-style warfare,’ was less concerned with the tactical salencies of the war as with the rapports of armed men with each other, their commanders and the outside world.¹⁸⁷ The unconditional obedience of the oath-bound recruits was cast aside and replaced by a vague form of soldierly democracy. The idea of “comradely discipline” (*tovarishcheskaia distsiplina*), which in the opinion of Valeriy Mezhlauk, the People’s Commissar of Military Affairs,¹⁸⁸ favorably distinguished Ukrainian forces from those of the Soviet Russia,¹⁸⁹ seemed to have been applied almost literally. “Merciless measures are being taken against the misdemeanors, debauchery, gambling in accordance with the resolutions made by the Red Army soldiers themselves,” so reads the early March report on the 15th Ukrainian Insurgent regiment.¹⁹⁰ The power of the rank and file to mete out punishments to the malefactors, institutionally expressed in the advent of regimental tribunals, was closely linked with the capacity to choose and dismiss their own commanders; previously described as an integral part of the partisan ethos, this practice was only reinforced as the troops from the Neutral zone came into contact with the partisans of Makhno and the rebels of Bogunsky. Among the Makhnovites, in particular, deliberations

¹⁸⁶ In the context of this discussion I prefer the term *partizanshchina*; it seems more specific, crisper, easier to tackle. *Atamanshchina*, being the central theme of the whole dissertation, evokes, besides the style of war, a peasant ideology of power, a vision of the future social body, even if stateless one, wherein the ataman was to play the role of some rural *caudillo*, limited in his authority by the cohort of close associates.

¹⁸⁷ Tactically, the conduct of the war had little to do with the conventional understanding of the guerilla warfare with its endless hit-and-run attacks or ability of the ‘soldiers’ to merge effortlessly into the local populace; true guerilla war represents a response to the presence of a better-armed and better-organized opponent – in the first half of 1919 the Soviets were clearer the stronger of all the protagonists. It is only later, when Ukraine again was set alight by the blaze of anti-Bolshevik peasant uprisings that the war-making became truly guerilla-like.

¹⁸⁸ Such was the state of affairs in the Ukrainian Soviet Government that there were two People’s Commissars of Military Affairs at the same time – the aforementioned Mezhlauk and, of course, Nikolai Podvoisky.

¹⁸⁹ *IVRKPU* nr 45, February 14, 1919

¹⁹⁰ RGVA f 103 o 1 d 23 ll 6-8

and voting were taking place practically on all levels. Referring specifically to the artillery branch of the Makhno army, a Soviet military inspector averred: “In order to be elected one is not required to possess any relevant experience, the only condition being a modicum of knowledge of the gunner’s craft (*artilleriyskogo dela*).”¹⁹¹ Implicit in that was the rejection of the ‘deadpan professionalism,’ an old habit stemming from the widespread distrust of the military specialists (*voenspetsy*) and the academy-nurtured officers from the pre-World War period.

Generally speaking, the adherence to the principle of the ‘comradely discipline’ and the insistence of the common soldiers on having their officers elected (*vybornoe nachalo*) allowed the ordinary rank-and-file to infiltrate areas of sheer strategic and tactical expertise; to put it differently, the persistence on executing commands out of the “awareness of the revolutionary duty”¹⁹² had stripped the art of war-making of all alleged political neutrality. The need for transparency became paramount, as could be espied from the comportment of Bogunsky’s partisans, so overkeen on knowing exactly “against whom and to what end they need[ed] to fight.”¹⁹³ Assemblies (*sobraniia*) of soldiers¹⁹⁴, a penchant born in the euphoric March of 1917 and sanctified by now as a revolutionary tradition, acquired trappings of a primitive parliament, where military directives issued from above, recommendations proffered by members of the personnel and, significantly, critical questions of the ‘present political moment’ were all discussed and debated in the same breath. The oft flaunted image

¹⁹¹ RGVA f 25860 o1 d 559, 3

¹⁹² RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 148 l 51

¹⁹³ RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 560 l 2

¹⁹⁴ Documents seem to indicate that the English word *miting* was generally reserved to the affairs organized by the officials from the outside; Russian *sobranie*, on the contrary, refers to the spontaneous and hence unsanctioned gathering of men, brought together by the feeling of shared urgency.

of the Makhnovites lying supine as they expatiate upon their next move could have been reproduced with the same staged exactitude in all troops of the Soviet Ukraine, regardless of their provenance and the potential to be subsequently transformed into regular army units.

Undoubtedly, the partisans would have not developed the same sense of inner autonomy and would have certainly shown greater alacrity in accepting injunctions from the Center without first subjecting it to some prefatory censure, had the fledgling state succeeded in establishing a working supply system, rendering thus partisans materially dependent upon itself; one does not, after all, bite the feeding hand. Alas, this was not the case for the Bolsheviks were never in position of consistently providing the Army with the necessities of life and war. “On March 25,” the People’s Commissar of Justice Aleksandr Khmel’nitskiy informed Nikolai Podvoisky, “... a delegation from the Volhynian regiment arrived, complaining about the absence of boots, clothing, equipment, bullets, [and] cannon shells,”¹⁹⁵ and that grievance reverberated with commensurate force and poignancy among the troops of Makhno,¹⁹⁶ partisans of the Tarashcha regiment¹⁹⁷ and Grigoriev’s subordinates.¹⁹⁸ In the course of six months, the artillery battalion (*divizion*) of Bogunsky’s obtained 39 sets of underwear, 33 pairs of trousers, 39 shirts, 39 service caps and 24 pairs of boots – laughingly little to meet the needs of few hundred men.¹⁹⁹ Having described how inadequate the work of the rear organizations was in supplying the 1st Ukrainian Soviet army, an agent of the Highest

¹⁹⁵ RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 44 l 1

¹⁹⁶ RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 559 l 4

¹⁹⁷ RGVA f 999 o 1 d 4 ll 3-4

¹⁹⁸ RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 557 l 2

¹⁹⁹ RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 560 l 6

Military Inspectorate thought it appropriate to append that all other armies of the Ukrainian front find themselves in an equal state of neglect and dereliction.²⁰⁰

Men of the Ukrainian Army were therefore entirely on their own in matters of provisioning. As a result, the old and reviled custom of “arbitrary requisitioning” – *samochnnye rekvizitsii* – became by now so thoroughly engrained that one inadvertently began speaking of the fully-fledged “predatory instincts” (*grabitel'skie instinkty*) of the insurgents.²⁰¹ In the best of cases, clothing and footwear were brought along by the partisans themselves; more often than not it had been simply ‘expropriated’ from the local peasants, or obtained in the battle, fact leading to the emergence of the Red Army soldiers, outfit in the uniforms of the Hetman, UNR or Galician armies.²⁰² Weapons as a rule were also seized from the populace or from the opponent. As a result, the soldiers, accoutered with rifles of all models (Russian Mosin rifles, old Berdan rifles, Italian, Austrian, German and even Japanese models), sometimes with a revolver and a dagger jutting out of the belt looked tawdrier and more pirate-like than ever before.²⁰³ Questions abounded: how could this bevy of men come into possession of proper ammunition, piebald as the origin of their weaponry was? Who could warrant an equitable distribution of the captured spoils of war between all the sundry clamoring detachments?²⁰⁴ By what miracle of an argument would one wean the insurgents from the idea that the objects snatched from the hands of the discomfited adversary represented their inalienable

²⁰⁰ RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 554 ll 4-5

²⁰¹ RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 148 l 181; RGVA f 103 o 1 d 38 l 8

²⁰² RGVA f 167 o 1 d 39 l 21

²⁰³ RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 554 l 3

²⁰⁴ Although short of rifles, troops of the 1st Ukrainian Soviet Army had an over-supply of the machine guns; the problem was that they were distributed neither equally nor rationally. Thus – on is informed – whereas certain regiments of the 3rd Border division had 4 machine guns or less, Bogun and Tarashcha regiments, units with the deeply-seated predilection for the *partizanshchina* methods of war, boasted over 50 machine guns each. (RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 554 l 3)

property?²⁰⁵ All said, the self-supply was a typical Catch-22 story, reinforcing itself by the very infrastructural quandaries it had created.

Likewise, due to the extreme weakness of the soviet administrative apparatus, the Ukrainian insurgents could proceed almost unimpeded in procuring the most important war material – able-bodied men; the convention of ‘arbitrary requisitioning’ found thus its complement in the practice of ‘arbitrary mobilization’ (*samochinnaia mobilizatsiia*). Divisional and regimental commanders had their own ‘mobilizational departments’ set up, responsible for bringing in new recruits into the ranks of their swelling armies.²⁰⁶ Always short of equipment, they were never too loath to let the POWs with arms serve alongside the often-unarmed Soviet soldier. Most, however, had their departed replaced thanks to the never-ending stream of the volunteers from the nearby villages; these tended to arrive in large parties,²⁰⁷ depending, of course, on the size of the represented settlement. Conditioned to no small extent by the traditional forms of peasant organization, this phenomenon of arriving *en masse* discloses nonetheless the nature of the ‘voluntary recruitments,’ its highly qualified character being perhaps best encapsulated in the following Makhnovite resolution:

After prolonged discussions... one is asked to vote either for the compulsory or for the voluntary mobilizations. As a result, the congress arrives to an agreement, that mobilization should not be compulsory (*prinuditel’naia*), i.e. based on the principle of exerting pressure from above by violence and orders, but **obligatory** (*obiazatel’naia*) in the sense that each peasant, capable of bearing arms, should **on his own** recognize his duty in joining the ranks of the insurgents and in protecting the interests of the entire toiling people of Ukraine [emphasis is that of the original document – M.A.].²⁰⁸

²⁰⁵ RGVA f 25860 o1 d 553 l 15

²⁰⁶ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapsiki*, v. 3, 137

²⁰⁷ *ibid.*, v. 3, 131

²⁰⁸ Nestor Makhno. *Krest’ianskoe dvizhenie na Ukraine 1918-1921: dokumenty i materialy*, 89

Regardless of how sincere the atamans-turned-commanders were when declaring their allegiance to the principle of the voluntary recruitment, by mixture of cooption, cajoling and coercion they had managed to keep their armies always on the rise. Towards mid April, Grigoriev's original three regiments were supplemented by another two (4th Partisan and 5th Tiligul Regiments),²⁰⁹ augmenting his total force to about 16,000 men (from 10,000 at the time of his joining the Bolsheviks).²¹⁰ More impressive yet were the growth figures of the Makhno troops – from three thousand in mid February²¹¹ to 16,000 by late April²¹² - although given the mobility of the maknovites and the high turn-over rate that latter number represented more an average potential than the actual strength of the Makhno's forces.²¹³

Between the partisans intent on preserving their rights and the Center bent on transforming them into “an obedient and malleable weapon of the Workers’ and Peasants’ Government”²¹⁴ there stood a figure of the ataman, *bat'ko*, commander with a direct mandate from his own men and a transcendent one from the invisible inchoate state. To the former he was a caring and a just father figure, a connoisseur of the mass psychology, eloquent as far the folk's idiom was concerned, cultured, but not to the point of appearing inaccessible; conversant with the world, he was crafty enough to manipulate it to the advantage of his subalterns. Like Bozhenko he knew how to combine blandishment with blackmail in order to assure that the insurgents received proper and timely medical treatment;²¹⁵ in the manner of Grigoriev, he never blanched before stopping provision-carrying transports to rip up their goods-laden

²⁰⁹ RGVA f 178 o 1 d 85 l 5

²¹⁰ Kakurin, *Kak srazhalas' Revoliutsiia*, v. 1, 98

²¹¹ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 3, 167

²¹² RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 559 l 1

²¹³ RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 559 l 2

²¹⁴ RGVA f 167 o 1 d 39 l 24

²¹⁵ RGVA f 999 o 1 d 10 l 7

bellies and disembowel their fatty contents among the inebriated soldiers or the covetous local dwellers. The size of the commanded detachment permitting, an ataman's rapports with his subordinates tended to remain unmediated and personal; detailed, disarmingly attentive lest a name be omitted and a Red Army man bereft of his well-merited allowance, orders of sailor Zhivoderov, commander of the Taras Shevchenko Regiment, unwittingly remind one of a small-scale manorial lord than an emissary of a revolution with universal pretensions.²¹⁶ Of course, with larger units – those of the Transdnieperian brigades (Makhno and Grigoriev) or of the 1st Insurgent Division (Shchors) – this immediacy was sacrificed to the strength of numbers; yet, a degree of informality had still been maintained, either by creating a system of lesser *bat'ki* underneath a greater one or by devising a remunerative and retributive code, sufficiently idiosyncratic to let the will and the voice of the commander be recognized without much ambivalence.²¹⁷

A surrogate father to his troops endowed with a right to reward and punish, the ataman was a real dilemma for the Bolsheviks who had subcontracted him and to whom he had technically owed allegiance. Insubordinate, stubborn, too full of initiative for his own good – rarely did the official portraits of the Red Army commanders in those days deviate from that farrago of epithets. “The regiment would blindly, unflinchingly go there where *bat'ko* would lead them,” so wrote Antonov of Bozhenko²¹⁸ – and they did, often to the considerable annoyance of the Bolsheviks. Grigoriev's great offensive in the direction of Odessa – an undertaking that had earned him most flattering accolades – took place without any prodding from the Bolsheviks; on the contrary, having been suspicious of Grigoriev from the moment of encounter,

²¹⁶ TsDAVO f 2 o 1 d 106 l 33

²¹⁷ On methods of Shchors, see RGVA f 167 o 1 d 39 l 22; on Primakov, RGVA f 167 o 1 d 39 l 15

²¹⁸ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v.3, 168

Antonov and Skachko (commander of the Army Group of the Kharkov direction) wanted to engage him on the fronts of lesser importance,²¹⁹ but the great warlord, the “ataman of Taurida and Kherson region,” had confounded them and their plans. Similarly, the insurgents would often not budge unless the order from the Center had been countersigned by their own commander. Shchors, for instance, piqued by the attempts at replacing him with some ‘reliable Soviet worker,’ kept a regiment of his 1st Division motionless in Vinnitsa despite clear directive to relocate; the conflict smoldered for a day and a half, at the height of the UNR counter-offensive, until Shchors was officially reaffirmed in his position – and thus strengthened in his subsequent dealings with the representatives of the formal power.²²⁰

Herein lay exactly the radix of the troubles with that bevy of refractory and self-important bearers of the Revolution’s crimson standard – in that jealousy with which they guarded their turf and their privileges against a possible intruder, however imposing his credentials may have been. Political commissars were either altogether absent or brooked for as long as they confined themselves to purely “demonstrative” roles of no practical import.²²¹ Otherwise, when the enthusiasm in applying ‘revolutionary discipline’ to the partisan half-brigands proved excessive, the commissars ran the risks of facing serious reprisals; occurrences of their being beaten by the Red Army soldiers, goaded on by their commanders, were not uncommon,²²² as were not the direct threats to their lives all that exceptional.²²³ Fiodor Dybenko, in fact, brother of the celebrated Pavel and himself the senior officer of the mysterious 4th Insurgent Division did not shirk from waging an informal and sanguinary war

²¹⁹ *ibid.*, *Zapiski*, v. 3, 221

²²⁰ RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 44 l 3

²²¹ Antonov, *Zapiski*, v. 3, 203

²²² RGVA f 103 o 1 d 31 l 38

²²³ RGVA f 103 o 1 d 31 l 34

against all who had questioned his regime of military misrule in Lugansk; his adversarial group included, besides the habitual political workers and the CheKa, certain unsuspecting soldiers from the neighboring Southern Front.²²⁴ Dybenko's methods, however, were outlandish even by the standards of that aberrant campaign and most of the atamans – the real warlords – defended their domains with greater judiciousness and lesser truculence. Most representative, perhaps, is the behavior of Bogunsky in Zolotonosha district, who, while allowing communist Executive Committees to exist, ensured that the key positions in the local Military Revolutionary Committees were firmly held by 'his men.'²²⁵

The Bolsheviks were often scandalized by the conduct of the troops and their leaders, but their responses at first were limited to somewhat rotary and innocuous admonitions in the name of order and decency.²²⁶ It is unlikely however that they could have proceeded with drastic measures at that time, dependent as they were on the insurgents. After all, adherence of the Ukrainian Soviet Government to the atamans was a military and infrastructural necessity, with declarations of ideological affinity with the 'self-organizing masses' representing but a discursive hide, considered long outmoded and even harmful by its Russian counterpart. Then again, despite numerous entreaties from Antonov's staff, the Center in Serpukhov had never seriously considered the possibility of sending regular army troops from the heart of Russia to Ukraine, further strengthening the link of the Ukrainian Bolsheviks with those Vatsetsis and his *voenspetsy* despised most – the partisan amateurs.²²⁷

²²⁴ documents pertaining to Dybenko's 'reign of terror' are found in TsDAVO f 2 o 1 d 126

²²⁵ RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 560 l

²²⁶ See examples of Lokotosh's address to the troops of the 1st Division in early December of 1918 (Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 3, 132) or Antonov's reprimands directed at the soldiers of the 1st Ukrainian Soviet Army in late March of 1919 (Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 3, 287).

²²⁷ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v 3, 348

The Party knew it well - *partizanshchina*, although a term of opprobrium, denoted a condition which could not have been avoided. Having repudiated the very principles upon which Skoropadsky and the UNR endeavored to realize their national projects, the peasant uprising brought in their stead not a reign of license (as many hostile observers would have it), but a constellation of fixed revolutionary committees and mobile armed units, coalescing together into the *regime of renewable revolution*. The Ukrainian Red Army, that extension and expulsion of the militarized folk, organized into seemingly manipulable detachments, constituted an evolved and an active piece within the structure, embodying the rural protest in its syncopated, muted and assembled form. Its core consisted of the alert and relatively articulate men, concerned less with property in itself, long since seized, divided and re-divided with irrevocable determination, as with the social and political conditions that would warrant retention thereof; in the clamor for “Land and Freedom” the stress inevitably fell on the latter. More importantly, that army of subcontracted atamans possessed infrastructural means (weapons, control over local Military Revolutionary Councils, etc.) and considerable reserves of popular appeal to substantiate their claim as the wards of the Revolution when they descried a danger looming over it. Although technically subordinated to the Ukrainian Front, Red commanders of Makhno’s or Bogunsky’s persuasion could transform their relatively small regiments into multitudinous masses without any external prodding, letting the Jack of the peasant unrest loose out of its rather rickety and yielding box – to the great disconcertion of the authorities.

Apprehensive of their vulnerability, the Bolsheviks had daunting tasks indeed to accomplish. First, civil government capable of inspiring minimal respect from the populace had to be restored; partisans, those self-styled children of February and October, needed to be disciplined into soldiers; finally, an enormous cultural gap, not to say outright aversion, separating political workers from the rank and file had to be eliminated if the Party were to secure a place in the spirit of those it called to action and sacrifice. Only so *Partizanshchina* might have been overcome – and that ultimately at the cost of alienating multiple Bolshevik allies, who had played such a pivotal role in the spectacular conquest of Ukraine. “There will be a struggle between one part of the army and another” – an apocalyptic rumor, so strange in its sibylline simplicity, was spreading across the ranks of the Volhynian regiment.²²⁸ The weight of its own pluralism was growing unbearable to the Revolution.

²²⁸ RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 148 l 139

Chapter IV
Front against Government: the End of the Bolshevik-Ataman Alliance

All those multiple bands, operating on vast expanses in the course of many weeks, present, in reality, a relatively insignificant force that could be easily overcome. The whole trouble is that, our Red Army is to a known extent flesh and blood [plot'iu ot ploti] of the very same partisan troops [author's emphasis].

Nikolai Podvoisky¹

¹ N. Podvoisky, *Na Ukraine: stat' I N. I. Podvoiskogo* (Kiev: Izdanie Politicheskogo Upravleniia Narodnogo Komissariata po Voennym Delam Ukrainy, 1919), 26

Riveted as they were by the vision of the worldwide revolution, the Bolsheviks never lost sight of a more immediate and, it could be claimed, paramount assignment: the need to recreate the state, which they had helped to destroy. On the abstract level, this state had been conceived as an element of the historical dialectics, which would result in the stateless and classless society at some barely cognizable future; in practical terms, however, revamping the state's listless tentacles was certainly the ultimate end, for it alone – the unquestioned control over the machinery of supply and mobilization – held the key to victory in the struggle of the determined yet naked and dispossessed contenders. Self-evident to an extent, it was this realization, more than the grace of their thought-constructions, which had given the Bolsheviks a sense of confident superiority – and that not only over their 'inveterate allies' of the Social-Revolutionary or Anarchist leanings, but also, significantly enough, over the paradigmatic 'etatists' and 'restorationists,' the *derzhavniki* akin to Denikin and Kolchak.²

The shared notion that the Revolution needed to bring forth the Revolutionary State was not, however, accompanied by a consensus regarding the means whereby that task was to be accomplished. Where was the power to reside – in the center or on the peripheries? Which forces were to assume the leading role and which subsidiary? How far could the collaboration of the Bolsheviks with other representatives of the radical left go? Could the proverbial masses be left to themselves and permitted to act in the spirit of the 'revolutionary creativity' without the tutelage of organized political agents? These questions provoked no

² Trotsky, who more than anybody else embodied the statist spirit of the Revolution, knew his reasons well when branding the Whites with an disparaging epithet of the '*mutineers*' at the high of Denikin's successes. (Lev Trotsky, *Kak vooruzhalas' Revolutsiia: na voennoi rabote* (Moscow: Vysshii voennyi revoliutsionnyi sovet, 1923-1925), v.2, b. 1, 61).

singular response from the practitioners of Bolshevik politics for reasons which probably had so much to do with their inexperience as with the loss of the monastic-like discipline in the wake of the October coup and the precipitous swelling of the party numbers. Neither straight nor unbroken, the path to the post-1921 settlement resembled more a labyrinth created out of a plethora of improvised intersections. Rather than solving the problems of state-building raised by the Empire's demise, the war had only brought them into the clearing's revealing light, imparted them an articulate form, so to speak, under which they would persist and be treated in the subsequent years.

The Ukrainian story in the first half of 1919 provides a concrete example of the confusion and inconsistency of the Bolsheviks' state-building projects. Drawn deeper into Ukrainian affairs by the unanticipated celerity of the Soviet advance, the Party had to confront the highly politicized countryside, which, albeit initially sympathetic to the government in Kharkov, cleaved to the scads of its own home-grown notions of what Bolshevism was said to entail. As was shown in the previous chapter, the populace, applying arms with which it had been amply supplied to buttress its convictions, became the primordial agent of civil struggle in the widest sense of the word, the ubiquitous interpreters of the Revolution's message. Such autonomy of the local players, itself an indispensable factor in the early victories of the Bolshevik arms, placed the mettle of the Party under great strain: the latter had to decide how much of its own legitimacy it was ready to compromise for the sake of retaining the essential initiative in organizing the new polity.

This chapter, therefore, investigates the politics of state-building between the collapse of the Hetmanate and Denikin's summer offensive by focusing on the question of the Army's organization; this demarche seems almost tautological in its nature, for, let it be stressed again, in Ukraine, more perhaps than anywhere else, the functioning state meant control over the use of arms – if not necessarily the fact of their physical possession (efforts at extracting them having proved too risky). Although the land may have seemed prone to succumb to anyone with enough courage to lead the insurrection (as Bubnov thought in March of 1919³), internally it was hardly an amorphous mass, inhabited by the conveniently enthusiastic and pliant population. Militarization, fragmentation and concomitant self-organization of the fragments around rural revolutionary committees (*revkomy*), party cells and, of course, the atamans, each with a more or less clear idea of how the war was to be conducted and what it was being fought over – that political reality of *atamanshchina* par excellence compelled many Ukrainian Bolsheviks to abandon the illusion of building a one-party centralist state with a regular military force always at its disposal. The heated arguments between the proponents of the partisan war and its adversaries, reverberating across all possible domains of political life, were reflected in the field-camps as the jarring noise of partisans' disaffection with the Center grew dangerously audible. In that respect, the account presented below strives to refute the oft-repeated scheme, according to which the ideologically uniform Bolsheviks endeavored to profit callously from the 'revolutionary enthusiasm of the masses' by usurping their conquests when the opportunity arose;⁴ on the contrary, the emphasis needs

³ *Tretii z'izd Komunistichnoi partii (bil'shovykiv) Ukrainy: 1-6 bereznia 1919 roku*, ed. S.I. Hurenko (Kyiv: Parlaments'ke vydavnytstvo, 2002), 175

⁴ Most, if not all, popular and semi-popular works on the makhnovite movement repeat the story of the Bolsheviks cheating Makhno out of his end of the deal – a narrative pattern established in the 1920's by the émigré anarchist writers. Introduction to the otherwise very respectable latest collection of documents on the subject does not deviate from this essentially anti-Bolshevik myth (*Nestor Makhno. Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie na Ukraine, 1918-1921: Dokumenty i Materialy*, 5-34).

to be placed not only on the interactions between the Bolsheviks and non-Bolshevik forces (both, to be sure, highly problematic categories), but also on the infighting within the Party itself, the struggle between institutions purporting to harbor the only vision of a legitimate order. The narrative climax of this chapter, Grigoriev's mutiny, would thus be presented as an event, occurring exactly at the moment when the *suspense of ambiguities* became unbearable for all actors involved: the Front, the 'civil' government in Kharkov, Ukrainian Left parties, local Bolsheviks, Moscow emissaries, CheKa agents, regimental commissars and finally the rank-and-file soldiers. The mutiny served thus as an unforeseen yet necessary crisis, which transformed the confused scuffle of people and ideas into the regular war with properly drawn battle-lines.

Part 1: Imperialists and Regionalists

Reflecting on the failures of the Bolsheviks in Ukraine, Vladimir Iudovski, the chairman of the Ukrainian High Military Inspection, remarked that "in approaching the task of liberating Ukraine, the center ... did not prepare itself for the problems [ahead]... either on the level of general politics (*obshchepoliticheskoy*), or even in the military sense." According to him, the government of the RSFSR had to be severely censured for having left Kharkov and the Ukrainian Bolsheviks to their own devices – letting them thus welter in the state of the *samostiinost'* ('autonomy').⁵ The reliance on local forces, the fateful alliance with "Grigoriev, Makhno and their likes" led to the ultimate military disaster suffered at the hands of the less numerous yet organizationally superior Volunteer Army.

⁵ RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 553 l 6

Fair as this retrospective assessment may be in general, it ignores that the fact that the Party, especially its Ukrainian branch, did work towards producing a blue-print for subsequent state building weeks before the German Revolution made such an endeavor possible. Having congregated in Moscow on October 17th, 1918, the delegates of the Second Congress of the Ukrainian Bolsheviks (CP(b)U) spent the next five days arguing about the role and the involvement of the Communist Party in creating an Army, directing local revolutionary committees, fostering forces of insurgency in the interior and possible negotiating with the non-Bolshevik Left movements. Symptomatically, the central debate of the Congress was the proper response to a seemingly trifling *military* occurrence, reported in a somewhat perfunctory and formulaic manner by the chief of Staff of the 1st Insurgent division Sergei Petrikovsky (Petrenko).⁶ Passing to the delegates ‘words of greeting’ from the partisans of the Neutral Zone, Petrikovskii mentioned the seizure of Starodub, a small town halfway between Briansk and Gomel recently abandoned by its German garrison. What was supposed to inspire a cheering ovation met instead with a harsh remonstrance from the chairman, Emmanuil Kviring, who did not fail to note that said action took place without the necessary approval of the so-called Foreign Bureau (*Zagranbiuro*) of the CP(b)U, and amounted therefore to a flagrant infraction of Party discipline.

The discussion flared up again the next morning, for the question of *tactics*, invoked immediately by what came to be known as the Starodub incident, was tangled up with considerations of a *strategic nature*, and even more important with the question of *supreme command*. The latent Party split between Left and Right factions came to the surface with

⁶ *Vtoroi s'ezd Kommunisticheskoi partii (bol'shevikov) Ukriany: Protokoly*, 34; although Petrikovsky's report is absent from the protocols, both its tone and its content could be conjectured with relative ease from the subsequent discussion.

sharpness reminiscent of the Brest-Litovsk days. Proceeding to equate the propensity of Ukrainian troops for autonomous operations with their treasonable tendency to recalcitrance, Kviring, leader and champion of the Right, concluded by describing “the partisan-style war (*partizanstvo*, or, more derisively, *partizanshchina*)” as politically hopeless, ‘bereft of prospects’ (*besperspektivnykh*),⁷ a skein of confused offensives “under the banner of meaningless (*nichego ne znachushchikh*) minor confrontations.”⁸ Its military inefficiency having been sufficiently demonstrated by the ruinous failure of the Nezhin uprising in August of 1918, *partizanshchina*, that is, reliance on ground peasant forces and their impulsive leaders, was still seen with approval by members of the Central Military-Revolutionary Committee, Piatakov and Bubnov in particular. Such continued support from high-standing Party functionaries combined with their precipitous release of the famed “Order Number One”⁹ was dubbed by another eminent rightist, Iakov Iakovlev (Epshtein), as ‘adventurism,’ comportment worthy only of left SRs¹⁰ an accusation too grave to be passed over in silence.

Both Piatakov and Bubnov defended their position aggressively. Piatakov, the more suave of the two, interpreted the actions of Krapivianskii’s troops around Nezhin not as a military failure, but as a test of the efficiency of the “partisan apparatus”¹¹ – that is, of the underground counter-state, groomed to replace the government. Seen from that perspective, actions of the partisan troops were successful. “From that struggle... we emerged ... not

⁷ Ibid., 42

⁸ Ibid., 51

⁹ See Chapter 2

¹⁰ *Vtoroi s'ezd...*, 39

¹¹ *ibid.*, 63

weaker, but stronger,” Bubnov seconded his colleague.¹² That armed engagement, the Left continued, was far from being detrimental and unpromising: hit-and-run methods of the partisan war deepened the demoralization of the more powerful enemy, i.e. the Austrian-German occupying forces, rendering it more susceptible to revolutionary propaganda (Piatakov);¹³ the political autonomy of the local leaders and the unbridled violence of the troops brought the reality of the Civil War into the village, engendering thus the much-anticipated class demarcation (*razgranichenie*) and partition (*razdel*) in that seemingly monolithic segment of social life (Bubnov).¹⁴ “We assert,” Piatakov told the Congress, “that the partisan war, waged until the present moment, will be conducted further, regardless of our resolutions.”¹⁵ The duty of the Party consisted thus in informing the ‘elemental movement’ (*stikhiinoe dvizhenie*) of the peasantry with the necessary degree of organization.

The implications of this debate were simple yet profound. The Rightist insistence on the need of transforming the partisan detachments both in the interior of Ukraine and in the Neutral Zone into a disciplined part of a regular Russian Red Army (Epshtein)¹⁶ stemmed from the conviction that victory in war could only be achieved on the Southern Front, that is, in the struggle against Krasnov’s Don and Denikin’s Kuban. Aptly encapsulated by the formula “to Kiev through Rostov,”¹⁷ the strategy espoused by Kviring & Company was at once *centralist* and *imperial*, centered on Moscow and shaped in the form of a symmetrical unperturbed pyramid. The Right faction saw Ukraine only through the prism of all-Russian interests, as a

¹² *ibid.*, 102

¹³ *ibid.*, 125

¹⁴ *ibid.*, 47

¹⁵ *ibid.*, 128

¹⁶ *ibid.*, 142

¹⁷ phrase coined by Lev Kamenev, who was present at the Congress as a plenipotentiary of the Russian Bolshevik party; *ibid.*, 43

secondary springboard abetting the theater of the real fight; their own belonging to the Ukrainian branch of the Communist Party was purely instrumental, for they were as unwilling to act on their own accord as they were loath to cooperate with the non-Bolshevik revolutionary left. This vision underpinned their key pragmatic proposal regarding the distribution of power on the local level, namely a call to draft Military-Revolutionary committees exclusively from the pool of Communists while making them fully accountable to the respective regional Party organizations.¹⁸

The Left, on the contrary, advocated an *autonomist* and *regional* strategy for both winning the war and spreading the revolution. Since in a peasant country such as Ukraine “it was impossible to centralize ... the partisan war in its initial stages,”¹⁹ the image of a local revolutionary committee as that of a agent-less transmission belt for directives moving from top to bottom was a hopeless dream; no political order could compel the insurgents on the border (to say nothing of those in the interior of Ukraine) to abandon their domestic tasks and bolt off for the Don to fight Krasnov. Granting the want of other options, Piatakov’s faction believed that the Bolsheviks needed to throw more tinder into the smoldering fire of the domestic war, bring it to the new level of intensity, harass and harry the occupying forces in sight.²⁰ Ukraine could not wait for the resolution of Russian problems and therefore required a separate treatment even if in perspective the victory of the revolutionary forces in Kiev would pave the way to the suppression of the ‘counter-revolution’ in Rostov: reversing the formula of the Right, one was exhorted to reach Rostov via Kiev. Of course, the recognition of the greater operational latitude, bestowed upon the *revkomy*, the readiness to negotiate

¹⁸ *ibid.*, 157

¹⁹ *ibid.*, 70

²⁰ See Bubnov’s resolution, *Vtoroi s’ezd...* 180-182

with the forces on the ground (however unorthodox they might be) and the exclusion of Ukraine from the strategic to-do list of the Russian planners meant a thoroughgoing change of the Ukrainian Communist Party itself, a transition from a formal redundancy to the vague anticipation of what would come to be called national Bolshevism. Yet that much no one was either ready or willing to admit.

Skillfully exploiting the debacle of the August uprising to discredit their opponents, the Right ultimately carried the day. The Central Committee, previously dominated by the Left Bolsheviks was reelected to give advantage to Kvirring and his followers. The Resolution, composed and presented by Iakovlev (Epshtein), was accepted by the majority of 77 delegates against 40 dissenters.²¹ Concluding that the platform adopted by the previous Central Committee was mistaken and its organizational ability unsatisfactory,²² the Resolution reaffirmed the allegiance of the Ukrainian Bolsheviks to their Russian counterpart and declared the unity of the Soviet Ukraine with the RSFSR to be the “general aim” of the continuing struggle.²³ *Partizanshchina* as a principle of war-making was denounced in favor of “organized, disciplined, fighting military units,” making up a force that could be reliably transferred within the ring of fronts of the ‘besieged’ Soviet republic. The proposal to enlist only Communists for revolutionary committees and thus to work towards concentrating all power in the hands of the Party also found its way into the final version of the Congress Resolution.²⁴ Similarly, all possible work with other parties of Soviet leanings had to be reduced to the bare minimum, i.e., occasional agreements of a ‘technical

²¹ *ibid.*, 159

²² *ibid.*, 167

²³ *ibid.*, 168

²⁴ *ibid.*, 170

character'. Acting in the anti-pluralist spirit of the party-mindedness, the Ukrainian Bolsheviks stressed the inadmissibility of a lasting collaboration with the non-Communist Left.²⁵

Part II: In Ukraine

The victory of the Right at the Second Congress of the CP(b)U, so complete in its appearance, must have been rendered easier by the simple fact that the delegates met in Moscow, all too proximate to the seat of the Russian Bolsheviks for one to act and think with the modicum of autonomy and yet too remote from Ukraine to preserve the sense of local possibilities. For, after all, the Right pleaded for an immediate hegemony in the land to be conquered by the bayonets of an entirely spectral force.²⁶ That said, the internal situation in Ukraine in the wake of the Nezhin Uprising was such that the underground party cells and the communist revkoms experienced great difficulties corresponding with each other let alone with the Central Committee or the All-Ukrainian Military-Revolutionary Committee. Characteristically, dispatches and reports from the regions, heard on the second day of the proceedings, painted a dolorous picture of the ubiquitous devastation (*razgrom*), communication break-down, diminution in membership, treason, lethargy and insufficiency of the propagandist work. The key Chernigov organization, for example, had lost almost two-thirds of its personnel and saw itself excised from four of the seven provincial districts with which it had hitherto maintained ties;²⁷ situation in Kiev may have been slightly better, but, in Kvirin's own admission, of the 14 military-revolutionary committees, operational in the

²⁵ *ibid.*, 171

²⁶ One shall not forget what happened to the partisan divisions of the Neutral Zone when Moscow attempted to use them against Krasnov; as a result of such an improvident decision, that semblance of a force began to look more like a semblance than a force (see Chapter 3)

²⁷ *Vtoroi s'ezd*, 22

province before the fateful August, three were irredeemably lost.²⁸ Poltava province, where the insurgents of the Zvenigordka and Tarashcha had given their last battles, suffered similar fate, for the directive to commence the uprising caught most of the organizations fully off guard.²⁹ On the other hand, although they had avoided the wreckage of the defeat, party organizations and the revolutionary committees in the Right Bank Ukraine were in the chronic want of cadres – so much so, in fact, that the collaboration with the ‘other left’ became a plain matter of survival. Province said to be “backward in the revolutionary sense”, Volhynia was bedecked with a network of revkoms, under whose aegis Bolsheviks, Left SRs and the anarchists cooperated with the single-mindedness of shared passion (if not conviction).³⁰ In Kherson, “the Left SRs [were] invited [to attend meetings of the party committees – M.A.] ... as employees of the *revkomy*”³¹; in Odessa the SRs did not wait to be invited, for they themselves volunteered to proffer assistance.³² Local cells, working underground in the atmosphere of virtual isolation, exiled to their puny isles of resistance, were gradually inuring themselves to the practice of acting at their own initiative.

It was not long before reality introduced sobering correctives to the Resolutions, taken at the Second Congress of the CP(b)U. That the Party was too weak to force history in the desired direction became manifest when the Ukrainian Insurgent divisions, lately marked out for the needs of the Southern Front, commenced advancing towards Ukraine “in defiance of the Supreme Command directives” as Antonov readily admitted,³³ the verity of this statement

²⁸ *ibid.*, 73

²⁹ *ibid.*, 21-22

³⁰ *ibid.*, 25

³¹ *ibid.*, 26

³² *ibid.*, 27

³³ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 327

would not be compromised if one extends the queue of agents whose will was thus defied by appending to it the entire cohort of the Right Ukrainian Bolsheviks, Moscow, Sovnarkom and even Lenin and Trotsky, too concerned with other affairs to arrest their thought on Ukraine for any prolonged period of time. The Army – hardly an army in the conventional sense, but the expelled excrescence of the Ukrainian insurgency – grew almost ten-fold as it was bringing vast stretches of land under nominal Bolshevik control.³⁴ That growth of course came entirely from the immense ‘inventory’ of the Ukrainian rebellion: arms, men, organized in semi-stable formations, local revolutionary committees that spurted up, generously doused by the blood of the Hetman’s immolated functionaries – all were being assimilated with remarkable facility and almost naïve confidence into the body of the victorious Revolution. Fought “less with the machine guns and cannons and more with proclamations and military music,”³⁵ the war was thus implicating the regime, whose troops were reputedly from beyond the northern border, in the scads of disjointed organs of local authority, abetted in their claims over the vacated political space by the preferential indifference of the German Army.

Generally speaking, local revolutionary committees (revkoms), comprising *in toto* the immense Leviathan of the Insurgent Apparatus (*povstancheskii apparat*) and, in perspective, the scaffolding of the nascent polity, could be divided into three categories, both in accordance to their origins and political character. Some, concentrated mostly in Chernigov and Kharkov provinces, were brought into existence by the Ukrainian Soviet troops themselves, whose task seemed all the more legitimate that the soldiers in those core

³⁴ the account of this growth is given with some detail in the previous chapter.

³⁵ Vladimir Zatonsky, “K voprosu ob organizatsii Vremenogo Raboche-Krest’ianskogo Pravitel’stva Ukrainy,” *Letopis’ Revoliutsii*, v. 1 (1925), 147

divisions came predominantly from these very regions. If only formally, the volost and village *revkomy*, established in the first two months (December 1918 – January 1919) by the passing Red Army units, consisted exclusively of the Communists – or of those, who declared themselves to be such.³⁶ A second class of the revkoms emerged within the vague zone of the porous and permanently labile front line: here examples of Zeleny with his revolutionary government set Tripol'e or that of Bogunsky in Pereiaslav come immediately to mind. As in Poltava, city occupied and held for few days by the insurgents of Mykola Shynkar,³⁷ the military revolutionary committees were as likely to be composed of the Ukrainian SRs and social-democrats as of the Bolsheviks, the only limit to their political will set, as indicated, by the nearness of the armed detachments from the Neutral Zone. A third group of the insurgent revkoms consisted of the organs of revolutionary power, situated too far from the Front to become a part of the Soviet Ukraine in any real sense. Typical, for example, were the institutions in Derazhna and Medzhibozh of the Letichev uezd in Podolia; there, having pronounced themselves for the power of the Soviets and against the Directorate, peasants created veritable village republics, bent on chasing away local Polish landlords and divvying up their possessions.³⁸ Nominal allies of the Communists in Kharkov, these Volhynian and Podolian revkoms indwelled a strange space between the ruin of the UNR and the erection of the Bolshevik Ukraine, accustoming themselves accordingly to the predicament of independent isolation.

³⁶ *Grazhdanskaia Voina na Ukraine*, v. 1, b. 1, 575

³⁷ *ibid.*, 463, 515

³⁸ *ibid.*, 522-523; Kossak-Szczucka's memoirs *Požoga* sheds light on the Polish perspective of the intermittent war with the Medzhibozh peasant republic

In order to address “problems of growth” and thus to confront the consequences of their own unexpected success, the Ukrainian Bolsheviks had to abandon cautious postulates, which restricted Ukraine and the Party to the ancillary parts of the greater Russian whole.

Considering the chaos, precipitated by the multitude and diversity of the local organizations, disheartened furthermore by the indeterminate and contradictory instructions from the Center (meaning Moscow and the Russian Communist Party), Piatakov and Zatonsky constructed a spirited argument militating for greater regional autonomy and sent it duly over to Stalin.

“What one needs,” they wrote in November of 1918, “is such an organ of Soviet power, which ... would be an actual (*deistvitel’nym*) center of the soviet work in Ukraine... and which would concentrate in its hands ... an extremely difficult and complex task of restoring the Soviet power on the local level (*na mestakh*).”³⁹ Situated advantageously to recognize priority of the *political* considerations over the *strategic* ones,⁴⁰ the new power center would be more than a tactical mean of ending interdepartmental infighting or a shield of parrying off harmful interjections from the changeable Serpukhov (Vatsetis’ headquarters); regardless of the designation that it might eventually bear – the Provisionary Government or the Territorial (*kraevoi*) Revkom – the proposed institution had to be strong enough to command authority over its own armed forces, the formally distinct Red Army of Ukraine,⁴¹ and over the territory, still to be won. Constantly courting the danger of incurring reprimand from “the old man” in Moscow, as Stalin informed them,⁴² the Young Turks of the CP(b)U, by now “in touching harmony” with Kviring’s men, proceeded from words to deeds and announced the birth of the Ukrainian Bolshevik government in Sudzha, the first town of note taken by the

³⁹ Zatonsky, “K voprosu ob organizatsii Vremenogo Raboche-Krest’ianskogo Pravitel’sstva Ukrainy,” 143

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, 143

⁴¹ *ibid.*, 144-145

⁴² *ibid.*, 142

Soviet arms (November 28th, 1918).⁴³ Incidentally, in his correspondence with Vatsetis, the “old man” Lenin had found this to be a superb idea, which had a merit of “depriving the chauvinists of Ukraine... of the possibility of regarding the movement of our units as an [act of] occupation.”⁴⁴ One is left to ponder only whether the grand planner of the Revolution would have so readily blessed the projects of his Ukrainian comrades had it been clear to him with what celerity the form of the besought autonomy would gain the corresponding content.

The government brought thus to life (necessarily albeit indirectly) by the Insurgency and insurgents had adopted on the surface a favorable view of the ‘local initiative’ in spreading out the Soviet power. A week before the Provisionary Workers’ and Peasants’ Government was declared, the Military Revolutionary Council of the Kursk Direction – the Headquarters of the Ukrainian Front in its embryonic form as it were – issued a directive to the rebel forces of Ukraine, recommending them (*predlagaetsia*) to coordinate their operations with the movement of the Soviet troops (*navstrechu nashemu dvizheniiu*, literally, ‘towards our movement’).⁴⁵ In one of its earliest appeals to the population, the Central Committee of the Ukrainian Bolsheviks (dominated, it must be recalled, by the Moscow-oriented Right faction) expressed its support for the insurgency and insurgent methods of struggle in simple terms of unequivocal power:

Workers, peasants and soldiers!... do not tarry for a minute in the cause (v dele) of organizing your revolutionary forces, in the cause of struggle for the Soviet power; elect revolutionary communist Soviets. Create organized, disciplined red workers’ and peasants’ regiments for the defense of the Soviets. Take into your hands the cause [delo] [of fighting] the White

⁴³ *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v.1 b.1, 456-458; V. Aussem, *K istorii povstanchestva na Ukraine (o dvukh partizanskikh diviziiakh)*, LR 1926 v 5, 12

⁴⁴ *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v. 1 b1., 458-459

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, 444-445

Guardists. No one can handle this business [dela ne ... sdelat] better than you could. Take power into your hands...⁴⁶

During the winter months of 1918-19 proclamations of the similar content were faithfully reproduced by the regional party committees as well. "Peasants," read the leaflet of the Kharkov Committee of the CP(b)U, "mobilize [your] forces, arm the poor, assist neighboring villages in overthrowing their lords too."⁴⁷ Communists of Poltava seconded this message sometime in early January 1919 with the following words: "Comrades!... Organize you own troops, organize military-revolutionary committees, organize Soviets of the workers' and peasants' deputies."⁴⁸ All of these manifestos, including, to be sure, the paradigmatic address of the Central Committee cited above, aimed at the audience on the other side of the 'frontline', beyond the reach of its formal authority – a feature that inspired a cynical reading in accordance with which the Bolsheviks had 'merely' exploited the 'popular enthusiasm' to the end of gaining power and winning the empire. The view, conveniently verified by the centripetal tendencies within the post-revolutionary Soviet system (and, even more so, buttressed by the liberal habit of expatiating upon the incurably illiberal nature of the Bolshevism) makes light of the fundamental affinity between *rebellion* and *state building*, a political conjunction, the assertion of which would seem axiomatic to most of the Bolsheviks at the time. Hence the simultaneous exhortation to destruction ('struggle', 'overthrowing') and creation ('organize', 'elect', 'mobilize'), evincing but faint indications of the future conflict as the word pairing *rebellion-state building* (or, equally, destruction-creation, and, on a more practical level, fragmentation-centralization) began to shed its inner identity and divaricate into two separate and mutually incompatible phenomena. In late 1918, however,

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, 469

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 531

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, 561

the dilemmas and temptations confronting any clandestine insurrectional organization in the aftermath of the successful take-over of the public powers were still inscribed in the alphabet of ambiguities and alternatives rather than the signs of the relentless dialectics – even when seen through the allegedly etatist lens of the Ukrainian Bolshevik Party.

Nevertheless, what could not be denied was that while inciting the populace on the adversarial embankment to proceed with the rebellion and self-organization, the top ranking Ukrainian Bolsheviks wanted above all to have a reliable force at their disposal – that is, a force, which would be disinclined to exercise its autonomy in an unsanctioned manner. This assertion did not imply an automatic disavowal of the Insurgency with its politics and specific war-making practices – not least because any hasty attempt at bringing the partisans under the unchallenged control of Kharkov would have spelled an even more precipitous end to the selfsame regime. That the progression from the Insurgency had to be a slow one was taken for granted by the Party; this abstract unity of the CP(b)U, however, proved precarious once practical questions began to thump peremptorily at the doors of the newly-decreed agencies. How exactly and by whose intercession the insurgents were to be transformed into a regular army, what structural elements of the *partizanstvo* could be regarded as useful for the armed forces of the Soviet Ukraine, which political practices had to be retained in order to allay the sores of the imminent metamorphosis – solutions were as varied as were institutions, created to handle above issues. In the end of the day, however, opinions and wills appeared to have crystallized around two poles of power - the government in Kharkov and the Front. Striding far beyond the bureaucratic scuffle of overlapping competences into the debate over the role of Ukraine for the Revolution, this confrontation represented a

transposition of the Right-Left divide from the relatively pacific environment of the Congress' proceedings into the circumstances of the war.

Part III: Government and the Front

The Provisional Government of Soviet Ukraine was very slowly beginning to deal with army-related affairs, setting-up various institutions with, as Iudovsky put it in February 1919, generally “a haphazard character” (*sluchainyi kharakter*).⁴⁹ True, its opening session in Sudzha (November 28th 1918) saw the establishment of the Military Department (*Voennyi otdel*, or *Veonotdel*), which was entrusted to the exemplary Rightist – Fedor Sergeev, better known under his revolutionary *nom de guerre* Artem.⁵⁰ A month later, a three-member Military board (*Voennaia kollegiia*) was created under the auspices of the *Voenotdel*; presided over by the same Artem, it was charged with administering “all cases, pertaining to the organization and management of the Ukrainian Red Army.”⁵¹ The board soon had to make space for an All-Ukrainian Staff, often referred to, mistakenly but tellingly, as the General Staff and the Central Supply Administration (*TsUS*). In principle, the two were supposed to bring order to the manner of employing Ukraine’s human and material resources; the Staff proceeded to divide Ukraine into provincial (*gubkomy*) and uezd commissariats (*uezdkomy*),⁵² which, if only on paper, kept records of men and horses. Arming, feeding and clothing fell upon the shoulders of the *TsUS*; yet, with Ukraine’s productive capacities at full stall, the inchoate Supply Administration faced the near-impossible task of locating and

⁴⁹ *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v. 1 b. 2, 113

⁵⁰ *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v. 1 b. 1, 457

⁵¹ *ibid.*, 523

⁵² TsDAVO f 2 o 1 d 104 l 14

watching over ammunition depots. Needless to say, that required the presence of an armed police and the agency had none.

All the same, it was not until late January that the Government abandoned its early haphazard experimentation and began working in a more or less consistent manner. The starting point was the arrival of six men from Moscow (Vladimir Iudovsky and Adolf Ioffe among them), each with a distinguished service in the Russian Higher Military Inspection and commendations from its chairman Nikolai Podvoisky;⁵³ this commission proceeded immediately with the establishment of an analogous institution in Kharkov.⁵⁴ Although its professed *raison d'être* was limited to “carrying out military plans of the government in the center and localities,”⁵⁵ in practice the Ukrainian High Military Inspection functioned as a real institution where policies were conceived and honed. Taking over the prerogatives of the “formless Military board,”⁵⁶ the Inspection abolished at the All-Ukrainian Staff, placing in its stead two large District Military commissariats with centers in Kharkov and Kiev respectively (between January 25 and 28 1919 and March 12, respectively).⁵⁷ Simultaneously, a thorough reshuffling within the provincial and *uezd* commissariats was conducted with a view to delimiting the extent of their administrative competence. According to new stipulations, the provincial commissariats were entrusted with the task of providing political guidance to the *uezd* commissariats, the latter thus occupying themselves with concrete problems of counting and accounting – that is, with keeping demographic figures of “men, horses [and] carriages” up-to-date. Given the rudimentary nature of the state apparatus at

⁵³ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 3, 120

⁵⁴ *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v. 1 b. 1, 581

⁵⁵ *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v. 1 b. 2, 71

⁵⁶ *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v. 1 b. 1, 720

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, 720, *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v. 1 b. 2, 114; v. 1, b. 1, 674-675

hand, realistically that book-keeping exercise translated into locating all nearby officers and under-officers and imposing some control over their mobility.⁵⁸ Conscious of the possible counter-revolutionary leanings among the commanding men of the former Imperial Army, Kharkov, nonetheless, could no longer be contented with the role of the class gaoler, seeking out the means of employing military cadres “in harmony with their knowledge and abilities” within the framework of an emerging army.

So wrote Nikolai Podvoisky,⁵⁹ man, whose own arrival to Ukraine, presaged by the activity of his colleagues and subordinates in the interior of the High Military Inspection, gave the germinating system of army management appearance of completeness. Published shortly before, a small brochure entitled *Experience of the Military-Revolutionary Tactics* provides a certain insight into Podvoisky’s thinking and ambitions. There he reasoned that the Revolutionary forces, divested of the technological resources of their ‘bourgeois adversaries’, would in their turn prove stronger of the two in spirit (*dukh*)⁶⁰ and in numbers.⁶¹ In Russia alone, he asserted, “we could always count on the contingent of 7 million men,”⁶² disposed with hardihood, speed and determination, the like of which the world had witnessed only at the time of *Völkerwanderung* – “when millions of ‘barbarians’ broke and ‘dissolved’ (‘*razlagalis*’) Roman legions,” he clarified inadvertently echoing Blok.⁶³ Listing imperceptibly on the side of a lyrical vagary, this metaphor lost none of its pertinence, for the envisioned degree of mobilization presupposed conversion of the entire land into an

⁵⁸ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 3 169

⁵⁹ N. Podvoisky, *Zashchita Sotsialisticheskogo otechestva* (Kharkov: Izdanie Politupravleniia Narkovoena, 1919), Order N 51, 6

⁶⁰ N. Podvoisky, *Opyt voenno-revoliutsionnoi taktiki* (Moscow, 1919), 15-16

⁶¹ *ibid.*, 10-11

⁶² *ibid.*, 8

⁶³ *ibid.*, 8

impenetrable “armed camp.”⁶⁴ The local populace, overtaken by the sentiment of “communist patriotism”⁶⁵ at the sight of its own nationals fighting under the standard of the Soviet power,⁶⁶ could thus be expected to carry direct organizational and material costs of the Revolutionary war. A nexus of communes, carefully earmarked to service units of the same provenance, would arise to work under the “guidance and control of the center [and] in accordance to its plans.”⁶⁷ In the end, the absence of true fronts and the checkered nature of the combat zones, characteristic of the Civil War, would imbue this invisible field of scattered relations with properties of a nerve system, generating the blood, bone and muscle of the future socialist state.

In practice, Podvoisky showed himself every mite an apologist of centralism as his writing might have intimated. On the very day of his appointment as People’s Commissar of Military Affairs (February 17th, 1919) – significantly, not *instead of*, but *alongside with* Valery Mezhlauk, the previous Commissar⁶⁸ – Podvoisky issued an appeal, in which, after duly acknowledging the contribution of the “heroic partisan troops,” he stated the need for a unified, “disciplined and conscientious (*soznatel’nyi*)” Army.⁶⁹ “All irregular units, all insurgent troops,” ran the lines of Podvoisky’s inaugural statement, “have to join the ranks of the Regular Red Army. No autonomous unit, which does not abide by [the principles of] the

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, 11

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, 12

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, 4

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, 13

⁶⁸ Ministerial functions having been distributed with a view of maintaining balance between the Right and the Left factions, Mezhlauk’s otherwise quant stay in office served as a reminder that the Party was still far from being united.

⁶⁹ Podvoisky, *Zashchita Sotsialisticheskogo otechestva*, 3; the adjective *soznatel’nyi*, undoubtedly one of the central words of the Revolution and the war, could be equally translated as ‘conscious’ (as in ‘class-conscious’) or even ‘informed.’

common discipline of the Workers' and Peasants' Army, should exist."⁷⁰ That such an army did not yet exist – that fact hardly troubled the new People's Commissar. He approached his task in full confidence that the local commissariats, purged and pruned by military inspections, would soon make a reality of his plans, even if the present moment seemed anything but ripe for their fulfillment.

These plans, modest at first, were rapidly gaining in ambition and scope. On February 21st Podvoisky's Commissariat consented to using the cadres of the regular 3rd International Division, hastily sent from the RSFSR, as a nucleus for the projected 3rd and 4th Ukrainian Rifle divisions and one cavalry divisions; in addition, the Commissar promised to deliver to the Front twenty four reserve battalions, six light artillery, two howitzer, one heavy batteries and five cavalry squadrons.⁷¹ The long-term program, presented two weeks later at the 3rd All-Ukrainian Congress of the Soviets,⁷² assumed that the compulsory military service could be reintroduced and proper mobilization be carried out – at first within the boundaries of the Kharkov Military District and then over the remaining territory of Ukraine. The intention, as the report to delegates of the Congress read, was to create additional seven infantry and two cavalry divisions, bringing the total strength of the Ukrainian Red Army to the astounding 625 thousand soldiers and 250 thousand horses⁷³; of those, about 400 thousand men were reserved for the immediate needs of the Front.⁷⁴ Partisan detachments from the Neutral Zone, troops of Makhno, Grigoriev and dozens of other 'field commanders,' puny in comparison to

⁷⁰ Ibid., 4

⁷¹ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 121-122

⁷² not to be confused with the 3rd Congress of the Communist Party of the Bolsheviks of Ukraine, which had taken place immediately before the Congress of the Soviets

⁷³ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 3, 182-183

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, v. 3, 171

the forces that the Commissariat of Military Affairs wanted to bring to Kharkov's cause, would thus be simply swept away, or rather, flooded over by the waves of the arriving young recruits.

This stupendous mass of humans and beasts would inevitably pose the problem of supply if it were ever to surge from the bleak *ordre de bataille* of Podvoisky's design onto the fields – bleak or otherwise – of actual struggle. The commissar was certainly not wanting in decisiveness when commandeering “all goods fit for military purposes” without paying much regards in whose hands that property may currently be held.⁷⁵ Shortly before his arrival, the Government abolished the Central Supply Administration, conferring its functions to the special division in the Ukrainian Commissariat for Food Supplies (*Narkomprod*). Although endowed with greater latitude than its predecessor, the said organization could only act with an explicit support from the Army since the bulk of the procurement troops had to be culled from the battle-line units.⁷⁶ This formal curtailment of Kharkov's prerogatives reflected fairly well the reality of the Center's limited suzerainty over the autonomous and semi-autonomous partisan detachments. All the same, on February 22nd the *Izvestiia* of the Provisional Workers' and Peasants' Government of Ukraine announced the establishment of the Extraordinary Commission for the Supply of the Red Army,⁷⁷ bringing to the daylight Kharkov's resolve at seizing the regulatory levers of provender-providing. Accountable to (albeit not controlled by) the Commissariat of the Military Affairs, that body of three men could theoretically supervise all industrial enterprises, even if their involvement with the material needs of the army were of limited nature; moreover, the Decree had enabled the

⁷⁵ Podvoisky, *Zashchita Sotsialisticheskogo otechestva*, Order N 51, 5

⁷⁶ *IVRKPU*, nr 41, February 9, 1919

⁷⁷ *IVRKPU*, nr 51, February 22, 1919

Commission to employ factories specializing in non-military production for the military purposes in case the former thought their participation indispensable. Symptomatically, the newly-instituted agency was sanctioned to exercise its authority not only in relation to production, preservation and inventory-keeping of the military goods, but also in the sphere of allocation thereof; considering that the usage and the distribution of the spoils of war had previously (prudently if not providently) been treated as the reserve of the army itself, such extension of competences represented a clean break with previous practices and a signal precedent for the forthcoming policy-setting pronouncements. To strengthen the position of the Commission (and consequently of the Bolshevik government in Kharkov) vis-à-vis the forces, unaccustomed to heeding injunctions of the outsiders, its ample faculties were further augmented to include the right of mobilizing “technical forces of Ukraine” as well as the power of apprehending anyone deemed obstructionist to the realization of the Commission’s resolutions. Most important, however, was the permission to make one’s presence permanent – equipped in this manner with a capacity of organizing its local organs and appointing the plenipotentiaries, the Commission could function to ice-break the glacier of the atamans’ habitual indiscipline in order to make their troops more amenable to the instructions from the Center.

In its effort to infiltrate the partisans, the Kharkov government relied more explicitly on the figure of a political commissar than the agents of the Extraordinary Supply Commission. For a while it was not clear to whom the commissar owed loyalty, for although legislated into existence by the Bureau of Military Commissars and hence beholden to its political chief

Artiom,⁷⁸ he was obliged to abide by the rules, composed and confirmed within the Political department of the Front.⁷⁹ The administrative overlap, however, did not hinder the transformed Commissariat of the Military Affairs from treating political education and surveillance as a constituent part of its regulatory empire. According to the statute, promulgated on February 12th 1919, the Political department of the Commissariat arrogated full responsibility for the managerial (*delovoi*) and political activity of the military commissars.⁸⁰ A slightly more nuanced memorandum, designed to lend the second lease on life to Artiom's by now derelict Bureau, stipulated that all appointments, dismissals or transfers of the commissars should receive preliminary approbation from the Commissariat of the Military Affairs in order to be valid. The same document granted the right of the 'motivated withdrawal' (*motivirovannogo otvoda*) to the High Military Inspection,⁸¹ that latter having essentially evolved into a combat brigade of Podvoisky's 'war ministry.'

Ostensibly, the Ukrainian commissar mirrored its Russian homologue: enjoined to "study commanding officers lest the possibility of treason arises," to "supervise political and moral upbringing of the Red Army soldiers" and to "maintain living ties (*zhivuiu sviaz'*) with local party organizations,"⁸² he was extolled as an embodiment of Revolution, of its justice, spirit and its probity. A *quintessential* distinction from the Russian prototype, a point of difference,

⁷⁸ *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v.1 b. 1, 457

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, v. 1 b. 1, 534-536; when in December 1918 the Head of Staff of the 1st Division asked the newly appointed divisional commissar to present himself formally, the latter exploded: "Keep in mind that Political Commissar is subordinate only to the Revolutionary Military Council of the Ukrainian Armies and ... does not submit reports to the agencies, that are subordinated to it in the political sense (*podchinennomu emu v politicheskoi otnoshenii*)." (RGVA f 999 o 1 d 4 l 8) The commissar was mistaken about his station within the convoluted administrative hierarchies, yet his error was highly symptomatic of the reigning disorder and confusion.

⁸⁰ *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v. 1 b. 1, 621

⁸¹ TsDAVO f 2 o 1 d 96 l 6

⁸² *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v. 1 b. 1, 535

the far-reaching implications of which would announce themselves under multiple guises in the subsequent discussion, resulted from the human *material* that the Ukrainian commissar was bound to observe, instruct and monitor. Whereas in RSFSR – so it would seem – the political commissar emerged to fence dangerous lunges from the employed officer corps, thought to be predominantly right-wing and counter-revolutionary (at least in the early days), in Ukraine men holding this position grappled with the ‘excesses’ of the Revolutionary armies, transgressions, which would stand out as incidents of *levoeserovshchina* (sympathy or affinity with Left S-R principles and praxis) or outright *anarkhiia* (anarchism or anarchy). The firebrand visionary whipping wavering masses into deed-begetting frenzy was bypassed in favor of a staid drill instructor, expected if not to tame his feral clientele than to persevere till the process of normalization would commence in earnest.

The civil government in Kharkov, troubled at first by indecision within its ranks, and suffering simultaneously from disbelief in its own success, gradually attempted to seize ultimate control and supervision over all army-related matters. For all their talk about the unprecedented character of the experiments conducted with so much clamor and pride, the Bolsheviks of Podvoisky’s or Rakovosky’s type wanted an army subservient to the state in the most bourgeois-conventional sense of the word; it was, in fact, with regards to Podvoisky that Adolf Ioffe noted: “he... gets involved with the creation of the regular army even too much.”⁸³ What this entailed was the extermination of *partizanshchina* and everything it came to be associated with – the autonomy of the commanders and their men, their penchant for self-supply, the fluidity of the rank-and-file, the reliance on the country-side and, on a slightly more abstract level, the untamed sense of soldiers’ entitlement to their own revolutionary discourse. A system of the military commissariats, distributed with growing

⁸³ Nestor Makhno. *Krest’ianskoe dvizhenie na Ukraine. 1918-1921: Dokumenty i materialy*, 110

density as one descended down to the level of a *uezd*, had to keep watch over the changing demographic potential of the population, and assume full responsibility for the mobilization of the reserves; by the same token, the supply commissariats (*prodkomy*), tied at once to Shlikhter's Commissariat of Food Supply (*Narkomprod*) as well Podvoisky's Military Commissariat, aspired to become sole intermediaries of the state's supply policies, weaning the troops away from the harmful habit of retaining all captured booty without due consideration for the 'starving city' or 'famished Russia'. Finally, the institution of political commissars arose to purge the ordinary soldiers of their left SR or anarchist tendencies and attune them to the serpentine curves of the Party line.

Kharkov was surprised to encounter greatest resistance from 'one of its own' – the association of military-administrative agencies, commonly referred to as the 'Ukrainian Front'. At the highest plane that entity included the small peregrinating field staff organized by Antonov, the static Staff directed by the *kadrovik* Vasiliy Glagolev and the Revolutionary Military Council (RMC), which at one time or another accommodated such prominent leftists as Iuriy Kotsiubinsky and Andrei Bubnov. Immediately underneath stood the commanders and staffs of the three Army groups, these having gradually crystallized in response to emerging strategic needs sometime between the months of January and April of 1919.⁸⁴ The areas of contact with the insurgents, rising from the ground, usually occurred

⁸⁴ The first among those Army groups – that of Kharkov Direction – had been culled from the general 'army mass' on January 13 – i.e. nine days after the establishment of the Ukrainian Front itself (for the respective directive see *Grazhdanskaia Voina na Ukraine*. V 1, b. 1, 552-553); headed at first by the old Bolshevik Vladimir Aussem, it was later entrusted to a cadre officer of the Imperial Russian Army Anatoliy Skachko; the Army Group of the Kiev direction, commanded by the former military commissar of the Poltava province Sergei Matsiletsky, was ordered into existence by Antonov on February 15th, 1919 (Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 3, 265); Nikolai Khudiakov, former captain of the Tsarist Army, became the commander of the Army Group of the Odessa direction in the last week of March (Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 3, 295); from April 15th

one or two rungs below – at the order of a division (Grigoriev), brigade (Makhno), or a regiment (Shchors, Bozhenko and uncountable slew of lesser atamans). Unlike in the political sphere, there was no visible fissure; on the contrary, Antonov and his entourage had merged smoothly with the rebellion whose resources they were so keen on harnessing. The Front ultimately assimilated the perspective of the partisans into its conception of the army and of the role that it would play in making the state and carrying the Revolution.

The evolution of the Front, although dwelt upon at some length in the previous chapter, calls for further discussion. It needs to be noted that the much bemoaned parallelism of competences resulted from decisions taken, as it were, during the ‘pre-historical’ period of the history of the Soviet Ukraine. The Front, let it be recalled, owed little to the shifting fortunes of the struggle for the political supremacy of the Ukrainian Bolshevik Party; a by-product of contingency and pragmatism, it represented an amalgam of two distinct military bodies – the Reserve Army in Orel and Antonov’s staff in Kursk.⁸⁵ It became known, somewhat oddly, as the Army Group of the Kursk Direction.⁸⁶ The Army Group managed to retain its autonomy vis-à-vis Ukrainian affairs, partially because Vatsetis’ half-hearted attempt to throw Antonov’s embryonic organization into the Don quagmire sheltered them from the effects of the rightists’ victory at the Second Congress of CP(b)U. Notwithstanding the criticism which the newly-elected Central Committee of the Ukrainian Bolsheviks had unleashed upon their predecessors, the staff in Kursk and their emissaries in the Neutral Zone

onward, the Group Armies of the Kiev, Kharkov and Odessa directions were remade into 1st, 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Soviet Armies respectively (Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 129).

⁸⁵ *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v. 1, b. 1, 388, 444, 449

⁸⁶ The designation, in fact, might have been chosen deliberately in order to conceal the veritable purpose of the Staff (see Antonov’s letter to Lenin on November 22nd, 1918 in *Grazhdanskaia Voina na Ukraine*, v. 1, b. 1, 449) – that said, it must be remembered that the Bolsheviks themselves were wanting in confidence as to the ends of the aforementioned agency.

had fixed their eyes upon Ukraine, lest they let the initiative in guiding and goading the Uprising be irrevocably lost to the forces of Vynnychenko's National Union.

The hour for reclaiming Ukraine having struck suddenly, it was unsurprising that the men around Antonov had shown themselves better prepared to tackle the task than either the Foreign Bureau (*Zagranbiuro*) or the Executive Bureau of the Central Committee; they possessed both experience in organizing their own – ‘domestic’ – insurgents and sufficient pluck to exploit that experience under the uncertain yet promising circumstances of the Ukrainian rebellion. The Staff put itself to work without delay, setting up departments, which were destined to give a semblance of shared organization to the expanding ranks of pro-Soviet partisans. Within two months (late November 1918 – late January 1919), the Staff of the Army Group of the Kursk direction (renamed into the Staff of the Ukrainian Front with the establishment of the latter on January 4, 1919) and the Revolutionary Military Council of the Front (created on November 17, 1918) laid the foundations for the Political Department of the RMC, the Administration of the Chief of Procurement, the Revolutionary Military Tribunal as well as the Administration of the Inspector of Artillery.⁸⁷ Of the four, the first were of particular importance as they covered regulatory functions in the domains which the government in Kharkov would later consider its prerogative. To put it differently, while the Workers' and Peasants' Government slumbered in infancy, the front hastened to take charge over the disjointed units of the Ukrainian rebels, setting up a subsequent confrontation with the civil authority.

⁸⁷ RGVA, f. 103, op. 1, d. 101, l. 47

All these departmental permutations were substantiated by a real, direct and necessary engagement of Antonov's men with the rebels. Initially as the order supported by the 'Austro-Germans' precipitously collapsed, all Antonov could wish for were "the few divisions from Central Russia," who alone would "consolidate the Soviet Power in Ukraine."⁸⁸ More specifically, he had counted on Vatsetis' generous promises, which included, among other things, transfers of the Moscow worker division, the 43rd worker regiment, the 2nd Orel brigade (or a cavalry division), two armored trains and a 5000-strong band from the Urals, led by a seasoned guerilla Innokenty Kozhevnikov.⁸⁹ In the end, however, Serpukhov gave none of that, conceding but three regiments from the 9th Rifle division to the needs of the Ukrainian Front, and those only temporarily.⁹⁰ Deprived thus of any meaningful assistance from the Center, the Staff of the Ukrainian Front had no other option but to rely on local formations and on the willingness of these irregulars to behave as an accountable fighting force.

Left to face the "elemental wave of the self-generating partisan troops,"⁹¹ the RMC of the Front, its Staff and Antonov personally had donned upon themselves the mantle of the revolutionary stewards, attending to the phenomenon that was perceived as the dawn of the 'Ukrainian October.'⁹² This role entailed a plethora of functions; unobtrusively, the RMC would name and number a rebellious unit, blessing it in this manner into official existence; it would preside over the displacements of the troops and give further directions, lest they lose

⁸⁸ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 3, 128

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, v. 3, 14

⁹⁰ RGVA, f. 103, op. 1, d. 101, l. 47; d. 81, l. 255.

⁹¹ R. Eideman and N. Kakurin, *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine* (Kharkov: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo Ukrainy, 1928), 28

⁹² *Nestor Makhno. Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie na Ukraine. 1918-1921: Dokumenty i materialy*, 57-58

a sense of strategic coherence; busy with grouping and regrouping the arriving mass of the volunteers, the commander of the Ukrainian Front could on occasion issue a threatening statement, proclaiming those who refused to join the Soviet Ukrainian troops “enemies of the Soviet Ukraine”⁹³. Sure enough, few of the most cantankerous and refractory rebel leaders were, as a popular euphemism of the time would have it, speedily ‘dispatched to the Headquarters of the General Dukhonin’ – i.e. executed without much regard for the due process; the case of Sakharov and a group of the Left S-R’s, who ventured to take over the soviet in Valiuki (or who were provoked into committing this malfeasance), meriting with their bungled effort swift and lethal revolutionary retribution, was a much-discussed affair, but no more than that.⁹⁴ Otherwise, during the first few months (December 1918 – March 1919), the Front did not tamper extensively with the internal affairs of the troops, trusting that the negotiated compromise with their commanders would ultimately bring greater rewards than the rush attempt at restructuring and subordinating; in exchange for fealty, the insurgent atamans expected to retain former clout over their men if not over their turf – even if as technical appointees of the Bolshevik center.

Negotiations with the Ukrainian atamans involved invariably and exclusively representatives from the Front, the Workers’ and Peasants’ Government in Kharkov hovering about as a typeset abstraction on the gauzy ticker-tape of the telegraph correspondence. Characteristic in many respects were the parleys with Grigoriev, conducted in the last days of January 1919.⁹⁵ After some hesitation the self-styled ‘ataman of Khersonshchina and Taurida’ sent a

⁹³ *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v. 1, b. 1, 486

⁹⁴ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 3, 52; *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v. 1, b. 2, 49-50

⁹⁵ Account is given in „K istorii grazhdanskoi voiny na Ukraine (Perekhod Grigor’eva k Sovetskoi vlasti,” *Letopis Revoliutsii*, 8(3) (1924), 175-188

telegram to Aleksandrovsk, in which he manifested to divulge his ‘platform’ unless the ‘kadets’ (the Volunteers of the White Army) had already taken hold of the city.⁹⁶ Finding himself on the receiving end of the exchange, Commander of the Kharkov Army Group Vladimir Aussem authorized the Head of Staff of the 1st Insurgent Division Sergei Petrikovsky (Petrenko) to carry on further discussions with Grigoriev, once the hurdle of the formal acknowledgement of Kharkov’s supreme authority had been overcome.⁹⁷ The ensuing telephone conversation between Petrikovsky and Grigoriev pitted blandishment against imperiousness; the Bolshevik delegate, intuiting ataman’s party leanings, took the risk of misinforming his interlocutor of the alleged left S-R presence in the government, to whose defense Grigoriev was about to bring his multitudinous troops. To sweeten the bitter pill of the submission and to ease the transition into the ranks of the Ukrainian Red Army, Petrikovsky thought it politic to add: “Compromises and contacts will be established subsequently in the party centers upon (reaching) the agreement between the Bolsheviks and the S-R’s.” The warlord, after a habitually boastful description of his exploits, deigned to concede:

I would like to regard our unification, or, rather my unification with you [as a unification] of a strategic nature (*operativnym*). I accept your conditions [and] recognize your supreme command, but with the caveat that the question of the ultimate unification of the High Command would depend on [the decisions of] our and your centers; I think that your Command and our Command would come to terms (*sgovoriat’sia*), for we are not arguing about power because the power should belong to the people (*narodu*) through its delegates (*izbrannikov*) ... your supreme power and our supreme power is [but a] provisionary revolutionary [power]. Permanent power will be created neither by us nor by you, but by the people.⁹⁸

Petrikovsky indeed preferred not to argue about power, taking whatever he could from the power-greedy and ambitious man. The words, uttered by the ataman, were a far cry from the

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, 178-179

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, 180

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, 181

type of a solemn oath that one expects to hear on a similar occasion – but they sufficed. Always a diplomat, the Bolshevik plenipotentiary said nothing about the necessity of reforming his troops or of subsequent migration of political workers from Kharkov – in short, nothing that may have alarmed Grigoriev to the creeping infringement on his authority – letting instead the chief of the South Ukrainian partisans dwell upon the strategic promises and exigencies of the region.⁹⁹ The concluding words were now of little import, for the ataman had already made up his mind to sever his ties with his sometime ally and thereupon to strike at the UNR troops of ataman Kotik stationed at Znamenka.¹⁰⁰ Soon afterwards he contacted Antonov, reiterating his willingness to collaborate with the Bolshevik Ukrainian Front, the four conditions for such collaboration being:

First, [one needs] to leave all of our organizations inviolable; second, to leave all arms, provisions and equipment at disposal as well; third – to let us keep our positions and titles; fourth – our struggle on the side of the Soviet power needs to be immunized from all kind of intervention into the internal affairs of our territories [and] troops as well as [from investigations into divisions of] spoils, seized by us in battle.¹⁰¹

Visibly embarrassed by the demands of his overweening new subordinate, Antonov, the man endowed with the highest military authority in the land, nevertheless agreed, charging the ataman (rechristened into Brigade commander) with the care for his old troops and approbating his right – albeit indirectly – to form the new ones (“at the discretion of the commander”).¹⁰²

⁹⁹ *ibid.*, 182-183

¹⁰⁰ *IVRKPU*, nr 40, p 3; *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v. 1, b. 2, 98; interestingly enough, in his conversation with Petrikovsky, Grigoriev expressed hope of pulling Kotik to his side. “Do not touch him,” he prayed his collocutor, “you too should try to establish links with him.” Petrikovsky seemed to have heeded to this advice, but Kotik refused to recognize the ‘boon’ of serving under the banner of Bolshevism was dealt with accordingly (“K istorii grazhdanskoi voiny na Ukraine (Perekhod Grigor’eva k Sovetskoi vlasti,” 183)

¹⁰¹ cited in Horak, *Povstantsi otamana Hryhor’eva*, 50

¹⁰² RGVA, f. 6 op 4 d 92 l 38

Imitating such scenario in essence if not in specifics, negotiations between the insurgents and the Bolshevik military authorities were taking place all over Ukraine. Makhno, ever since November 1918 *de facto* partner of the Bolsheviks, had finally been reached by the armored train N 8 with Fiodor Dybenko aboard, who brought him an offer of a formal alliance; *bat'ko* did not linger with an affirmative reply. Insurgents, who had taken Cherkassy in February, were similarly courted by the Commander of the Ukrainian Front,¹⁰³ bent as he was on augmenting the inchoate Ukrainian Red Army (as well as his own authority, this needs not be forgotten). Likewise, ataman Anton Bogunsky from Zolotonosha or the ‘Supreme commander of the Southern Soviet Army’ ataman Popov from the vicinity of Tiraspol found too strong the temptation of adding the enticingly reductionist Bolshevik commanding title, succumbing to its charm in their own turn. The results of the parleys were understandably different, the degree of submission to Antonov’s Headquarters, or, conversely, the measure of autonomy left to the rebels being determined by the strength of the insurgents in question, popularity of the leaders among the soldiers and the locals or their proximity to the centers of the Bolshevik power (Kiev, Kharkov, perhaps Yekaterinoslav).¹⁰⁴ All the same, to the extent that other Bolshevik authorities were absent, the Front became the *underwriter* of sorts, guaranteeing the inviolability of power balance, which was established between the distant monopolist of the abstract violence (the Bolshevik state) and its rough-and-ready worldly practitioners. More than a mere mediator with the proverbial Center, the Front acquired the

¹⁰³ *Direktivy komandovaniia frontov Krasnoi Armii, 1917-1922*, ed. N. N. Azovtsev et al. (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo, 1971-1978), v. 1, 582

¹⁰⁴ That said, I am yet to find an example of an insurgent unit, which, having gone over to the Bolshevik side, would have immediately received an appointee from Kharkov as a replacement of its previous and supposedly trusted ataman.

function of the Center itself – and Antonov – that of a High Judge, graced with Solomonic wisdom and impeccable revolutionary consciousness.¹⁰⁵

Invested with such a function, the Front evolved into the main defender of the Insurgents and their cause in the face of the increasingly censorious attitude from the Center. Early in March of 1919, with a string of undeniable successes backing him up, Aussem rose from his seat to rebuke the Central Committee of the Ukrainian Bolsheviks for their initial skepticism and the liberal usage of the unseemly epithet ‘bandits’ in reference to the 1st Bogun Regiment.¹⁰⁶

Quite to the contrary, men around Antonov – Aussem among others – did their outmost to prop up an image of insurgents as unblemished either by stains of aboveboard criminality or by blemishes of ideological heterodoxy. When the Government in Kharkov pointed its accusatory finger in Makhno’s direction, inculpating him and his troops instances of robbery and wanton killing, Pavel Dybenko, Makhno’s boss and protector, retorted by quoting the peasant bat’ko himself:

We were and are exterminating banditry at its roots. Even if something of the kind occurs, it is being perpetrated by the provocateurs, who entered the ranks of the insurgent army with an express purpose [of committing malfeasance]...Punitive expedition is only necessary so that one could see for oneself that the lie, reported to you, is a lie.¹⁰⁷

Months later, on the very eve of the fateful May events, Antonov denied any connection of Makhno with the pogromists, left SRs or any of the ‘unadulterated’ “bandit elements,” who may have jumped on the bandwagon of the Revolution while its overworked coachman

¹⁰⁵ In May, when Grigoriev’s fate as anti-Bolshevik mutineer had already been sealed, ataman called Antonov “honest revolutionary” and one of the few “honest individuals” among the Communists. To that theme, however, I shall return again later (Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 203-205)

¹⁰⁶ *Tretii s'izd Komunistychnoi partii (bil'shovykiv) Ukrainy*, 44

¹⁰⁷ *Nestor Makhno. Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie na Ukraine*, 65; *IVRKPU*, February 7th 1919, nr 39.

inauspiciously dozed off.¹⁰⁸ At about the same time, Commander of the Ukrainian Front authoritatively described Grigoriev and his troops as constituting “our reliable reserve” despite the rumors of Grigoriev’s deceitfulness, which kept on stubbornly cropping up from the incredulous quarters of the Kharkov-sent agents.¹⁰⁹

Nowhere was the Front’s defense of the insurgent-based army more dogged and the rift between its representatives and the civil government in Kharkov more pronounced as in the realm of supply. In the non-productive environment of the Civil War, the discretionary powers over the remaining inventory of arms, clothing and fuel was ultimately and intimately tied to the issue of the state authority *par excellence* and in that respect no agreement between Rakovsky’s Sovnarkom and Antonov’s Revvoensovet seemed attainable. The striving of the Soviet Ukrainian government to establish itself at the heart of a well-functioning distribution system – either on its own, or with a dint of assistance from the analogous administrative body of the RSFSR¹¹⁰ - encountered staunch resistance of the self-supplying Ukrainian troops. “I cannot accomplish anything,” lachrymosely reported M. Maizel, head of the accounting commission to the ill-famed Transdneprian division:

Dybenko... unflinchingly lays hand on all military property. He despoiled all storehouses. The Department of the Military Procurement orders boots, yet, before they are even ready, armed men from Dybenko’s staff come and take everything away. Dybenko himself seized all journals in the supply department of the Provincial Military Commissariat (Gubvoenkoma) and now he demands that everything, preserved in the supply department, be surrendered to him.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Nestor Makhno. *Krest’ianskoe dvizhenie na Ukraine*, 129-130

¹⁰⁹ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 81

¹¹⁰ See the agreement between Podvoisky and Ivan Mezhlauk (Valery’s brother), then the head of the Russian Central Supply Administration, signed in Kiev on April 14th, 1919 (*Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v. 1., b. 1, 733)

¹¹¹ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 3, 184

However brazen, Dybenko's comportment had to be tacitly tolerated, the practice of treating "all captured [booty] as their own possession"¹¹² (in Podvoisky's assessment) drilling too deep of a hole in the psyche of the Insurgents to be wrangled out of it with justifiable ease. In his penitent speech before the delegates of the 3rd Congress of the KP(b)U, Aleksandr Shlikhter, the commissar of the Food Supply, grounded the inefficiency of his ministerial branch in the worn-out soil of Army's non-cooperation and obstructionism. "It is unknown to us how much bread we possess...", he said, "because everything finds itself at the disposal of ... the armed units..., [which] treat the spoils as military loot without ever letting procurement agents to see what those spoils actually contain."¹¹³ These complains from the Ukrainian center kept on mounting, reaching the ear of Vatsetis in Serpukhov, who pointedly suggested Antonov to refrain from asking for supplies and to focus instead on transferring "enormous military stock" kept hitherto by the tight-fisted partisans into the hands of the nascent rear (*tylovye*) organizations.¹¹⁴

Herein lay the bone of contention, and the exasperation of Podvoisky's and Shlikhter's men with the insurgents loath to give up their booty barely measured up to the profound disenchantment of the Front relative to the Government's ability in meeting subsistence needs of the army. Conceding the formal 'correctness' of the *Narkomprod*'s position, Antonov riposted with an emphatic 'but': "... without its own procurement organs, with its hopes placed squarely on the Commissariat of Food Supply, our army would have not lasted even a day."¹¹⁵ To drive that point home, Antonov divulged the puny content of the state

¹¹² RGVA f 33221 o 1 d 30 ll 1-2

¹¹³ *Tretii z'izd Komunistychnoi partii (bilshovykiv) Ukrainy*, 133

¹¹⁴ RGVA f 6 o 4 d 92 l 113

¹¹⁵ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 146

deliveries that the Army Group of the Kiev Direction – 1st and 2nd Ukrainian Divisions, Belenkovich’s brigade plus few smaller auxiliary units, i.e., a crowd of 50,000 men and 10,000 horses – obtained in the period from early March to mid-April of 1919:

Grain – 2086 poods,¹¹⁶ flour – 21400 poods, groats – 10050, baked bread – 671 poods, meat – 522 poods, salo [pork cured slabs] – 254 poods, legumes – 500 poods, soap – 645 poods, hay – 1750 poods, straw – 807 poods, pomace, bran, horse biscuits (konskie galey) – 4600 poods.¹¹⁷

Taking those figures and converting them into something slightly more comprehensible, one arrives to an average soldier’s diet of less than 4 grams of meat or over 5 grams of baked goods per diem. Notwithstanding these numbers, more absurd than dramatic, the image of an insurgent, delineated by the emissaries of the Higher Military Inspection, and then retouched and corrected by a skilled hand of the political commissar, differed remarkably little from unit to unit. “Neither uniforms, nor underwear is available – many did not change [their clothing] for more than a month,” stated the report on the 1st Voznesensk Regiment¹¹⁸; “there are no boots, no uniforms and equipment, no bullets nor artillery shells” (Volhynian regiment)¹¹⁹; “provisioning of the army is highly unsatisfactory” (Grigoriev’s 1st Transdneprian brigade)¹²⁰; “uniforms are deplorable (*skvernoe*), which leads to frequent misunderstandings among the soldiers” (4th Nezhin Regiment).¹²¹ Speaking on behalf of the entire Ukrainian Army, Reinhold Berzin, man sent by Vatsetis to Antonov’s staff, felt compelled to admit: “The principal hindrance [in the construction of the Army – M.A.] was and is the lack of rifles, uniforms...”¹²² Swathed pell-mell, shod if lucky, the insurgent of the Ukrainian Front knew well what options loomed behind Podvoisky’s sparse words, to wit,

¹¹⁶ One pood equals approximately 16.4 kg

¹¹⁷ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 138

¹¹⁸ RGVA f 25860 op 1 d 557 1 3

¹¹⁹ RGVA f 25860 op 1 d 44 1 1

¹²⁰ RGVA f 25860 op 1 d 557 1 2

¹²¹ RGVA f 103 op 1 d 31 1 14

¹²² RGVA f 6 o 4 d 92 ll 22-26

that “the supply is supported exclusively by the armed forces”¹²³ – pertinacious adherence to one’s own region (case of Bogunsky and Grigoriev to some extent), within the cozy circle of one’s kith and if not, allowing for *bat’ko*’s ambition, wanderlust or even a faith in international revolution, a steady west-bound progression, marked by a minor plunder here and a major pogrom there, a trail rippled with bloody misdemeanors, wrecking havoc to the possibility of a *modus vivendi* between the passing troops, sedentary locals and the transposed communists.

For the Front the root of the problem could have not been clearer. “Narkomvoem,” wrote Antonov as he reflected retrospectively on the accomplishments and omissions of the Bolsheviks in Ukraine, “created in Ukraine an impossible situation for the Ukrainian Front – the parallelism of organs (above all those involved with the supply system) complicated and confused the task [of Army reorganization – M.A.]”¹²⁴ Verbal agreements between Podvoisky and Antonov seemed to be of little value, for, as Antonov averred, the reservoirs of equipment and outfit found in Ukraine, whittled away among the numerous claimants in the rear (*tyloviki*) – “state bureaucrats (*uchrezhdentsy*), home guard, Narkomvoen’s own formations.”¹²⁵ Podvoisky’s ambitious plans, seen first with a degree of incredulity, were provoking growing concern as more resources were drifting away towards their fulfillment under the greedy gaze of the disadvantaged front-line troops. “I insist on providing in the first place for the needs of the field units,” fulminated the Front Commander in his dispatch to the People’s Commissar of the Military Affairs on March 9th, 1919.¹²⁶ The latter,

¹²³ *Grazhdanskaia voina*, v. 1, b. 1, 722

¹²⁴ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 338

¹²⁵ *ibid.*, v. 4, 140

¹²⁶ *Grazhdanskaia voina*, v. 1, b. 2, 205

unperturbed by Antonov's repeated admonitions, continued along the path of institutional autonomy, attending to the establishment of the new "5th Division"¹²⁷ (early May 1919) and "6th Division," even though formations under that very name already existed for quite some time (Grigoriev, incidentally, being the commander of the original '6th Division'). "Antonov and Podvoisky are in the state of war with each other"¹²⁸ – this assessment, submitted by Antonov's last Chief of Staff, summed up the situation precisely.

Antonov certainly struck an off key note when he reduced the conflict with Podvoisky to the "insufficient delineation of competences" between Narkomvoen and the Ukrainian army command.¹²⁹ In his mind, peaceful coexistence or a productive collaboration with the 'civvies' from Kharkov could have transpired only on Front's own terms, that is, in the circumstances of Government's faithful submission (and unswerving commitment) to the Army and its demands. Pasting together his thoughts into a practical maxim, the Ukrainian Front Commander appealed to Trotsky: "If the rear (*tyl*) is not *working for the front*, there will be no regular army."¹³⁰ To guarantee the preeminent position of the Front in the public affairs, Antonov's first idea was to advocate greater decentralization than his comrades in the Ukrainian Sovnarkom were willing to accept.¹³¹ The fate of the Russian Imperial Army, debilitated by permanent procurement jams, offered a scenario, which was both cautionary and instructive, its moral lessons, in Antonov's profound belief, containing the key to solving many a problem of the Ukrainian Front itself:

¹²⁷ *ibid.*, v. 2, 56

¹²⁸ RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 89 l 1

¹²⁹ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 3, 184

¹³⁰ *ibid.*, v. 4, 136, emphasis is mine.

¹³¹ In the early epistolary wrangle with Podvoisky, Antonov militated for the decentralization of "monetary and supply apparatus" – "in order to eliminate red-tape (*volokitu*)" as he explained. (*Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v. 1, b. 2, 206)

The chaos [razrukha] in the system of military supply [during the First World War]... resulted from the fact that the bureaucratic districts, into which the country was broken up, were perfectly disconnected with the fronts... We cannot repeat this error. **In the present moment the entire territory of Ukraine has to be divided not into districts, but into fronts**, with parts of the rear being distributed with the view of servicing [v otnoshenie obsluzhivaniia] the nearest front.¹³²

That proposal, amounting to the tacit recognition of conquests, made by the insurgent atamans in the winter flurry of 1918-1919, was discarded when the shells of Grigoriev's rebellious troops tore gaping holes in the overstrained fabric of the Bolshevik order. Antonov recoiled from his earlier decentralist position in the opposite direction, expatiating upon the need of a new, all-powerful Revolutionary Military Council, which, by subsuming all competing military organs (including the Commissariat of the Military Affairs), would accomplish at last the long-awaited fusion (*sliianie*) of the rear with the Front.¹³³ That cardinal change of mind did not, however, affect his deep-rooted sympathy with the Insurgency and its plight. In contrast to Podvoisky and, by extension, to Rakovsky and his cabinet, he trusted the well-meaning resourcefulness of the partisans and their leaders, and continued to do so right into late twenties.¹³⁴ Forgotten were the days when Antonov had to plea for the transfer of few more 'Great Russian units', apprehensive as he previously was of the wayward partisans; long overcome, these reservations (albeit attuned to the spirit of orthodoxy, upheld at the 2nd Congress of CP(b)U) had given way to the conviction that "in

¹³² Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 3, 183

¹³³ *ibid.*, v. 4, 316

¹³⁴ In an aside on Makhno, Antonov dolefully admitted: "Former Commander of the Ukrainian front till this moment believes that the tactics of our Ukrainian comrades in that period with regards to Makhno was incorrect one, not well thought-out... One should have not indiscriminately rejected from the ranks of the Red Army insurgent troops which grew out of [Makhno's units]." (*Ibid.*, v. 4, 114) These lines, it needs to be underscored, were penned down in 1933.

building regular Red Army, one should rely precisely on them,”¹³⁵ a blueprint for securing the friable body of expedient alliance with the scaffolding of the enduring content.

These were hardly empty words, designed to lull the partisan troops into the sense of anesthetic security before visiting upon them a sudden *coup de grace*, terrible and effectual in proportion to the weight thrown onto the scales of the battle. Well informed of the changing moods within its heterogeneous Army, the Front was prepared to negotiate with the insurgents beyond the pale of the necessary and permissible stipulated by Kharkov. Shortage of weaponry rather than an ideological affinity made the principle of volunteer-based mobilization (*dobrovolchestvo*) – one of the key tenets of the Insurgency¹³⁶ – seem almost virtuous in the eyes of the Bolshevik military officials. What men in arms needed, in the appraisal of the Ukrainian command, were the specialists of various stripes and colors – sophisticated field engineers, experts of the cannon craft, deft horse-riders, seasoned machine-gunners, etc; the Front’s instructions to Narkomvoen, enjoining it to concentrate its efforts on locating and mobilizing the NCO and lower officers of the former Tsarist Army were motivated precisely by those considerations. Otherwise, Antonov and his Staff had little doubt that the Ukrainian village would not stint in buttressing their cause, faith best captured by Babin’s imperative recommendation “to lean upon local units (*mestnye chasty*)” when carrying out urgent mobilizations.¹³⁷ This advice found perfect listeners at the Front Headquarter all the more so that the latter, always alacritous to expostulate with the ongoing ‘arbitrary drafts’, not only kept on tolerating pet mobilization departments scattered among all self-respecting rebel detachments, but learned to imitate its enterprising subalterns by

¹³⁵ *ibid.*, v. 3, 184

¹³⁶ see Arshinov, 64

¹³⁷ RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 89 l 1

conducting recruitments of its own – in flagrant disregard of Narkomvoen and its district Commissariats. Typical in this respect was comportment of V. Tkachuk, the head of the Operation Department of the 1st Army; plenipotentiary of the said formation, he was dispatched to rural Podolia in mid April 1919 with an assignment of ascertaining popular mood and churning fresh battalions from the village volunteers.¹³⁸ Needless to say, the Command preferred adjusting the widespread albeit unrecognized practice within the institutional framework to the provoking of the troops by inundating them with the recruits from unfamiliar lands and of unfamiliar persuasions;¹³⁹ it was ready to act in that manner even if such mobilizations (and *a fortiori* behavior of the Front) were unfailingly judged as “extremely pernicious” (*pagubnym*) in the reports, submitted to the Higher Military Inspection or any other affiliated governmental agency.¹⁴⁰

In the similar vein, the stance assumed by the Front toward the Ukrainian CheKa perfectly tallied with its intention at propitiating the insurgents. The Extraordinary Commission in Ukraine (VUCheKa) did not merely chafe politically irascible troops, cleft to autonomous existence with sinews of most powerful and volatile jealousy; constantly tampering with the affairs of the Army, “roistering in the trains [and] embittering local populace” in Berzin’s version,¹⁴¹ the CheKa quickly aligned itself among the most notorious symbols of foreign

¹³⁸ RGVA f 167 o 1 d 38 1 9

¹³⁹ The report on the brigade of Anton Bogunsky (June 13th, 1919) contained a characteristic line: “Red-army soldiers... do not look approvingly at those, [who were] mobilized into the ranks of the Red Army; one does not want (*ne zhalaiut*) to see them become part of the brigade” (RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 560 1 2). Their resentment was of a two-folded nature – not only were the partisans of Bogunsky grated by the presence of the ‘foreigners’ in their midst, but the very principle of mandatory recruitment struck them as inimical to the pathos of *voluntary* participation.

¹⁴⁰ RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 554 1 4ob-5

¹⁴¹ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 3, 174

domination.¹⁴² A demand to suspend activities of CheKa without delay by replacing it with the democratically elected Military Revolutionary Tribunal constituted one of the key points of the resolution, passed by the Revolutionary Military Council of Guliai-Pole on March 7th 1919.¹⁴³ Autocratic by nature – a petty tyrant and martinet in the rendition of some – ataman Grigoriev found little value in suchlike refinements of the revolutionary politics, sending Rakovsky a warning on March 13th that he would impose a “military regime” (*voennuiu vlast’*) in the occupied provinces if local Extraordinary Commission persists in “sticking its nose where it does not belong” (*suiutsia tuda kuda im ne nuzhno*).¹⁴⁴ The atamans in Bolshevik service were certainly not too squeamish about putting their threats into action, dispersions (*razgon*) of neighboring CheKa’s soon becoming an occurrence of high frequency and broad extent, strange sport of sorts. Fiodor Dybenko, commander of the 4th Partisan Rifle Division (thereafter known as the 42nd Division), whose reputation for troublemaking outmatched even that of his notorious brother Pavel, disabled Lugansk Extraordinary Commission in February 1919, although only temporarily and not without consequences for himself.¹⁴⁵ Grigoriev’s troops apparently had done away with the CheKa in Znamenka “on several occasions” as they were passing through that town;¹⁴⁶ in the last week of March, a 120-strong CheKa unit stationed in Belaia Tserkov was disarmed by the Red Army soldiers with a connivance, startlingly enough, of certain Litvin, a local employee of

¹⁴² ‘Foreign’, of course, does not mean ‘non-Ukrainian’ – as the Nationalist historiography would have had it; instead, the adjective qualifies practices, considered ‘unjust’ and hence ‘counterrevolutionary.’ It is in that context only that one shall understand insurgents’ proclivity at combining allegedly nationalist (or chauvinist, as some would say) slogans with the opposition to *kommissaroderzhavie*, ‘commissarocracy’ – that is, as application of familiar terminology to the new semantic field.

¹⁴³ RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 148 l 51; in practice, the Revolutionary Military Council of Guliai-Pole echoed the deputies of the 2nd district Congress at Guliai-Pole, held between February 12th and 16th, 1919; although still enthusiastic supporters of the Bolsheviks, the insurgents of the Makhnovite region felt no inhibition expressing their resentment with a simple and unambiguous slogan: “Down with the CheKa!” (See *Nestor Makhno. Krest’ianskoe Dvizhenie na Ukriane*, pp 70-91)

¹⁴⁴ TsDAVO f 2 o 1 d 106 l 26

¹⁴⁵ TsDAVO f 2 o 1 d 126

¹⁴⁶ RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 148 ll 136-137

the Higher Military Inspection;¹⁴⁷ even Vasily Bozhenko, the legendary commander second only to Shchors in the Bolshevik roster of immortalized heroes, felt the impulsion to go and “finish off” (*dlia raspravy*) Kiev CheKa when he received the news of his wife’s sudden death. “She was killed by the CheKa. Immediately send the telegram ordering inquire into details of her death... otherwise I will not endure this (*ne perezhivu*),” reported Tarashcha *bat’ko* as the thin ice of official jargon broke into an oppressive bellowing of a mournful husband.¹⁴⁸ “It took our most responsible (*otvetstvenneishim*) comrades (Zatonsky it seems) a great deal of effort before they managed to pacify the raging *bat’ko*,” Antonov added with a still palpable relief in his rather matter-of-fact recollections.¹⁴⁹

As varied and unique as the reasons for resenting the CheKa might have been, the Command of the Ukrainian Soviet Army approached this institution as if it were a universal malady that required a country-wide treatment. Thus, describing the Ukrainian Extraordinary Commission as a malign ‘state within a state,’ Antonov proposed to break up its centralized administrative apparatus and transfer remaining acting CheKas to the jurisdiction either of the local Executive Committees or special departments carved out within the Front.¹⁵⁰

Nikolai Vishnevetski, one of the founding members of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Ukrainian Front and a Political Commissar of the 2nd Ukrainian Soviet Army, voiced an opinion that was more in the spirit of the rough-and-ready radicalism of the rebels: instead of targeting its head (in Antonov’s style), he recommended excising the CheKa’s limbs by abolishing its uezd-level bodies. Removed from local affairs – such was his thinking – the

¹⁴⁷ RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 148 ll 6-7

¹⁴⁸ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 163

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*, v. 4, 164; RGVA f 103 o 1 d 31 l 23

¹⁵⁰ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 152-154

Extraordinary Commission would be rendered innocuous and hence ‘bearable.’¹⁵¹ This solution – dismissed as “counterrevolutionary” by a contrite Antonov in his Stalinist era confession (1933) – found a reflection in an April telegram from Anatoli Skachko to the Ukrainian Front Commander, a note short in form but far-reaching in its effects. Persuaded that local CheKa’s “are egging on (*provotsiruiut*) Makhnovite troops¹⁵² and the populace towards a rebellion against soviet power,” the then chief of the 2nd Ukrainian Army insisted on “the eradication of all uezd- and front-level commissions with the sole retention of the provincial [ones] as well as the delegation of all tasks associated with the counter-revolutionary struggle (*peredacha... bor’by s kontrrevoliutsiei*) ... into the hands of special military branches, answerable to the Army Commanders.” The telegram concluded:

In case of refusal I would be compelled to carry out this measure within the limits of my army on my own authority, and then one could hang me for being a mutineer, for I would rather be hanged than see all conquests of the Red Army reduced to zilch [*svoditsia na net*] due to the stupidity and tactlessness of some petty jackasses and dolts, who had obtained out of the blue the right to consider themselves the vigilant eye of proletarian power.¹⁵³

The Army commander was most obviously preaching to the choir; assured of his boss’ unanimity and protection, Skachko did not run a great risk of being strung up for his “mutineer” acts, all the less so since his previous – and successful – endeavor at disarming detachments of the Extraordinary Commission (in March of 1919)¹⁵⁴ – went entirely unpunished.

The Front’s relative lenience toward the insurgents and staunch opposition to the Cheka prefigured the left ‘heterodoxy’ that Antonov and his Staff began to advocate in the name of

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*, v. 4, 258-259

¹⁵² At that time, Makhno, as a commander of the 3rd Brigade of the Transdneprian Division, was nominally subordinated to Skachko and, as we shall see later, to the Command of the Southern Front.

¹⁵³ *Nestor Makhno. Krest’ianskoe dvizhenie na Ukraine*, 98-99

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*, 855

their troops. The Commander's appearance at the Third Congress of the CP(b)U was highly significant. Having listened to the quarrels of Kviring, Averin, Piatakov and others, Antonov stepped up to the dais and plainly, "in soldierlike fashion," explained the needs and sentiments of his subordinates:

...it is necessary to maintain [in the ranks of] the Red Army complete unity of the front and complete unity within its political aspirations. This is necessary above all as a guarantee of our victory. I had been involved in practical work rather than political infighting (*politicheskimi raspriami*) or fractional parleys and I have to say, that **our army and those enormous layers (gromadnye sloi) from which it emerged are strangers (chuzhdy tomu) to what is taking place here in the audience.**... Here [one hears] the superficially factual, but the main, the fundamental thing which I have not perceived is... that striving toward the reorganization of one's own life, dreamt about by the masses in the wake of revolutionary storms ...¹⁵⁵

The message furtively reproached the Right for their principled opposition to the partisan detachments and insensitivity to their political feelings.¹⁵⁶ The veiled critique proved of little avail. True, the alliance of the military with the Bolshevik Left did succeed in voting the predominantly rightist Central Committee out of the office – for “abjuring from [the task of] practical preparation of the momentous armed uprising of the worker and peasant masses”.¹⁵⁷ Yet, the repeated insistence of the Left on bringing non-Bolshevik socialist parties into the revolutionary forces – a demand militated for by the impatient insurgents outside the hall of the Congress – was voted down again, as any “consensus with such petit-bourgeois parties as the right SRs, Mensheviks, left SRs, independent (i.e. independent social-democrats, *nezalezhniki*) Ukrainian social-democrats and others” was judged unacceptable.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ *Tretii z'izd komunistychnoi partii (bil'shovykiv) Ukrainy*, 50

¹⁵⁶ See address made by Ivan Klimenko at the Congress, *ibid.*, 51-54

¹⁵⁷ *ibid.*, 200; that is, the Right was censured for letting the Ukrainian National Union claim the leadership in the anti-Hetman uprising in the earlier stages of power struggle.

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.*, 201-202

Antonov continued to believe that the road to dominating the minds of the ataman-led units was paved in compromise with their political ‘representatives.’ The Eight Congress of the Russian Communist Party pronounced faulty the dogmatic self-isolation pursued by their Ukrainian comrades.¹⁵⁹ Encouraged, Antonov explained in a note to Lenin on April 17th 1919, “The Ukrainian Army, which has been built not solely by the communists but also by the Ukrainian SRs, Left SRs [and] the anarchists, does not easily yield to the exigencies of discipline, has not yet disposed itself of the partisan, insurgent spirit and hence cannot be counted on a whole as a fully reliable support by us.” Anyone acting in deliberate denial of these facts would be courting a disaster and therefore, Antonov quickly proceeded to argue that one had no choice but to allow representatives of the Ukrainian SRs and the Independent social-democrats to enter Rakovsky’s government in Kharkov.¹⁶⁰ The next day Lenin telegraphed Rakovsky, blessing a possible cooptation of the Ukrainian Left Socialist Revolutionaries¹⁶¹ (incidentally renamed in March of 1919 into the Ukrainian Party of the Socialist Revolutionaries (Communists)¹⁶²). At the same time, in “On the state organization of Ukraine”, Lenin proposed an all-Ukrainian Revkom with a “solid Bolshevik majority”, but including representatives from the borotbisty.¹⁶³

Before proceeding any further, the two competing visions of the state-making, discernable in the deeds of the Front and the counter-deeds of the government, need to be recapitulated.

Both creative agents, it seems, accepted the idea of an autonomous Ukraine with its own

¹⁵⁹ *Kommunisticheskaia Partiiia Ukrainy v rezoliutsiakh i resheniiakh s'ezdov i konferentsii*, 32

¹⁶⁰ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 147-148

¹⁶¹ *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v.1 b.1, 737

¹⁶² See Khrystiuk, v. 4, 129-130

¹⁶³ *Nestor Makhno. Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie na Ukraine*, 112-113; in the aforementioned telegram Lenin suggested the inclusion of “no more than three” SRs, which he recommended to put under Bolshevik supervision lest they dare to deviate from the specified party line.

interests, distinct from – albeit harmonious with – those of the Soviet Russia (Rakovsky’s circle having done so with greater reservations and more overtly as a temporary measure than the Front, *peu importe*). That, of course, did not mean that the Russian presence stopped being paramount in the conduct of Ukrainian affairs. On the contrary, in its state-building undertaking, the government was constantly harking back to what became known as “*the Russian experience*” (*rossiiski opyt*), appropriating solutions issued from it for the simple reason that Ukraine, it was commonly held, found itself “in the stage that to a great extent resemble[d] the first period of the soviet power in Russia.”¹⁶⁴ Certain modifications notwithstanding, Kharkov attempted to import wholesale institutions and practices that the North had forged sometime ago. Constitution, adopted at the Third Congress of the CP(b)U, designs of forced communalization, elaborated by Meshcheriakov’s Land Commissariat (Narkomzem), efforts at grounding politics of provisioning in the principles of class discrimination (setting up of the Committees of Poor Peasants in villages, Provincial Supply Committees in cities, etc) were faithfully replicating the established pattern even if the major imitators doused liberal praises upon the virtues of regional sensitivity and circumspection. Unexceptionally, the soldered activities of Narkomvoen and Higher Military Inspection aimed at converting the armed Insurgency into the Red Army of the Russian mold. “The principle of volunteering (*dobrovol’chestvo*),” Povdoisky informed his listeners in the lecture on the general state of affairs in Ukraine, “on which our [Ukrainian] Red Army was based so far, has to be replaced with compulsory mobilization.”¹⁶⁵ More specifically, he wrote few weeks later, the new army was to be made out of “the Russian military units and [the recruits from] the industrial centers of Ukraine” – in that manner only could the fateful dependence

¹⁶⁴ *Tretii z'izd Komunistychnoi partii (bil'shovykiv) Ukrainy*, 90

¹⁶⁵ RGASPI f 146 o 1 d 15 l 46

on the militarized countryside be overcome and thus the ground for the productive cooperation between the Soviet Ukraine and RSFSR be established.¹⁶⁶ At this point the jigsaw puzzle, parceled into government proposals, communiqués to and from Kharkov, projects fulfilled or foiled, begins to yield a coherent picture of the desired Ukraine: the land, wrung from the grip of the headstrong partisans and delivered (by administrative means preferably) into the dulcet embrace of the Party and, in theory, proletariat, was primed to become a centralized, civilian and a city-ruled state, conscientiously channeling its produce and arms, stray and hitherto unclaimed, to the common victory in the war of Russian succession.

In contrast to Kharkov, the Front thought that any provocation of the insurgents would not only be impractical, but, given the powerful, organic link of the latter with the surrounding population, likely lethal. “[Grigoriev] and his army are of the same mold as the middle peasantry (*srednee krest'iantvo*) of the Aleksandria uezd that begot them,” wrote Antonov to Rakovsky less than a week before the uprising. “He has enormous sway over the given uezd as its native who fought restlessly against the oppressors of the local villagers (*mestnogo selianstva*); he augmented his influence by surrounding himself with the most powerful people from different *volosti*.”¹⁶⁷ By absorbing atamans with their fluctuating retinues – without altering their substance, since means of pulverization and digestion were not accounted for in the absorption process – the Front extended a formal recognition to the principle that was supposed to animate Ukraine’s political life. Sequestered into zones of interests (‘operational zones’ in the army jargon), administered dictatorially by the military

¹⁶⁶ Podvoisky, *Na Ukraine*, 23, 37

¹⁶⁷ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 195

(according to ‘the wartime demands’), with its locus of power situated in the countryside, Ukraine resembled less a bounded territorial entity than a loose confederation of pulsating peasant autonomies and wandering regiments. In that reticulation of insurgent fiefdoms, the Command played the role of a cementing body, a repository of authority founded to no small extent upon the charisma of the Front Commander. “Antonov is popular at the Front,” wrote his Chief of Staff as he was criticizing otherwise deleterious activities of Narkovoen and CheKa.¹⁶⁸ Involved more than anybody else in securing the alliance with the partisans, Antonov traveled all over Ukraine, accompanied by his own ‘field staff’ as a medieval potentate of yore, haranguing in front of the troops, deliberating with their leaders, bullying them when possible and blandishing when necessary. Although he was certainly not casting himself as a military dictator – the armed rebels remaining as apprehensive of the ‘foreign’ appointees (*spetsy*) from the Front Headquarters as they were of any other intruder – the Commander regarded government envoys with suspicion consistent with his position of a ‘head ataman,’¹⁶⁹ helping thereby to allay their undue impact and to maintain for a while the fragile *modus vivendi* with the insurgents. In short, the form of the statehood was to result from the negotiation, just as the revolutionary strategy ultimately was, its spearhead pointing not south-eastward, to Donbass or Kuban, but at Romania and Hungary, that multi-chamber heart of the European Civil War.

Part IV: Moscow and Road to Mutiny

¹⁶⁸ RGVA f 6 o 4 d 92, l 163ob

¹⁶⁹ Berzin, who traveled to the Front along with Antonov in March 1919, allegedly heard the latter saying: “It is inadmissible to expose the revolution and the army to the dangers which might arise due to the bad faith and insufficient steadfastness of one or the other civil agency (*grazhdanskikh uchrezhdenii*)” (RGVA f 6 o 4 d 92 l 47ob). It perfectly jibed with the abnegation of the ‘civil authority’ (*protiv grazhdanskoi vlasti*), which had touched the psychic core of almost every Red Army regiment in the spring and summer months of 1919.

Even with these seemingly irreconcilable differences in sight, the showdown between the Front and the Government – a clash between ‘military’ and ‘civil’ authorities, centered around the figure of Grigoriev – was anything, but a foregone conclusion. Hidden in the evasive contingencies of the irreversible time, the event nonetheless had precursors, producing a suggestive din not to be lost on an attentive listener. A poignant first movement to what was to occur in early May of 1919 had in fact been composed in Dybenko’s quarters, when that shipless sailor from the Baltic sea gained control over Yekaterinoslav and the contiguous steppe region (late January 1919). His authoritarian behavior coupled with the alleged disregard for the decrees of the Yekaterinoslav Provincial Executive Committee compelled its Chairman, Vasily Averin, to file a complaint with a long list of grave and disparaging accusations. The crimes imputed to the commander of the Transdneprian division went far and wide – he was said to have seized depots with military apparel, exacted boots later reportedly sold at the market, appropriated “30,000(*sic!*) coal-laden carts” etc;¹⁷⁰ seen from their aggregate effects, Dybenko’s activities “killed all economic life” and “disorganized Soviet [administrative] apparatus” in Yekaterinoslav.¹⁷¹ Addressing the audience of the Third Congress of the Ukrainian Bolsheviks, Averin unambiguously hinted at Dybenko’s anarchist and left SR sympathies (“*stoit na pozitsii anarkho-levoeserovskoi*”),¹⁷² for only an apostate from the Bolshevik orthodoxy could “patronize anarchist and ‘bandit’ Makhno.”¹⁷³ “There is no place for [Dybenko] not only in the

¹⁷⁰ RGVA f 6 o 4 d 92 ll 45ob, 46

¹⁷¹ *Tretii z'ezd Komunistychnoi partii (bil'shovykiv) Ukrainy*, 136; the number of the appropriated carts is supposed to be 30, not 30 thousand, as Antonov points out in his book. (Antonov-Ovseenko, v. 3, 175)

¹⁷² *Tretii z'ezd Komunistychnoi partii (bil'shovykiv) Ukrainy*, 16

¹⁷³ RGVA f 6 o 4 d 92 l 45ob; Dybenko, it should be reminded, was expelled from the ranks of the Russian Communist Party in May of 1918 for his alleged misconduct in fighting the Germans.

presidium [of the Congress], but in our ranks as well,” concluded Averin’s thought his colleague from the Poltava province Iakov Drobnis.¹⁷⁴

The delegates of the Congress did not have to be told twice what exactly was at stake here. Speaking on the fifth day of the proceedings, Abram Kamensky, the head of the inquiry commission, situated the conflict within the context of “not fully (*ne vpolne*) crystallized rapports between the civil and military authority” unfolding under conditions of “perfectly (*sovershenno*) unformed [local] soviet apparatus.”¹⁷⁵ Dybenko, Kamensky further argued, might have been justified in monopolizing instruments of power in the region attached to the vague front-line zone, the Party, however, possessed neither the technical expertise nor the goodwill of impartiality to ascertain conclusively the validity of this claim.¹⁷⁶ Instead, another commission was called into existence, comprised of the representatives from the “central soviet government” (that is, Moscow and Serpukhov) and the commanding officers of the Ukrainian front. A group of men, led by Antonov and Berzin reached Yekaterinoslav on the evening of March 4th and Dybenko, who did not waste time creating the illusion of cosmetic order, easily prevailed over his detractors, reduced in the eyes of the commission to petty and bilious ‘factionalists’ (*fraktsionery*).¹⁷⁷ The divisional commander, on the contrary, slighted by the ‘spiteful’ Averin, the local “Pompadour” in Antonov’s quip,¹⁷⁸ emerged innocent, “a conscientious communist” whose deeds respected the moral constraints of his mission.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁴ *Tretii z'izd Komunistychnoi partii (bil'shovykiv) Ukrainy*, 17

¹⁷⁵ *ibid.*, 137

¹⁷⁶ *ibid.*, 137-138

¹⁷⁷ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 3, 176; RGVA f 6 o 4 d 92 l 47

¹⁷⁸ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 3, 176

¹⁷⁹ RGVA f 6 o 4 d 92 l 47

Needless to say, this only ended the formal part of the “Dybenko affaire,” his imperious manner changing little in the wake of this exoneration. At his own discretion Dybenko raised and reduced the officers in his brigade, meriting from Skachko a sobriquet of dubious honor: “autonomous ataman Dybenko.”¹⁸⁰ Later, at the time when strategic necessity demanded all available resources to be concentrated against the Volunteers and the Cossacks pouring out from the Don, he carried his rugged army in the singularly vagarious manner deep into Crimea,¹⁸¹ where a jocular Crimean Soviet Socialist Republic was established with a humorless and short-tempered dictator at its head. Reports kept on amassing, portraying Dybenko as a great purloiner of the provision trains that, deflected from their Don-bound path, seemed to invariably end up in the hands of his starved underlings. Rakovsky even threatened to declare Dybenko (along with Makhno) enemy of the proletariat if he does not wean himself away from his “bashi-bazouk politics”¹⁸² – an empty threat for the time being, since neither the Front nor the government in Kharkov were prepared to countenance the consequences of such a momentous rift.

Betraying weakness more than some vestigial affinity, the unwillingness to address problems of Insurgency played into the hands of the native warlords, bent on retaining political latitude under the hallowing guise of governmental sanction. Dybenko, ataman more naturalized than natural, could act practically unperturbed in the lower bent of Dnieper; even greater independence was evinced by “the ataman of Khersonshchina and Taurida” Grigoriev, who

¹⁸⁰ *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v. 1, b. 2, 241; Skachko actually used this phrase in a rhetorical question, when he asked Dybenko to identify himself either as a commander (*nachal'nik*) of a division or an ‘autonomous ataman.’

¹⁸¹ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 56 (see Skachko’s telegram to Antonov, dated April 14, 1919)

¹⁸² *ibid.*, v. 4, 101

described the town of Aleksandriia as “my capital” with an ease at once unselfconscious and suggestive.¹⁸³ Probably most conspicuous was the case of ataman Anton Bogunsky, whose word meant law in Zolotonosha uezd, only some 90 miles south-east of Kiev. Nineteen-year old stripling styling himself in the fashion of the day with a long-winded “Ataman of the Revolutionary army of the Poltava riverbank,”¹⁸⁴ he maintained barely camouflaged connections with the ‘mutineer’ Zeleny; together they plotted to overthrow the Bolshevik regime in Kiev,¹⁸⁵ but Bogunsky withdrew in time when risks appeared unpardonably high. Intolerant of anyone or anything impinging upon his authority, the young ataman did not shirk from arresting certain “comrade Laipass,” when the latter arrived to Zolotonosha with an assignment to organize a regiment.¹⁸⁶ Similarly, when the local Executive Committee began acting as a cover for the CheKa, he unceremoniously dismissed it, bringing in its stead a *revkom* from the “unaffiliated comrades (*bespartiinykh*), right and left S-Rs” with himself set as its chairman.¹⁸⁷ The Bolsheviks, apprised of Bogunsky’s antics, showed astounding insouciance, limiting their repressive countermeasures to an hour-long dressing-down session with the Front Commander. “We decided not to fan the flames of that story,” commented the man, who would rather look past the brewing treason than forsake his faith in the peaceful domestication of the insurgents.¹⁸⁸

The tri-partite tug of war, locking together agents from the government, the army and the Front was eventually arbitrated through the intervention of Moscow. The interest of the

¹⁸³ *ibid.*, v. 4, 194

¹⁸⁴ RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 148 ll35-37

¹⁸⁵ RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 148 ll 35-37, l 56, ll 68-69; TsDAHO, f 5 o 1 d 154 l 35-39

¹⁸⁶ RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 148 ll 35-37

¹⁸⁷ TsDAHO f 57 o 2 d 281 ll 53-57; TsDAVO f 2 o 1 d 106 l 74; RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 560 l 2

¹⁸⁸ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 3, 332-334

Russian center in Ukrainian affairs developed only gradually. Thus, disconcerted by the rapid advance of the partisans, Lenin proceeded to reprimand Trotsky, who should have allegedly kept them in check. On January 3rd 1919 Lenin communicated his concerns to the leader of the Russian Red Army: “I am very worried about you becoming too enmeshed in Ukraine to the detriment of the general strategic task (*obshchestrategicheskoi zadache*), insisted upon by Vatsetis and which consists in a speedy, decisive and general offensive against Krasnov. I fear it utterly that we might be getting on too late with this...”¹⁸⁹ Although after some acrimonious exchange with Serpukhov Antonov succeeded in making the latter acknowledge the existence of the distinct Ukrainian Army, the idea of the Front’s independence sounded like anathema to the ears of the Supreme commander. Vatsetis thought it most sensible to raise the Dnieper into a defensive limit of the struggling Soviet Republic.¹⁹⁰ Ukraine for a while filled roles of secondary import – a buffer separating Russia from the West and an ancillary flank to the Don and Caucasus, where the resolute battle was scheduled to take place.

Moscow had to radically revise its attitude toward Ukraine once events on the Southern Front took an ominous turn. The military and political leadership was caught completely off-guard, for, much as Moscow was habituated to news of resounding defeats in the North Caucasus, it took the victory in the Don region for granted. The steady advance of the 10th Army from Tsaritsyn southward against the demoralized Cossacks and the persistent albeit ineffectual push to dislodge Denikin’s volunteers from the right bank of Seversky Donets¹⁹¹ allowed

¹⁸⁹ N. Ye. Kakurin, I. I. Vatsetis, *Grazhdanskaia voina*, 155

¹⁹⁰ *Grazhdanskaia Voina na Ukraine*, v. 1 b. 1, 543; v. 1 b. 2, 164-167; N. Ye. Kakurin, I. I. Vatsetis, *Grazhdanskaia voina*, 167; *Direktivy Glavnogo komandovaniia Kransoi Armii (1917-1920)*, 219-220

¹⁹¹ See N. Kakurin, *Kak srazhalas’ Revoliutsiia*, v. 2, 132-151

Trotsky to prophesize in early April that the ‘counterrevolution’ would be quashed within a fortnight.¹⁹² “Krasnov is beaten. Denikin will be beaten,” he confidently proclaimed before the Party members and Soviet functionaries in Samara on April 6th, 1919.¹⁹³ Tested shortly afterwards, Trotsky’s prediction turned out to be a sham. On April 8th, the Kuban corps of general Andrei Shkuro struck at the 8th Army and found itself face to face with the brigade of *bat’ko* Makhno. Skachko, Commander of the 2nd Ukrainian Army and Makhno’s nominal superior, was alarmed by these developments. “Volnovakha is taken by the enemy,” he anxiously reported, “Mariupol is cut off... Makhno left Mariupol for the Front, but he would not be able to reach the battle site ... We could consider our entire left flank, from Grishin to Volnovakha, to be fully denuded.”¹⁹⁴ A few days later, the careworn commander painted an even more distressful scene: army regiments from the neighboring Southern Front fleeing in panic, Shkuro’s “wolf hundred” of 5000-strong¹⁹⁵ in pursuit of the 9th Division, and Makhnovites, their “remnants” to boot, trying their utmost to stanch the avalanche of the Kuban horsemen.¹⁹⁶ Turning to Antonov, Skachko implored him “to pull out the cavalry from the west and fling it to us in the east.” “It is going to be a rotten affair otherwise.”¹⁹⁷

No doubt, in his response to the “hysterical commander” Antonov hit the nail right on the head when he stated that Shkuro’s strength was blown out of proportion and that his breakthrough was but a minor raid.¹⁹⁸ However, the raid brought Ukraine into the field of vision of Russian battle-planners and battle-makers. Moscow plumbed the pluck and the

¹⁹² Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 49

¹⁹³ Trotsky, *Kak vooruzhalas’ Revoliutsiia*, v. 2 b. 1, 331

¹⁹⁴ Nestor Makhno. *Krest’ianskoe dvizhenie na Ukraine*, 119

¹⁹⁵ *ibid.*, 858

¹⁹⁶ *ibid.*, 121

¹⁹⁷ *ibid.*, 858

¹⁹⁸ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 55

hardiness of the Armed Forces of South Russia (as the combined troops of the Don Host and the Volunteers became known) and discovered that its capacity in overcoming the resistance of the whites was incumbent upon Ukraine's unconditional support of *its*, Russia-oriented, strategy. Ukrainian Bolsheviks were thus expected to supply their northern neighbor with men and arms, yet, instead of lining themselves up in the state of subordinated coordination, the Front, the insurgents and even the overwhelming majority of Kharkov's government were seen as working in cahoots to subvert central authority (*nedopustimo samostiinichaet*).¹⁹⁹ "There is no divide between the Southern Front and the Ukrainian Front," was Lenin's brusque riposte to the Ukrainian military command when the latter insisted on Ukraine's unique conditions and the necessity of keeping the Ukrainian insurgents within the bounds of their homeland.²⁰⁰ Lenin, however insisted, and on April 22nd, he issued an order that would result in the near-collapse of the Ukrainian Army and the definitive abolition of the separate Ukrainian Front. "Ukraine," he wrote to Rakovsky "is beholden (*obiazana*) to accept the Don basin as the unquestionably most important Ukrainian front."²⁰¹

It was in accordance with this injunction that the Command of the Southern Front (represented by the cadre officer in Bolshevik service, Vladimir Gittis), Serpukhov and the Kremlin began imposing demands upon the Ukrainian Front that it was incapable of meeting. Skachko's originally modest request for one brigade²⁰² quickly snowballed into two divisions that Lenin, in Podvoisky's rendition of Leader's wishes, wanted immediately transferred to

¹⁹⁹ Nestor Makhno. *Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie na Ukraine*, 124

²⁰⁰ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 59

²⁰¹ *ibid.*, v. 4, 66

²⁰² *ibid.*, v. 4, 53

the Don.²⁰³ “We have three divisions,” asserted Skachko in a dramatic letter to the Ukrainian Front Commander, “and we could give them by removing two from the Odessa and Kiev directions.” “Two divisions to the Eastern Front, the Don-Mariupol Front! Two divisions or death of the revolution!” the missive’s pitch reached an ecstatic chanting.²⁰⁴ Antonov’s reaction was one of befuddlement and indignation. Years later he wrote his belated response to the Commander of the 2nd Army, Vatsetis and those in the Party leadership, who insisted on sending all available resources in the direction of Donbass:

To exact three divisions! – and in such a time, when protracted battles against the Petliura army were still taking place at Shepitovka, against the mixed white forces at Tiraspol, when almost an entire division was held up by the suppression of internal uprisings; three divisions, i.e. essentially everything that we somehow managed to put up together ...

Giving away three battle-ready divisions to the Southern Front in addition to what we had already given, would have meant in those conditions not only the rejection of the ‘breakthrough to the West’, but the deliverance of Ukraine into the hands of the petliurovtsy (who were yet far from being broken).²⁰⁵

The willingness of the Center to engage similar arguments with the counter-arguments of its own was perfectly encapsulated in Vatsetis’ militarily curt response: “Carry out the order and report back.”²⁰⁶

Presaging the subsequent dissolution of the Ukrainian Front, Nikolai Kakurin, one of the earliest and otherwise levelheaded commentators on the Revolution and Civil War, once claimed that the Command of said Front “was not particularly inclined to accommodate the

²⁰³ *ibid.*, v. 4, 55; *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v. 1, b. 2, 383

²⁰⁴ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 61-63; the Odessa and Kiev directions refer, of course, to the Army Groups, recently renamed into the 3rd and 1st Soviet Ukrainian Armies respectively. The Eastern front in the given context does not advert to the armies facing Kolchak in the Urals, but the area where the Ukrainian Front joined the Southern Front.

²⁰⁵ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 65

²⁰⁶ *Direktivny komandovaniia frontov Krasnoi Armii*, v. 2, 197, 200

needs of the Southern Front.”²⁰⁷ Still, in the month of April alone the Southern Front received over 8 thousand bayonets, 3 thousand cavalry and two armored trains from its western neighbor.²⁰⁸ Sometime in the late March Antonov and Dybenko let the entire 3rd Transdniprian brigade of *bat’ko* Makhno (about 10 thousand men according to Kakurin)²⁰⁹ slip into the operational command of Gittis.²¹⁰ Other units soon followed suit: the 11th and 12th regiments (collectively known after their commander as “the Tekendzhants’ brigade”), the Internationalist regiment, a mixed brigade commanded by Iakov Pokus, etc.²¹¹ They even discussing the imminent dispatching of Grigoriev’s brigade, still flush with its staggering victory at Odessa; Antonov, however, had a second thought and decided to send more manageable men in lieu of Grigoriev’s unruly soldiery.²¹² Before long, Antonov - goaded by Rakovsky, Podvoisky and naturally Lenin himself – made a solemn promise of a hefty delivery, which was supposed to consist of 30 thousand bayonets, 3 thousand cavalry and 60 guns to top it all off.²¹³ Grigoriev’s uprising clearly left no time for the execution of such promises, although it did, ironically enough, destroy the Ukrainian front and so deliver its remnants to Moscow.²¹⁴

²⁰⁷ N. Kakurin, *Kak srazhalas’ Revoliutsiia*, v. 2, 136

²⁰⁸ RGVA f 6 o 4 d 92 l 180ob

²⁰⁹ N. Kakurin, *Kak srazhalas’ Revoliutsiia*, v. 2, 139

²¹⁰ Distinct story in its own right, that transfer did not transpire effortlessly. Arguing that the detachment of the 3rd brigade from the rest of the Transdniprian division would have disruptive effects on the Ukrainian Army as a whole, Antonov and Dybenko (then the Divisional commander) attempted to sabotage the directives of the General Headquarters receiving severe rebuke from Vatsetis. (*Direktivy Glavnogo komandovaniia Krasnoi Armii*, 222-223). On the other hand, according to Arshinov’s *History of the Makhnovist Movement*, the makhnovites insisted on fighting Denikin and the Cossacks as the necessary condition of collaboration with the Bolsheviks (Arshinov, 64)

²¹¹ RGVA f 6 o 4 d 92 l 180ob; Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 65; *Grazhdanskaia Voina na Ukraine*, v. 2, 8-9

²¹² Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 66, 83

²¹³ RGVA f 6 o 4 d 92 l 180ob-181

²¹⁴ Antonov had precisely that in mind when at the end of his magnum opus he presented a list of staggering figures which were supposed to betoken the contribution made by the Ukrainian Front to the Bolshevik victory over Denikin: some 50 thousand bayonets, 4 thousand cavalry, 540 machine guns, 104 cannons, 5 armored trains – that is, practically, the entire force at his disposal less the troops of the mutinous Grigoriev (Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 330).

Thus, it was not exactly for the lack of trying that the Command of the Ukrainian Front failed to propitiate the Russian center. The issues between Moscow and the Front, invisible or neglected at first, stemmed from the irresolvable difference in the principles according to which the two thought and operated. The existence of the separate Command, responsible *de jure* to Kharkov (rather than Moscow), but *de facto* only to itself, broke the unity of the strategic plan, articulated and finessed by the Russian Bolshevik leadership. Inversely, it created a condition under which the pursuit of a parallel strategy became a possibility and ultimately, a reality. To be sure, as a man who had been commissioned down south to Kursk with an express purpose of splicing an army from the disjointed insurgent fragments, Antonov had to recognize the centrality of the Don region and the primacy of the Serpukhov military will; yet as a Commander-in-Chief of a state, allied with yet independent from (if nominally) Russia (a position acquired subsequently to his appointment to Kursk), Antonov transformed into an embodiment of that parallel strategy, fixing his gaze unflinchingly westward. “At the threshold of a corridor to Europe, we face enormous tasks,” blared the commanding voice of Antonov’s telegram to Rakovsky.²¹⁵ In his response to Skachko, composed around April 20th, the Commander of the Ukrainian Front gave a plenary explanation of those tasks:

The Rumanians are currently advancing against Hungary, Bulgaria is primed to fall upon Rumania, in Turkey there is ferment. The whole Balkan Peninsula is boiling. **And the entire task [consists] in organizing the strike, capable of crushing down the last barriers for the development of revolution. There is a lot of strength [available] locally and one cannot engage them elsewhere. Once it ignites up there (tam tronetsia) – then would our hands be fully untied** (Antonov’s emphasis).²¹⁶

²¹⁵ *Direktivny Glavnogo komandovaniia Krasnoi Armii*, 222

²¹⁶ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 64

Expressed in those words, the so-called “breakthrough to the West” – *proryv na zapad* – evolved into a sole *raison d’etre* of the Ukrainian Front, other ‘strategic assignments’ appearing bleak or nonexistent in the light of Entente’s hectic retreat from the coasts of the Black Sea and the seemingly imminent collapse of the Nationalist resistance in the yet unoccupied patches of Volhynia.²¹⁷ Turning – literally and brazenly – its back on Russian affairs (unfolding towards a climax in the Don-Seversky Donets region), the Soviet Ukraine informed the world of its west-bound orientation in a double ultimatum with which Rakovsky’s government attempted to stun Rumania (sent on May 1st and May 3rd). The exact terms were of consequence only insofar as they were meant to cause a provocation or a precedent, their fulfillment skillfully ruled out by the immoderation of demands.²¹⁸ With Europe therefore looking like an overripe fruit ready to be plucked, the Command of the Ukrainian Army was making last preparations before launching itself on the path of the great Red Crusade.

The Ukrainian Front, the acting military organ of a respective Soviet republic, insisted on defining its own strategy despite the fact that Vatsitis had for some time talked of the Front’s tasks as being successfully resolved.²¹⁹ That stubborn, even recalcitrant, adherence of Antonov to the precepts of autonomy no doubt reflected his own ambitions as well as those of his aides, who, like Bubnov, espoused views of the “Left Bolshevism.” Still, more than anything else, the distinctiveness of the Front’s outward striving betokened its partisan origin and its evolving insurgent content – essential characteristics, which, in the final analysis,

²¹⁷ *ibid.*, v. 4, 7

²¹⁸ *ibid.*, v. 4, 47; *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v. 1, b. 2, 404-406

²¹⁹ *Direktivny Glavnogo komandovaniia Krasnoi Armii. (1917-1920). Sbornik dokumentov* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1969), 229

were fully independent of the Front's commanding officers, be they in the Antonov's Field Staff or the Revolutionary Military Council. When sometime in the late twenties Vatsetis blamed the partisans for having carried the Ukrainian Red army "well beyond the assignments, imposed upon it by the High Command,"²²⁰ he was merely reiterating an opinion, current among certain military circles at the time of the said events. On April 17th Glagolev, for instance, apprehensively reported that

[h]aving gone far and beyond the basic directive of the High Command (to settle firmly at the Dnieper river and limit oneself to reconnoitering), the front, naturally, could only stop now at Dniester, although the inclusion of the Bessarabian insurgents into its ranks indicates that the front, comprised of the insurgents, may move even further to the west.²²¹

The Front, impervious to notions of discipline and regularity, prone to high desertion rates, could only sustain itself by drawing from the inexhaustible spring of the armed countryside. To survive it had to absorb and to absorb it had to advance forward, like the momentum-gaining oceanic wave, or, better yet, an avalanche, rolling menacingly down the declivity into the distressed valley of the alarmed European bourgeoisie.

The westward leaning of the Front was additionally buttressed up by the professed reluctance of the Red insurgents to risk their lives in the name of 'Muscovy' (*Moskovshchyna*). "For Russia we won't fight, for Ukraine we will" – that phrase, attributed to the mobilized residents of the Chernigov province²²² concisely verbalized the sentiment of the entire Ukrainian Red Army (with a possible exception of Makhno's brigade²²³). Etiologically akin to the resentment of the region-bound militiamen, it pointed in no uncertain terms to the

²²⁰ N. Kakurin, I. Vatsetis, *Grazhdanskaia voina*, 167

²²¹ *Direktivy komandovaniia frontov Krasnoi Armii*, v. 2, 195

²²² TsDAHO f 57 o 2 d 281 ll 31-32

²²³ See resolutions taken at various makhnovite Congresses (*Nestor Makhno. Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie na Ukraine*, 87; RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 148 l 51, etc.)

development of the positive kind, namely, to the advent of a greater corporate identity, wrought out of the common ‘insurgent experience’. Although the partisan, geographically and mentally extricated from his village, was yet not too keen on recognizing in the lineaments of “the whole World” features of his mother, as one idealistic poet might have wanted, he certainly could situate his own interests and welfare within an enormous compound of the Front and the Ukrainian Bolshevik statehood. This spicy concoction out of Bolshevism and Nationalism found its way in the resolutions and proclamations, released or voted on behalf of the atamans while they were still formally attached to Kharkov. In one compromising leaflet Anton Bogunsky envisioned Ukraine as a culturally and economically independent entity, a country, governed by the “local Ukrainian people (*liudei-ukraintsev*),” defining this category in terms of territorial origin rather than religious or ethnic affiliation (“all living in Ukraine”).²²⁴ His closest associate Grudnitsky, chairman of the Zolotonosha executive committee by decree of the revolutionary Fortune, expressed the same idea without the superfluous finesse of Bogunsky’s legalism. “It is not necessary to abide to the Center,” he told the soldiers, congregated to perform the rite of election, “Neither should one be subordinated to the oncoming Muscovites (*moskaliam*).”²²⁵ Too complex and fraught with consequences for the future to be impounded within the constrains of a single paragraph, that clamor for native leadership and native politics, intermixed with increasingly violent attacks on Jews, local or not, Russians, “Latvians, Chinese and Magyars” (when those latter were around),²²⁶ became first audible and then grew louder in direct proportion to the involvement of the Soviet Russia in the affairs of Ukraine – as if the revelation of the sham of

²²⁴ Nestor Makhno. *Krest’ianskoe dvizhenie na Ukraine*, 116-118

²²⁵ RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 148 ll 35-37

²²⁶ With time, it seems, this expression became a fixed phrase, representing all non-Jewish and non-Russian foreigners. Proclamations of Zeleny, Grigoriev, Struk and others give plenty of evidence to this socio-linguistic development.

independence made the insurgents cherish with double and triple force the very object that the Moscow's tactless agents held in so low an esteem. Antonov understood this very well, better, in fact, than most of his colleagues, who tended to ascribe "the chauvinist tincture" of the insurgents to the effects of the nondescript "Ukrainian judeophobia" as well as the machinations of incidental "blackguards" (*prokhodimtsev*).²²⁷ Bypassing Rakovsky's government, Antonov went straight to Moscow, imploring it to "compel the 'great Russian carpetbaggers' (*naezzhikh 'velikorossov'*) to treat the locals and the circumstances under which they lived with greatest possible tact" lest they succeed in marring the Soviet power with denigrating epithets of an occupying force.²²⁸ From the perspective of the Front Commander, the plea came none too late, the recent defection of the 14th Mirgorod Regiment to the side of the UNR²²⁹ and the rapid proliferation of the 'unaffiliated' bands, with certain among them adding a yellow-blue standard to the stock of Bolshevik-inspired amulets,²³⁰ divulging undeniable symptoms of the metastasizing disintegration. As the unwelcome prospect of warring for Russia on the eastern border of Ukraine began to advance from not so distant a future, many partisan units thought it apt to cross the border of a different kind – that same line between relative legality and the state of insurgency from which they had all so recently emerged.

Was Moscow even conscious of the dangers involved in playing against an opponent who held the trump card with a dreadful word "rebellion" written on it? The attitude that Moscow

²²⁷ See, for instance, the report of Aleksandr Brianski, a commission chairman of the Higher Military Inspection, submitted to S.S. Danilov on May 4th, 1919 (*Nestor Makhno. Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie na Ukraine*, 131-135);

²²⁸ Antonov-Ovseenko, v. 4, 148, 153-154

²²⁹ This occurred on April 18th and was the first example of a mass desertion of the Red Army unit to the side of the nationalists.

²³⁰ One such band attacked a train with the Higher Military Inspection personnel on board; but for the timely intervention of the 24th Regiment stationed nearby, Ioffe, Iudovski and others might have not lived to see the triumph of their comrades (*Nestor Makhno. Krestianskoe dvizhenie na Ukraine*, 133).

had assumed toward the Ukrainian Front and Ukrainian army was dictated perforce by the desire at rendering them innocuous so that at all subsequent rounds the man with arms would yield without much resistance to the superior will of the state. A mite too fractious for its own good, the staff of the Ukrainian Command could nonetheless be brought in line by means of cajoling and reprimands; in the unlikely case of obstinate perseverance, Antonov and his supporters could simply be dismissed on charges of proverbial *samostiinost'* (impermissible autonomy) and be replaced with more amenable individuals.²³¹ On the other hand, the Ukrainian ataman-turned-regimental (brigade, divisional) commander and, even more so, the rank-and-file insurgent presented a dilemma of an altogether different caliber. Outgrowth of state erosion, they had not only habituated themselves to acting independently in the absence of exacting central authority, but elevated this practice into the central tenet of their existence, the cornerstone of their revolutionary pride. Their indiscipline was profound, corporeal, epistemological. Similarly, the measures that Moscow had to adopt to introduce order and obedience had to be precise and radical, a deft combination of a surgeon knife and a powerful antibiotic designed to excise the tumor and preclude the possibility of recidivism. The bulky body of the Ukrainian front, which the Russian Bolsheviki coveted so much – even if it comprised but of “bayonets and machine-guns in prodigious quantity”²³² – could only be won over by pouncing upon bodies of individual partisans and disciplining them into the material, suitable to enter into *la grande muette* of the Soviet Republic.

²³¹ On May 5th, 1919 Lenin sent two telegrams to Antonov, Podvoisky and Rakovsky in which he castigated the former two for showing too much unwanted initiative. “The fall of Lugansk (which took place a day before – M.A.) demonstrates the accuracy of those, who accuse you of *samostiinost'* and [the unsanctioned] striving to Rumania (*ustremlenii na Rumyniiu*),” wrote the agitated Leader to his Ukrainian subalterns (*Direktivny Glavnogo komandovaniia Krasnoi Armii*, 231-232).

²³² Glagolev complained that the Front possesses neither good artillery, nor the engineering troops to speak of, nor reliably rear units – nothing, but elementary military brown with bayonets and guns (*Direktivny komandovaniia frontov Krasnoi Armii*, v. 2, p. ?)

With this in mind, Moscow endeavored to break through the carapace of insurgent practices and seize the self-mobilized and self-propelled insurgent, hoping to succeed there where the Ukrainian government had failed. Their numbers and frequency of visits growing exponentially from early April onwards, the northern emissaries were dismayed at the state of dereliction in which most of the partisan units were discovered. “When speaking of Grigoriev’s brigade,” concluded one of the inspectors of the 1st Transdnieperian brigade, “one cannot but point out at the critical lack of ... experienced political workers and that of the apposite literature.” “The Red Army soldiers,” continued another in the same vein, “are by and by politically illiterate (*daleko politicheski negramotny*)... in consequence of that both anti-Semitism and drunkenness are flourishing in these troops.”²³³ Makhno’s men, praised until recently for their bravery and spirit of self-sacrifice, came under the fire of critique, directed at them, from beyond the Ukrainian border. “Political work worthy of mention is entirely absent in the troops of Makhno... one often observes [propensity] to hard drinking and dissolute behavior among the commissars, which sets a ground for the [subsequent] corruption (*razlozheniia*) of certain unconscious (*nesoznatel’nych*) soldiery masses.”²³⁴

The fact that the Transdnieperian division (Makhno, Dybenko and Grigoriev) joined the body of the Front in the later stages of the Ukrainian scramble and was generally notorious for its willfulness did not weight all too heavily in the making of such judgments, for other units – those which had traced the track of the Bolshevik advance from its first unsteady steps – were too placed on the scales of revolutionary solvency and found utterly wanting.

²³³ RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 557 ll 1-6

²³⁴ *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v. 1 b. 2, 374

The 7th Sumy Regiment, upon which Antonov lavished expressions of unstinted enthusiasm, was seen as a breeding ground of alcoholism with company commanders among its principal fanciers.²³⁵ The legendary Bogun Regiment, the veritable kernel of the entire Ukrainian Army, fared even worse. Having acknowledged its achievements in opening phases of the struggle, comrade Eidelstein, an employee of the Central Bureau of Communication and Information, spared no disparagements in narrating the history of its subsequent degeneration: “After the regiment spent some time in Kiev and Vinnitsa... [where] it met the counterrevolutionary and anti-Semitic peasantry, a good half of men became converted to anti-Semitism, one quarter professing their sentiments overtly.”²³⁶ Bereft of conscientious guides, the Ukrainian Army, never too reliable force to begin with, seemed to careen towards the ideal of smug licentiousness, cleaving to the human and material assets of the land when Lenin’s Russia needed them so acutely.

Convening on April 8, 1919 to discuss military-related questions, the Central Committee of the CP(b)U resolved, among other things, “to heed most serious attention to the political work in the Army,” “to supply [it] with the maximum quantity of the communists [to serve] as rank-and-file soldiers as well as political commissars,” “to assign [the army] party cells the task of establishing immediate connection with the military department of the Central Committee,” and, finally, to exert oneself in the “direction of preventing Petliura elements from penetrating the Army.”²³⁷ *Grosso modo*, this set of decisions summarized the soft – “pedagogical” – aspect of reform that Party in Moscow intended to pursue with

²³⁵ RGVA f 103 o 1 l 36

²³⁶ RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 148 ll 79-80

²³⁷ *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v. 1, b. 1, 724-726; see also resolutions of the 3rd Congress of the CP(b)U in *Kommunisticheskaia Partiia Ukrainy v rezoliutsiakh i resheniakh s'ezdov i konferentsii*, 41-43.

unconditional assistance from the local Bolshevik government. Having declared Ukraine to be the “military camp”²³⁸ – in neat concord with Podvoisky’s earlier recommendations²³⁹ - Kharkov proceeded at once to mobilize all communists with an aim of creating “military units, ready to assemble speedily and march off at the injunction of the Party center.”²⁴⁰ The so-called reserve regiment of the Kiev organization of the Communist Party, decreed into existence on April 12th “in conjunction with the latest developments” – was among several of similarly willed detachments, distinct from the rest by virtue of having Bolshevik top-brass in its ranks (Bubnov serving, for instance, as its political commissar).²⁴¹ These measures, intended more for the nearby future rather than for the urgent present, were accompanied by the efforts at strengthening position of the serving communists within already existing troops. Setting up of the party cells, task half-neglected until now, resumed in earnest, supported by the internalized belief that their presence automatically diminishes instances of “banditry” and that, on the contrary, propensity to insubordination grows markedly when the soldiers and their commanders are left unobserved – or “unenlightened in matters of the Communist teaching” – by the party organizations. “The communist cell is being established anew,” commented the political commissar of the Transdnieperian division upon the situation in the 5th Regiment of its 2nd brigade. “Strict revolutionary discipline is introduced in the regiment. The best regiment of the 2nd brigade...”²⁴² Typical was the observation made in early May with regard to the 13th Regiment of the 3rd Border division: “The Communist cell includes 20 communists and 27 sympathizers. Despite the low numbers, the cell spawned up ambitious

²³⁸ *ibid.*, v. 1, b. 1, 717-718; see also Podvoisky’s report, dated April 9th, in *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v. 1, b.2, 317-320.

²³⁹ Podvoisky, *Opyt voenno-revoliutsionnoi taktiki*, 7-8

²⁴⁰ *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v. 1, b. 1, 716

²⁴¹ *ibid.*, v. 1, b. 1, 731

²⁴² *ibid.*, v. 1, b. 2, 340

party work (*razvila bol'shuiu partiinuiu rabotu*).²⁴³ True enough, in the spring of 1919 the actual count of the card-carrying members tended, if anything, to diminish, susceptible as the communists were to the scything effects of lead, disease and desertion; the party cells, on the other hand, being perhaps a better representation of the Bolshevik foothold in the Army, were most certainly proliferating. Thus, if in the late February of 1919 the 2nd Soviet Ukrainian division encompassed about 40 cells (with over 400 members, not counting troops of Grigoriev, then part of the said division),²⁴⁴ two and a half months later, that is on the eve of Grigoriev's mutiny, its political commissar Isaak Mints could report presence of 61 cells (albeit housing only 248 communists).²⁴⁵ As a consequence, the cells were often very small, totaling, as in one regiment of Grigoriev's brigade, as few as three members;²⁴⁶ few regiments could boast as many as 50 communists (the 5th Regiment of the 2nd division was a notable exception). Still, they were functioning as key nodes in the nexus of communication and surveillance as well as loyalty dischargers, releasing the political commissar from the state of forced isolation and helping him lay the foundation of the establishing party control, at least in theory.²⁴⁷

When these relatively mild measures proved insufficient, the Center felt tempted to sterner measures. The 2nd division tottering on the brink of mutiny in the last week of April, the inspection recommended immediately establishing "a divisional tribunal and extraordinary investigatory commission."²⁴⁸ Similarly, in a belated reaction to pogroms in Berdichev,

²⁴³ RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 148 l 181

²⁴⁴ *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v. 1, b. 1, 645-646

²⁴⁵ *ibid.*, v. 2, 22

²⁴⁶ *ibid.*, v. 1, b. 2, 341

²⁴⁷ *ibid.*, v. 1, b. 1, 636-638

²⁴⁸ RGVA f 103 o 1 d 31 l 67

staged by the soldiers of the 9th, 21st and 5th Cavalry Regiments between March 19th and March 22nd, its commanders were instructed to present themselves before the court of revolutionary justice.²⁴⁹ Exasperated at the stubborn refusal of the Makhnovites to accept regular army norms,²⁵⁰ Grigori Sokolnikov, then a member of the RMC of the Southern Front, made the radical suggestion – “Remove Makhno” – which gained immediate approval from Lenin.²⁵¹ Another *enfant terrible* of the indomitable Ukrainian insurgency, ataman Grigoriev, also appeared on the black list of commanders the Party wanted to disavow. “It is the opinion of the Central Committee,” Piatakov informed his colleagues in the Ukrainian RMC, “that Grigoriev ... needs to be liquidated.”²⁵² How exactly Moscow and Kharkov intended to execute this risky maneuver was not yet specified. Antonov’s account of these events enables one to make such a conjecture²⁵³, as do the fictionalized memoirs of Bazhenov-Trifonov,²⁵⁴ for a brief moment political commissar appointed to Grigoriev’s units.

Still, for as long as Antonov and the apparatus of the Ukrainian front maintained influence over the Bolshevik proceedings in Ukraine, assassination of the major warlords, let alone trial by tribunal and execution by firing squad, was thought unwarranted and dangerous.

²⁴⁹ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 3, 288-289. See manuscript of Tsiunchik-Orlov’s memoirs, commander of the 5th Cavalry Regiment, RGVA f 37982 o 1 d 11 l 64

²⁵⁰ Speaking on behalf of his soldiers, Molchanov, commander of the 9th Division, adjacent to the Makhno’s brigade, described to Vatsitis the form that this resistance had assumed, namely “the forced taking away of the arms, tearing of the Red Army insignia, open anti-Red Army agitation... demand to introduce the principle of electing commanders (*vybornogo nachala*).” In other words, makhnovites were not only protecting their own ‘insurgent identity’ threatened by the imposition of the proper regular army discipline, but endeavoring to convert other, non-Ukrainian troops, to their creed of faith (RGVA f 6 o 4 d 92 l 134). Viktor Belash, the long-standing head of Staff of the Makhnovite Army, maintained, on the hand, that these accusations held no water whatsoever and were fabricated by the Bolsheviks as a justification for anti-makhnovite activities (A. Belash, V. Belash, *Puti Nestora Makhno*, ?)

²⁵¹ *Nestor Makhno. Krest’ianskoe dvizhenie na Ukraine*, 122

²⁵² Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 74; see also Ioffe’s recommendations concerning Makhno and Grigoriev, submitted to Rakovsky on May 4th, 1919 in *Nestor Makhno. Krest’ianskoe dvizhenie na Ukraine*, 130-131.

²⁵³ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 194

²⁵⁴ Bazhenov-Trifonov, *Kalenaia tropa*, 192

Army reorganization, the most ambitious undertaking of its kind since the by-gone days in the Neutral Zone, held more realistic promise. In early April of 1919 the Transdnieperian division, the most exceptionable part of the Ukrainian Red Army, was finally broken up in three pieces, with Dybenko's second brigade destined to evolve into a separate Crimean army,²⁵⁵ the third brigade of Makhno allotted to Gittis' Southern Front and Grigoriev's first transformed into the 6th division.²⁵⁶ His vanity undoubtedly flattered by such a promotion, Grigoriev, nonetheless, found himself subordinated to the newly created 3rd Ukrainian Soviet Army, headed by the *spets* Nikolai Khudiakov; the sovereignty of the great steppe ataman was thus compromised as a result of establishing more proximate and precise jurisdiction. Smaller atamans from the region – Popov, Bogun and Grigoriev's competitor and successor Pavel Tkachenko – were thrown together with the unruly Bessarabian partisans to produce the so-called 5th division. Commanded by another outsider, Peshekhonov, it complemented Grigoriev's troops within Khudiakov's gestating army.²⁵⁷ The ambivalent position of Makhno, tied operationally to a different military formation, yet politically and sentimentally an exponent of Ukrainian affairs, allowed it to remain unaffiliated for the time being – until Antonov and Skachko agreed to use the brigade as the foundation for a planned 7th division.²⁵⁸ Although additional, reputed trustworthy, units were to enter into its ranks – with a clear aim of allaying the explosive nature of the Makhnovite tinder – the division still worried the Command of the Southern Front. To those critics who saw this transformation as a fatal empowerment of Makhno, Skachko and the Revolutionary Military Council of the 2nd Ukrainian Soviet Army responded with an argument that could have been applied to changes

²⁵⁵ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 92

²⁵⁶ *ibid.*, v. 4, 41

²⁵⁷ *ibid.*, v. 4, 35, 130; *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v. 1, b. 2, 315-316

²⁵⁸ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 87

elsewhere on the Ukrainian Front: “The restructuring of Makhno’s brigade ... could create conditions auspicious for internal work in it, for it gives [us] an opportunity to send a large number of our political workers as well as commanding officers.”²⁵⁹ The circle of reform was expected thus to be completed – first, by renaming and reshuffling the troops and then injecting into the resultant mass sufficient quantity of the party appointees to keep them morally hale and physically malleable.

These reforms, implemented now with greater consistency than ever before, had only intensified the very evil they were supposed to curb. The mass of insurgents, bearing collectively the name of the Ukrainian Red Army, remained averse to the attempts at making a regular force out of them with a near prospect of being used against Russia’s whites; what is more, their dissent became more frequent, more violent, and, if one could say so, “aimed,” the ultimate object of the outbursts being the Soviet authority itself and those that came to be associated with it either symbolically or institutionally. For all their complexity, the Jewish pogroms, until late March of 1919 sanguinary prerogative of the UNR troops and the unclassified peasant bands, represented radical repudiation of the stately order, *which allegedly betrayed the Revolution and subverted the spirit of Bolshevism* (and not vice versa).²⁶⁰ The Commander of Rzhishchev garrison in the Kiev province expressed this idea in the succinct apology of ataman Zeleny, whose mutinous activities he was actually obliged to counter:

²⁵⁹ *ibid.*, 306; see Trotsky’s objection in *Nestor Makhno. Krest’ianskoe dvizhenie na Ukraine*, 149

²⁶⁰ In late May, Makhno, distancing himself from Grigoriev, stressed, nonetheless, that the slogans espoused by the latter “are analogous to those of the makhnovite movement and express discontent with the Soviet power, which had *forsworn principles of the October*, implanted one-sided Soviets with their bureaucrats and fenced itself off with a cordon of the extraordinary committees.” (TsDAVO, f. 2 o 1 d 249 l 36)

We found out that the followers of Zeleny also stand for the Soviets, that they are ‘independent Bolsheviks’, that the Ukrainians cannot look by indifferently as the Russian conquerors, calling themselves communists, are foisting everywhere their commissars and the ‘yids’, that these latter are keeping all power in their hands and that [men of Zeleny] fight against the condition under which the country with 80 percent Ukrainian population is governed not by the Ukrainians but by the ‘yids’, Great Russians and the Latvians.²⁶¹

It was, therefore, not merely in a fit of panic, or out of unbearable fatigue and frustration, but in an act of deliberate provocation of central power that the Red insurgents, previously *relatively* unaffected by the anti-Semitic propaganda, turned their weapons against the Jewish populace of the former Pale. The aforementioned pogrom in Berdichev in the last week of March was followed by another one in Belaia Tserkov, perpetrated by the “exemplary” 6th Regiment²⁶²; or one in a small Volhynian town Sal’nitsa, which the “bandit” 5 Cavalry Regiment had duly recorded to the list of its “accomplishments” alongside that in Berdichev; the “legendary” *tarashchantsy* (2nd Tarashcha regiment) were responsible for the particularly vicious pogrom in Chudnov-Volynsk, leaving behind at least 10 dead and the whole village burned to the ground;²⁶³ insurgents from the 4th Nezhin regiment had almost outcompeted their comrades in criminal malfeasance when they passed through the city of Kazatin.²⁶⁴ A pogrom staged in the town Malin (ukr. Malyn) in the first week of April by the soldiers of the 11th and 20th regiments must have seemed to its residents only as a second act in the drama of plunder and murder, the opening scenes of which were performed only days before by the followers of ataman Struk.²⁶⁵ When seen separately, as a double crime of local

²⁶¹ RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 148 ll 68-69. This text is quoted from the original draft. Substantial part of it was crossed out by the author of the report, so presumably the People’s Commissariat of Military Affairs, the recipient of the dispatch, saw it in a highly abridged and censored form.

²⁶² Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, 4, 262

²⁶³ RGVA f 25850 o 1 d 148 ll 139-146; RGVA f 103 o 1 d 31 l 8

²⁶⁴ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, 4, 262

²⁶⁵ RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 148 l 2

significance, this particular event harks back to the fact of real juncture between Struk and men of the 20th regiments, Struk's fellow-villagers and, in the days of the November uprising, comrades in arms. From a broader perspective, however, pogrom in Malin – as well as, for example, the recurrent 'acts of license' (*beschinstva*) of the 6th regiment in the area of Vasil'kov, the turf of Zeleny²⁶⁶ - manifested profound affinity with, or even sympathy for the deeds of Zeleny, Struk or Sokolovski, all of whom at one point counted themselves among the allies of the Soviet power. Admittedly minor in comparison to the contemporary massacres in Chernobyl (April 7-12) or Zhitomir (March 22-24) with their death tolls measured in hundreds of victims, pogroms perpetrated by the Red insurgents were nonetheless related to the latter just as the acts of provocation are to the state of war, which divided the said atamans, by now fully autonomous, from their former Bolshevik protectors.

Antonov had implied exactly that when he informed Lenin of his dark presentiment. "I see," went his dispatch from April 19, "that our army swells with an unhealthy swelling (*pukhnet nezdorovoi pukhlost'iu*), and I see disintegration (*raspad*) ripening up in its interior."²⁶⁷ The pogroms, of course, were the most radical, often irrevocable expressions of that "swelling" – and therefore rather exceptional. On a more mundane level, the growing chasm between the stiff-necked insurgents and the authority that strove to domesticate them found its articulation in the acts of violence committed against various "soviet workers," members of the communist cells, commissars, local revolutionary and executive committees, chekists and military inspectors. Although appeals to settle scores with the "overbearing appointees" – *naznachentsy*, as the representatives of central power were indiscriminately referred to –

²⁶⁶ RGVA f 103 o 1 d 31 l 34; RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 148 ll 139-145

²⁶⁷ *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v. 1, b. 2, 360-361

circulated already in the earliest stages of the Bolshevik offensive,²⁶⁸ only in April did they finally begin to bear the intended fruit. An epidemic of anti-communist, better said “anti-state,” manifestations swept the army. On April 15, soldiers of the Serebriia regiment, “over the protests of the commanding officers” arrested the commissar and thrashed him within an inch of his life; afterwards, the same informant claims, “the red army men of the very same regiment beat up the political worker who was disseminating newspaper ‘Zhitomir communist,’ threatening to kill him if he reappears with an aim of conducting communist propaganda.”²⁶⁹ With two of their comrades court-martialed and executed – allegedly for showing too much zeal in divesting civilians of their possessions – insurgents of the 6th regiment swore to “slaughter” local revkom in retaliation.²⁷⁰ This threat was carried out, if belatedly and vicariously, when on May 2, 1919 soldiers of the 21st regiment shot three members of the Zhitomir revkom and released their fellow men at arms, previously arrested by the CheKa.²⁷¹ Unwilling to try their luck, the soviet authorities in Berdichev readily yielded to the antics of Shchors, whose ‘messengers’ stormed in demanding 240 *vedro* of alcohol – “for the automobile repair purposes,” they asserted.²⁷² The Berdichev appeasers did succeed in melting the Red Army anger into transient hilarity (the sources record this obligingly), managing thus to postpone the pogrom, but on May 9, with the renewed pressure from the UNR direction compounding to the widespread anxiety, soldiers of the 22nd and 8th

²⁶⁸ See, for example, Trotsky’s thoughts on the Kupiansk affair in January of 1919 in *Kak vooruzhalas’ revoliutsiia*, v. 2, b. 1, 168-169

²⁶⁹ RGVA f 103 o 1 d 31 l 38

²⁷⁰ RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 148 ll 83-84

²⁷¹ RGVA f 103 o 1 d 31 l 19; although, judging from a different document, the aforementioned execution of the Zhitomir revkom was conducted by the selfsame 6th regiment (RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 148 l 145).

²⁷² RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 148 ll 139-145; one *vedro*, literally bucket, contains a little over 12 liters of liquid.

regiments fell upon Berdichev CheKa, broke into the municipal treasury and left laden with plunder – all under the indifferent gaze of the 1st Army Revolutionary Military Council.²⁷³

It was not, however, in Volhynia (operational theater of the 1st Soviet Ukrainian Army), but in southern Ukraine, Crimea and Donbass, dominated by the overgrown parts of the former Transdniprian division, where the animosity between the insurgents and the soviet authorities reached its zenith. A political commissar, sent in April of 1919 to the 3rd brigade of Makhno, relayed the comportment of the Makhnovite chief of staff Boris Veretel'nikov (mistakenly referred to as Veretennikov), who “was boasting how one would annihilate all those *naznachentsy* and chase them out from [all] the villages, where they would [only] dare to appear.”²⁷⁴ The result of such campaign of intimidation was such that, another agitator telegraphed, “political workers decline to go and work among the troops of Makno.”²⁷⁵ Shafranski, one-time fearless commissar of the Shchors' Bogun regiment, refused outright the dubious privilege of spreading the truth and instilling revolutionary discipline in Grigoriev's quarters. “I would rather submit to the arrest warrant than become political commissar,” he is said to have declared.²⁷⁶ His fears were not exaggerated, for the troops of Grigoriev, with or without explicit permission of their ataman, launched veritable hunt on the soviet workers. “Destroyed are entire volost executive committees,” wrote the district military commissar of Krivoi Rog (ukr. Kryvyi Rih) on April 24, “Twenty-seven communists are killed in Shesternia (ukr Shestirnia), twenty-two in Kazanka.”²⁷⁷ Less than a week before, insurgents of Grigoriev's Verbliuzhka regiment, who abandoned their position despite

²⁷³ RGVA f 103 o 1 d 31 l 20; Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 262

²⁷⁴ *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v. 1, b. 2, 362

²⁷⁵ *ibid.*, v. 1, b. 2, 374

²⁷⁶ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 82

²⁷⁷ *ibid.*, v. 4, 190

Antonov's categorical objection²⁷⁸, disarmed the railroad guard at Dolinskaia junction, killed its commanding officer and took whatever money, clothing and food they could find; this attack might have been written off as straightforward looting by the famished soldiery had it not been inscribed into their programmatic slogan: "Down with the communists, extraordinary committees and commissars."²⁷⁹ Hastening to the troubled surface of the Bolshevik dominion, these outbursts were giving the brewing underlying unrest dimensions of an open uprising.

In the context of such lethal skirmishes, Grigoriev's attempts at shifting burden of responsibility onto the shoulders of local authorities²⁸⁰ seemed, at the very least, superfluous, although the Front Commander kept on listening, preferring to treat the affair as transient and adventitious. This peculiar correspondence between Grigoriev's half-sincerity and Antonov's cultivated naiveté had long outlasted its own practical import and entered into realm of pure and inconsequential histrionics, the actual future of the soviet project in Ukraine being decided on the ground level of the political and military hierarchy. The intelligence report delivered to the Staff of the 1st Ukrainian Soviet Army on May 2, 1919 transmitted the laconic verdict, pronounced by the rank-and-file: "All soldiers are in the mood antipathetic (*nastroenny protiv*) to the civil authority."²⁸¹ Their political education commenced and completed in 1917, the Ukrainian insurgents, whose commanding and 'discourse-generating' spearhead consisted of the privates and NCOs (*unteroffitsery*) of the former Imperial army,

²⁷⁸ *ibid.*, v. 4, 37

²⁷⁹ RGVA f 167 o 1 d 22 l 97

²⁸⁰ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 193; in one of the last telegrams to Antonov, Grigoriev complained about the Bolshevik punitive expeditions, who impose contributions and otherwise deal harshly (*raspravliaiutsia*) with the populace - "especially with the families of the Red Army men" - causing "extreme" unrest among the troops (RGVA f 178 o 1 d 24 ll1-4)

²⁸¹ RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 148 l 145

indwelt the world, forged in the laboratory of the Greater February – the world that had enjoined free elections of the commanders, encouraged cacophonous deliberations over affairs petty and grand and apotheosized small-scale politics. In other words, the post-Imperial chaos was their native element, the ruins of authority – their habitat and, by inverse reasoning, the recrudescence of the central state – their anathema.

The language, employed when talking about the state was varied, but the attitude toward the object of conversation – invariably negative. The Makhnovites, the most sophisticated and organizationally sufficient species in the great Partisan kingdom, railed against the “authorimaniac” (*vlastnicheskii*)²⁸² penchant of the Center, its narrow party-mindedness and flagrant disingenuity of intent, which saw the installment of the *pro forma* communes (*kazennye kommuny*)²⁸³ side by side with that of the “contemporary *okhranka*” – ЧеКа.²⁸⁴ Their celebrated slogan – “Down with the Commissarocracy!” (*komissaroderzhavie*)²⁸⁵ – embraced as much constructive political content as that otherwise decomposing and anti-political movement was capable of garnering at the moment. Others, less steeped in theory and more in quotidian rural existence, perceived the authority through the prism of its distance and its foreignness, the resultant invisibility rendering it in their mind insensitive and necessarily unjust. Appearing in the guise of some “military specialist” exported from Russia or a city-nurtured Jewish propagandist, the authority developed a habit of ordering and exacting without ever remunerating the insurgents for the good faith shown; so resolves

²⁸² *Vlastnicheskii, vlastnichestvo* are the Makhnovite neologism; one could also translate it as ‘authori-centric’.

²⁸³ Arshinov, 57

²⁸⁴ *Nestor Makhno. Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie na Ukraine*, 111-112

²⁸⁵ Another apt makhnovite neologism that had gained currency among the Ukrainian troops as early as mid-March of 1919 – perhaps even earlier (more on that term see reports to Narkomvoen and the Higher Military Inspection, RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 152 l 29; Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 3, 203; *Nestor Makhno. Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie na Ukraine*, 131-135; as well as resolutions of the Makhnovite Congresses, *Nestor Makhno. Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie na Ukraine*, 87)

itself the mystery of that strange nationalism, espoused by one Bogunski or one Zeleny, who, while decrying preponderance of the non-Ukrainians, could dissociate themselves uncompromisingly from the statist projects of the Petliura's circle. The most basic objection, however – complaint so evocative of the February 1917 and therefore so relevant – had been voiced in the barracks of the Kharkov garrison: “It is said that one is reverting to the old style of command (*staromu poriadku komandovaniia*, i.e. *ancien regime*) and it is likely that soon they will start beating you as they had done before.”²⁸⁶ Not that, of course, the partisans were such touch-me-nots, the widespread use of corporal punishment by Shchors or Grigoriev clearly disabusing anyone of that illusion; yet, they certainly found it demeaning that the appointed higher ranking officers (rather than their own elected *bat'ko*) could handle them no better than some remorseless “gold-epauletted” reactionary.²⁸⁷ In short, the problem with the state – the problem of any transcendent authority – was not the beating itself, but the nonconsensual, un-family-like nature thereof, abuse that reeked of counter-revolution.

It was precisely this resentment that had given birth to the paradoxical opposition between the “Bolsheviks” and “Communists,” a rapport that was conveniently and conventionally reduced to the ignorance (*temnota*) of the masses both in the coeval bureaucratic reports and the subsequent histories of the Civil War. “We are for the Bolsheviks but against the communists,” the soldiers of the 11th border guard regiment were apparently claiming in the month of April,²⁸⁸ and this assertion propagated through the open space with a facility of an

²⁸⁶ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 237.

²⁸⁷ Report to the Staff of the 1st Ukrainian Soviet Army, dated April 18th, 1919, contains the following seemingly banal, but actually highly suggestive line: “The Red Army men of the 8th regiment are agitated against the regimental commander, who had struck one soldier when the latter by oversight let the horse jump out of the moving train.” (RGVA f 103 o 1 d 31 l 38)

²⁸⁸ RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 148 l 181

age-old beloved folksong. “Zeleny calls himself a Bolshevik, but says that he is not a communist,” so went the unintentionally incredible but utterly humorless report on the April Fool’s day.²⁸⁹ Ataman Angel from Chernigovshchina established his political identity in duplicate terms.²⁹⁰ “Bandit” Klimenko (or Klemenko), formerly commander of the Uman garrison²⁹¹ declared in a forged issue of *Izvestiia* that he “goes for the Soviet Russia, but against the communists and the yids.”²⁹² Showing minimum creativity, Makhno reckoned himself among the so-called “free communists,”²⁹³ category established to draw attention to the inauthenticity of the Party-bound comrades. Having supported the Bolsheviks in their bid for power, the insurgents became united with the spirit of Bolshevism, or, at least with its decentralizing – centrifugal – tendencies; the history of state disintegration and of army collapse (to say nothing of land seizures and other peasant “incivilities”) was, few reservations considered, more their history, or pre-history, than that of the capital-ensconced revolutionaries. The communists with their plans at bringing the state back into operation appeared as the Revolution’s illegitimate children, or, what is worse, as the outright imposters – either way, the insurgents believed, they had forfeited all inheritance rights to the post-revolutionary tomorrow, because they had been acting in the style of the pre-revolutionary yesterday. For a while the secret tension between the insurgents and communists had no visible consequences, the Party being too weak and sufficiently agile to risk provoking the Army. Yet, with Kharkov first supported and then practically replaced by Moscow, with events in Caucasus and Severski-Donets sending ominous echoes across Kremlin halls, the centripetal drive began to grow at the rate of an imperative, threatening to

²⁸⁹ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 3, 340

²⁹⁰ RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 148 l 177

²⁹¹ TsDAVO f 2 o 1 d 233 ll 93-98

²⁹² TsDAVO f 2 o 1 d 233 ll 89-91

²⁹³ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 113

undermine the fragmented paradise of the ataman-ruled Ukraine. This interaction between antipodal tendencies resembled less the cool-headed vector summation than an exothermic chemical reaction, for, rather than yielding a certain harmonious balance at the end (as Antonov, the Front Command and the Left Communists might have hoped), it resulted in an explosion which were only to strengthen one of the elements at the price of annihilating the other.

Grigoriev's uprising was such an explosion – a violent clash of the rural, militarized and anarchistic Bolshevism with the urban, civil and etatist Communism.

Part V: Mutiny

The uprising, which brought an end to the strained collaboration between the Partisans and the Soviets and which interred the vexingly autonomous Ukrainian Front, seems superficially easy to recount and account for. It is usually seen to be the handiwork of one man, Ataman Grigoriev, invariably described as a sot, scoundrel and adventurer and his enterprise, by extension, as drunken debauchery and pure adventure (*avantiura*).²⁹⁴ The speed with which Grigoriev's main forces were defeated and the regular nature of operations undertaken makes it appear kindred to the series of other failed military coups (those of Muraviev in July of 1918 or of Mironov in August of 1919), while the simultaneous outbursts of rural violence, more collateral than causal, couple it with the fully-fledged peasant rebellions (or 'wars') in the Volga ('Chapan war' in March of 1919), Tambov (1920-1921) and West Siberian (spring

²⁹⁴ The earliest announcements of the Grigoriev's uprising already set the tone to the subsequent historical stylization of the movement – see *IVRKPU*, nr 111 May 13, 1919; see Trotsky's speech in Kharkov, *IVRKPU* nr 119, May 19, 1919; Resolution of the Council of the Workers' and Peasants' Defense in *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v. 2, 32-34; Antonov's address to the troops in Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 211-212.

of 1921) regions. Structural similarities aside, neither ‘putsch’ nor ‘peasant movement’ render full justice to *grigorievshchina*, the former erring on the side of belittlement and the latter ascribing to the ataman reserves of agency he did not possess. Rather, the uprising functioned as a mechanism of accelerated political demarcation, in the course of which the players, previously implicated with each other in a rapport of misjudged consanguinity, some infantile association, had recognized their mistake and, as if overcompensating with the bill of regret and embarrassment, set stringent limits to the permissible in the exercise of state-building, army command and, ultimately, revolutionary guidance.

Appropriated as it may have been by the agitated peasantry in search of an apposite pretext, Grigoriev’s violent *volte-face* organically stemmed from the debate over political precedence, a conflict that had already grown old – to the extent at least that anything could be classified as having age in this time of fleeting scenes and self-abbreviating stages. The task of the Communists, more urgent than ever in the light of troubling news from the Donbass, consisted in taming the great ataman and in imparting “regular form” upon his troops or in disbanding them with a subsequent redistribution of men among the more “reliable units.”²⁹⁵ At certain point – against Antonov’s by now rather impractical admonition to moderation – blandishment with high offices and press accolades gave way to impatience and irritation, major figures at the Center (Kamenev, Piatakov, Ioffe) lobbying for the immediate removal of Grigoriev.²⁹⁶ The ataman – a true megalomaniac who preferentially resided in the celestial realms of fantastic endeavors – nonetheless correctly made out the shape that the events closer to his earthy dwelling were gradually taking and readied himself for what appeared

²⁹⁵ Podvoisky’s words, Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 196

²⁹⁶ *Nestor Makhno. Krest’ianskoe dvizhenie na Ukraine*, 130-131, Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski* v. 4, 74

inevitable; using the forthcoming May 1st festivities as an excuse, he concentrated his troops around major railroad-junctions and cities under his control, Yelisavetgrad in particular, excising it beforehand “from the outside world.”²⁹⁷ Communists, municipal executive committees, organs of Cheka were pressured into silence and inactivity, cowed by visions of speedy and often lethal reprisals. Finally, leaflets of unambiguous content started to circulate around Grigoriev, which, although never signed by the ataman himself, urged the Red Army men to make their choice – “between the commune” with its appointed officers, as one intercepted telegram put it, or “the honest socialist of Ukraine ataman Grigoriev,” who “stands unflinchingly on the Soviet platform” and “does not trust the incomers from the North.”²⁹⁸

It was after one of those largely anonymous exhortations that things came to a head. On May 7, Nikolai Khudiakov, the commander of the 3rd Army and Grigoriev’s nominal boss, presented his notorious subaltern with an ultimatum: either impose order upon the troops, or face removal.²⁹⁹ On the very same day, the ataman issued his memorable *Universal*.³⁰⁰ Testament of the national Bolshevik ideology, this signal document effortlessly combined notions of the “Ukrainian people” (*Narod Ukrainskii*) with that of the “toiling masses” (*triushchegosia liuda*), appeals to popular rule and nonpartisanship with an authoritarian tone that brooked no dissent, a peremptory call to order (*Poriadok neobkhodim* - “order is necessary”). “Here is my order,” so began the programmatic part of the *Universal*:

²⁹⁷ N. Bobryshchev, “Bor’ba s banditizmom na Elisavetgradshchine,” *Letopis’ Revoliutsii*, v. 5 (1926), 45

²⁹⁸ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 197-198

²⁹⁹ *ibid.*, v. 4, 198

³⁰⁰ TsDAVO f 2 o 1 d 106 l 209; this is the copy I use, although I am aware that numerous other copies exist (in print as well) and that they may slightly differ from that text – from the perspective of orthography and syntax rather than word choice or content.

Mobilize in three days all those capable of bearing arms, and immediately occupy all railroad stations, leaving your own commissars at each station. Each volost', each village should form troops and send them to their uezd town; from each uezd town send four hundred of your best fighters to Kiev and two hundred – to Kharkov; if you have weapons, send them with weapons, if not – send them forth with pitch forks, but I ask you to carry out my order and victory will be ours.

Having proclaimed the government of the “adventurer” Rakovsky deposed, the *Universal*, nonetheless, reaffirmed the supreme right of the All-Ukrainian Congress of Soviets to form the new government according to the will of the people. Heeding the model once formulated by its equally famous predecessor, i.e. the November Address of the Directorate, Grigoriev’s appeal asked all “political speculators” (Communists in Kharkov) to abandon their offices peacefully, without forcing anyone resort to violence; unlike the aforementioned prototype, the document carefully avoided any liberal allusions to “democracy” (*demokratiia*) and “citizenry” (*hromadiane*), preferring to employ the SR-inspired stand-ins (“people’s power”, *narodniia vlast'* and “laborer”). Bestrewn with sacerdotal terms and invocations (“holy laborer,” “man of God,” “godly people”), it was certainly and perhaps even exclusively destined for a peasant audience, with whom Grigoriev hoped to strike an alliance and whose discontent he purported to understand and embody.

Much confusion ensued in the following three days with Grigoriev actively disavowing the authorship of the *Universal*³⁰¹ and Antonov refusing to give up hope of conciliation. “In the name of glory and honor and welfare of the Ukrainian peasants and workers,” he wrote to the ataman on May 7, “you take the regiments into your iron hands and forward to new victories.

³⁰¹ RGVA f 178 o 1 d 24 l 77; Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 201

The Commander of the Ukrainian armies gives his full confidence to the Red regiments of Kherson region and their invincible leader (*vozhdiu*).³⁰² Antonov cleft with “optimistic obstinacy” to the possibility of peaceful resolution, beseeching the government in Kharkov to bide their time while he managed to clear up the misunderstanding and provocation. On May 10, the Front Commander finally succeeded in getting Grigoriev on the line.³⁰³ Grigoriev no longer played innocent, not only recognizing the *Universal* as his own, but actually subjecting his interlocutor to the inconvenience of hearing the entire text read aloud. Grigoriev denied outright any connection with either the White or Petliura agents. “[When writing the *Universal*]” he claimed, “we had thought above all about the Rumanians, the Poles, Denikin and even Kolchak... Do not worry... if you need an army against Kolchak, we will send it.” Similarly, having reiterated his opposition to Rakovsky’s “regime,” Grigoriev continued to count on Antonov’s support and collaboration, congratulated the Front Commander for visibly sharing the stance of the insurgents (*govorite kak nash edinomyshlennik*), and even proposed he should lead the army as he did before, against all “violators of the people’s will” old and new. Antonov noted that the Soviet government enjoyed the unconditional support of the army. “I would like to report,” was Grigoriev’s impatient rejoinder, “that the 1st Army will not fight against me, part of the 2nd army is on my side, part of the 3rd Army through the brigade commander Makhno maintains contact with me, delegates of Bogunsky are now at my place ... [and] the railroad personnel is on my side [as well].” Putatively loathe to see unnecessary blood spilt, the ataman asked his despairing ex-boss to let him occupy Nikolaev and Kherson since orders to take over Kiev, Poltava, Ekaterinoslav and Kharkov had already been provisionally and providently issued by him.

³⁰² RGVA f 178 o 1 d 2419

³⁰³ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 203-208

Antonov must have struggled to understand the exact meaning of the planned undertaking, but to Grigoriev it seemed obvious – a military action or a coup, carried out by revolutionary troops against the government that through a sequence of compromising steps had lost its right to represent and serve these troops.

This interpretation of the rebellion remained dominant among Grigoriev and his followers even if events were not unfolding according to his predicted scheme. Grigoriev's was not a mutiny of an overweening corporal primed to become the new hetman of Ukraine³⁰⁴, but a vocal statement of the "Red Army risen (*vosstavshaia krasnaia armiia*)... to fight against mendacity, darkness, provocation, violence, political speculators and adventurers."³⁰⁵ So wrote Ivan Masenko, Grigoriev's long-standing assistant and his deputy at the time of the uprising. He specified further both the purpose of the struggle and the manner of conducting it:

We ask all honest fighters for the workers' and peasants' revolution to join our ranks, and so united we will march forth against those who with their politics make international predators out of our worker and peasant friends [stationed] along the Red front... The government of Rakovsky, elected by its handful of hangers-on, called itself the workers' and peasants' [government], but from the first day of its domination it locked us up and placed the yoke upon our necks. Such humiliation we cannot endure and thus we decided that it was better to die than carry out the will of the handful of charlatans [whose] politics was knitted together from lies and deception, insincerity (*lzhi i obmana, fal'shi*), provocation, betrayal of the workers' and peasants' revolution.

Iurko Tiutiunyk, for the moment Grigoriev's chief of staff and second in command of the rebellious army, situated the present endeavor of the ataman within the ongoing struggle of the Ukrainian people "for human existence" (*chelovecheskoe sushchestvovanie*) against all

³⁰⁴ RGVA f 178 o 1 d 2 l 140

³⁰⁵ TsDAVO f 2 o 1 d 233 l 106

recent oppressors: Wilhelm's "iron army," Petliura, and, finally, boastful "powers of the imperialist Entente." He adamantly denied the accusation, disseminated by Kharkov, namely, that Grigoriev's troops were acting in the interests of Denikin; "if we meet up with Denikin, it would be only to settle scores with him, as we did with the White Guard at Kherson, Nikolaev and Odessa."³⁰⁶ In other words, the army was conceived as a bastion against all forms of counter-revolution, irrespective of its professed political color (white, red, yellow-blue).³⁰⁷

Tiutiunnyk was right, or almost right, for the Army began to lose its formal unity, remonstrate with the 'civil' authorities and lambaste the Communists, though not necessarily in Grigoriev's direct favor. Some troops, to be sure, joined the ataman without reservations and delay once the fact of the uprising became known.³⁰⁸ Such was, for instance, the 4,000-strong garrison of Yekaterinoslav, in particular the 56th and the so-called Black Sea regiments (known also as the 57th Regiment), which took over the city, opened the prisons, declared allegiance to the ataman and compelled the remaining soldiers to follow suit.³⁰⁹ Garrisons of Cherkassy, Kremenchug and Kherson likewise surrendered their cities to the advancing troops of the rebels when the latter appeared nearby.³¹⁰ Somewhat more complex was the case of Nikolaev, a port city submerged in a four-day long foment, which ended on May 16th in the pogrom of the CheKa and the establishment of the Nikolaev Soviet of the

³⁰⁶ TsDAVO f 2 o 1 d 233 l 109

³⁰⁷ This same idea was implied in the previous chapter when it was asserted that the rule of the insurgents constituted the so-called *regime of the renewable revolution*.

³⁰⁸ Only on the 10th, i.e. three days after Grigoriev issued his *Universal*, did the Ukrainian Bolshevik government declare him outlaw; Antonov, however, loitered till May 12th before informing the troops of Grigoriev's 'treason' and pronouncing the death sentence upon this new-fangled 'Cain' (*Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v. 2, 32-34, 44-45)

³⁰⁹ "Grigorievskaia avatiura", *LR* 1923 v 3, 153; Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 240-244

³¹⁰ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 228; TsDAVO f 2 o 1 d 229 ll 1-7

workers and red army soldiers.³¹¹ Presided over by two obscure sailors, Proskurenko and Yevgrafov, the newly-formed Soviet maritime republic warmly received Grigoriev's delegates but refused to let his main forces cross the city line;³¹² on the 19th of May, however, the sailors linked up with the ataman, thus inciting the remaining Soviet authorities to a speedy and disorderly evacuation.³¹³

Generally speaking, the news of Grigoriev's 'treason' furnished the troops and their commanders that lacking mite of courage which allowed them to translate their barely concealed exasperation with the Bolshevik rule into an overt rejection thereof. To put it differently, the uprising functioned less as a trigger than as a pretext for opening hostilities against Kharkov (and in this respect deserves to be treated as the culmination of a long-brewing process rather than the inception of a new development). In the small town of Iuzefovka on a key strategic railroad line Kazatin-Uman, soldiers of the 6th company of the 58th Regiment fell upon the armored train "Kiev Communist," contriving to tear off Red stars from the defenders' caps due to the star's reputed 'Jewish' connotation. About 50 miles south of Iuzefovka, in Lipovets (ukr. Lypovets), a local garrison rose up against the authorities, inauspiciously denuded of all protection with the departure of the communist detachment to the tumultuous countryside. The 58th regiment, a garrison in Lipovets, the 8th regiment and other units scattered across Volhynia gravitated towards most notable of the regional rebels – Klimenko (formerly Red army commander), ataman Volynets, Bondarenko, etc³¹⁴ - just as the soldiers of the 20th and 151st regiments towards theirs (Sokolovski and

³¹¹ RGVA f 178 o 1 d 2 ll 324-325

³¹² TsDAVO f 2 o 1 d 229 ll 1-7; RGVA f 178 o 1 d 2 l 304

³¹³ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 222

³¹⁴ TsDAVO f 2 o 1 d 233 l 89-91

Struk).³¹⁵ A champion of the Bolshevik cause during the German occupation and one of the organizers of the Partisan troops in the Neutral Zone, Fiodor Grebenko (Gribenko) resolved to act on his own, possibly taking a cue from the ataman himself: on June 1, 1919, Grebenko stopped carrying out orders and pulled his 1st Cavalry regiment from the city of Starokonstantinov, which he was bound to defend.³¹⁶ Riotous, or very close to being such, were the activities of Primakov's Red Cossacks, pride and glory of the entire Ukrainian Red Army; sent on May 18th to fight Grigoriev, the cavalymen marked their path by routing CheKa, disarming militia, breaking into the prison of Lubny and preying upon the civilians; so great in fact was the risk of losing the regiment to the rebels that its destination was finally changed to Donbass, where the sobering presence of Denikin's Whites proffered a promise of their gradual ideological convalescence.³¹⁷

That even the best units were not averse to such conduct demonstrates the extent to which the Ukrainian Red Army – the arms-carrying body soldered from the former insurgents – was susceptible to the decimating effects of the pestilential *grigorievshchina*. “In essence, any of our regiments (in May of 1919) could have hoisted the flag of rebellion against us and at times it was not altogether clear why this or that unit fought on our side and not on the other.”³¹⁸ Zatonsky, who indited those lines years after, when Time's poultice had soothed and flattened Grigoriev's uprising from the dire emergency into a safe (albeit unpleasant) memory, only restated the simple realization, which so angered, confused and chagrined the

³¹⁵ TsDAGO f 57 o 2 d 281 ll 27-28

³¹⁶ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 264; accidentally, Grebenko's unauthorized movement did not immediately place him on the list of the fallen and disgraced; he kept on trading his merits earned in the Tarashcha uprising for the immunity from the law until at least mid July, when, capital of honors fully depleted, he was arrested by the Bolsheviks and subsequently shot.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, v. 4, 265-268

³¹⁸ V. Zaton's'kyi, *Vyr: Z minuloho* (Kharkiv: Derzhavne vydavnytstvo, 1926), 10

Bolshevik leadership during those suspenseful days: the army became highly unreliable, the army was no more. Voroshilov, recalled from his cabinet work in the Ukrainian People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs to head the much-expanded Kharkov Military District (May 10th),³¹⁹ complained in the final days of the uprising that "there had been not a single steadfast unit [available] to fight Grigoriev. Numerous regiments had gone over to Grigoriev, others declared themselves neutral, some began executing battle orders but not before routing CheKa, staging an anti-Jewish pogrom, etc."³²⁰ Podvoisky, his position suddenly circumscribed to the task of overseeing the administrative activities of the military commissars,³²¹ fully concurred with his colleague, recognizing, in fact, in the uprising a plenary confirmation of the ancient suspicion that he harbored vis-à-vis the partisans.³²² "Many front-line units, which haven't yet rebelled, are no better than those of Grigoriev," he noted, not without a degree of acrid satisfaction.³²³ Factually correct, Antonov's observation regarding rear-guard troops' greater proclivity to panic and disaffection (as opposed to those under his direct command)³²⁴ seemed now carping at best and irrelevant at worst since the absence of a clear distinction between the front and the rear, epitomized by the failure to create a regular army (structure) and accentuated by the rebellions in April and May (event), had been one of the key features of Bolshevik rule in the first half of 1919.³²⁵ Be that as it may, his words could not and did not evoke much sympathy, for the near-complete collapse

³¹⁹ *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v. 2, 35

³²⁰ TsDAVO f 2 o 1 d 233 l 64

³²¹ *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v. 2, 39-40; RGVA f 6 o 4 d 92 l 123

³²² Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 3, 184

³²³ RGVA f 33221 o 1 d 30 l 1

³²⁴ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 261

³²⁵ Event and structure are intertwined here to such a degree that it is impossible ultimately to tell one from the other; to put it in concrete terms, the uprisings were caused to no small extent by efforts to regularize army management, just as those efforts were frustrated by the outbursts of uprisings. This is, quite simply, one of the key points of the chapter.

of the partisan army had already divested its administrative-operational extension, i.e. the Ukrainian Front, of its *raison d'être* – and its commander, of his former political weight.

The Front was not done away in one blow, but rather was dismantled stepwise, at a pace and rhythm established by the unfolding of the military operations against Ukraine's main turncoat. At first, however, it appeared that the long-standing competition between Antonov and Podvoisky for seniority in the military affairs had been resolved in favor of the former; on May 11th 1919 the Council of Workers' and Peasants' Defense of the Soviet Ukraine saw Antonov at last endowed with a title comparable to that of Vatsetis – commander-in-chief of all Ukrainian armed forces.³²⁶ Made in the midst of grave crisis, this decision actually aimed to transform the Ukrainian Front into the “internal front” (*vnutrennii front*);³²⁷ with one deft stroke, therefore, the Army found itself stripped of the permanence that ‘national’ status should have otherwise warranted. Now events began to proceed at a greatly accelerated rate; on May 19th the Ukrainian Politburo, meeting with Trotsky present, decreed: “The Ukrainian Front, as the front of all Ukraine, shall not exist (*suchchestvovat' ne dolzhen*).”³²⁸ On May 24th the membership of the Revolutionary Military Council was expanded to accommodate two newly-sent “specialists” from Russia;³²⁹ on the very same day, a preliminary agreement was reached, according to which the abolished front's assets were divided three ways, with one piece passing to the Western Front, another to the Southern Front, and the rest temporarily forming the so-called Expeditionary Corps, expressly charged to fight Grigoriev

³²⁶ *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v. 2, 39-40

³²⁷ See the report of Vladimir Gorin, Marxist philosopher turned political educator, submitted to Podvoiski in response to the cited decision on May 14th, 1919 (RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 88)

³²⁸ *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v. 2, 62

³²⁹ *ibid.*, 77-78

under Antonov's curtailed command.³³⁰ With the release of the landmark Order N 104 a fortnight later, even that stump of the former Ukrainian Army ceased to exist: the 2nd Soviet Ukrainian Army, so bitterly contested by Gittis, Skachko and Antonov, was to form the basis of the future 14th Army, the 1st and what remained of the 3rd were to be merged into the 12th Army of RSFSR.³³¹ Antonov lingered on for a short time, yet on June 19th Trotsky announced the task of the Ukrainian Front accomplished, thanked its Commander and the personnel and asked them all to leave.³³²

Together with Antonov, another Moor was ushered out – ataman Grigoriev. The uprising that he began represented, as was indicated earlier, the greatest internal crisis faced by the Ukrainian Red Army and the Soviet Ukrainian state; it did have a chance of carrying the day, not least because Grigoriev's slogans,³³³ as the political commissar of the 2nd Army Vishnevetsky put it, found resonance among the Red Army soldiers as much as among the “petty bourgeoisie” (i.e., middle peasantry), from which that Army emerged.³³⁴ In the course of few days Grigoriev succeeded in taking Yelisavetgrad (May 9), Uman, Cherkassy (May 11), Kremenchug, Zolotonosha (May 12), Yekaterinoslav (May 15), Nikolaev (May 19), etc; most of these towns and cities became scenes of vicious pogroms with hundreds of dead, thousands of maimed, violated, traumatized. Yelisavetgrad, large and once flourishing trading town that had experienced several pogrom waves, “was turned into a tomb, a ruin.”³³⁵

³³⁰ RGVA f 6 o 4 d 92 l 158; *Direktivy Glavnogo komandovaniia Krasnoi armii*, 234-235

³³¹ RGVA f 6 o 4 d 92 l 189

³³² TsDAVO f 2 o 1 d 106 l 93; L. Trotsky, *Kak vooruzhalas' Revoliutsiia*, v. 2, b. 1, 194

³³³ “Down with the CheKa!”, “Down with the Commissars!”, “Down with the foreigners!” – in short, away with the centralized state and its tightening noose; the absence of slogans inspired by the practices of requisitioning is not only conspicuous but intentional – paramount, indeed, for the understanding of *grigorievshchina* and its genesis.

³³⁴ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 258

³³⁵ N. Bobryshchev, “Bor'ba s banditizmom na Elisavetgradshchine,” 48

Jews and non-Jews were targeted, although not with commensurate perseverance – the latter for working in the Soviet institutions, for being communists, commissars or chekists, and the former, to use Masenko’s appeal once more, “atoning” for the transgressions of their “agents,” whose “dirty and provocation-ridden work did much to taint honest, loyal and devout sons of the revolution, the *frontovik* Red Army soldiers” – in essence, for letting their kinsmen serve the Soviet state.³³⁶

Once the initial shock dissipated its benumbing spell, the Bolsheviks waded into the task of self-defense. Antonov’s officers, thoroughly compromised in the eyes of authorities both in Kharkov and Moscow, inspired little faith and were quickly eclipsed by new and tested men from the Southern Front and Kharkov military district – Voroshilov, Aleksandr Parkhomenko, Yevgenii Trifonov, and others who would comprise the backbone of the Soviet High Command, expurgated from the ‘amateur dabblers’ with partisan proclivities. Even less faith did the Bolshevik capitals confide in the Ukrainian soldiers, who demonstrated chronic proneness to fraternize with the insurgents. One had to seek help elsewhere in order to put forth units “untouched by the chauvinist, anti-Semitic agitation.”³³⁷ It seemed most natural to follow the example of the Lugansk communists and ask for a few “hardened Great-Russian” regiments, even if on occasions one had to countenance murmurs of resentment in their midst: “Why should I fight for the *khokhols*, what good is this Ukraine

³³⁶ TsDAVO f 2 o 1 d 233 l 106ob; this is, of course, the pogromists’ own interpretation of the pogroms, which deliberately skirts plunder as one of the main motives of violence; neither do they mention the deeply seated animosity of the peasants towards the Jews, conditioned by education, formal religion and informal superstitions. These are momentous questions, to be sure, yet, they cannot be explicitly addressed in this chapter. What interests me more in this case is the quasi-necessary association of ‘power’ with ‘Jewry’ – hence the oft-repeated slogan of the insurgents – “Down with the Jewish power!” (L. Miliakova, ed. *Kniga pogromov; pogromy na Ukraine, v Belorussii i evropeiskoi chasti Rossii v period Grazhdanskoi voiny, 1918-1920 gg: sbornik dokumentov*, (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2007), 120).

³³⁷ RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 90

for me?”³³⁸ The international units begrudged their lot less than did the Russians and looked the part too; alongside with the preexisting regiments and companies of the Rumanians, Hungarians (2nd International Regiment of Rudolf Fekete), Volga Germans (Katharinenstadt, or Ekaterinenstadt Regiment, commanded by A. Fuchs), Chinese and Latvians, new units were formed from the mobilized Bulgarian and Czechoslovak communists.³³⁹ Their utility, however, was of limited scope, for, albeit battle-worthy, they often behaved towards the local populace with unwarranted brutality, negating whatever tactical gains they might have obtained on the front-line by leaving behind a seething and disgruntled countryside.³⁴⁰

All in all, the Ukrainian Communists could only fully count on themselves and on those social layers and sub-layers that feared Grigoriev and the *jacquerie* of the ‘soldierized’ peasantry more than the Bolsheviks. On May 12th, the Central Committee of the CP(b)U issued a circulaire to eleven provincial party committees, ordering them to marshal all available internal resources to fight the ataman – “without touching the front.”³⁴¹ That same day Podvoisky announced the formation of communist units from the mobilized rank-and-file party members; each cell, union, industrial enterprise or institution was expected to produce new platoons and companies.³⁴² Simultaneously, every citizen of the Soviet Ukraine aged 18 to 40 could consider himself liable for call-up, a potential defender of the threatened regime.³⁴³ Mindful, however, of the difficulties involved in such large-scale mobilizations, recalling the shameful failure that it had suffered previously attempting to bring under arms

³³⁸ TsDAGO f 57 o 2 d 281 ll 44-47

³³⁹ *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v. 2, 67, 68

³⁴⁰ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 263

³⁴¹ *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukriane*, v. 2, 43-44

³⁴² *ibid.*, v. 2, 47

³⁴³ *ibid.*, v. 2, 48

residents of Kiev and Kharkov provinces, the Party focused exclusively on workers, “both those in service of enterprises as well as those temporarily unemployed, but registered in the labor exchange.” Quotas of workers were established for the large cities that roughly corresponded to the strength of the municipal and provincial party organization: Kiev and its environs, afflicted by the bands of Zeleny, Angel, Sokolovsky and the rest, had to supply only 7,000 persons; Kharkov, Yekaterinoslav and the Kharkov district – 24,000; Odessa, Nikolaev and their surrounding area – 14,000.³⁴⁴ The intention was clear. “In order to ensure peaceful positive work,” wrote Kharkov *Izvestiia* on May 22, 1919, “and to augment the might of the Workers’ and Peasants’ republic, encircled everywhere by enemies, one needs to create a strong armed force, an army, that would not succumb to petty-bourgeois and adventurist influences...”³⁴⁵ To put it differently, communists, workers, internationalists and the Great Russian units had to coalesce into a new army, preferably urban,³⁴⁶ certainly party-bound and instrumentally obedient, to fight the remnants of the old, built in the hinterland by private initiative during the former absence of state authority.

Although that new army did not come into being overnight, the Bolsheviks managed all the same to tilt the scales of the conflict in their favor. Grigoriev was first halted and then sent back to his point of departure. The Bolshevik troops – communists, internationalists, cadets (*kursanty*), the few accountable Ukrainian units at Kharkov’s disposal – inflicted heavy defeats upon their opponent, taking back Kremenchug on the 19 of May, Cherkassy (which changed hands at least twice) on the 21 of May, and Yekaterinoslav, where battles seemed

³⁴⁴ *ibid.*, v. 2, 49

³⁴⁵ *IVRKPU* nr 119, May 22, 1919, nr 119

³⁴⁶ “Only the proletariat could create such an army” – from the aforementioned issue of *Izvestiia* (*IVRKPU*, nr 119, May 22, 1919)

particularly dogged. On the 22 of May, the informal capital of Grigoriev, the large town of Aleksandria, had fallen to the group of P. Yegorov; there, according to official figures, most likely exaggerated, the followers of Grigoriev lost up to 3,000 men, five armored trains, thirty guns and two echelons filled with cannon shells.³⁴⁷ By the end of the month, out of the 15 or 20,000 men the Bolsheviks felt safe to ascribe to their adversary,³⁴⁸ the ataman commanded the loyalty of perhaps 3,000; 9 of 11 armored trains passed into the hands of the Communists; 45 guns out of 52 that Grigoriev's 6th division once possessed were either captured or destroyed in fighting. Within two weeks, wrote Antonov, "Grigoriev was reduced to the role of the bandit ataman à la Struk or Angel."³⁴⁹

The official announcement about the definitive suppression of Grigoriev's "adventure" (made a tad too early in accordance with an established Russian tradition) anteceded the Order N 104 by a little over a week.³⁵⁰ These two quasi-simultaneous events – Antonov's demission and Grigoriev's reduction, to bring it to the level of personalities – concluded the whole phase of the Civil War, a period that began sometime in the fall of 1918, was pierced through by the German Revolution, bracketed the collapse of the Hetman's state and the emergence of the ephemeral Directorate, ordained rural insurgents to power, rolled out the red carpet to the Bolsheviks, and brought the strange child named "Ukrainian Red Army" to life – only to blow it up into pieces on the dusty roads of the sun-filled country. It could be dubbed the time of improvisation and brinkmanship, insofar as the political uncertainty,

³⁴⁷ TsDAVO f2 o1 d 229 ll 25-26

³⁴⁸ TsDAVO f2 o 1 d 229 ll 15-16

³⁴⁹ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 249

³⁵⁰ The Front issued its version of the statement on May 25th, whereas the Ukrainian Central Executive Committee waited till May 27th before drawing up its own balance sheet (*Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v. 2, 80-81; Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 249).

precipitated by the defeat of the Central Powers, a situation more promising than alarming, in tandem with the extreme attenuation of resources available to warring parties, made them seek partnerships that one might have not even thought about, or may otherwise have been warned against contracting by some prismatic and authoritative will. Yet, this will being absent, the Bolsheviks and the atamans found themselves fighting the same opponent (Petliura's Nationalists, the Entente and the Volunteers), giving the proverbial "strange bedfellow" concrete dimension. Whether this alliance was meant to outlive its own usefulness or whether either of the sides expected rather naively to remain immune to the influence of another is futile to ask; suffice it say, however, that whatever attitudes and intentions the Bolsheviks had shared or borne in 1918, by the spring of 1919 there had been a solid minoritarian contingent in the Party circles who not only considered this solution workable but who were ready to accommodate the partisans in key questions of army command and, ultimately, power distribution. Intermediaries for the most part between the civil authorities in provincial and republican capitals and the warlords in the hinterland, these men absorbed the shocks of the centralizing politics and limited the depth and extent of Kharkov's jurisdiction; yet, in a rather ironic twist, they safeguarded Ukraine's strategic initiative as well as its partial political independence; in short, they adhered to the model articulated by the Bolshevik Left – classified earlier as *autonomist* and *regionalist*. The outburst of the uprising in May of 1919 – provoked by the tension of multiple appearances (conjugate conflicts between the Front and the Government, the Periphery and the Center, military and civil institutions, etc) - dealt these protectors of the partisans a blow from which they never recovered. At the same time, with the May crisis having ousted successes of the vertiginous Ukrainian epopee from the Bolshevik political memory, the victorious

mainstream in the Party was compelled to stipulate and hone principle, which, when translated into the realm of action, would protect the center from arrangements that may prove either compromising to its monopoly on army management or disruptive to the unity of unity of the strategic planning. It could be said that Grigoriev taught the Bolsheviks to reconcile themselves to the position of *Staatsmachthaber*, pure state power-holders, and finally to act as such.

Conclusion: Ukrainian Lessons

Trotsky, whose appearance in Ukraine coincided – non-accidentally – with the dissolution of the Partisan army and the crisis of Bolshevik power – arrived exactly to the aforementioned conclusion, namely, that the position of political domination requires approaches to war-making radically different from those that had been practiced up to that point.³⁵¹ “In the actual Ukrainian mutiny,” he wrote in his “Ukrainian Lessons,” the Bolshevik credo-setting statement in the wake of Grigoriev’s uprising, “we find savage and inebriated degeneration of the very same *partizanshchina*.”³⁵² This “*partizanshchina* of the cursed memory,” as he dubbed it a little later,³⁵³ was understood by him and his colleagues as a phenomenon with two faces. *Parizanshchina* on the ground – we could call it *atamanshchina* proper or even *immanent partizanshchina* – expressed itself in the advent of autonomous and semi-autonomous armed units, held together by the authority of sundry “atamans, little fathers

³⁵¹ See his “Partisanstvo i reguliarnaia armia” in *Kak vooruzhalas’ Revoliutsiia* (v. 2, b. 1, 59-64), where he argues that partisan-style warfare, the “small war,” befits the weaker opponent, the “mutineer” and the “rebel” in his conflict with the state; he had no doubt that the Bolsheviks were the strongest of all forces present, and hence, most prone to employing methods of the ‘big war’ – “heavy masses, unity of the front, centralized leadership” (ibid., 60)

³⁵² “Ukrainskie uroki,” *IVRKPU*, nr 116, May 18th, 1919,

³⁵³ “Prestupnaia demogogiiia” in *Kak vooruzhalas’ Revoliutsiia*, v. 2, b. 1, 234

(*batek*) and little uncles (*diadek*).”³⁵⁴ Less interested in that facet of the decried development, Trotsky reduced it rather hastily to the inadequate effort exerted in converting partisan units into regular formations, “when troops would simply rename themselves into brigades and divisions with corresponding renaming of their chieftains.”³⁵⁵

Trotsky’s opponents, individuals akin to Antonov and Andrei Bubnov, impressed both by their first-hand experience of the troops and by a degree of sympathy towards them, supplied Trotsky’s observations with the lacking analysis. In an article pointedly entitled “What lessons are we talking about?” Bubnov discovered that:

If there is no proper organization of the centralized supply, [capable of procuring] the army with all the necessities, from cannons to puttees, if the army lives by grazing (*na podnozhnom kormu*), a thrifty [and] energetic commander, [likewise] skilled in the military art, will always succeed in gaining prominence and in rendering his troops... dependent upon his will – by means of concentrating in his hands everything that his unit has either obtained [in the battle] or received.

Trotsky’s demand to have a “certain regime” imposed might have been made in vain, yet, continued the former member of the Front’s Revolutionary Military Council,

[i]f in the armed units, even when they are endowed with a proper internal organization, strict discipline is lacking, order of subordination is not established, that is, if the elements of volunteering and a troop system (*otriadnoi sistemy*) are still alive, a prominent commander, if he is an adventurer and a rogue, would pupate from the ataman to the counterrevolutionary insurgent, i.e. the organizer and leader of the armed mutiny.³⁵⁶

Commenting upon those events years later, Antonov reiterated the testimony of his then subordinate and brought his train of thought to the anticipated destination: “The army

³⁵⁴ “Ukrainskie uroki,” *IVRKPU*, nr 116, May 18th, 1919,

³⁵⁵ *ibid.*, Podvoisky agreed wholeheartedly. “The politics of conversion (from the partisan troops to regular Red Army – M.A.) was limited changing names and regrouping units” (N. Podvoisky, *Na Ukraine*, 24). It seems that the greatest opponents of the partisan-based army, above all Trotsky and Podvoisky, shared the same aversion for more consistent and, frankly, profound thinking about the logistics of aforesaid conversion.

³⁵⁶ “O kakich urokakh idet rech’?” article of A. Bubnov in *Kommunist*, nr 68-nr70, found in TsDAHO, f 5 o 1 d 259 ll 159-170

remained half-naked, half-shod, half-starved... Hence, the clout of the free (*volnych*) *bat'ki* and the atamans-go-getters (*atamanov-dobytychikov*) was strengthened to the extreme *despite the transition from [irregular] parties to regular regiments* (my emphasis).³⁵⁷

To ascribe the roots of *partizanshchina* to deficiencies in the supply system and the inability to construct a viable mobilization apparatus (as did Antonov and Bubnov) could have not been Trotsky's intention for the reason that it would have implicated the civil state in the excesses of the Ukrainian front, would have discredited it, in fact, beyond repair. The variables arranged themselves to produce a typical "chicken or egg" quandary – the question being whether failures of the state engendered *partizanshchina* or vice versa, whether *partizanshchina* undermined the state. To that question the Russian Narkom had, unsurprisingly, only one emphatic answer: *partizanshchina* was at the root of the problems. This, namely, the primordial and congenital opposition of *partizanshchina* to the central state authority, constituted another facet of the phenomenon,³⁵⁸ far more dangerous, in Trotsky's mind, than the attachment of the soldiers to their immediate leaders with all their willful vagaries and antics. In contrast to the *immanent partizanshchina*, that other breed of *partizanshchina* possessed an ideological, even a *transcendent* dimension. Progressive in its creatively "destructive" tendencies at the outset of the revolution, *partizanshchina*, in Trotsky's estimate, surrendered its "quite legitimate [historical] rights" once the proletariat took over power;³⁵⁹ but for the chance of self-liquidation, however, it elevated misrule into a principle of rule, swapping thus its revolutionary overcoat for a reactionary livery. Pervasive and insidious, the overarching political-military modality of *partizanshchina* finds its

³⁵⁷ Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 338

³⁵⁸ "Ukrainskie uroki," *IVRKPU*, May 18th, 1919, nr 116

³⁵⁹ *ibid*

apologists in the Bolshevik leadership, “the unconscious and semi-conscious ideologues who concluded that partisan troops cannot be subordinated to the ‘armchair’ (*kabinetnomu*), ‘learned’ command, [and] that they require some special management (*osoboe rukovodstvo*).”³⁶⁰ Indubitably Trotsky meant Antonov³⁶¹ without yet as much as mentioning the organization he headed by name. His Ukrainian counterpart, Podvoisky, avoided Trotsky’s bashful circumlocution, encapsulating the crux of the *transcendent partizanshchina* in a formula: “To eliminate (*likvidirovat*) *partizanshchina* in truth (*v deistvitel’nosti*) means to eliminate the proverbial separatist autonomy (*samostiinnost*) in matters of military management.”³⁶² In light of this prescription, the Ukrainian Front epitomized simply a different order of the same reality of which Grigoriev cast only the most visible figure – not even as a body, enfolding and protecting various insurgent units, but as an administrative instrument of the Soviet Ukraine’s will to strategic initiative (if not overt independence), the carrier of that ‘separatist autonomy’ against which Podvoisky directed the fire of his critique.³⁶³

In short, *partizanshchina* represented an outgrowth of the state destruction that expanded horizontally and rose vertically as a type of a cancerous ersatz, a peculiar organism that might have taken a form and appropriated functions of a state without authentically being

³⁶⁰ *ibid*

³⁶¹ That Trotsky quasi-explicitly alluded to Antonov (and Skachko to certain extent) becomes obvious from their telegraphic exchange that took place in the last days of April. Antonov argued against transferring Makhno’s troops to the Southern Front, fearing that it might ‘decompose our units and frustrate our supply system.’ To that Trotsky retorted, using words and phrases that would be reserved for the article: “Your considerations that Ukrainian troops are capable to fight exclusively under Ukrainian command is the product of unwillingness to look reality in its face... Makhnovites are retreating ... not because they are subordinated to Gittis and not you, but because they encountered an enemy, more formidable than *petliurovtsy*.” (Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski*, v. 4, 118)

³⁶² N. Podvoisky, *Na Ukraine*, 27; *samostiinnost*, of course, is and was an untranslatable concept.

³⁶³ Podvoisky meant no less than that when he recommended to “abolish the independent (*samostoitel’nyi*) Ukrainian Front” in order to establish firm ties with Moscow. (RGVA f 33221 o 1 d 30 12)

one – a species of political weed. Podvoisky called it Ukraine’s “greatest calamity... supported... not formally, but essentially and hence factually by the entire apparatus of command.”³⁶⁴ That symbiosis between the insurgents and the Front seemed at first sight hardly natural, for, after all, the officer in Antonov’s headquarters and the ataman of a peasant band each availed themselves of concepts and categories which had to reduce ground for mutual understanding to a tiny sliver indeed: one measured the Revolution’s progress in great abstractions of nations, continents and classes whereas the other saw only to his turf, his men, his repute. Yet, even if they looked and thought differently, they found themselves united by a certain centrifugal nature of their reified ambition, with the Front as whole moving away from Moscow in a west-bound direction, to Bessarabia, Galicia and Hungary and its composite parts drawing into themselves, further from the swarms of the emissaries, dispatched by the center. In the end, the Front and the army acted as one body, attained an unspoken consensus concerning strategy and tactics – and as such, as a double-headed symbol of Ukrainian “adventurism,” were judged responsible for the criminal misuse of men, land and weapons when these means of war-making were rapidly vanishing in the maelstrom of Denikin’s breakthrough.

Of the two problems – that of the Front and that of the partisans, each reflecting, as pointed out, different facets of *partizanshchina* – the former seemed easier to handle. The separate Ukrainian command, the step-wise dismantlement of which has already been chronicled above, stood on the way of completing “the military unification of Russian and Ukrainian republics.”³⁶⁵ With the sphere of Antonov’s prerogatives first being reduced to that of the

³⁶⁴ RGVA f 33221 o 1 d 30 l 1

³⁶⁵ RGVA f 25860 o 1 d 45 l 6

‘internal front,’ and then to the transient ‘expeditionary corps,’ the great formal hurdle was removed, and therewith went all the compunctions respecting the denunciation of republican autonomies. The draft of the Central Committee Directive on the Military Unity, signed by Lenin and Stalin in May 1919, clearly stipulated that the “necessary condition for succeeding in that war lies in establishing (*iavlaietsia*) the unitary command over all troops of the Red Army and the most rigorous centralization in the manner of disposing (*v rasporiashenii*) forces and resources of the socialist republics.”³⁶⁶ That document became soon the basis of the Decree, issued on June 1st (i.e., three days before the Order Nr 104 formalized the end of the Ukrainian Front), which constrained Ukrainian initiative to the necessity of combating “forces of international imperialism.” Summoning Ukraine along with the *papier-mâché* constructions of the Soviet Lithuania, Latvia, Crimea and Belarus, to form ties of “the closest association” (*tesneishego ob’edineniia*) with Russia, the Decree authorized transfer of control over the army command and organization, national economy, railroad management, finances and labor politics from the republican to the federal level, an administrative metamorphosis memorialized in the enlarged Russian Council of Defense.³⁶⁷ The two Ukrainian military districts (Kharkov and Kiev) subsequently had to enter into “the general organizational system of the federal republic” with a vaguely defined task of “creating red Ukrainian units from the Ukrainian workers and Ukrainian peasants... with the Ukrainian officer corps and the command in the Ukrainian language.”³⁶⁸ Linguistic vestiges rather than instruments of manipulation, the frequent allusions to ‘things Ukrainian’ (units, workers, language) offered poor consolation to the Ukrainian Soviet state, denuded henceforth of any real substance; much less could these words have tempered Lenin’s intent, gradually brought

³⁶⁶ Lenin, *PSS*, v. 38, 400

³⁶⁷ *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v. 2, 110-111; Lenin, *PSS*, v. 38, 401

³⁶⁸ TsDAVO f 2 o 1 d 96 l 48

into execution, to have “all [forces] from the [Ukrainian] western front” join Moscow’s military effort in Donbass³⁶⁹ even if this meant calling off the planned breakthrough to the West and abandoning struggling Hungarians to their own highly insufficient devices. In the test of strategic wills, Russian affairs took clear precedence over any professed commitment to the International Revolution.

Unlike the Ukrainian Front, the *partizanshchina* on the ground could not have been crossed out from the political landscape at the stroke of a pen. In theory, of course, units were now disbanded with greater ease and at slighter provocation, shuffled together with other dissolved formations to reemerge with a cleansed record, renewed command and changed name; that new bout of name-making, in fact, had to intimate the growing Russian-Ukrainian military consolidation. As indicated, the three old Ukrainian Armies were reduced to two, the 12th and the 14th – to fall into the hedged ring of the Russian armies like missing teeth into the vacant alveoli. Likewise with the divisions: the fiery and insubordinate one of Shchors, providently infused with the sedative substances from the 3rd Frontier division, became known in June of 1919 as the 44th division³⁷⁰, the 5th Ukrainian division with the remnants of the Grigoriev’s former 6th was reformed into the 45th division, Lengovsky’s 2nd, enriched by some partisan material from Volhynia, hitherto became known as the 46th division, etc.³⁷¹ Irrevocably losing their purposefully capricious appellations, markers of hubris and deeply-conceited belief in their own special destiny, regiments too quickly succumbed to the anonymity of ordinal digits: 41st (former Shevchenko regiment), 42nd (former Dniester

³⁶⁹ *Direktivny komandovaniia frontov Krasnoi Armii*, v. 2, 206;

³⁷⁰ *Istoriia 130 Bogunskogo polka*, 25

³⁷¹ *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v. 2, 149-150

regiment), 43rd (Berezino-Tiligul'sk regiment),³⁷² 388th, 389th, 390th (odds and ends of the overgrown Bogun regiment)³⁷³ ... Plans were further made to anneal the reformed Ukrainian troops with fresh recruits from the RSFSR or, in fact, to have the Ukrainians replaced with the detachments from the "Great Russians" and "foreign communists",³⁷⁴ on the other hand, the Ukrainians, especially those that were caught roiling Soviet waters with sediments of popular disaffection (like POWs of Grigoriev's defeated army), were presented with the unenviable option of confronting the Russian Whites on the hills of the Urals or in the suburbs of Petrograd.³⁷⁵ In perspective, this combination of internal renewal with external exchange, described in one contemporary memorandum as "the politics of soviet colonization,"³⁷⁶ had to isolate the army from its country-side environment, divest the rebels of the latent support stored up in the ranks of the Red regiments, and finally entrust the hard-pressed Bolsheviks with a reliable instrument of defense and policing.

Victorious but weakened, the Bolsheviks reemerged from the crisis with a conviction that any ongoing collaboration with the remaining warlords, Makhno in particular, representing as it did the practical outcome of the liquidated Front's political promiscuity, had to be curtailed or abrogated altogether. In his dispatch to Voroshilov and Mezhlauk, Trotsky asserted that that "the [current] task boils down to turning the defeat of Grigoriev's bands to good account," that is, "to breaking up the Makhnovites by removing their top (*verkhushku*)

³⁷² TsDAVO f2 o 1 d 104 l 68

³⁷³ *Istoriia 130 Bogunskogo polka*, 25

³⁷⁴ TsDAVO f2 o 1 d 233 l 91

³⁷⁵ *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v. 2, 85

³⁷⁶ TsDAVO f2 o 1 d 233 l 91

and pulling up their lower strata (*nizy*).³⁷⁷ Although *bat'ko* had distanced himself from Grigoriev – with some delay and tinges of prevarication³⁷⁸ - his repute as “the honest and brave soldier” (Kamenev’s words)³⁷⁹ vanished overnight, replaced by the image of a turncoat and a werewolf, a counterrevolutionary mountebank, who gave asylum to the “elements of dissolution, decay, agitation and putrefaction.”³⁸⁰ Conveniently and uncompromisingly, the blame for the misfortunes in the Donbass region was laid on Makhno despite the fact that his retreat before the Kuban Cossacks of Shkuro resulted from the defeat of the Southern Front’s own 13th Army.³⁸¹ This concentrated campaign of anti-Makhnovite harassment, conducted on the lines of secret communiqués, transcripts of the Bolshevik-sponsored Congresses and broadsheets of the official Soviet press culminated on June 6th with Order 107, which declared the anticipated Makhnovite congress illegal and equated their leader to the deserter deserving undelayed death.³⁸² Taking note of Grigoriev’s failure, Makhno thought it most prudent to resign from command of the brigade; once accomplished, he absconded with a small cavalry escort, to the visible consternation of his troops.³⁸³ The Bolsheviks, on the other hand, appeared ostensibly satisfied with such an arrangement, for they decided not to press claims any further, allowing Makhno’s closest associates (Belash, Kalashnikov, Kurilenko, etc.) to remain in charge of their old units – in the slightly altered capacity, to be sure, of the Red Army officers.

³⁷⁷ RGVA f 6 o 1 d 92 l 159; On May 23rd 1919 Trotsky reminded members of the RMC of the Southern Front that “the defeat of *grigorievshchina* creates an auspicious moment for the elimination of *makhnovshchina*.” (*Nestor Makhno. Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie na Ukraine*, 149)

³⁷⁸ See the text of Makhnovite proclamation “Who is Grigoriev?” in Arshinov, *Istoriia makhnovskogo dvizheniia, ?*

³⁷⁹ *Nestor Makhno. Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie*, 136

³⁸⁰ Trotsky, “Beseda s predstaviteliami khar'kovskoi pechati”, in *Kak vooruzhalas' revoliutsiia*, v. 2, b. 1, 193.

³⁸¹ N. Kakurin, *Kak srazhalas' revoliutsiia*, v. 2, 147

³⁸² Trotsky, “Prikaz Predsedatelia RVS Respubliki...” in *Kak vooruzhalas' revoliutsiia*, v. 2, b. 1, 200-201.

³⁸³ Arshinov, *Istoriia makhnovskogo dvizheniia*

There remained, of course, many other insurgent atamans in the Soviet service, the great and small hero brigands of the Revolution, regarded now with unconcealed suspicion as if their defection were but a matter of time. Names of Shchors, Bozhenko or Bogunsky continued to appear in war communiqués and correspondences, more frequently as harbingers of discomfiting news – cases of disobedience, rampages and pogroms – than as heralds of victories. Tolerated out of necessity, they saw their clout drastically reduced owing not only to the formal inclusion of the Ukrainian troops in a much larger Russian military-administrative system, but also to the radical shift in the operational center of gravity from the Right-Bank Ukraine to Don and Seversky Donets. In essence, the partisans were left with two options – to abide by the general instruction and follow in Don-bound direction, or to remain stock still, fastened to the land, closer to their lifelines in the Ukrainian village, faithful to themselves and their *vol'nitsa*. Neither of the options seemed unquestionably preferable, for if the eastward progression signified exposing oneself to the drills of the Bolshevik inspectors and the cannonade of their opponents, the latter retrogression to the original condition meant placing oneself in opposition to the state as well as a dangerous acceptance of the actualized “partisan” identity.

In the summer of 1919 the gestation period came to a close. The Bolsheviks, who had attempted to ride the wave of massive upheaval with the intention of harnessing popular energies and directing them in the desired channel, were compelled to repudiate uprising as a mechanism for winning the war and an algorithm for building up the state. Their army might still be called Red to remind one of its extemporaneous, rebellious, Red Guard origins, the Bolsheviks, nevertheless, opted for the forces mobilized, organized and led according to the

principles of the overturned Empire; as much as they talked about the International Revolution, the Bolsheviks fought fundamentally for that same Empire, the easy surrender of Ukraine to Petliura and Denikin standing for a type of a second Brest-Litovsk, i.e. a major tactical concession for the sake of an even greater strategic gain. That reconciliation of the Bolsheviks with their place and tradition – an ideological triumph of the *imperial* and *centralist* vision over the *regional* and *autonomist* one – was accompanied by the crystallization of the insurgency into a force of its own, a hydra-like creature with multiple heads and multiple names, none flattering when proceeding from the Moscow power-holders.³⁸⁴ With boundaries thus delineated, the intermediaries had either disappeared (Ukrainian Front) or lost much of their significance (Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic, as it was known then). What remained was a nondescript body of Red Army soldiers, squeezed between the Uprising and the State as Ulysses' crew between Scylla and Charybdis. Although many, perhaps most, were “dreaming about returning to Makhno,”³⁸⁵ they were prevented from doing so out of fear of being shoved to the dark side of illegality - of becoming ‘outlaws’ without the right of appeal and the grace of amnesty. That fear, more than the defeat of Grigoriev, resounding and speedy though it may have been, constituted the real victory for the nascent regime.

³⁸⁴ Employed throughout this chapter, the idea of various competing visions could be circumscribed within a matrix, constructed at the intersection of oppositions: *imperial/regional* and *centralist/autonomist*. Moscow Bolsheviks and Ukrainian atamans, as indicated, stood at polar ends of this ‘squared’ spectrum, with the former struggling to realize the state project of an *imperial* and *centralist* nature and latter cleaving to the reality that was to remain *regionally*-bound and *autonomist*. The Government in Kharkov, however weak, could be schematically described as an embodiment of a vision that was *centralist* yet *regional*; the option of being *imperialist* and *autonomist* borders on the improbable, although the Whites at their earlier stages, when they were still dependent on the resources and benevolence of the Kuban and Don Cossack Hosts, could possibly fit the bill.

³⁸⁵ TsDAVO f2 o 1 d 104 l 84

Conclusion

Another Look at the Ukrainian Lessons

The crushing of Grigoriev's mutiny, achieved by dint of strenuous effort, did not reassure the Bolshevik control over Ukraine, let alone their victory in the southern sector of the Civil War. On the contrary, in a rather paradoxically manner they succeeded thanks to the powerful and sweeping offensive launched from the direction of Don as it compelled Moscow to ferry Russia's substantial resources from the Urals southwestward in anticipation of a crisis there. Such was ultimately the irony of a proper timing between Grigoriev's action and Denikin all-out offensive,¹ multiplied by the boon of immense space and scarce forces, which allowed the Bolsheviks to escape the trap of a two-pronged attack (really, a three-pronged attack if one counts revived activities of the UNR) and parry and destroy one of the menacing thrusts in the meantime.

Although the war was far from over, being destined to go on for another two years, its strategic outlook changed as did political aims of its principal competitors. To the extent permitted by ruined infrastructure and stalled industrial production, the war ceased being an *ad-hoc* movement of troops of questionable loyalty and indeterminate provenance, developing into what traditional narratives always held it to be: the struggle of the Moscow-based Red North against the Cossack-heavy White South. This centralization of political wills manifested itself almost tautologically in the suppression of local autonomies, concerted military actions, better-drawn front lines and mobilization schemes more in tune with the exactions of the true war. Under such circumstances *atamanshchina* had to fall by

¹ Whether Grigoriev intended to time his rebellion with Denikin's operations still remains disputed. Suffice it to say, however, that Makhno himself used the alleged correspondence between the two as a pretext for staging a speedy trial over Grigoriev and killing the great ataman subsequently (the story of Makhno's hosting Grigoriev with an intention of ridding himself of his guest is presented in all major Makhnovite accounts; one could, for instance, refer to the depositions of Chubenko, Makhno's adjutant found in *Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie na Ukraine, 1917-1922*, 776ff).

the wayside, as a sign of early confusion and unwarranted mass enthusiasm. Without disappearing, it devolved from a poignant expression of radicalized rural life to a form of political banditry – i.e. to the highly combustible residue of the revolutionary popular initiative.

The experience of confronting the atamans taught the protagonists in Ukraine possibly their most important lessons. For one, the Bolsheviks, who threw in their lot with the rural insurgency and suffered costly consequences, seeing not only the troops but also their men slip out of the Party control, resolved to abstain from similar experiments in the future. Thus, mindful of the debacle, which hatched from the thin shell of their previous success, the War commissar Leon Trotsky issued a warning on December 11, 1919 to the troops of the Southern front *en route* into “the areas of Ukrainian partisan activity (*partizanstva*).”

Measures of extreme caution were recommended lest the troops succumb to the “infection of *partizanstvo* and *makhnovshchina*”:

- a) organize extensive agitation campaign in print and in word, explaining advantages of the regular army over the insurgent troops...;
- b) cleanse the units entering Ukraine of the commissars, commanders and Communist cell members disposed to indiscipline and partisan war;
- c) take all necessary measures which would prevent the Red Army men of Ukrainian origin from leaving their units for their native village, all the more so with arms;
- d) raise the discipline level in general among the troops, conducting rigorous struggle against all manifestations of banditry (*banditizma*) and license (*proizvola*).

No partisan troop was to be allowed to serve in the ranks of the Red Army; if only for the fear that they might build coteries of loyal men around themselves, commanders were prohibited from accepting any volunteers, be they part of the group or just lone stragglers.²

² *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine*, v. 2, 538-539

This list of precautions couched in the language of peremptory demands seemed to have inspired another symptomatic document of the era. Bearing the title “Our Military Politics in Ukraine” and signed off by a set of Bolshevik and Borotbist notables, it made explicit the link between the centralization of the war-making both on the level of command and that of execution. The need of to fully integrate Ukrainian forces into the Russian Red Army running through this declaration as an absolute imperative, it was “the evil of professional partisan style war, *makhnovshchina* and banditry” which stood as the obstacle towards the accomplishment of that process. The tendency to autonomous action, strengthened through revolt and revolution, was equated with the greatest calamity, whose eradication underscored the question of Soviet Ukraine’s very survival. “All partisan troops should be disarmed immediately and those offering resistance should be extirpated” – this programmatic statement, laconic and unambiguous, appeared all the more remarkable since it came from men who, like Zatonsky, less than a year before that, were vociferously encouraging the masses to taking up arms against the oppressors without waiting for the deliverers from the north. Now the order was reversed with those masses being enjoined to surrender their enormous stocks of weapons lavished upon them by the “sundry regimes in their posthaste efforts to build up the Ukrainian army.” Although the irony might have gone unnoticed for the authors themselves, the overall point could have hardly been made clearer: disarming of the populace would sever the tie of kinship between peasantry at large and the ataman-controlled army as its expression and, by putting an end to practices forged within the smithy

of rural militancy, would endow the Bolsheviks with dependable and manipulable force at once.³

Subsequent events showed that the Bolsheviks did not always steer clear of consorting with “the elements of social decay, chaos and destruction of Ukrainian statehood.”⁴ The alliance with Makhno concluded in autumn of 1920 to fight Wrangel might have been judged as an example of Moscow’s inconsistency had the diplomatic duplicity not arrogated upon itself the distinguished place of a top characteristic. Carefully sequestered from the rest of the Army, the Makhnovite troops saw themselves stripped of all immunities once the Perekop isthmus was taken and Wrangel made harmless, experiencing on their own skin the import of Bela Kun’s famous remark: “Crimea is a bottle from which no counterrevolutionary would manage to leap out...”

The non-Bolshevik Ukrainian national Left – the Socialist-revolutionaries and Social-democrats of all hues and persuasions – never recovered from the shock of defeat suffered shortly after their greatest triumph, i.e. the overthrow of Hetman and the capture of Kiev. The inability to domesticate the ‘peasant elements’ and to keep the atamans akin to Zeleny and Grigoriev from defecting to the other side tried and tore the loose fabric of the Ukrainian block, separating the warp of socialist threads from the weft of nationalist matter. Volodymyr Vynnychenko, for instance, was inclined to see the failure of the Directorate as an incontrovertible evidence of its sliding in the direction of the reaction, away from the principles upheld by the social revolt. In his historical magnum opus, *Vidrodzhennia natsii* –

³ TsDAVO f 2 o 1 d 96 ll 48-50

⁴ *ibid*

a book of penance and remorse – the former chairman of the UNR tirelessly stressed how the Ukrainian government forfeited the interests of the “popular (*naridnykh*) masses” for the sake of propitiating appetites of the “national (*natsional'nyy*) petty bourgeoisie.”⁵ His comrade in triumph and in misery, a notable Ukrainian S-R Pavlo Khrystiuk seconded Vynnychenko’s critique. ‘Bolshevik’ on the surface and in the vigorous lines of its declarations, the government created on the Christmas night of 1918 proved to be a “typical product of the Ukrainian National Union”: narrow enough to give substance to the accusations of ‘chauvinism’ and too petty bourgeois and moderate to be truly revolutionary.⁶ The disappointing sojourn in power truncated by “popular uprisings” – mostly defections of the atamans – convinced a number of the UNR supporters to follow the atamans’ lead by accepting the “soviet platform” and to come to terms with the advancing Bolsheviks. In the end those individuals found themselves either dissolved within the Communist Party (Borot’bists and many of the independent social-democrats, the *nezalezhnyki*) or forced into exile, where they would dwell, like Vynnychenko himself, in the state of political prostration and unavenged bitterness.

In contrast with their disenchanted colleagues from the Vynnychenko camp, elements associated with Petliura decided to jettison the ballast of socializing slogans and accentuate instead the national – anti-Russian, anti-Bolshevik, anti-colonial – aspect of the struggle. No doubt this was partially motivated by the desire to solder the ties with uncountable guerrilla groups whose reluctance to support UNR proved so critical a factor in its jousting match with the Soviet Kharkov. Their efforts were not spent in vain with some of the great atamans –

⁵ Vynnychenko, 480

⁶ Khrystiuk, v. 4, 20ff

Iurko Tiutiunnyk, Iulian Mordalevich, Evhen Angel or ataman Orlyk among them – joining the anti-Bolshevik cause under the nominal guidance of Petliura. The disadvantage of this seemed all too obvious however, for the atamans, intractable as always, could hardly be expected to obey the weakened regime in some remote Podolian town.

In essence, Petliura did what the Bolsheviks had refused to do: by loaning his name to the partisan leaders and alienating bits and pieces of the UNR authority, he disappeared in the movement of a loosely-knit guerilla war. From late 1919 onward and with increasing frequency the Bolsheviks were speaking not of Petliura himself, but of the bands of the ‘petliurovite’ coloration (*petliurovskoi okraski*) or of *petliurovshchina* in general⁷ - just as they spoke of the Makhnovite bands and *makhnovshchina*. Sharing the monopoly with Makhno over the vague spirit of the late Ukrainian insurgency, Petliura reemerged in the cloud of a fabulous aura, “a myth, born in Ukraine in the mist of the frightening nineteen-eighteen” as an anonymous citizen of Bulgakov’s *White Guard* put it.

The immediate victim of the great peasant *jacquerie*, Hetman Skoropadsky and his entourage seemed to have harbored no anger for the peasant masses themselves, evincing a type of patronizing generosity of seasoned land grandees. “The people,” wrote the Hetman in his memoirs, “desire only to improve its situation (*byta*), yet it is fully incapable of making sense of the questions [pertaining to its wellbeing – M.A.]”

Earlier, under the old government, he was told that all evil comes from the rioters. “Beat them up” – and he beat them up. “All evil comes from the *burzhui*, beat him up!” – and he beats him up, for he thinks this alone is going to better his station. All those programs, even those which are now considered

⁷ Documents found in Fond 3204 in TsDAVO (“Permanent Commission on the Struggle against Banditry”) contain long lists enumerating bands of the said political disposition.

moderate like those of the socialist-revolutionaries, stand incomparably farther left than the convictions dwelling in the healthy mass of people; only the war coupled with the demoralizing effects of the revolutionary government resulted in making people believe that one could simply chase the landowners away from their property without paying them a halfpence.⁸

In Hetman's view, the difference between "Petliura et Vynnychenko" and the Bolsheviks counted only insofar as the former functioned only as the transition to the latter – with the latter, to be sure, being but harbingers of chaos and "final depredation."⁹ Dictatorship, therefore, represented the single panacea against the license ushered by the revolutionary politics¹⁰ – as well as the means of self-discipline exercised by the nation to keep itself without bounds of reason.

As early as April 1919, when the aforementioned memoirs were completed, Skoropadasky stumbled upon the notion of a *cordon sanitaire*. Ukraine had to be strong militarily, politically and socially – buttressed by the army, powerful executive and the cohort of solid smallholders (*khleboroby*) – in order to withstand the onslaught of the hydra-like Bolshevism with its multiple heads. The *ancien regime* sentimentalities and the distrust of popular instincts differentiated this vision from the fascism of the inter-war era; the revived Hetmanate would align itself more with the string of militarized Central European regimes, which clothed their abnegation of the revolution in the astute language of liberal promises.

The peasant resistance – passive at first and then overt and violent – left an indelible impression upon those, who came to Ukraine as the outside deliverers. Contrary to what

⁸ Pavlo Skoropads'ky, *Spohady: Kinets 1917-Gruden' 1918* (Kyiv, Philadelphia: Instytut ukrains'koi arkheografii ta dzhereloznavstva im M.S. Hrushevs'koho, 1995), 212

⁹ *ibid.*, 182

¹⁰ *ibid.*, 174

might have been expected, the leading representatives of the Central powers came out with their faith in the virtues of occupation strengthened rather than weakened. It was the tampering of the civil authorities with the procedures of the military – the “hapless attitude of Berlin towards ‘militarism’” in Ludendorff’s turn of the phrase – which restricted the extracting capacities of the army and egged the peasant onto the acts of sabotage.¹¹ The last commandant of the ill-starred Austro-Hungarian “Eastern Army” Alfred Krauß accused Vienna of political escapism, unwilling to admit that the absence of “the ruthless and consistent application of power” accounted for the failure of Habsburg Ukrainian policy; lacking courage to face the truth, the obsolescent empire endeavored in vain to correct its errors by replacing convicted scapegoats with scapegoats-to-be.¹² Indirectly the author was suggesting that the next occupation – if there would be any – should cast aside any pretence of humanity or humility as irrelevant for the aims at hand and teach the populace to defer to the law of bayonet in silent resignation. Whether they have read Ludendorff or Krauß, the German generals from 1941 had outdone themselves in ruthlessness of the military rule – with the catastrophic effects for the occupied and the occupiers.

Although they did not regard themselves as outsiders – certainly not to the extent of the Germans – the Galicians wore out their welcome in the “Great Ukraine” all too quickly. According to Evhen Konovalets, the rada of the Galician Sich Riflemen attempted to dissuade the Directorate in November 1918 from issuing a general mobilization order, believing that it would sprout to life a score of “unorganized and undisciplined units.”¹³

¹¹ Ludendorff, 502

¹² KA Krauss B/60, Nr. 11 “Die Ukraine”

¹³ Evhen Konovalets, *Prychynky do istorii Ukrains’koi revoliutsii* (Prague: Nakladom Provodu Urkains’kykh Natsionalistiv, 1928), 17

Insofar as the atamans' subordination to the UNR authority was concerned, the judgment of the Galicians proved to be correct. Their drama, however, was that the Sich Riflemen had to pull the Directorate's chestnuts out of the fire as they strove to stanch the wave of peasant uprisings, being, after all, the last reliable force at the regime's disposal. The peasant, as Osyp Nazaruk avers, could not forgive the rifleman his participation in punitive actions, and, as he went on assaulting minor detachments and breaking up connections with zeal and ardor, he seemed to draw his inspiration from the earlier deeds of the Polish villagers during their showdown with the rebels of 1830 and 1863.¹⁴

When the agreement with Denikin was added to the roll of crimes, the predicament of the Sich Riflemen – and politically involved Galicians in general – became worse than unenviable. “Moscow and Poland regarded them as the greatest support of the execrable Ukrainian statehood, and their own Ukrainian people – from the rural masses all the way to the upper layers of intelligentsia – were pointing at them as those guilty of all the ills, which befell Ukraine.”¹⁵ What was the combined effect of marginalization, loneliness and disillusionment on the political education of Andriy Melnyk, Dmytro Paliiv and Konovalets himself, who started their political life in the ranks of the Sich Riflemen, moved through the various conflicts in the aftermath of 1917 only to settle for the post-war Ukrainian Military Organization (UVO) and finally the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) (Paliiv went even further to serve in the SS)? Could one discern in those formative years when the Ukrainian peasant revealed his unwelcoming face to the stunned Galician youth roots of successive and seemingly relentless radicalization of the latter? Maybe not in the manner of

¹⁴ Nazaruk, 142

¹⁵ Konovalets, 28

strict causality – but the repugnance for revolutions with its utopian slogans, fear of anarchy, distrust of the political intrigue (*politykanstvo*) and, finally, the glorification of state sovereignty for sovereignty's own sake were all there – contained in that baggage of complex sentiments, which they were seen carrying off from the turbulent and frustrating years of the Eastern European Civil War.

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